

Media Development

Vol. XLX 4/2002

Published four times a year by the World Association for Christian Communication
357 Kennington Lane
London SE11 5QY England
Telephone +44 (0)20 7582 9139
Fax +44 (0)20 7735 0340
E-mail: wacc@wacc.org.uk
http://www.wacc.org.uk

Editors

Pradip N. Thomas
Philip Lee

Editorial consultants

Clifford G. Christians, *Professor, University of Illinois, Urbana, USA.*
Marlene Cuthbert, *Professor Emeritus, University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada*
Regina Festa, *Director, Workers' Television, São Paulo, Brazil.*
Cees J. Hamelink, *Professor, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands.*
Karol Jakubowicz, *Lecturer, Institute of Journalism, Warsaw, Poland.*
Kong Zhiqiang, *Professor, Fudan University, Shanghai, China.*
Fernando Reyes Matta, *Director, Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales, Santiago, Chile.*
Michèle Mattelart, *Professor, University of Paris, France.*
Emile G. McAnany, *Professor, University of Texas, Austin, USA.*
Breda Pavlič, *Unesco, Paris.*
Usha V. Reddi, *Professor, Osmania University, Hyderabad, India.*
Robert A. White, *Director, Centro Interdisciplinare sulla Comunicazione Sociale, Gregorian University, Rome, Italy.*

Subscriptions

Individual subscribers world-wide £20 or US\$ 30.
Libraries and institutions in North America and Europe £40 or US\$ 60.
Libraries and institutions elsewhere in the world £27 or US\$ 40.

WACC personal and corporate members receive *Media Development* as part of membership privileges. The contents of *Media Development* may be reproduced only with permission.

Opinions expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of the editors nor of the WACC.

Cover design

John Bury

Printed by Battley Brothers Ltd
37 Old Town, Clapham
London SW4 0JN

ISSN 0143-5558



- 3 Communication Rights in the Information Society: The CRIS campaign**
- 5 Is the 'Information Society' a useful concept for civil society?**
- 6 Why should intellectual property rights matter to civil society?**
- 8 What is the special significance of community media to civil society?**
- 10 Media ownership: Big deal?**
- 12 The corporate sector and information control**
- 14 A personal account of PrepCom 1**
Seán Ó Siochrú
- 20 Statement to the WSIS Civil Society Press Conference**
Bruce Girard
- 21 Highlights of the CRIS campaign**
- 24 The CRIS campaign: Mobilisations and blind spots**
Sasha Costanza-Chock
- 27 Gender issues, the digital divide and the WSIS**
Anna Turley
- 28 Working for gender and equality in the world information society**
UNIFEM
- 30 Y de nuevo las mismas preguntas: ¿Cómo se articulan democracia y comunicación en el siglo XXI?**
Fernando Reyes Matta
- 35 The information society: A case for setting up an international tribunal**
Antonio Pasquali
- 40 Moral challenges in the information society**
Cees J. Hamelink
- 44 In the event . . .**
- 46 On the screen . . .**
- 51 In memoriam Francis P. Kasoma (1943-2002)**
- 52 The Film Council, the British Film Institute and media education**
Len Masterman
- 54 Information rights of refugees in Southern Africa**
Michael S. Gallagher SJ
- 61 Refugees' right to information and communication in the Australia and Pacific region**
Nic Maclellan
- 71 Disability matters . . .**
- 74 On the page . . .**

THEME

FORUM

This issue of *Media Development* is devoted to the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) campaign launched by a consortium of NGOs belonging to the media advocacy group Platform for Communication Rights (PCR) in late 2000. The reports carried in this issue – a mixture of old and new – do not by any means provide an exhaustive overview of all the civil society related activities around the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). That has taken on a life of its own, although it would be fair to say that CRIS, and the broader Civil Society Coordinating Group (CSCG) formed during the first Preparatory Committee (Prep Com) meetings in Geneva in July 2002 (and which incidentally includes quite a few CRIS members), remain the most visible, articulate and active expressions of civil society (CS) and the WSIS.

What this issue does provide is the background to the CRIS campaign, an overview of some of the events in which CRIS has been involved, a few CRIS two-pagers that outline key issues related to the information society, the obstacles that have become a predictable aspect of CS/WSIS interfaces. There is also a critical piece that highlights some of the shortfalls and blind spots of the CRIS campaign, along with a few other CRIS situationers.

CRIS was conceived in terms of, and remains, a campaign – its objectives are directed towards mobilising civil society at regional and local levels and facilitating its active involvement in the WSIS. There are different sections to this

campaign – outreach, publicity, content and finance – and each of these is coordinated by individuals representing organisations/institutions involved in the CRIS campaign.

The CSCG, on the other hand, was formed during Prep Com 1. It represents the majority of CS organisations present at the Prep Com and was constituted in order to offer a more unified CS response at WSIS events. It involves both CRIS and non-CRIS related representatives and its sub-committees, caucuses and working groups have intensified, focussed, articulated and represented civil society concerns, at regional WSIS meetings, for instance at the European regional meeting in Bucharest, and an informal meeting on themes and content. While there has been some overlap between CRIS and the CSCG, more attention needs to be given to clarifying this relationship, strengthening the partnership and mutually reinforcing the work of these two, related expressions of civil society.

For instance, the forthcoming CRIS/WSIS related meeting 'The World Summit on the Information Society: The Asian Response', to be held in Bangkok November 22-24, aims at mobilising CS in Asia towards framing a common response for the regional WSIS consultation scheduled for Tokyo in January 2003. This needs to be seen as a part of a common CS process. The outcome of this meeting – an Asian CS response – will hopefully become the basis for lobbying by the CSCG Asia Caucus in Tokyo.

While the WSIS was conceived in terms of a tripartite partnership between governments, the private sector and civil society, transparency has been at a minimum. After nearly two years of involvement, it is apparent that the commitment of the organisers is to a

'pliant' rather than 'involved' CS. To some extent, the organisers have exploited the inherent impossibility of any group to represent that amorphous entity called CS – a canvas that the organisers have stretched to include all sorts of groupings from universities to 'organisations' representing the private sector. The representativeness of CRIS, or for that matter the CSCG, has been queried at every WSIS related meeting and time and again CRIS has found itself in the company of 'Cold' warriors, representing organisations like the World Press Freedom Committee, who are openly hostile towards the right to communicate. The flurry of pre-Bucharest emails condemning the top-down nature of planning and the divide and rule manoeuvres of the organisers is indicative of the time spent by CS engaging with and deciphering the 'Realpolitik' of the WSIS – not a constructive use of the limited time and resources of CS.

If Prep Com 1 is anything to go by, it would seem that the regional consultations, the two remaining Prep Coms, and the main event scheduled for Geneva in 2003, are bound to give CS a variety of headaches. From the perspective of CRIS, there is the hope that a full-time CRIS co-ordinator will ease some of the problems related to networking, information sharing and CRIS publicity. While there is global interest in CRIS, the lack of consistent follow up has invested CRIS with a certain haphazardness that needs to be overcome. There is a need for a full-time campaign staff member, for an identifiable desk and for more method and less madness.

So why spend time and resources organising CRIS when the odds seemed to be resolutely stacked against informed CS involvement? Why waste energies

Continued on page 13



Communication Rights in the Information Society: The CRIS campaign

Whose information society?

The Information Society, we are told, is upon us. The promise is for a knowledge-based society, yielding untold dividends for education, health, development, democracy and much more. Seamless networking and knowledge flows from major centres to village hut, and back again.

The reality, if current trends continue, might be very different, the dream might become a nightmare

- The fruits of human creativity – from academia to media, from indigenous medicines to music – are being privatised, ownership concentrated into the hands of a few, and access restricted to those who can pay.
- The airwaves, for radio, television and telecommunications, are being sliced up and sold to the highest bidder.
- The Internet, once a promising new public sphere, is increasingly commercialised and controlled;
- The media, sanitized and homogenised, sell consumerism to people, and people to advertisers.

Many fear that behind the current drive toward the information society is the relentless expansion of corporate control, stifling dissent and manufacturing consent. Global corporate interests are firmly in the driving seat, with governments relegated to referee between monoliths wrestling for the greater share of spoils. Scant attention is paid to international regulation and the implications for people and social development.

Yet people worldwide are also forging a new vision of the information society, one with human rights at its core. New forms of media and networking tools are being used to build global communities from the local level, to share knowledge, amplify marginalised voices, organize political action, empower participation, and sustain and celebrate cultural and intellectual diversity.

We must choose, and then build, the information society we want. Will it be one that suits the corporate elites, but excludes the majority? Or one that sustains and expands sustainability, human rights, and people's dignity? The right to communicate is a universal human right, underpinning and serving all other human rights. The emergence of the information society must see this right extended and

reinforced this right to the benefit of all.

The summit

Many UN summits have been held, the Rio Earth Summit and the Beijing Women's Conference among the most prominent. There is now to be a UN **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)**, in Geneva in December 2003 and Tunis in 2005. It aims to 'develop a common vision and understanding of the information society . . . and to draw up a strategic plan of action for successfully adapting to the new society' (see <http://wsis.itu.int>). **Civil Society must take the lead**, articulating a vision of an information society with people at the centre.

CRIS mission

The CRIS campaign – Communication Rights in the Information Society – was launched in November 2001 by the *Platform for Communication Rights*, an umbrella group of international NGOs active in media and communication. For CRIS, the Summit is a means, not an end. The issues we face are much larger than can be addressed there, but it offers a promising starting point.

Our vision of the 'Information Society' is grounded in the Right to Communicate, as a means to enhance human rights and to strengthen the social, economic and cultural lives of people and communities.

Crucial to this is that civil society organisations come together to help build an information society based on principles of transparency, diversity, participation and social and economic justice, and inspired by equitable gender, cultural and regional perspectives.

The World Summit on the Information Society offers an important forum to promote this objective. We aim to broaden the WSIS agenda and goals especially in relation to media and communication issues, and to encourage the participation of a wide spectrum of civil society groups in this process.

CRIS themes and actions

Setting human rights at the centre of an information society means working across a spectrum of areas. CRIS focuses on themes that can directly affect people's lives, such as:

- Strengthening the *public domain*, ensuring that information and knowledge are readily available for human development, and not locked up in private hands;

- Ensuring *affordable access to, and effective use of*, electronic networks in a development context, for instance by innovative and robust regulation and public investment;
- Securing and extending the *global commons*, for both broadcast and telecommunication, to ensure this public resource is not sold for private ends;
- Instituting *democratic and transparent governance* of the information society from local to global levels;
- Tackling information *surveillance and censorship*, government or commercial;
- Supporting *community and people-centred media*, traditional and new.

CRIS creates a space for civil society to reflect, to network, and to act on the information society through three pillars of action:

- Raising awareness, educating, stimulating debate on key aspects of the information society as it relates to human rights and development;
- Facilitating and encouraging mobilisation of civil society around these issues, to act in a variety of fora at different levels;
- Drafting, consulting and refining civil society positions in relation to the WSIS, and advocating and lobbying for their implementation.
- In practical terms, this includes producing briefing papers, interactive web resources, running and participating in seminars, sharing information, lobbying and advocacy.

What you can do

CRIS is an open campaign, drawing together existing groups and activists. It is organised around working groups, with thematic groups focusing on specific issues, and national and regional chapters supporting local activity.

CRIS is an initiative of the **Platform for Communication Rights**. CRIS campaign members include organizations and individuals committed to the promotion of communication rights and the Right to Communicate as a means to enhance human rights and the social, economic and cultural lives of people and communities.

The founding members of CRIS are listed below. To join CRIS please contact us at act@crisinfo.org and/or visit the web sites: <http://cris.comunica.org/> <http://www.comunica.org/>

Organizations

- African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET)
- Agencia Latinoamericana de Información (ALAI)

- Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica (ALER)
- Association for Progressive Communication (APC)
- Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires (AMARC)
- Catholic Media Council (Cameco)
- Centre of Community Networking and Information Policy Studies (CCNS)
- EED International
- European Communication Research Consortium (ECCR)
- Global Community Networking (GlobalCN)
- International Women's Tribune Centre
- InterPress Service (IPS)
- MediaChannel
- PANOS Institute
- Peoples Communication Charter
- Rede de Informações para o Terceiro Setor (RITS)
- VECAM
- World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)

Individuals

Jeff Chester; Michael Eisenmenger; Warren Feek; Regina Festa; Bruce Girard; Margaret Gallagher; George Gerbner; Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron; Michael Gurstein; DeeDee Halleck; Cees Hamelink; Mike Jensen; Wolfgang Kleinwächter; Robert McChesney; Kaarle Nordenstreng; Seán Ó Siochrú; Claudia Padovani; Valerie Peugeot; Marc Raboy; Bob Scott; Claire Shearman; Sara Stuart. ■



Is the 'information society' a useful concept for civil society?

Is the term 'The Information Society' (or the related 'Knowledge Society') useful for civil society? Does it adequately describe the changes in global social structures and processes that are currently taking place? Is there really a new form of society emerging? And if so, a society for whom, and how can it be harnessed to enhance human rights and fulfil pressing human needs?

The information society is not ideologically neutral

The answers to these questions are not at all obvious, as the term bears a heavy ideological burden. As the post-war industrial boom spiralled into stagflation and recession, Daniel Bell's (1973) book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* set the stage for the development of the idea of the 'information society'. Bell argued that the economic upheaval being experienced by the industrial economies of the North heralded a shift from their being based on the production of goods to that of human services. Computing, scientific research and development, education, health care – such knowledge based services were to become the backbone of a new post-industrial economy and an information based society.

Through the 1980's and early 1990's the wholesale transfer of industrial manufacturing to low wage arenas of the South picked up steam, and a flood of studies and reports sponsored by governments and think tanks followed Bell's lead and framed this economic restructuring as the rise of an 'information society.' Fuelled by neo-liberal economic policy, free trade, privatisation, deregulation, and structural adjustment became the bywords of a an emerging plan that was essentially a means for breathing life back into an ailing capitalist system.

Information technology played a key role in this process. In the global arena it facilitated the rapid movement of both capital and goods, linking the new manufacturing centres in the South with markets in the North. In the North, deregulation of telecommunications markets was envisioned as helping fuel investment and R&D in information technology and thereby providing the technical infrastructure for production and exchange of new information commodities.

Like others before them, when the European Union embarked on a major drive to re-regulate and privatise the telecommunication sector in the mid-1990s, they used the term 'information society' specifically to underline that the new society towards which they were striving would have an important *social* focus. Restructuring was not simply about infrastructure (ultimately to be owned and controlled by the private sector), but also about societal development and investment, ensuring that the benefits reach people.

Unfortunately, activities and budgets targeted at achieving the social goals were minuscule as compared to huge changes wrought by re-regulation and privatisation of the infrastructure. In 1995, the G7 group of industrialised countries introduced its own version of the Global Information Society, again offering a few small pilot applications to promote universal service while vigorously pursuing liberalisation policies that have largely succeeded in de-nationalising the telecommunication industry and are proceeding with the media sector more generally.

In this respect, the 'Information Society' is an invention of the globalisation needs of capital and their supporting governments. While there has, as a result, been major growth in access in many countries of the South, this is largely confined to urban areas and more profitable markets, and most have found themselves on the wrong side of a growing 'Digital Divide' - a multi-faceted divide that has well-educated, high-income males with 'Western' perspectives clearly on top everywhere, North and South.

The World Summit on the Information Society, the Dot Force, and even the UN ICT Task Force are seen by many as simply the latest round in this imbalanced policy development – window dressing on the most recent drive to impose a neo-liberal model of communications in every corner of the globe. While focusing (to limited effect) on the latest wave of inequity, the 'Digital Divide', they fail to tackle, or articulate, deeper issues of the huge structural changes we see in the whole information and communication arena.

Rescuing the concept: Back to origins

This vision of the Information Society, driven by the needs of transnational corporations with little more than lip service to real human needs and ever growing inequities, is not endorsed by many in civil society. Thus a first step is rehabilitating the term the 'Information Society' to assert that there is no single model of the information society, but many possible 'information societies'. The next step is to determine what kind of information society will best enhance social development and human rights, and whether

the WSIS offers an opportunity to join with others in designing and implementing this.

A problem with the current use of Information Society is that it often presents information and communication technologies, and access to them, as ends in themselves rather than as enabling tools. A focus on the latter would soon raise more fundamental questions that were at the heart of the earliest debates on the information society, or what was then known as 'post-industrial' society. In the 1970s, policymakers realised that *information* was playing an increasing role not only in economic sectors (the growth in information workers, services, intelligent goods etc.), but also in social, cultural and political life. The generation, dissemination and effective use of information were becoming critical factors in the dynamic of society. This trend gained impetus in the decades following, and has given rise to the idea of the 'knowledge society'. Closely related to the 'Information Society', this notion posits a link between information and knowledge, but in a competitive market-led environment. (The 'Knowledge Society', however, comes with its own ideological baggage, that will not be gone into here.)

Key questions for the WSIS

If civil society is to embrace and rescue the notion of an information society it must return to these basics by posing the right questions:

- Who generates and owns information and knowledge? Is it utilized for the private benefit of a few or the public benefit of many?
- How is knowledge disseminated and distributed? Who are the gatekeepers?
- What constrains and facilitates the use of knowledge by people to achieve their goals? Who is positioned best, and who worst, to take advantage of this knowledge?

Many subsidiary questions this framing of the issue: Have global trends in copyright gone too far in supporting corporate owners, at the cost of creativity and the public domain? Is concentration of media ownership threatening political participation and cultural diversity? Will liberalisation in telecommunication constrict universal service policies, especially for rural and poorer users? What impact will the creeping privatisation of radio spectrum have on this public resource? What are the long-term implications of the commercialisation of the knowledge environment, through advertising and the promotion of a consumer ethic, especially in poorer countries? Is the current erosion of privacy and growth in surveillance necessary? What actions are needed to address the causes of the digital divide? How can youth and women participate and shape

information society policies? Can current trends in global governance put human rights at the centre of the information society agenda? Will the Information Society bring sustainable development for all? The WSIS might offer a timely forum in which to raise these vital issues.

Is the 'information society' a useful concept for civil society? Potentially, yes – if it is fleshed out to embrace the full dynamic of information and knowledge in society, and if it focuses on enhancing human rights and social, cultural, and economic development. But if it stops short at discussing the 'Digital Divide'; if it confuses the means – technologies – with the ends – human development – then it fails to transcend its narrow ideological roots.

Further reading:

Christopher May, *The Information Society: A Sceptical View* (Polity, 2002);

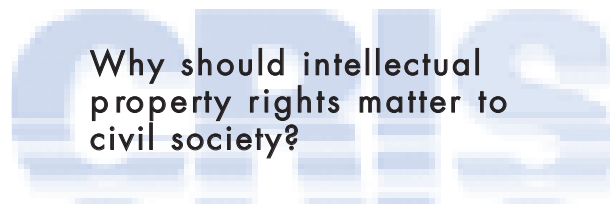
Subhash Bhatnagar & Robert Schware (eds.), *Information and communication technology in development. Cases from India*, Sage, New Delhi, 2000.

Gert Nulens, Nancy Hafkin, Leo Van Audenhove & Bart Cammaerts (eds.), *The digital divide in developing countries: Towards an information society in Africa*, VUB Press, Brussels, 2001.

Jan Servaes (ed.), *Walking on the other side of the information highway. Communication, culture and development in the 21st century*, Southbound, Penang, 2000.

Robin Mansell and Uta Wehn (eds.), *Knowledge societies. Information technology for sustainable development*, Oxford UP, Oxford, 1998.

Frank Webster, *Theories of the information society*, Routledge, London, 1995.



Why should intellectual property rights matter to civil society?

Inventions of the mind – ideas – are very special. All culture and society is built upon innumerable layers of accumulated past knowledge and ideas. In the arts, medicine, education, agriculture, and industry – in almost all areas of human endeavour – knowledge and ideas lie at the base of the flowering of human life and its passions.

Intellectual property rights (IPRs) emerged in the industrialised world as a means to mediate and

control the circulation of knowledge, as a means of balancing the conflicting rights of different groups involved in the generation and use of ideas of economic value. IPRs are premised on concerns that the *creators or authors* of ideas have an economic right to a fair return for their effort and a moral right to not have their ideas misrepresented.

However, ideas are not simply the product of individuals and corporations. For the most part they incorporate and build upon the traditions, collected wisdom, and understanding of social groups and societies. Sometimes they build upon natural creatures and processes that have taken millions of years to evolve. Generally, at least in part, research is financed or subsidized by public funds and tax dollars, and public institutions are deployed to develop and maintain their social and economic viability. Consequently, *society in general* has a social right to use ideas to the benefit of the public good – especially if they are key to social and physical well being.

IPRs attempt to balance these rights: the moral, the economic and the social.

Trends in regulation

In information and communication industries *copyright* is the most important form of IPR. However, with the continuing rise of the Information Society and the development of information commodities, *patents*, *trademarks* and *integrated circuits designs* are becoming increasingly relevant.

In the last few decades, three distorting trends have emerged: corporations have emerged as the key owners of copyrighted material; the scope, depth and duration of copyright has grown hugely, to encompass not only intellectual work but also plant and life forms; and copyright owners wield a formidable set of instruments to enforce their rights nationally and internationally.

While IPR had traditionally been used by the cultural industries to reinforce their control over 'ideas' and 'products', the threat posed by 'copying' in a digital era, has led to a renewed interest in IPR and to increased investments in the proprietorial significance of IP. In a knowledge economy, any content that is a product of the digital manipulation of data is considered intellectual property. Technically speaking, even an email message can qualify for IP protection. Some of the factors that have contributed to the consolidation of a market-based, global IP regime include the following – shrinking profits in an era characterised by technological and product convergences, economic downturn in the telecommunications and dotcoms sectors, and the real and imagined threats to corporate profitability posed by

piracy via subversive uses of technology such as MP3 and establishments such as the recently domesticated, peer-to-peer, net-based music swapping service, Napster.

IPR has affected the public's access to knowledge in the public domain and to copyrighted works, limited legitimate opportunities for cultural appropriations, stifled learning, creativity, innovation thus placing curbs on the democratisation of knowledge. IPR has also infiltrated into the domain of food and medicine, threatening the sustainability of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity.

The TRIPS armoury

A key means by which IPR has been reinforced and extended is through the WTO-related, Trade Related Agreement on Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), and the Copyright Treaty (1996) that was negotiated by the UN-related, World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). These agreements have been used 1) as a means to tie trade with IP, 2) as templates for national legislation on IPR and 3) for ensuring the harmonisation of global agreements such as TRIPS with local IP legislation. These global agreements have been backed by trade associations such as the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), groups like the US-based International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA) and corporations such as AOL-Time Warner, Microsoft and IBM. These groups are jointly concerned with issues such as the impact of piracy on profits, and are keen to extend the life of copyrights and patents, thus profiting from royalties and licensing agreements by creating more or less permanent enclosures over cultural property.

The TRIPS Agreements cover 1) patents, 2) industrial design, 3) trademarks, 4) geographic indicators and appellations of origins, 5) layout design of integrated circuits, 6) undisclosed information on trade secrets, and 7) copyrights (literary, artistic, musical, photographic, and audiovisual).

TRIPS favours industrialised countries and transnational copyright industries, while limiting the freedom of countries, especially less-industrialised ones, to design IPR regimes to meet their economic, social, and cultural needs. Especially onerous are TRIPS provisions on the patenting of life forms and pharmaceuticals and the appropriation and commodification of indigenous knowledge by TNCs.

Copyright and patent mania

In the US, Congress extended the terms of copyright eleven times during the last forty years. The 1998 digital copyright law extended copyright by 20 years; works copyrighted by individuals in the post-1978 period were granted a term of 70 years

beyond the life of the author; works owned by corporations were protected for 95 years and extensions applied even to authors who were long deceased or to works that were out of print. These extensions have also effected other parts of the world. Moreover, there has been a massive increase in patent applications – 7.1 million applications were filed in 1999 as against 1.8 million in 1990. WIPO received a record 104,000 international patent applications from the information industries in 2001. 38.5 per cent of these applications came from the USA while the developing world hardly managed 5 per cent. In Europe, Philips filed for 2010 patents in the year 2000, while British Telecommunications amassed 13,000 patents protecting 1700 inventions in that same year. IBM remained the top filer of patents in the USA with 2,886 patents in the year 2000. It earned \$1.7 billion from licensing its patents – a fraction of the \$38 billion that US companies earned from royalties in the year 2000. This has created a climate where all knowledge is commodified and sold on the market to the highest bidder, leaving the public good in a vulnerable state.

IPR and its implications for civil society

The key issue for civil society is that related to the democratisation of knowledge. Since creativity builds on itself, what does civil society need to do to protect traditions of creativity? Would Shakespeare's writings or for that matter Microsoft's Windows platform have been created if strict IPR laws had been enforced? What can be done to reward creators without allowing them to monopolise knowledge in perpetuity? What needs to be done to protect the global commons, and culture and life forms in the public domain that are the heritage of humankind? Are there possibilities for global civil society-governmental-inter-governmental collaborations in the matter of advocating for a 'cultural exception' clause related to trade in cultural products? What needs to be done to ensure that the cultural environments that we inhabit also include copyright and patent-free zones? What support can civil society give to the copy-left and open source movements? What pressure can civil society exert at local levels to ensure that IPR legislations respond to social and cultural needs rather than to the needs of international capital? What can be done to keep the Internet an open and innovative commons for all?

Additional resources

For an accessible introduction to IPR and Information issues, see James Boyle's (1997) *A Politics of Intellectual Property: Environmentalism for the Net*, <http://james-boyle.com>, *Making Sense of IPR* under

the resources section in the WACC website, www.wacc.org.uk, Vandana Shiva's *Protect or Plunder?: Understanding Intellectual Property Rights* (Zed Books, 2001), and Chapter 7 on the World Intellectual Property Organization and Intellectual Property Rights in *Global Media Governance*, by Seán Ó Siochrú and Bruce Girard with Amy Mahan (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002). For more substantive readings, see Ronald Betting's *Copyrighting Culture: The Political Economy of Intellectual Property*, (Westview Press, 1996), Rosemary's Coombe's *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation and the Law*, (Duke University Press, 1998) and Lawrence Lessig's *The Future of Ideas: The Fate of the Commons in a Connected World* (Random House, NY, 2001).



What is the special significance of community media to civil society?

Community media provide a vital alternative to the profit-oriented agenda of corporate media. They are driven by social objectives rather than the private, profit motive. They empower people rather than treat them as passive consumers, and they nurture local knowledge rather than replace it with standard solutions. Ownership and control of community media is rooted in, and responsible to, the communities they serve. And they are committed to human rights, social justice, the environment and sustainable approaches to development.

A voice for civil society

Much is promised by the information society – access to vital knowledge for health and education, better information from governments and corporations, electronic democracy, global trade and exchange, up to the minute news. But because they lack the resources to make their voices heard in this shifting social landscape, the world's poorest communities face the twin dangers of being left out of this new economy and becoming a cultural dumping ground for mass market products made by and for the richest economies.

Community media help balance these inequities. They provide the means for cultural expression, community discussion, and debate. They supply news and information and facilitate political engagement. Radio is the most widespread electronic communica-

tions device in the world and community radio is a practical and cost-effective means of reaching and connecting the world's poorest communities. Independent and community publications provide news and views that are often framed out of the corporate media. And in the field of Community Informatics (see below), web-based media are increasingly seen as means for helping communities achieve social, economic, cultural and political goals.

Community media in practice

Community media are integrated with practices of community life. They offer concrete means for public participation and for defending cultural diversity. Their content includes political and economic news that facilitates community dialogue and involvement, community and personal messages (marriages, union-meetings, lost donkeys), musical greetings, educational programs for development (health, environment, gender), information programs, and culturally relevant entertainment. Through access to the production and consumption of relevant communications, these media form a collective platform for community empowerment.

A growing trend is the formation of regional, national, and transnational networks that support local communications initiatives and facilitate political and social participation at all levels of community. For instance:

- The National Community Radio Forum of South Africa is pioneering the use of Internet and satellite distribution for exchange of social action programming and news among its 100 community radio station members in South Africa.
- In North America, Deep Dish Television is a network that provides programming to 200 to 300 public, educational and municipal television channels. The programmes are produced by different communities using satellite television as a means of distribution.
- The Latin American Indigenous Broadcast Network 'Red Quechua Satelital' combines e-mail, audio by internet and satellite transmission, to daily connect 28 Quechua and Quichua radios and their audiences with news-bulletins and radio magazines. These community media contribute to the cultural and political awareness of the twelve million discriminated and mostly poor Quechuas and Quichuas in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador.
- 101.7 MAMA FM: is a community radio station set up by the Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA). The first women's radio station in Africa, it targets women between the age of 15-45 with gender sensitive educational pro-

grammes, and offers training and practical experience for female journalists.

- In San Francisco and New York, the Independent Press Association provides a range of services to bolster both the financial and editorial aspects of independent and community publications that serve groups and communities often marginalized by the corporate media.
- Around the world a growing number of Independent Media Centres are struggling to create an interactive, web-based platform for reporting and sharing information on social issues and social movements.

Building community media

Because communication is a basic right and a necessary condition for social and economic development, community media can make a strategic contribution to that development. But a sustainable approach requires firm foundations.

Building community media requires an approach based on the empowerment of peoples and communities – not private investors. Nation states and international institutions have to guarantee access for production, distribution and consumption to all groups in society, and legislative reforms that assure effective access and support policies for community media must be implemented. In part, this requires strengthening rights to freedom of information and freedom of expression. Similarly, copyright and intellectual property right regulations must allow for the free circulation of that may impact upon health and well being.

Greater awareness of the development potential of community broadcasting, and particularly community radio, is needed among governments, intergovernmental agencies and the private sector. Community media projects require assistance to adapt to new digital production technologies and to increase their access to the internet. Strategic links need to be made between community radio and telecentre development, and opportunities to cluster broadcast, print, and web-based community media resources must be developed and promoted.

In particular, the development of community radio and the future of community television will depend on access to significant technical resources. Affordable access to frequencies, channels and bandwidth and the adoption of appropriate technical standards is imperative. Governments and intergovernmental bodies, including the International Telecommunications Union, need to ensure spectrum allocation and technical standards provide for community media development. Private media and telecommunications providers must be required to offer free or

low cost channel space and bandwidth for community media content.

A burgeoning perspective is that of community informatics, which is concerned with the enabling uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in communities – how ICTs can help achieve a community's social, economic, cultural, or political goals. Community informatics brings together the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders – community activists and groups, policymakers, users/citizens, artists, and a range of academics working across disciplines. A Community informatics approach considers access facilities, service design, telecentre or community access centre design, design of the community system, online service delivery, and online support. Applications of community informatics include community Internet access, community information, online civic participation, online community service delivery, community economic development, education/training/learning networks, community and regional training, and telework.

A rich literature has developed in community informatics, which covers a broad range of issues, focusing on case studies in North America, Europe, Latin America, and developing countries. These issues include: Access: how are access needs met in particular communities? Are community networks able to bridge the digital divide?; Community economic development: how are community networks contributing to this?; Social cohesion: are community networks contributing to social inclusion? What has been the effect of community participation?; Development: are telecentres and other public access facilities meeting the needs of those in developing countries? Learning: how are community networks being used or contributing to digital literacy?

Conclusion

Community media are key to creating a strong, socially responsible civil society. They must have access to sufficient financial resources whilst respecting and preserving their independence from government and commercial media corporations. Revenues raised from the sale of spectrum and cable and telecommunications licenses should be reinvested in social communications objectives, including support for community media development. And policy initiatives that support and promote community media at regional, national, and transnational levels – such as tax incentives, production funds, and legislation supporting the creation of co-operatives and other not-for-profit organizational forms – should be devised and implemented. Communication policy development and international investment in information and communication technologies must consis-

tently include support for community-based media.

Further reading and resources

- Fraser, Colin and Sonia Restrepo Estrada. *Community Radio Handbook*. Unesco (Paris, 2001)
- Downing, John with Zamara Villarreal Ford, Geneveve Gil, and Laura Stein. *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*. Sage Publications (Thousand Oaks, California, 2001).
- Geerts, Andrés & Victor van Oeyen. *La Radio Popular frente al nuevo siglo*. ALER (Quito, 2002)
- Girard, Bruce (ed). *A Passion for Radio*. Black Rose (Montreal/New York, 1992). Online at <http://comunica.org/passion> and in Spanish (*RadioApasionados*) at <http://comunica.org/apasionados/>
- Gumucio Dagron, Alfonso. *Making Waves: stories of participatory communication for social change*. Rockefeller Foundation (New York, 2001) Online at <http://www.cominit.com/making-waves.html>
- Gurstein, Michael, ed. *Community Informatics: Enabling Communities with Information and Communication Technologies* (Idea Publishing, 2000).
- Halleck, DeeDee. *Hand held visions: the impossible possibilities of community media*. Fordham University (New York, 2002)
- Keeble, Leigh and Brian D. Loader, ed. *Community Informatics: Shaping Computer-Mediated Social Relations* (Routledge, 2001).
- Mtimde, Lumko, Marie-Helene Bonin, Nkopane Maphiri, Kodjo Nyamaku, *What is Community Radio*. AMARC/Panos (Johannesburg, 1998)
- Peppino, Ana María. *Radio Educativa , Popular y Comunitaria en América Latina*. UAM (Mexico, 1999).
- Rodriguez, Clemencia. *Fissures in the Mediascape: an international study of citizen's media*. Hampton Press (Cresskill, N.J. 2001)



Media ownership: Big deal?

It may seem as if only governments and the private sector have a stake in the media business, especially since their interests often overlap. However, media

concentration also raises a number of issues for civil society.

Media ownership has undergone a radical shift during the last decade. A handful of international and regional media corporations – AOL-Time Warner, News Corporation, General Electric, Sony, Vivendi, Viacom, Televisa, Globo and Clarín, along with a few others, now control vast sections of the media market. For example, close to 35% of newspaper circulation in the UK belongs to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Silvio Berlusconi controls three of Italy's four private broadcasting stations and has recently appointed a friend of his to head the public broadcasting station, RAI. This trend towards media concentration is linked to the spread of neo-liberal economics, technological developments and the emergence of global and regional agreements on multi-lateral trade. In fact it mirrors the pattern of global economics in which 225 of the richest people have a combined wealth equal to the annual income of the world's 2.5 billion poorest people.

What happens when media ownership is concentrated to this extent within and across media sectors?

The emphasis on profit-oriented, advertising-fuelled content has already led to a decline in the range of options available and a loss of space for informed debate. Media content, media channels and distribution systems are in the hands of a handful of corporations. There are threats to the current system that oversees ownership and allocation of Internet domain names. Even the audiovisual spectrum, which is public property, is under siege from commercial interests. As a result, ordinary people are denied access to independent media channels and alternative visions of economic, political and social futures.

Convergence and concentration

Technological developments, particularly convergence characterised by the coming together of previously unrelated technologies, have led to a scramble for market leadership and to further media concentration. The buy-out of the 'traditional' media conglomerate Time Warner by the upstart 'new' media company America Online is one example of these new alliances. The intent was to unite Time Warner's 'content' and cable systems with AOL's broadband distribution system. Hundreds of such mergers have taken place over the past ten years, though some have since fallen victim to the dotcom bust.

Some of these take-overs have come about under rather dubious circumstances. Take for instance the continuing saga over the ownership of the Internet

domain '.nu' that once belonged to Niue, an island in the Pacific. .Nu was sold for a small fee to an entrepreneur from the USA in rather unclear circumstances. The entrepreneur went on to profit from this deal at the expense of the cash-strapped government of Niue. Such examples of prospecting for the world's information resources by fair means and foul are commonplace and characterise the global media economy.

Trade and intellectual property rights

These developments in media concentration need to be seen against the backdrop of global and regional trade negotiations, in particular the emergence of global trade forums such as the World Trade Organisation and the development of regional trade blocs such as NAFTA, Mercosur and ASEAN. With the decline of traditional industry, the global cultural and service industries have become a premier source for corporate profits. The WTO has overseen the liberalisation of audiovisual trade, the privatisation of telecommunications and the opening up of media markets throughout the world. One of the key ways in which corporate media monopolies have extended their interests is by including intellectual property rights (IPR), in particular 'copyrights' and 'patents'.

It is common knowledge that the global power of the Windows operating system is maintained by Microsoft's assiduous protection of its software codes and its licensing system. And intellectual property (IP) has become the means by which Donald Duck is maintained as private property by the Disney empire. As IP is extended to cover products and practices related to traditional media, mass media and digital media, concerns have been raised about the impact on culture as the global heritage of humankind.

What are the issues for civil society?

While it is true that in many countries people nowadays have access to a lot more alternative media sources than twenty years ago, mainstream media networks continue to account for a significant proportion of audiences throughout the world. In addition, alternative media sources themselves are coming under increasing pressure to bend to market-driven realities. This poses a number of questions for civil society.

- What needs to be done to achieve a more level playing field in media ownership? How can civil society contribute to this?
- What does the media ownership map look like in your city?
- What role ought the state to play in regulating media ownership?

- What can be done at local levels to democratise IPR?
- What needs to be done to ensure that affordable access to information and communication becomes a reality locally nationally and globally?
- What kind of media ownership leads to the development of people-friendly cultural environments?

Additional resources

The book by Edward S. Herman & Robert W. McChesney (1999), *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism*, Cassel: London and Washington, is a good introduction to global media ownership. Also check out *Media Development* 4/1998, an issue dedicated to Media Ownership and Control, or Gillian Doyle's (2002), *Media Ownership*, Sage: London.. There are some informative web sites related to this issue. Check out The Media Ownership Chart at www.mediachannel.org and FAIR resources at www.fair.org



One of the most important political decisions a society makes is how to control its media system. Control entails ownership, regulation and subsidy. Ownership may rest with governments, corporations, non-government organisations or private individuals. It may serve the interests of profit or be non-profit-making. Regulation may be provided by the government, a non-profit agency, political parties, the users of the media and/or advertising.

Research reveals that once the patterns of ownership, regulation and subsidisation of a media system are understood, it is not hard to comprehend the biases and pressures built into that system. The following analysis explains the constraints placed on media workers, both journalists and others, and explores the range of media fare being offered to the public.

Controlling media content

Ideally a society will deploy a system of media control that will promote desired values and downplay undesired ones. In authoritarian societies, rulers invariably keep a tight grip on the media either through direct ownership or strict regulation of con-

tent. One hallmark of democratic societies is the lack of government control over the media, which is to a large extent independent of the State. Yet as common as it is for the media to be in the hands of predominantly private forces, it is a little noted fact that with little explicit government regulation the outcome can be just as undemocratic. This is particularly the case whenever entry barriers are placed on a media market, making it non-competitive and allowing the media owners to use their control to advance the political interests of the 'owning' class. Such has been the case in Venezuela in recent times, for instance, where the ostensibly 'free' press has attacked the democratically elected government of populist Hugo Chavez with a ferocity and willingness to lie that might make one of Stalin's hack *Pravda* editors blush.

There is nothing 'natural' about privately run media any more than there is about government-run media. Even a capitalist society can logically decide to have a largely non-commercial media system. All media systems are the result of direct and indirect government policies. In the case of radio, television, cable and satellite broadcasting, the role of government policy-making is self-evident. When the government offers a monopoly franchise to a limited spectrum, it is not setting the terms of competition but rather picking the winners of that competition. Government policy-making is fundamental to other media sectors as well. Copyright, for example, which forms the basis of book publishing as well as the film and music industries, is a government-granted and enforced monopoly policy. Another example is the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which grants special privileges to journalists that no other industry enjoys. More broadly, government recognition of corporations and the legitimacy of profit is the starting point of modern commercial media systems. As history shows, there was nothing natural about these developments.

What kind of regulation, ownership and subsidisation?

One of the ironies emanating from debates over media policy is the use of the term 'free market' by corporate media executives to describe their business and political philosophy. Often the term 'free market' is proposed as an alternative to 'government regulation'. This is mostly a rhetorical and propagandistic ruse with no credible basis in fact. Media markets are almost never free markets in the economic sense of the term. They are almost always oligopolistic markets in which the government plays a central role in setting up the largest players as well as providing subsidies and defining the rules of the

game. When corporate media CEOs complain about 'government regulation' they are not complaining about the gift of monopoly rights to the airwaves. That aspect of government regulation is most welcome and expected, and they never wish to see it end. The type of government regulation that upsets media corporate executives is regulation that reflects the interests of the general population, rather than their own private interests. So the debate is never one of regulation vs. free markets, but rather always one of what type of regulation, what type of ownership, and what type of subsidy.

The need for public debate

By this logic, it is imperative that public debate over media policies be vigorous and widespread. This debate should constitute a significant part of a healthy democracy's political culture. The more open and informed public participation, the greater the likelihood that the resulting policies will serve the broadest democratic values. At the national level, media issues have varied in importance from nation to nation. Let us postulate two general rules. Firstly, the healthier the political democracy, the more likely there is going to be lively public debate and an interest in media policy. Secondly, dominant interests in media industries, particularly private corporate interests, provide no incentive for such a debate. These stakeholders much prefer the public to think the media system is the natural domain of the corporate sector. In a nation like the United States, for example, a combination of weak democracy and extremely powerful private media interests has led to media policy being developed in the most undemocratic manner imaginable. Public participation in media policy debates is rendered vastly more difficult because the corporate news media do not cover the topic.

With the emergence of a global market economy the problems of media policy-making become even more daunting. The media sector has become a major area for capitalist investment and a central component of 'globalisation', both in economic and ideological terms. As the importance of the media has grown, media policy-making has been relegated to forums like the World Trade Organisation or the World Intellectual Property Organization, which are explicitly designed to be heavily weighted toward elite interests. Thus for those interested in promoting a healthy and vigorous society it is of vital concern to stimulate democratic decision-making in media policy formulation, so that the resulting system serves the interests of the broad population and not just those of the wealthy corporate owners and their friends in government.

Recommended reading:

- Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (New York: The New Press, 2000)
- Georgette Wang, Jan Servaes & Anura Goonasekera (eds.) *The new communications landscape. Demystifying media globalization* (London: Routledge, 2000)

The above CRIS Campaign Issue Papers are intended to initiate discussion around issues related to the WSIS. We need your comments to correct, refine or supplement the ideas. Visit our website at www.crisinfo.org or send your comments to issues@crisinfo.org. Feel free to reproduce any of the papers, acknowledging the source.

Editorial

Continued from page 2

that can be directed towards more constructive engagements elsewhere? The answer is simple. CRIS exists because of the recognition that ordinary people have a stake in developing the vision of an information society, participating in the working out of that vision and benefiting from the implementation of that vision. The right to communicate has yet to be recognised as a human right. WSIS offers an opportunity for CS to define this right and, to pressure governments and inter-governmental agencies to recognise it. The right to communicate is based in the recognition that communication is a defining characteristic of personhood, the basis for inter-subjectivity, for relationships, for community.

The world has witnessed the consequences of letting governments and the private sector determine the visions of global communication and its rules of engagement. The struggles over TRIPS, ICANN, and the unfolding attempts to globalise surveillance and restrict communication freedoms in the post-September 11 world, remind us of the continuing nature of the struggles related to the democratisation of communication. If CS forfeits the opportunity to contribute towards the making of a just information society now, the resulting deficits will be even harder to redress at a later stage. Despite numerous obstacles, the WSIS is an unprecedented opportunity for CS to contribute towards the making of global policy on the information society. This is an opportunity that we cannot ignore.

The following is a personal account of the WSIS PrepCom, written by Seán Ó Siochrú of the CRIS campaign.

Day 0: Sunday 30 June 2002

We arrived to register at the Conference Centre, the location of the huge multi-lingual theatres that host the intergovernmental sessions, the day before the PrepCom. We quickly realised that the Civil Society Segment was actually to be held in the basement of the ITU Tower itself, only a couple of minutes walk from the PrepCom venue but still physically removed and unlikely to offer opportunities for informal exchange with delegates. Given this, many of us camped for the duration in the basement Press Area

A personal account of WSIS PrepCom 1

Seán Ó Siochrú

of the Conference Centre, where there was a bank of computers, lots of network connections, better access to delegates, and (vital) unlimited photocopying. This was our 'unofficial' networking area, our toe-hold in the official conference building.

CRIS people there on Sunday morning, about a dozen, met first at 11.00 am, in the PrepCom registration area – interrupted by the World Cup Football kick off. A few gave up the match to prepare the agenda for the afternoon open CRIS meeting. This began at 3.00 pm, with a good attendance of about 40 people, maybe half already involved in CRIS. But just about all the others were ready to join in with us – and we with them. The meeting was positive, and some key decisions were taken:

- We set up an e-mail list of all those present, which grew into the WSIS-Prep1 list. The Conference Centre and the ITU Building are very well cyber-connected – you could even buy a card for wireless internet access anywhere in the building – so a list appeared to be an easy way to stay in touch. But those without a laptop or who couldn't check their e-mail regularly risked falling out of the loop (more than 150 messages were sent to the list during the five-day meeting). By Thursday we set up an old-fashioned – chalk, glue and paper – bulletin board, which served the needs of many better.

- We agreed to meet every morning, at 8.00 or 8.30 am, to report back and plan out the day. This was to be open not just to CRIS members but to all who agreed broadly with CRIS aims, and so became known as the CRIS+ meeting.
- We agreed that a major concern was that the Civil Society Segment had been organised in such a way as to leave no opportunity for us to strategise together. Basically, there was to be a briefing every morning from the Civil Society Division (CSD) of the Secretariat, followed by Workshops on whatever topics people had asked to have included. Most of us felt we had not come all the way to Geneva to take part in Workshops, especially since it would mean being isolated from the decisions being taken in the other building.

Day 1: Monday 1 July

We held our first CRIS+ meeting in the morning at 8.30 am in the basement of the ITU Tower. We decided to seek time, from the CSD, for a Civil Society Plenary Discussion on Strategy later in the day. We also spent some time analysing the proposals before the PrepCom, especially with regard to the modalities for the so-called Rules of Procedure for PrepComs, which include the modalities and mechanisms by which civil society will be able to participate at this and other PrepComs. While rules and procedures were not the main interest of most civil society participants, they are the most important item on the agenda of the first Prepcom, since they define who will be able to participate and how.

The official documents contained two optional proposals (Rule 55). One would open the door widely, in principle, to civil society participation (option b); the other (option a) being far more restrictive. The details of the modalities for participation were then to be included in an Annex to the rules. Furthermore, Rule 56 used the exact same wording, but appeared to accept individual private sector firms for official accreditation, which we understood to be a dangerous precedent in a UN Summit.

We also heard that one of our CRIS+ number (I think it was Stéphane Koch from ISOC) had secured the domain name wsis.info, which we promptly set up as our ad hoc Website. The media team used this site throughout the week for posting our various documents and communiqués. Unfortunately, this resource was underused. Few of us thought to look at it and it was not widely publicised. We could have made more use of it, for CRIS members other civil society actors, and even our onsite lobbying efforts.

The opening ceremony of the Intergovernmental meeting then began at 10.00 am, in the Conference Centre, which (like all plenaries) was open to all. We

heard Daniel Pimiento give a speech presenting a civil society perspective (he rightly denied being able to represent civil society) – apparently he had been asked by the CSD a couple of days before to make this speech. This was followed immediately by the First Plenary Meeting.

But by then, most of us were trooping back to the ITU Tower for the opening of the Civil Society Segment at 12.00, in which Cees Hamelink exceeded his usually high standards in rhetorically juxtaposing humour with serious comment. (His paper is on the wsis.info Website)

We also heard here that the Intergovernmental session to decide the Rules of Procedure (SubCommittee 1), beginning at 3.00 pm, was to be open only to government delegates. We had ways to monitor developments - I was a member of the Irish delegation, and Michel Egger of the Swiss delegation – but it seemed we were doubly removed from the decision making and discussion processes. It did not augur well.

In the meantime, an early highlight of the Intergovernmental Plenary was the election of the President of the WSIS: Adama Samassekou from Mali. (We heard the former Mali President Konaré had pulled out in his favour, as he could not commit to all the travel involved). A nice touch was that Samassekou, immediately upon his election, rushed over to the Civil Society meeting which was just breaking up, and made a short speech emphasising the key role he sees for civil society. After that, the PrepCom Plenary settled into a series of intensely boring 'opening statements', a fitting start to the official activities overall. (Later debates made these speeches, by comparison, seem interesting.) These continued all day and into the next, as one by one ministers and officials had their say.

For the afternoon, we produced the first of many 'Communiqués' which expressed our views to the rest of the PrepCom. This one was presented in the name of CRIS, whereas later ones came from the Civil Society Segment as a whole, or its Sub-Committees. (These are all on the wsis.info site.)

The real action also began in the afternoon in the closed Sub-Committee 1 on Rules of Procedure. Sub-Committee 1, which is open to all governments, tediously began the process of line-by-line trawling through the draft proposal. It very quickly became clear that Pakistan, Iran, Egypt and a few others were determined to filibuster this indefinitely, specifically with a view to narrowing participation down to governments only. The tactic was to object to everything. Their attack was not directly on civil society or the private sector – the main intent seemed to be on putting the governments fully in charge of the

Summit. Of course, nothing was explicitly said to this effect – all speeches reaffirmed the need for all stakeholders etc. etc. But those in the meeting became very familiar with the Pakistani delegate's voice, and indeed there was general surprise when she failed to object to a line or phrase.

By the end of the day, the Chair of the session, D. Stauffacher (Swiss ambassador to the UN events in Geneva), could see it was going nowhere, and so began developing informal proposals to progress on the real sticking points. These proposals were to be put to a sub-group of the main protagonists the next day, to try to break the impasse. The meeting was even more secret – it was held in another room and no-one other than selected Government delegates could attend (and not, for instance, civil society representatives on the government delegation). Denmark, current holder of the EU presidency, represented EU countries, which met in private session every morning to agree their position and strategy. From then on, we were to rely on often quite inaccurate rumours emanating from time to time from this room.

Back at the Civil Society Segment, during lunchtime we explained our problems regarding the absence of Civil Society Strategy Plenaries to Louise Lasonde and Alain Clerc of the CSD. It transpired that they were each going to chair one of the first two Workshops (on Governance and Communication Rights, and the Gender Caucus), so any agenda rearrangement would have to include both. The Gender Caucus did not agree to conclude their session early, which would have facilitated a plenary Civil Society discussion. But the other Workshop agreed to drop a couple of speakers, and Alain Clerc, chairing it, agreed to reserve the last hour before 6.00 pm for a plenary civil society strategy discussion. He had also agreed to step down from the Chair, as we argued that civil society organisations should themselves select a chair and generally decide what they should do.

Unfortunately, it did not work out that way. The session continued on, very loosely chaired by Alain Clerc, until 5.50 pm. The translators left precisely at 6.00, so there was no possibility of holding the plenary. At the end, Alain Clerc agreed with a small group that the Tuesday morning briefing session at 9.00 am would instead be devoted to strategy.

The private sector also met that day, under the auspices of the International Chamber of Commerce. They too were concerned about lack of access and participation – though they were surely not unaware of the major marker being set for the future, to allow private firms in as accredited participants. At the time we thought it was a precedent, but the reality is

that Monterrey (FfD) had already set the stage. We will have to figure out how to deal with this.

Day 2: Tuesday 2 July

The government session continued the next day with opening statements in Plenary, and the secret unofficial meeting trying to broker a deal on Rules of Procedure. There was not much there for us, so we were busy getting organised.

The CRIS+ meeting began at 8.00 am, and a large group came. Unfortunately none of our informal meetings had interpreters, since they had not been planned in advance. English was the norm. The meeting reaffirmed our decision that it was necessary to have a series of Civil Society Plenaries, organised by ourselves.

The promised Civil Society Strategy Plenary then began at 9.00 am. Alain Clerc again took the chair, though we understood that the previous evening he had agreed to step down. It became more like a question and answer session, and quite a few people became agitated. After talking for over an hour, the meeting had several proposals on the table, including the creation of Sub-Committees to shadow and comment on the work of intergovernmental Sub-Committees. A proposal was also on the floor to elect a new Chair for the meeting, but Alain, probably in confusion, attempted to wind up the Plenary meeting, convene a civil society Sub-Committee on Rules of Procedure, and continue with the planned agenda of workshops.

Knowing that the status of the Civil Society Plenary would then have become uncertain (who would call another one? Who would chair it?) several people insisted that Alain Clerc stand down as Chair. In an uncomfortable and confused moment, he complied, leaving the top table empty. We elected Renata Bloem, President of CONGO, to Chair the plenary session. (CONGO is the Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations.) She agreed – on condition that we would elect a new chair for the next meeting. (We never did – Renata did a fine job and chaired all our subsequent plenary meetings.)

So we then immediately convened a meeting of our Civil Society Sub-Committee on Rules of Procedure, and elected Roberto Bissio as Chair. (Roberto at one point offered to act as a 'suicide bomber', if we needed to make a difficult point in Plenary. As he dryly noted, however, he could do it only once.) We found a room that could seat 15, but in the end over thirty people were there, some spilling out the door. At this, the French Ambassador (who was very helpful) arrived and gave us a draft of the negotiation proposal on Rules of Procedure.

These were very worrying, essentially offering a watered down version of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio + 10, scheduled for August/ September 2002). We were very dissatisfied, and a delegation comprising myself and others met officially with D. Stauffacher and Bruno Romazzotti (also on the Swiss delegation) and went through our concerns. A few of us stayed up late drafting a second Communiqué.

The secret negotiations also went on into the night – there was genuine concern that the entire process could break down. The EU had even prepared what the Irish delegation called a 'doomsday statement', to be read out if it broke down irrevocably. It makes interesting reading.

One other item of note that day. The Intergovernmental Plenary invited speakers from civil society and the private sector. We were told that 19 had duly registered to speak but that we had to choose only four or five. An equal number were to speak from the private sector. (Incidentally, the private sector not only had their own meetings, but also had associations attending the civil society sessions – one of the imbalances of which we complained.)

The five all spoke well, Luis Dávila from ALER spoke on behalf of CRIS; Anne Walker on the gender theme; one spoke on behalf of both the youth caucus and Asian civil society organisations; Alain Ambrosi spoke on behalf of the Carrefour Mondiale de l'Internet; and M. Diallo from Mali gave a message from the African regional preparatory meeting. We agreed that each would devote a part of their short (four-minute) speech to issues of common concern.

However, the process by which this number of speakers was arrived at was never clear. And in the end there were six private sector and six civil society – the sixth 'civil society' position was expressed by the International Publishers Association, an industry association that was not nominated by the civil society plenary.

Day 3: Wednesday July

As always, the day began with a lively CRIS+ meeting to compare notes and discuss priorities. The Civil Society Plenary at 9.00 am then discussed and approved the Communiqué on Rules of Procedure it. Sheets were passed around for individual endorsement, and within a few minutes a total of fifty-eight organisations had signed up. Within a couple of hours we had it translated into French and Spanish, and in the hands of many delegates, passed around in the corridors and in the main meeting rooms. (Later that day, we were handed two 'non-papers', i.e. they had no official standing but were the basis of discussion, that further refined the earlier draft

agreement but brought no improvement.)

The Plenary also agreed to set up a second open Sub-Committee, to match that of the governments – a Sub-Committee on Substance and Content. And we set up a Sub-Committee on Finance to begin lobbying for support for civil society participation, especially from the South, and to begin to devise mechanisms for administering such support. A Press Group was created, which set about organising our own press conference alongside the official one. Gradually, civil society organisations were coming together and getting organised. This plenary was attended by well over 100 people.

The new WSIS President wanted to meet with all sides on the Rules of Procedure, and agreed to a delegation from civil society. At 4.45 pm, just before he was to go back into the open Plenary meeting, he met with myself and Meryem Marzouki from IRIS. He seemed sincerely determined to ensure that civil society should have effective participation, but he was up against stiff opposition. He was concerned also that we might run with a counter Summit. We explained our concerns in detail to him.

Day 4: Thursday 4 July

After an early CRIS+ meeting, there was news that a breakthrough had been made in the negotiations. Furthermore, the Chair of the Session, D. Stauffacher, was coming to address our Plenary about it. He outlined the plans – in reality nothing new on offer. They were going to go with option a), the restrictive one, but with an appendix that made it somewhat less restrictive. As we noted, the only innovation was an unwelcome one – they were definitely going to include individual private sector firms for accreditation, and this was to be formally decided in a special session of the Sub-Committee on accreditation convening on Friday morning. He himself was most helpful throughout, but he left the meeting in no doubt as to our concerns.

Later, the inter-governmental Sub-Committee 2 on Content and Themes could finally begin its deliberations, and our own shadow Sub-Committee began drafting its ideas. Unlike with Sub-Committee 1, civil society organisations were permitted to participate in formal sessions of Sub-Committee 2. It held all its meetings in the plenary room, with hundreds attending, and most contributions took the form of formal statements rather than debate or discussion of the issues. The game was that if you managed to say what you thought should be on the agenda, then whatever body or mechanism was later assigned to refine the agenda could refer to it as official input. If you didn't get to voice your theme and nobody else voiced it, then it was not an interest of the meeting.

It became clear very soon that Sub-Committee 2 would not get far. Immediately some countries indicated that the WSIS should not consider anything that falls under another UN context – so human rights were out. Brazil and many G77 less developed countries were intent on retaining only a narrow ICTs and development focus. The USA wanted to include just three items: infrastructure, e-commerce and security. The EU proposed a broader agenda covering e-government, e-inclusion and education. Few governments wanted to limit the agenda to the US proposal, but few wanted governance questions on the agenda either.

Later, Sub-Committee 2 did offer another chance for civil society to address the meeting, this time on themes. Conflicting stories abounded all morning as to how many might be allowed speak. We were finally told late in the morning plenary that we had to select just one speaker from our plenary, as the other slots had been filled – once again we were in the dark as to how the other places were bartered, and who had taken the decision on who was to speak supposedly on behalf of civil society. The final speakers included representatives of cities, universities, gender/women and others. We agreed that a person from the Youth Caucus should speak on our behalf, once again expressing our general concern especially in relation to the WSIS agenda and themes.

Bruce Girard and myself got to talk to the President informally one more time, over evening cocktails! We explained our concerns on accreditation in depth, and on content, and outlined the argument in our communiqués. Once again he emphasised that his door is always open, and that he wants our active participation. He also said that he was concerned by the possible precedents that might be set regarding accreditation of private sector firms.

Day 5: Friday 5 July

After the final CRIS+ meeting – with tiredness beginning to show in many faces – the first Civil Society Segment Plenary of the day discussed progress and statements, updated overnight after the previous day's events. It also began to address the issues of how to organise in the next phase.

After this, a delegation led by Steve Buckley (with myself, Susanna George, Bill McIvor and George Christensen) met with the Secretary General of the ITU, Yoshio Utsumi. The forty-minute meeting had its light moments, as Utsumi strained to fashion three fingers into three solid columns, planting them firmly on the table and stroking each in turn to demonstrate his vision of the WSIS: high-level government commitment; a broad agenda; and wide participation of

all stakeholders. I leaned forward and pointed out that his three fingers were effectively being chopped in half in this PrepCom, asking will the Summit still stand on these stumps? Amid laughter (we discovered a good sense of humour), he changed his metaphor to that of an extendable tripod.

At the end of the forty-minute meeting, Utsumi agreed to help set up informal contacts with governments, if we sought them; and that he would remain open to future periodic meetings. Significantly to those who have been demanding this for years, he also agreed to consider and respond to proposals we would put to him about NGOs participating more effectively in ITU activities (they have long refused to accredit NGOs in the normal way). We are firming up these promises with a letter.

Although the Sub-Committee 2 meeting had been formally open to civil society, the real negotiations, as with Rules of Procedure, did not take place in the plenary hall, but in a closed meeting (and apparently a very difficult one) all day Friday. The failure to reach an agreement on the agenda (though the principles were informally approved) was the cause of the late start of the final plenary session. In one way this was advantageous to us, since gave us more time to reflect on the implications and come up with more consistent proposals for the agenda.

The civil society media group, the same who did the wsis.info website, arranged a press conference at 13.00 Friday, immediately following the press conference with Adama Samassekou (chair of the preparatory process) and Utsumi (ITU Secretary General) and in the same room. Bruce Girard spoke for the plenary and for CRIS, expressing our concerns about the rules and procedures adopted, and concluding that while we have decided to continue with process, we will evaluate that decision as we proceed with our challenge to the accreditation of private sector firms and in the expectation that the restrictive rules and procedures adopted this week will be reconsidered at PrepCom2.

We held our final Civil Society Plenary Session in the afternoon, in a spot originally allocated to CRIS, between 1.30 pm and 3.00 pm. We had been told that translation would be available, but it was not. We began late to facilitate the Gender Caucus, who were scheduled to finish by 2.00 pm, and we had agreed to take no decision before they arrived (in the event, only CRIS members of the Caucus came).

There was general agreement to set up an Interim Co-ordination Group, and to continue with the Sub-Committees. Overall, people could see the need to set something in place, or at the next PrepCom we would be back to square one. Final communiqués were drafted expressing our great disappointment,

but also our willingness for the time being to continue with the process. (Again, endorsement appeared to be unanimous, and our position on the Rules of Procedure was immediately endorsed by fifty-seven organisations.) There was a general feeling that continued involvement will depend on how the words agreed translate into real participation, and whether the agenda is left with anything of interest by the time the informal meeting is finished with it.

After our session, we went to the final intergovernmental Plenary, to distribute our various final statements. The Plenary, which was to begin at 15.00, only did so at 17.00, shortly before I had to leave. A delegate on his way to the airport said it was like wading through 52 chapters of *War and Peace*, only to find the last few pages missing. But in fact the real decisions had already been taken. Minimal provision is being made to allow the participation of civil society; the doors are being opened wide to individual private sector firms; and the agenda will be left to the tender mercies of a (probably closed) meeting sometime in the Autumn.

'A shambles' is how one national delegate described the overall meeting. He said that under no circumstances could he recommend to his Minister that she should attend the European meeting. There was simply not enough of interest on the table. I could see his point. But for civil society, deciding whether or not to participate is more complicated. For example, the regional meetings can permit major participation by civil society – they are not bound by agreements here. And it may offer a good opportunity to mobilise at a European level. A Spanish delegate argued that open regional meetings, like the African one and the upcoming European one, would be *de facto* precedents, pressuring the second Prepcom to adopt more open rules and procedures.

A further twist was added by another European delegation. They suggested that the only reason they were still in the WSIS process was because civil society was sticking in there. It would appear that if a critical mass of civil society organisations pulled out, then the EU itself might also abandon ship. These are matters we must continue to review.

Final comment

It's fair to say that all of us in CRIS worked for the civil society presence as a whole, building a general alliance and a feeling of identity between us all. We largely set aside a distinct CRIS presence, and opened out. We joined with some great activists from different areas, and really worked as a team. In some ways, this gave us an even bigger influence as people appreciated that we were not pushing a particular agenda. The CRIS influence was every-

where and undoubted. In lobbying e.g. the European Commission, I began to explain what CRIS was about, but was quickly assured they knew all about CRIS (and in general were impressed). We even heard scurrilous rumours spread by a former Unesco cold-warrior that CRIS was a conspiracy, really a front for an ex-Soviet Lenin Peace Prize winner. Such rumours can only do us good (but who was this, anyway?). Our five two-page leaflets were widely distributed, and were well appreciated. An EU official also told me that the series of communiqués were very important to them as they provided timely feedback on the civil society position – which they in turn needed in the negotiations.

The other main civil society presences were the Youth Caucus, who were well prepared (and supported by Sasha, our CRIS internee) and joined in fully with us after a while; and the Gender Caucus (which of course has many CRIS members) who joined in but at the same time kept their own separate stream of activities going.

The PrepCom was simultaneously greatly disappointing and hugely exhilarating, the former because of the official outcomes, the latter thanks to the spontaneous level of organisation that was achieved by civil society there. If we build on the latter, we may yet be able to influence the outcome of future PrepComs and the Summit. More important we may begin to organise together outside of the WSIS process, on shared issues of concern.

This mirrors the general conclusion of the Civil Society meeting – let's closely monitor developments over the next months, demanding and taking every opportunity to participate in the intercessional activities on agenda, regional meetings and participation. If the door is repeatedly closed to us, and if the agenda ends up at the lowest common denominator, then let's reassess our situation and be ready and organised to take whatever actions we decide are best, both leading up and at the PrepCom. The danger is that we will again end up responding to events, not influencing them.

Pressing issues for civil society right now include consolidating our new Civil Society Co-ordinating Group; establishing relations with the CSD – they must be encouraged to recognise the legitimacy of this group (which it must continue to earn) and to provide the support it needs. At the same time, some of us are determined to take the matter of private sector firms' accreditation to higher UN levels, and to open discussion with other groups such as Third World Network etc. on how this fits in broad global governance trends. The whole issue of what precedents exist here, and their implications, deserves close study.

All of us must learn and apply practical lessons for the Regional Meetings and PrepComs – the need to plan and organise meetings and events in advance, ensuring we have interpreters, arranging effective means of communication between us and with others, the value of monitoring and reporting back, and especially of ensuring the we are open, transparent and inclusive in our activities. ■

Seán Ó Siochrú, 16 July 2002. Thanks to Bruce Girard and Sally Burch for their comments.

Back issues of *Media Development*

- 3/2002 Reporting the Israeli/Palestinian conflict
- 2/2002 Impunity and the media
- 1/2002 Mass media and democratisation in Asia and Eastern Europe
- 4/2001 Confrontation, communication, reconciliation
- 3/2001 Communication and cultural identity in Asia
- SPECIAL ISSUE JUNE 2001:
The News Embargo on Iraq
- 1/2001 Communicating cyberspace and virtual reality
- 4/2000 Communicating reconciliation
- 3/2000 Women and media: The need for policy
- 2/2000 Racism in the media
- 1/2000 Communication and the globalisation of poverty
- 4/1999 Language and the right to communicate
- 3/1999 Changing perspectives in Europe today
- 2/1999 Key issues in global communications
- 1/1999 Children and media

Back issues of *Media Development* can be bought singly or in bulk (when available). A single copy costs £3 including postage. A 50% discount will be given for orders of 10 or more. Make cheques payable to 'WACC'. Order from: WACC Publications, 357 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5QY, United Kingdom.

More than 150 people, representing some 100 civil society organisations from all over the globe, came to Geneva to participate in the first Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society.

Civil society organisations have been working on issues of concern to this summit for many years. NGO networks were the first to provide email and internet connectivity in many less-industrialised countries. NGOs provided the connectivity for the UN Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 and for the Cairo Summit in 1994. We have unique and valuable experience with issues relating to the use of ICTs for development, and we have long been recognised for our on-the-ground expertise in areas such as technology, policy development and project implementation, and for our work with communities at the grass-roots, especially with priority sectors such as women, youth and the poor. In the areas of culture and communication, NGOs have been leaders in promoting and supporting cultural and linguistic diversity, pluralism, democracy, freedom of expression and human rights.

We came to the PrepCom because the issues related to the promised information society are fundamental to our concerns for social, economic, and human development, and because we believe that a vision of a people-centred information society can only be achieved with the full and active participation of civil society.

We also came here because statements made by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and declarations and official documents issued by the United Nations, the ITU and the WSIS Secretariat repeatedly emphasised the need for the full participation of NGOs and civil society.

During the past week we were actively involved in all proceedings open to us – monitoring, debating, responding to proposals and questions from national delegations, formulating positions, lobbying, and, when the opportunity was presented, intervening in the formal proceedings of the PrepCom. We have also been active in the months leading up to the PrepCom, including the African regional preparatory meeting, a series of Unesco NGO consultations on the WSIS, and various seminars and meetings such as the one organised jointly by the Communications Rights in the Information Society campaign and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Geneva last November.

Major decisions faced by government had to do with how we would be able to participate in the official process, including such things as how and how often we would be able to address official sessions. However, the results of three days of meetings behind closed doors leave us with serious reservations. We had hoped for innovation. In their most optimistic interpretation, the agreements reached here represent a variation on established practices, but nothing in the way of positive innovation. Other interpretations see the decisions reached here as a major setback – eroding rights and responsibilities won by civil society in the UN system over the past fifty years.

Encouraged by the various declarations, announcements and official documents, we had hoped to be able to contribute to the process by participating in the organising bureau, joining in formal and informal agenda discussions, and having a voice in decisions concerning the ongoing participation of civil society in the process. We hoped to be able to actively contribute new ideas to the partnership we were invited to join.

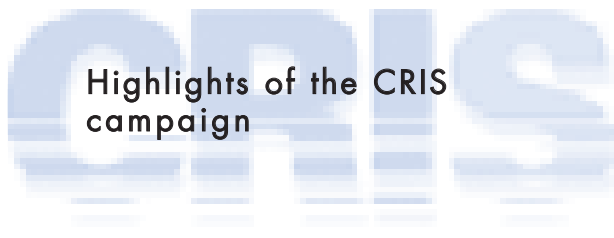
What we got was disappointing.

We will not be able to participate as observers in the bureau. We can be excluded from participation in the agenda development. We have no guarantee of inclusion in significant aspects of the formal process.

We are particularly disturbed by the possible precedent of accrediting individual firms to UN summits. The private sector has always been capably represented by its trade and industry associations, accredited by the UN as NGOs, but this summit is also proposing the formal accreditation of individual firms, responsible primarily to their shareholders or individual owners. A decision to include individual commercial actors in this manner in a UN summit, without the appropriate discussion and reference to established procedures, is unprecedented and we will be challenging it at the highest levels of the UN system.

We have decided to continue to engage with this process, but will be evaluating this decision while we proceed with our challenge and in the expectation that the restrictive rules and procedures adopted this week will be reconsidered at PrepCom2.

Statement by Bruce Girard, co-chair of the civil society plenary at PrepCom1 and member of the Coordinating Committee of the Campaign for Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) to the WSIS Civil Society Press Conference – July 5, 2002.



December 2000 – We first heard of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Barcelona at the Global Community Networking conference, from Mohammed Harbi, a senior ITU staff member. In his speech Harbi emphasised the need to involve NGOs and civil society organisations. We had the impression that we were the first ones to be invited.

For a few years there had been rumours of a UN summit on information and communication, with both the ITU and Unesco being mentioned as lead organisations. The ITU's claim went back to 1998 when its Plenipotentiary conference in the United States resolved to hold the summit.

Following Harbi's announcement, the Platform for Communication Rights, a coalition of NGOs working in international communication issues that came together in 1996, began to monitor the process, although very little seemed to be happening at the time.

October 2001 – Apart from a leaflet, there was very little information about the WSIS. Letters to the ITU went unanswered. We did not understand why there was so little information only two years before such a large summit. At a meeting in WACC's London offices, the Platform for Communication Rights decided to launch the campaign for Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS). But, as more than one person at the meeting observed, our primary objective was simply to put communication issues on the global agenda, and if the WSIS turned out not to offer that opportunity, we would focus our efforts elsewhere.

November 2001 – After the October meeting we called Reinhard Keune at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's office in Geneva to ask him for information on the WSIS and to help us initiate contact. He suggested that instead of a meeting with the WSIS, we organize a seminar. The seminar, *Communication as a Human Right in the Information Society*, was attended by forty people, mostly from public broadcasting organisations and NGOs specialised in communication. Representatives from the WSIS Secretariat, Unesco and the ITU attended the second

day of the two-day seminar.

Seminar participants critiqued the agenda for being primarily concerned with technical and infrastructure issues and for having a narrow understanding of access. One of the proposed themes was *The Needs of Users* and it was felt that this should be redefined as *Information Society Citizenship*. We are not *users* of the info society, but citizens of it with the rights and obligations that citizenship permits and imposes. Another theme, *ICTs and Education*, was about using technology to deliver education efficiently. It was felt that this should be broadened to include the range of education required to prepare people for the information society, to enable them to shape and utilise it to their ends.

Discussions with Unesco, ITU and the WSIS on the second day were very positive. All three agreed that the participation of civil society was key to the success of the Summit. The WSIS Secretariat committed to working transparently and to keeping civil society informed and involved.

January – February 2002 – CRIS's participation in panel and workshop at the World Social Forum attracted much interest and a Brazilian chapter of CRIS was formed soon after. Also in January, Sean O Siochrú and I began helping the Civil Society Division of the WSIS Secretariat in their efforts. The WSIS was supposed to be a tripartite summit, with governments, the private sector and civil society working together. The problem was, nobody knew what this should look like. We put together a small working group of experts and started to elaborate some innovative proposals for how civil society could participate as well as some arguments for why civil society participation was essential. The important documentation from this project is at <http://comunex.net/wsisis/>.

CRIS used this period to start developing proposals for content and themes for the WSIS, working on a series of short presentations of some of the major themes and getting them translated, printed and put on the WWW. We also put together some of the tools we would need – a campaign leaflet, a website, and e-mail lists, including the CRIS Info list which now has more than 300 subscribers. If you are not on it, you can subscribe at http://comunica.org/mailman/listinfo/crisinfo_comunica.org.

In February, we got a copy of a letter sent by the ITU Secretary General to all governments inviting them to the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) in July. In the letter, the secretary general requested that governments 'strongly consider including representatives from the private sector and civil society in your preparatory team'. We sent the letter to the CRIS Info

list suggesting that people contact their governments and ask how they propose to include civil society in the process. Two months later we learned that our distributing the letter was a violation of ITU protocol of scandalous proportions, prompting us to suggest that the WSIS adopt a 'transparency protocol.'

April 2002 – In February Unesco had held a series of four thematic consultations in Paris. In April, Unesco and the Civil Society Division (CSD) of the WSIS hosted a 'plenary', with the participants of the four consultations plus a number of others. Of the 150 participants, more than twenty were members of CRIS and a number of others joined afterwards. Largely thanks to CRIS, the consultation came up with a series of very good proposals on modalities of participation. Content and themes proposals were also interesting, although less cohesive.

Following the Unesco consultations, CRIS continued to move ahead, with varying degrees of success, on the two tracks – themes and modalities of participation. Many of our proposals for themes were incorporated in a document presented by the CSD at Paris as the final official proposal to be discussed at the PrepCom. But when we arrived at the PrepCom in July, this version was nowhere to be seen – instead there was a confusing collection of proposals, once again emphasising technology.

July 2002 – The term *Preparatory Committee* invokes images of a small group taking care of the practicalities of organizing a meeting. A *PrepCom*, as it is referred to, is not at all like that. Held in Geneva's international conference centre PrepCom 1 was a massive and highly formal affair. For days at a time official delegates, many of them professional diplomats, read from prepared texts in a room so big you often cannot see who is speaking. Sequential monologues do not a dialogue make.

The more than thirty CRIS members who participated arrived with goodwill and optimism. We knew that the primary work of a Prepcom is to define the rules of the game, and were prepared to join in the process. However, others had other ideas about the role of the civil society. The discussions on the rules and procedures were to be held behind closed doors – government participation only – and a special programme had been organized for civil society, safely located across the street from the main gathering and concerned with thematic issues, rather than the strategic ones that governments were discussing. It could have been an interesting event, but we hadn't travelled to Geneva for a parallel seminar. We were there because we had been invited to be full partners in the WSIS.

The advance work that CRIS had done meant that we were well prepared for dealing with the reality of the PrepCom. CRIS members met the day before and decided to put CRIS's content concerns on the back burner in order to focus on supporting the whole civil society plenary. The rules governing participation were the important thing being discussed and there was a broad consensus about them.

The civil society plenary was well organised, had access to the various sub-committees and national delegations, and its positions were received favourably by many, including the EC, many African and Latin American delegations as well as Switzerland, Ireland and Canada. However, the rules that were adopted were anything but innovative. They will not allow NGOs to participate in the *bureau*, the real decision making body for the summit, even as observers. NGOs can also be excluded from participation in the agenda development and have no guarantee of inclusion in significant parts of the formal process. The promise of innovation and partnership appeared to have been forgotten.

The discussion of themes reached no conclusion, but if NGOs are excluded from the discussions, there is no reason to be overly optimistic. Evaluating the meeting on the final day, CRIS, and the civil society plenary, decided to continue to engage the WSIS on the basis of *sceptical engagement*. We will continue to participate in the process, in the hope that the restrictive rules will be reconsidered by the next PrepCom in February.

September 2002 – The WSIS announced an 'informal meeting on content and themes' for September 16, 17 and 18. CRIS found out about it on August 23, and sent the news to the CRIS Info list. The official invitation for civil society was only sent on September 3, leaving less than two weeks to prepare. We are also told that there will be only four spaces for civil society organisations to speak and that we will only be able to participate on the first day. On the other two days, government delegates will meet behind closed doors.

Pradip Thomas from WACC, a founding member of CRIS, agreed to present a paper on behalf of the coordinating group of the civil society plenary. The paper, is probably the most substantial document presented at the three-day meeting. It is on the WWW at http://www.geneva2003.org/home/documents/doc01/16sept_en.pdf

With the support of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) CRIS commissioned six papers on key communication and information right issues. The papers, which will explore issues more deeply and map out proposals,

will be ready for distribution at the next PrepCom in February.

So far . . .

CRIS has successfully put communications rights issues on the agenda of civil society organisations and governments, although we have not yet been able to have significant influence on the formal agenda.

CRIS is recognised as an important reference point – a link to its website features prominently on the WSIS Civil Society Division's website and we are regularly consulted by the secretariat, listened to by the EC, many governments, the chair of the preparatory process and others.

However, there is still resistance, and on paper we haven't gained much. CRIS, like the rest of the civil society, maintains a position of sceptical engagement – as long as the WSIS provides a vehicle for putting communication rights on the agenda, we will be there. If it does not offer that opportunity, we will apply our energy elsewhere. ■

WSIS and CRIS resources

Web sites

The main sites to visit are <http://www.itu.int/wsis/> and <http://cris.comunica.org/> where there are many links to other organisations working on issues related to the information society including:

<http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc/>
<http://www.undp.org/>
<http://www.itu.int/home/index.html>
<http://www.unesco.org/wsis>
<http://www.coe.int/portalT.asp>
http://www.europa.eu.int/information_society/index_en.htm
<http://www.oecd.org/EN/home>
<http://www.worldbank.org/>
<http://www.geneva2003.ch/>
<http://www.comunex.net/wsis/>

<http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/>
<http://www.iwtc.org/>
<http://www.womenaction.org/sectionj.html>
<http://www.idrc.ca/acacia/>
<http://www.anais.org/>
<http://www.apc.org/english/index.shtml>
<http://www.apc.org/espanol/index.shtml>
<http://www.amarc.org>
<http://www.aler.org.ec/>
<http://www.isiswomen.org/>
<http://www.panos.org.uk/>

<http://www.oneworld.net/>
<http://alainet.org/>
<http://www.comunica.org/>

WSIS and CRIS-related events

November 2002

- Pan-European Regional Conference, Bucarest, Romania, 7-9 November.
- Workshop on 'The World Summit on the Information Society: The Asian Response'. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development. Bangkok, Thailand, 22-24 November.

December 2002

- International Conference on Information, Technology, Communications and Development, Kathmandu, Nepal, 1-3 December.
- ITU Telecom Asia 2002, Hong Kong, 2-7 December.
- 5th International Conference on Computer and Information Technology, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 27-28 December.

January to June 2003

- WSIS, Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, Tokyo, Japan, 13-15 January.
- OECD-APEC Global Forum: Policy Framework for the Digital Economy, Honolulu, Hawaii, 14-17 January.
- WSIS, Latin America & Caribbean Regional Conference, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 27-30 January.
- COMNET-IT: Connecting the Commonwealth: Strategies for Countering the Digital Divide, London, UK, 28-29 January.
- CTO Digital Africa Summit: Building Digital Opportunities through Public-Private Partnerships, Accra, Ghana, 3-6 February.
- AMARC 8 (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters), World Conference, Kathmandu, Nepal, February.
- WSIS, PrepCom-2, Geneva, February.

July to December 2003

- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 69th Council and General Conference, Berlin, Germany, 1-9 August.
- 4th Global Citizens Network Congress, Global CN 2003, Rockhampton, Australia, 1-4 September.
- WSIS, PrepCom-3, Geneva, September.
- World Summit on the Information Society, part 1, Geneva, 10-12 December. ■

This article briefly discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the CRIS campaign, describes the ways in which CRIS has mobilized to achieve various kinds of outcomes, and examines the structure of the campaign with a critical eye. It ends with an emphasis on the need for CRIS, and for civil society groups more broadly, to develop a firm stance on the minimum criteria for continued civil society engagement with the WSIS process.

Social movement scholar Suzanne Staggenborg

The CRIS campaign: Mobilizations and blind spots

Sasha Costanza-Chock

(1995) has examined the strategies used by various feminist organizations and the results they achieved, differentiating between *cultural*, *mobilization*, and *policy* outcomes.¹ Of course, these categories overlap, but they can be used to carefully consider what is meant by movement success. In the case of the CRIS campaign, cultural outcomes would refer to the degree to which CRIS is able to bring ideas about communication rights into play, develop discourse, and frame issues in the media or in other public forums. Mobilization outcomes would refer to whether CRIS is successful at bringing together networks of individuals, organizations, and other movements to take action on communication rights issues. Policy outcomes would refer to CRIS success at influencing language in declarations, laws, and action plans, either within WSIS or in other policymaking arenas.

The CRIS campaign has worked towards all three kinds of outcomes, though it is now focused primarily on achieving policy outcomes within the WSIS.

Cultural outcomes

One of the main CRIS activities has been the development of a series of '2 pager' documents useful for

cultural outcomes in the sense that they summarize various complicated issues around communication rights in a format meant to be broadly accessible. However, Aliza Dichter (of www.mediachannel.org and member of the CRIS outreach working group) has criticized these documents, ostensibly designed to simplify communication rights issues for the broader public, as too difficult for people outside of academic or media policy circles to really engage with. She encourages communication rights activists to *tell more stories*, making abstract communication rights concrete with examples and personal narrative.² There is no space to explore this further here; I will instead move to a sketch of the structure of the CRIS campaign. (The issues papers are reproduced in this journal and are available online, at www.comunica.org/cris/documents/issues.htm)

Mobilization outcomes

The CRIS campaign is a decentralized network, with some highly active nodes (both individuals and organizations) and others that are relatively quiescent, which in some ways makes it difficult to discuss how issues of gender, class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and other power inequalities cut through the campaign structure itself. We might take the membership of the various CRIS working groups (cris.comunica.org/home/workgroups.htm) as a kind of index.

These working groups do have individual and organizational members from all continents, but the majority of members active on working group email lists (the primary means of coordination, another issue we will return to) so far have been those from Europe and, to a lesser degree, Latin America. The CRIS network is multilingual, with activities by campaign members in the various local languages and with campaign documents translated into English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Russian, and Italian. Still, global campaign coordination takes place almost entirely in English, with Spanish the most active second language.

In addition, so far the primary actors within CRIS have been mostly (though not exclusively) white, of balanced gender, of the intellectual class that moves through the NGO and academic worlds, with steady internet access and user skills. The broader CRIS network that extends beyond the working group members is so far also mostly (but not exclusively) based in NGO and academic circles, with some degree of ties to independent media networks and media activists. While CRIS has made a few approaches to the Communications Workers Union in the UK, Communications Workers of America, and some other unions, the campaign generally has put little

effort into (and has had little success in) engaging organized labour in either communication rights activity or the WSIS process. The campaign also lacks strong ties to poor people's organizations either in the North or South, and has only peripheral links to groups that focus on either conventional mass street mobilizations, media-oriented protest activity, or direct action tactics.

If the campaign hopes to bring communication rights into the WSIS process, a concerted effort needs to be made not only to craft language within the WSIS official documents (see below), but also to mobilize currently excluded segments of civil society. Dee Dee Halleck of Paper Tiger Television and Deep Dish Satellite Network put it this way: "The main activity of CRIS should be to get thousands of people and groups to register for the WSIS! Literally thousands – let's *flood* the ITU with accreditation requests." One way to make issues of communication rights impossible for governments and the private sector to ignore would be to fill the WSIS meetings and plenaries with bodies, and the ITU email boxes and web forms with inputs.³

However, it's (relatively) easy to tell people about the WSIS and help them register, but individuals and groups already short on funds don't want to waste scarce resources sending delegates to yet another UN conference. The question of why they would want to do so only grows louder since the corporate invasion at WSSD Johannesburg. What's more, for a campaign that talks so much about ICT access, CRIS doesn't seem to have any systematic mechanisms in place for working with 'offline' groups. If CRIS is serious about bringing in the viewpoints of people 'left behind' by the so-called information society, it will have to learn how to truly incorporate their input and participation. Still, despite these criticisms, it remains true that the wide and growing, decentralized, network nature of CRIS is open. The successful attraction and incorporation of groups that are currently missing may later be key to the campaign's current primary effort - the push towards WSIS policy outcomes.

CRIS policy activity

To that end, CRIS has had an active presence in several forums that feed directly into the WSIS process, including Bamako, the WSIS PrepCom 1, the 3 day Informal Meeting on Content and Themes, and others. CRIS has also had a presence in a variety of NGO, academic, and social movement gatherings, for example the World Social Forum, the 2002 Leeds Community Media conference, and the 2002 Barcelona conference of the IAMCR (International Association of Media and Communication

Researchers), to name a few. At this time of this writing, there are also plans for CRIS to be active in the European Social Forum, the Montreal Global Forum on Community Networking, the 2003 World Social Forum, the European and Latin American regional WSIS meetings, and of course the PrepCom 2.

The most important function CRIS plays at these forums is to guide less experienced civil society groups through the bureaucratic backwoods of the WSIS process. This was clear during the PrepCom1, where CRIS was able to incorporate many new members and the specific concerns they brought to the table, stepping back when appropriate but still providing some degree of guidance, strategy, and leadership in negotiating with the ITU Civil Society Division secretariat.

For example, at PrepCom 1 the ITU CSD Secretariat had arranged for civil society delegates to meet in a separate building across the street from the 'real' meeting of national delegates. What's more, the ITU had set up an academic-style conference agenda for the civil society meeting, which might have been intellectually stimulating but would have provided zero input to the decisions on accreditation, rules and procedure, and agenda that were being made by national delegates. CRIS took the lead in organizing civil society delegates to replace the ITU-appointed chair. This was a necessary step and allowed the reshaping of the planned civil society 'conference' into various working groups and caucuses that worked to monitor, respond to, and provide spoken and written input into the meetings of the national delegates.

CRIS members were also key to arranging a Civil Society press conference at the end of PrepCom1. During a meeting with the ITU press staff, it became clear that they considered civil society voices hostile. ITU press staff not only refused to publicize the CS press conference or make their press list available to the CS press group, they also initially refused to even make a room available for the CS press group to hold their own conference. After a 20-minute deadlock on this point, CRIS members took the initiative and were able to secure a room by threatening to hold a press conference on the street corner, where the main story would become the exclusion of civil society groups from WSIS.

To be fair, it's still unclear to what degree the ITU Secretariat is actually friendly to civil society groups but simply incompetent, and to what degree they are purposefully acting to marginalize, sideline, and distract civil society actors from meaningful participation. Regardless, these anecdotes should call to mind Frederick Douglass' maxim, 'Power concedes nothing without demand.' This brings us to the last point

I want to make: the CRIS campaign, and civil society groups more broadly, need to determine their own minimal criteria for continued engagement with the WSIS process – and to clearly and publicly threaten withdrawal if those conditions are not met.

Will CRIS take a stand?

There's a danger that CRIS will perpetually avoid the key decision of whether to remain inside trying to shape WSIS language, or pull out. If demands are not met and the decision is to withdraw, then the CRIS campaign must choose how to relate to WSIS from the outside: either ignore it and focus efforts elsewhere, or leverage the mainstream media coverage it will generate in order to push forward communication rights discourse in the mass media and in other arenas at local, national, regional, and global levels. The threat would be made more effective by a promise: to organize a counter-summit, along with other forms of protest, media actions, or disruptions.⁴

It's possible that the stance will never be taken, the threat never made, and the CRIS campaign will by default continue to focus on careful attempts to influence small clauses within WSIS declarations and action plan language. I don't mean to suggest that this is not one possibly worthwhile activity. This is fine, if it is a strategy that is thought over, agreed upon, and pursued. If it emerges by default, despite continued inhospitable conditions to civil society input, then (to put it bluntly), CRIS may end up banging its head against the wall inside the halls of WSIS to little effect, missing a brief window of opportunity to push communication rights into the media eye and more firmly onto the agenda of the broader global justice movement.

Tactics of counter-summit and protest are no panacea. Deciding to exit the summit might dissipate CRIS momentum, which has up to now been built around and through the WSIS process. But it might also free CRIS up to focus more on broadening its base and to work through other cultural/mobilization arenas like the World Social Forum, or other policy arenas at local, national, regional, or transnational levels.

Conclusions

In terms of cultural outcomes, CRIS should continue to develop materials to serve as accessible starting points for broad-based discussion of communication rights, and also should develop a strong, coherent press strategy;

- In terms of mobilization outcomes, CRIS needs to approach segments of civil society concerned with communication rights but not currently engaged in the WSIS process, including independent media,

organized labor, poor people's movements, direct action and street mobilization networks, and the broader movement for global justice;

- In terms of policy outcomes, CRIS has so far been successful at providing a degree of experience and leadership to civil society groups working within the WSIS process. Given the disappointing exclusion of civil society from important parts of that process, coupled with the encroachment of private corporations, CRIS needs to work with other civil society groups to develop a (relatively) unified bloc that presents a firm stance on minimal requirements for continued civil society engagement with WSIS. If these requirements are not met, this bloc should withdraw from WSIS and work from the outside to a) leverage WSIS media coverage to call attention to communications rights issues not on the WSIS agenda, possibly through a counter-summit, and/or b) shift its energy to mobilization in other forums and at other levels that might be more effective.

Finally, WACC's decision to support a full-time CRIS campaign coordinator certainly makes it easier to envision these and other goals moving substantially forward over the coming year. ■

- 1 Staggenborg, Suzanne: "Can Feminist Organizations be Effective?" In M. M. Ferree & P. Y. Martin (Eds.), *Feminist Organizations*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.
- 2 Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and many others have called for the reinsertion of narrative into 'policy talk.' See Benhabib, Seyla (Ed.): *Democracy and Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- 3 This would be an example of Albert Melucci's decentralized, ICT-enabled transnational networks or Critical Art Ensemble's 'swarm' politics. See Melucci, Albert: *Changing Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; and Critical Art Ensemble: *The Electronic Disturbance*. New York: Autonomedia/SemioText(e), 1994.
- 4 If this path is taken, it would be fitting to organize both street and virtual collective action. See Costanza-Chock, Sasha: "Mapping the Repertoire of Electronic Contention." In Andrew Opel and Donnalyn Pompper (Eds.), *Representing Resistance: Media, Civil Disobedience and the Global Justice Movement*, Greenwood, in press.

Sasha Costanza-Chock is a graduate student at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, and coordinator of the CRIS-Youth Arm. Email him: schock@asc.upenn.edu

There is growing recognition that those who most need the boost that ICTs can provide are least able to take advantage of it. The bridging of this 'digital divide', is, therefore, now high on the global development agenda with multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies channelling millions of dollars into projects which aim to support the ability of the marginalised to harness the power of ICTs.

One of the key elements of concern over the digital divide is recognition that women within developing

Gender issues, the digital divide and the WSIS

Anna Turley

countries are in the deepest part of this divide, further removed from the information age than the men whose poverty they share. In China, for example, women ICT users comprise a mere 7% of users (UNIFEM, May 2001). There is an increasing consensus in the international development community that this gap is a major source of gender inequality and one of the major obstacles to mainstreaming a gender perspective in development. Despite basic agreement on its existence, there is a wide divergence of perspectives on the causes and manifestations of and solutions to the gender digital divide.

Among gender and communication activists and organisations both the North and South, approaches to the divide range from a Marxist perspective that sees technology as an expression of male power and capitalist domination, to a postmodern approach in which both technology and gender are cultural processes subject to negotiation, contestation and, ultimately, transformation. Multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies and governments have tended to focus on women's exclusion from technology with increased access and further equal opportunities policies as appropriate solutions.

Women's access to and control of ICTs has

featured prominently in both the theory and practice of the gender digital divide. Women's access to and control of ICTs is dependent on factors such as gender discrimination in jobs and education, social class, illiteracy and geographic location – factors that mean that the great majority of the world's women have no access to ICTs. Despite the emphasis of policy makers on getting women connected, many civil society actors have argued that the issues of access and control are more complex than just connectivity.

Policy makers tend to think that by bringing connectivity to a country, its benefits will reach everybody without further intervention, yet the practical and daily constraints to women's access to and control over new ICTs are well known. The high cost of computers and connectivity keep them far beyond the reach of most women. ICT infrastructure is largely urban-centred. Internet content is overwhelmingly in English. Insufficient attention is paid to use of the Internet for women with low levels of literacy and gender roles and other cultural factors often mean that women have less time to make use of ICTs

While there is a great deal of effort and investment to expand access to ICTs for women by multi-lateral and government agencies, far less attention is being paid to the extent to which gender concerns are shaping the regulatory and policy environments that will ultimately determine the utility and relevance of these technologies. Whether at global or national levels, women are under-represented in all ICT decision-making structures including policy and regulatory institutions, ministries responsible for ICTs, and senior management of private ICT companies. The main problem is that decision-making in ICTs is generally treated as a purely technical area where civil society viewpoints are given little or no space, rather than as a political domain.

Bridging the digital divide, and particularly the gender digital divide, has become an issue which every organisation and government wants to tackle. There have been numerous and varied initiatives for bridging the gap, yet the gender digital divide seems to be increasing, rather than decreasing. It is clear that without active intervention by gender advocates, new ICTs are unlikely to make the kinds of positive contributions to gender equality, sustainable development and democratisation that have been called for. ■

Anna Turley is Women and Media Programme Officer and Editor of the bi-annual publication *Media and Gender Monitor* at the London office of the World Association for Christian Communication.

The following statement was made by Joanne Sandler, Deputy Director for Programmes, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva, 1-5 July 2002.

On behalf of UNIFEM, the women's fund of the United Nations, and Noeleen Heyzer, its Executive Director, we express our appreciation for the opportunity to address this first session of the preparatory meeting for the World Summit on the Information Society. We are particularly pleased to join you at

*Working for gender
and equality in the
world information
society*

UNIFEM

the inception of this process, and hope you will see UNIFEM as a resource as the planning moves forward.

UNIFEM has prioritised issues and opportunities embodied in the WSIS agenda in response to the groundswell of interest and energy from women around the world to be part of the Information Society.

We are here because of a woman named Gladys from Southern Africa. Gladys is a teacher at an all-girls school and the co-founder of a crafts centre employing 33 women in her village, each shareholders as well as workers. When the centre's tourist trade diminished because of the political situation in the area, Gladys was able to find new markets in the Netherlands when she was trained in e-commerce in a UNIFEM-sponsored project.

We are here because of a woman named Aisha from South Asia. Aisha had an opportunity to draft legislation to introduce protection orders for women survivors of domestic violence in her country. She was able to incorporate lessons learned from

countries worldwide when she participated in our electronic discussion on ending gender-based violence. 2,500 activists to end violence against women, including over 40% from developing countries, participate in this list, started with funds from the World Bank. The participants in <end violence> offer a shining example of what is possible in the Information Society.

We are here because achieving the Millennium Development Goals will be impossible if women are excluded from the sectors of society that are generating the greatest opportunities. If we use ICTs strategically, the acronym – MDGs – could also stand for 'Making Development Gender Sensitive'.

We come to this Preparatory Committee meeting with a simple message. Take gender and women's rights into account as you are developing a vision and deliberating issues of access and applications. Almost every country in the world has already committed to this by agreeing to the Beijing Platform for Action. More than 165 governments agreed to equality between men and women by signing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). At this PrepCom, we have the opportunity to connect the path toward equality that emerged from Beijing, with the vision for global connections and knowledge-sharing that could emerge from this process.

Making a difference

While we look at the new opportunities inherent in the internet, videoconferencing and other wireless and electronic technologies, we should not lose sight of the continuing value of radio, video and other more traditional technologies to women. Based on collective experiences and agendas that have emerged from women's organizing around information and communications issues, we would highlight three areas that the World Summit could focus on to make a difference in women's lives and in national development.

First, ensure women's participation and gender analysis in shaping the regulatory and policy frameworks that govern ICTs. How can we bring gender equality into cyberspace? We need gender analysis of telecommunications policies in every country. We need data disaggregated by sex and qualitative assessments on the use of ICTs to understand how to shape policies to ensure equal access for women and girls. We need to have more women on boards of directors and as CEOs of information technology companies. We need to have strategies that encourage and support girls to study math and science and more women in policy-making decisions in ministries of telecommunications. We know that many countries

Training in video-making being given by the Women's Media Centre, Cambodia. Its mission is to raise the awareness of social issues from the unique perspective of Cambodian women; to improve women's status by means of promoting socially conscious television, video and radio programmes; and to increase women's participation in the mainstream media through workshops, research and public lobbying.



are undertaking e-readiness surveys focused on policy. We would assert that e-quality and e-readiness go hand in hand.

Second, invest in innovative capacity-building strategies to ensure that women and girls – particularly those who are marginalized and poor – can shape the digital future and generate content that is relevant to their interests. As the main providers of unpaid care work in families and communities, women and girls face serious constraints on their time, mobility and access to financial resources and technology infrastructure. Where the HIV/AIDS pandemic is destroying families and communities, it is girls who are being pulled out of school, and who need specially-designed opportunities to make sure that they can benefit from the possibilities offered by ICTs. In countries in conflict, as well as in post-conflict and refugee situations, ICTs offer possibilities of linking women and girls to options and opportunities that war has destroyed.

While women and girls have onerous demands on their time and suffer disproportionately the constraints arising from HIV/AIDS, conflict, illiteracy and poverty, they will go to great lengths to enable change for their families and communities. If ICTs offer a more effective way of generating income, securing education and training, and getting critical information related to health and well-being, women will find time to incorporate these into their lives. ICTs can facilitate life-long learning for women if the right policies and partnerships are in place.

The private sector has a key role to play here. This is what we are trying to do in Jordan, in a partnership that involves Cisco Systems, the Cisco Foundation, the Government of Jordan, UNDP and UNRWA. The project has designed women-specific Cisco Networking Academy Programmes, and, in 2001, facilitated the creation of Cisco labs and a curriculum targeting young women in 10 institutions in Jordan. This project is an example of what broad-

based partnerships between government, the private sector, NGOs and the UN can achieve.

Finally, ensure that social responsibility and gender justice inform all ICT strategies and programmes. While the digital divide threatens to increase inequalities between rich and poor – including rich and poor women – the gender digital divide threatens to increase inequalities between men and women. Those who have benefited from the digital revolution can take a lead in bringing others along.

Social responsibility and gender justice are at the heart of a new partnership that UNIFEM launched this year. Called Africans in the Digital Diaspora, the objective of the partnership is to link successful African IT entrepreneurs on the continent and in the Diaspora with fledgling women's microenterprise programmes in Africa. A core group of African IT entrepreneurs have already committed to leading this programme, which will involve networking, mentoring, and undertaking pilot projects and partnerships supported by the private sector and private foundations.

Gender equality is a goal. ICTs can be a powerful vehicle for achieving that goal and other Millennium Development Goals. That is why we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ITU and UNDP, to promote opportunities to bring telecommunications, development and gender equality together.

UNIFEM, our partners, and scores of gender advocates worldwide are ready to offer more than just calls for gender equality. We are ready to offer expertise and insights that will contribute to a policy and regulatory framework – and a dynamic community of users – that reap the benefits of diverse perspectives and needs, and a commitment to 'E-Quality' for all. ■

<http://www.unifem.undp.org/index.html>
<http://www.itu.int/wsis/>

En el 2003 el mundo vivirá una de sus grandes Cumbres Mundiales en torno a un tema global esencial para el nuevo mapa de poder que han configurado las telecomunicaciones, la realidad digital y el llamado ciberespacio. Allí los Estados, pero también las organizaciones de la sociedad civil internacional debatirán – y disputarán – sobre el sentido que esta nueva realidad tiene para los desarrollos económicos, para las diversas culturas y para la vida de los ciudadanos.

*Y de nuevo las
mismas preguntas:
¿Cómo se articulan
democracia y
comunicación en
el siglo XXI?*

Fernando Reyes Matta

La más antigua entidad del sistema de Naciones Unidas, la International Telecommunication Union, (ITU) – nacida en el siglo pasado como la Union Telegráfica Internacional – ya ha hecho su convocatoria. Las conferencias regionales están en marcha.

A medida que se acerque la fecha las preguntas sobre el futuro que allí se estará configurando dejarán de ser sólo tecnológicas, para tomar un creciente rostro político y cultural. Si la información es el gran recurso del siglo XXI ese debate en Ginebra será clave para definir los parámetros en que se producirá nuestra inserción en los nuevos mapas de la globalidad. Las preguntas volverán a la esencia donde retornamos cada cierto tiempo: ¿Y aquí los ciudadanos donde estarán? ¿Tendremos más o menos democracia en medio de esta expansión digital? ¿Qué traerá a los hombres y mujeres de este

continente la creciente revolución comunicacional? ¿Cuánto nos falta por saber para no quedarnos atrás?

Las preguntas no son tan distintas de aquellas que a mediados de los setenta atizaron la puesta en marcha de un gran movimiento de investigadores de la comunicación en este continente. En muchos casos, la pérdida de la democracia en la región era más que suficiente motivo para pensar desde esa realidad la transformación comunicacional que vivía el mundo. Los debates en el seno de la Unesco fueron tan intensos que Estados Unidos y luego el Reino Unido terminaron por alejarse de la entidad. La conferencia de 1976 fue especialmente ilustrativa de esta situación. De todo ello emergió la Comisión Internacional para los Problemas de la Comunicación, más conocida como Comisión MacBride que en 1980 dio a conocer su Informe Final.¹

Pero si los gobiernos y ciertas entidades internacionales de prensa levantaban el dedo para calificar de ‘peligro totalitario’ la propuesta de un nuevo orden informativo, al interior de la ITU fue vista en esos mismo años por las grandes corporaciones de este campo como una ‘oportunidad’ para lanzar una gran política de inversiones en infraestructuras de telecomunicación. Progresivamente el debate político sobre la Comunicación perdió presencia en la Unesco, mientras las grandes personalidades de la política mundial optaban por la ITU como escenario para hacer sus propuestas sobre la ‘Information Society’ y la ‘Supercarretera de la Información’.

Globales, alternativos y locales.

En 1980 nació la CNN. Pero también en los umbrales de esa década comenzaron a articularse las redes computacionales. Quienes impulsaban la llamada ‘comunicación alternativa’ sabían que allí se estaba construyendo una historia de nuevas posibilidades. Los más intuitivos entre nosotros fueron los brasileños y gente como Carlos Afonso, en IBASE, fueron pioneros para hablar del poder de las redes en la base social.

Así los tiempos coincidieron para poner en marcha dos fenómenos que hoy se entrelazan. La CNN y otras experiencias similares iniciaban un nuevo camino para ‘lo global’ en las comunicaciones. Las experiencias alternativas comenzaban a descubrir que ‘lo local’ podía articularse con otros que también estaban en lo mismo y tejer una red usando los nuevos recursos comunicacionales.

En 1987 escribimos un artículo en la revista TELOS, de España, donde avanzábamos algunas interpretaciones de lo que estaba ocurriendo en este

campo.² Aún no había llegado Internet, pero los sistemas de correo electrónico ya estaban permitiendo trabajar en acciones coordinadas globalmente. Un ejemplo concreto era la forma como Amnesty International había logrado perfeccionar su trabajo de urgencia.

Desde hace un par de meses AI, la organización preocupada de los derechos humanos y los presos de conciencia en todo el mundo, puso en marcha la 'Red de Acción Urgente'. Para ello usa los microcomputadores, los modems (tarjetas de comunicaciones), los teléfonos y todo el instrumental que las redes teleinformáticas están multiplicando con gran celeridad, gracias a los cuales ha logrado un impacto significativo en su tarea. Alrededor del 35% de los casos de acción urgente reportaron un cambio favorable: presos 'desaparecidos' que reaparecen, sentencias de muerte conmutadas, situaciones de incomunicación que terminan.

Desde el momento que Amnesty International recibe una denuncia urgente, pone toda la información dentro de una conferencia electrónica cuya clave es 'AI: UAN'. Son las letras en inglés correspondientes a Amnesty International: Urgent Action Network. Sin duda, el elemento clave de esta operación es la velocidad del trabajo. Amnesty International difunde la información urgente en pocas horas, y también de un día para otro comienza a sentirse la presión en favor del perseguido. El gran salto se dio gracias a un nuevo mundo de comunicaciones: las redes de microcomputadores (TELOS, N°14, Madrid).

En ese mismo trabajo señalábamos las dudas y desafíos que las entidades sociales tenían frente a estas nuevas formas de comunicación. Dudas hoy, plenamente resueltas.

Es habitual que estas entidades se aproximen con dudas y resguardos a los microcomputadores y las redes. A algunos les preocupan las intervenciones 'invisibles' que puedan recoger las informaciones y hacer mal uso de ellas. A otras les parecen prácticas de alta tecnología y de países desarrollados, lejanas de las necesidades inmediatas de la base social. A otros les preocupan los costos que estas comunicaciones puedan llegar a tener. Las tres formas de preocupaciones se van superando con la experimentación misma. La efectividad de la acción a través de las redes demuestra que, más allá de posibles intrusos, lo importante es la agilidad informativa para perfeccionar coordinaciones (TELOS, *ibid*).

Esas acciones pioneras y esas dudas ya son historia. Dos décadas después tenemos suficientes elementos para ver el impacto que esas tecnologías han traído al escenario de lo político social y también las nuevas preguntas generadas.

En agosto de 1991 tuvo lugar el intento de golpe militar contra el parlamento ruso en lo que aún era la Unión Soviética. Los golpistas siguieron un modelo clásico: ocuparon inmediatamente los estudios y torres de control de la radio y la televisión y pusieron bajo control los diarios y agencias de noticias. Pero en su diseño no entró la ocupación de una modesta oficina con un par de computadores donde funcionaba una emergente organización ecologista, la 'Glasnet', juego de palabras con *glasnost*, concepto clave en la apertura que condujo al fin del régimen comunista. Glasnet, conectada por teléfono a los computadores de otras redes de Finlandia y del resto del mundo, estaba enviando permanentes comunicados desde Moscú, dando a conocer lo que ocurría y transmitiendo el discurso de Jeltzin parado arriba de un tanque y las reacciones que el golpe había gestado en la confusa sociedad moscovita y en el resto del mundo soviético, ya en crisis. Fue un momento clave para demostrar que otro mundo de comunicaciones, instalado en medio de la sociedad civil y conectado a otras entidades similares en el resto del mundo, podía cruzar las fronteras y generar corrientes de opinión que circulaban por circuitos distintos a los creados por los 'mass-media' del siglo XX.

En 1994, Alvin y Heidi Toffler indicaron que:

'Esta sociedad civil internacional, enlazada gracias a los recursos tecnológicos más sofisticados (que a menudo son precisamente los más sencillos de utilizar), ha ganado una significativa presencia en el debate y la discusión política en numerosas naciones, de la misma forma que se ha diversificado y cobrado presencia también en el plano internacional'. Para algunos analistas 'el ciberespacio, al menos hasta ahora, manifiesta una pluralidad mayor que la del mundo real.'³

La nueva diplomacia ciudadana

Una nueva 'diplomacia ciudadana' se había gestado alrededor de los grandes debates internacionales. Haciendo uso principalmente del correo electrónico y de las casillas dedicadas para pasar luego al uso de los web sites, con la incorporación de texto, audio y video, se pusieron en marcha grandes operaciones para influir en las cumbres que marcaron los años 90.

El primer momento político que mostró la existencia de este nuevo fenómeno se produjo en la Cumbre de la Tierra, en Río de Janeiro. Desde ahí fue evidente que los debates internacionales, marcados tras el fin de la Guerra Fría por una preocupación central en el desarrollo social, debieron considerar también a este llamado 'tercer sector': una multitudinaria y heterogénea gama de entidades no

gubernamentales capaces de colocar agenda, crear escenarios y abrir cauces a una mirada nueva en los macro problemas contemporáneos. De la Cumbre de la Tierra se pasó a la Cumbre de Población, del Hábitat, de Desarrollo Social, de los Derechos Humanos y de la Mujer. Cada una de ellas fue demostrando las capacidades y reenfoques derivados de este activismo transnacional. Pero la toma de conciencia global de que algo nuevo estaba ocurriendo sólo se produjo con las manifestaciones en Seattle, en diciembre de 1999.

Durante muchos meses, la Organización Mundial del Comercio, WTO, había organizado su conferencia destinada a poner en marcha una nueva ronda de conversaciones para el comercio mundial. Ya en el interior de APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum) en septiembre de ese año en Auckland, el presidente Clinton había hecho sentir que esperaba convertir la Cumbre Internacional de Seattle en un salto adelante en los procesos de apertura de libre comercio y la liberalización económica.

Para todo estuvieron preparados, menos para la fuerza de las protestas que se expandieron por Seattle, y que desde allí gestaron un llamado de atención de carácter mundial. Más de 40 mil manifestantes se instalaron en las calles de esa ciudad, haciendo imposible el trabajo en la WTO no sólo por los obstáculos creados y los desórdenes de las confrontaciones con la policía, sino porque mediante un sofisticado sistema de comunicación, establecieron una tribuna paralela que, a través de Internet, buscó señalar que la economía global necesitaba ser mirada no sólo bajo la lupa de las cifras macroeconómicas, sino bajo otra lente que tomara en cuenta las condiciones reales de vida de millones de seres humanos castigados por el desempleo y la pobreza a medida que el modelo económico global se ha expandido.

Medio ambientalistas, sindicalistas, defensores de los derechos humanos y representantes de muchas otras agrupaciones y minorías, unieron sus brazos y sus computadores:

‘Gracias en gran parte a Internet, que les ha permitido fortalecer sus lazos, hacer públicas las injusticias y acrecentar sus números, los activistas se han organizado, abarcando desde el poder obrero de antaño a la destreza cibernética de los liberales universitarios. Sus crecientes números hacen que el movimiento “Manos que cruzan América” parezca un juego de niños.’⁴

Los analistas de inteligencia comenzaron de inmediato a preocuparse por saber quién era el líder de todo esto. Su sorpresa fue mayor cuando se enteraron que no había un líder, que no había un Pat Robertson o un Ralph Nader:

‘La movilización por la justicia global no es un acontecimiento jerárquico de subordinación, al igual que la Internet el movimiento antiglobalista es un conjunto de personas que no solamente se las arregla para sobrevivir sino que además crece, sin cabeza’ (*Time*, *ibid*).

Por cierto, no faltaron quienes enfatizaron la ironía detrás de este acontecimiento: los contrarios al globalismo se movilizan a través de una de las creaciones más dinámicas de la nueva economía, la web. La red se supuso que ayudaría a articular los mercados en un enorme espacio de comercio mundial, no a organizar a miles de piquetes de protesta, decían los comentaristas de dicha publicación.

Pero la expansión y presencia de la red ya trae otras preocupaciones políticas. En definitiva, las mismas inquietudes del pasado frente a otros avances de las tecnologías. Durante julio del 2000, se registraron pronunciamientos políticos internacionales que pusieron luz sobre el carácter de Internet y la posibilidad de que el ‘cyberspace’ se pudiera convertir en otro escenario de desigualdades.

El peligro de la ‘brecha digital’

Una declaración, muy difundida en todo el mundo, del Presidente Ricardo Lagos de Chile, Thabo Mbeki de Sudáfrica y Goran Persson, Primer Ministro de Suecia, señaló lo siguiente:

‘La tecnología de la información es, en todo el mundo, un factor clave en los procesos de desarrollo económico, político y cultural, sin embargo, hasta ahora solamente una elite tiene acceso a ella. Si la tecnología de la información no está disponible para todos, puede llegar a ser otra fuente de división y de mayor desigualdad, además de un obstáculo para el desarrollo. La brecha digital ya existe, y nuestra tarea como líderes políticos es asegurar que disminuya, dentro y entre nuestras naciones.’⁵

Casi al mismo tiempo tuvo lugar en Japón la reunión del llamado G-8, esto es, el Grupo de Países de Mayor Desarrollo Económico Capitalista, más Rusia. Los países del G-8, reunidos en Okinawa, ensalzaron los beneficios que la revolución digital supone para la economía mundial, pero también advirtieron los peligros que se ensanche la brecha entre los ricos y los pobres en este sector. Los líderes suscribieron la Carta de Okinawa sobre la Sociedad Global de Información:

‘Debemos asegurar que sirva al crecimiento económico sostenible, al bienestar social y a la cohesión social, a fortalecer la democracia, promover los derechos humanos, resaltar la diversidad cultural, así como la paz y la estabilidad internacional.’

Los comentaristas y los despachos informativos desde Okinawa indicaron que, según estadísticas de ese momento, el número de usuarios de Internet se había casi duplicado en un año – de 180 millones a fines de junio de 1999 – estaba llegando a 330 millones en junio del 2000. Sin embargo, los informes también remarcaron que el 90% de los usuarios de Internet existentes en el mundo provienen de los países más desarrollados.

Detrás de las cifras y llamados de atención, se ubica un espacio que no está necesariamente referido a la frontera países desarrollados/países en desarrollo, sino a aquellas fronteras creadas por el nuevo fenómeno de las ‘comunidades de interés’ que, a partir de un determinado discurso, constituyeron una posición y buscaron tener una influencia significativa en la agenda internacional.

Un nuevo tipo de alianzas emergió, durante la última década del siglo 20, entre las instituciones y grupos de la sociedad civil existentes en países desarrollados con aquellas instituciones y personas que en los países del sur comparten una misma sensibilidad e impulsan similares conceptos: un activista del ecologismo ubicado en el sur de Chile tiene mucho más que ver con un activista de Suecia, de Filipinas, de Canadá o Nueva Zelanda, con los cuales comparte una plataforma común. Las comunidades de interés han creado un ‘cyberciudadano’ que no sólo habita en su espacio geográfico específico, sino también en un espacio virtual de su ‘comunidad de interés’. La principal herramienta de estos grupos es la coordinación de acciones y, con ella, van generando procesos de alcance internacional como nunca antes los puso en marcha la sociedad civil.

Lo que han debido entender al cruzar el 2000 los ejecutivos más tradicionales de la economía global es que en la globalización los signos ideológicos y políticos se entremezclan, se confunden, haciendo posible que no sólo desde el poder político o económico sea factible la conexión a las redes, sino también que éstas sean espacios de facilidades para organizaciones e individuos.

De alguna forma, los más contestatarios en el pasado respecto de la expansión de los nuevos recursos tecnológicos también han descubierto que en Internet los discursos del polo dominante y del polo dominado, al decir gramsciano, interactúan e influyen a veces con presencia tanto o más poderosa de aquellos que se supone detentan el poder.

Las redes y las torres gemelas

Los hechos del 11 de septiembre abrieron otra vez todos los escenarios comunicacionales a las preguntas claves. Y en esta circunstancia también las redes fueron una oportunidad nueva y significativa para

los sectores excluidos de la producción de los mensajes comunicacionales dominantes.

El 11-S, como le gusta decir a la prensa española, la historia fue reubicada en el escenario de la simultaneidad. Ni diferencias de lenguas, ni distintos horarios, ni culturas diversas anularon la explosión de globalidad que significó el primer acto terrorista transmitido en directo a todo el mundo. Registro de las primeras opiniones de distintos gobernantes, como de los primeros comentarios de los periodistas y del público en la calle, demostraron que en aquellas horas la reacción era la misma tanto de los gobernantes como de los gobernados: había ocurrido algo grande, espantoso, inesperado, sin que nadie pudiera dar explicaciones precisas del alcance de los hechos y de quién estaba detrás de ellos.

Los atentados contra el World Trade Center y el Pentágono demostraron que en el mundo de hoy *la sobreabundancia informativa es un recurso en crecimiento, pero es cada vez más precario el recurso de la interpretación*. Los hechos estuvieron conectados directamente con los terminales más finos de la emoción de cada cual y las imágenes se repitieron una y mil veces porque en cada instante que ellas se mostraban, desde diversos ángulos, se mantenía vivo el horror y el estupor.

Los medios europeos, tal vez con una mayor cercanía al mundo musulmán y una perspectiva profesional siempre más analítica, marcaron a poco andar sus diferencias. Las grandes estaciones europeas como BBC, TV1 o TVE se volcaron a encontrar los factores culturales y socioeconómicos que parecían estar detrás de la operación terrorista. A la vez, fueron enfáticos en hacer la diferencia entre el mundo musulmán y el islamismo, y el grupo talibán acusado del atentado y su líder Osama bin Laden.

En América Latina, con la excepción de las grandes corporaciones como Televisa y O’Globo, se vivieron varios días con la retransmisión de CNN y, ocasionalmente, de alguna cadena europea. La superposición de los logotipos locales sobre el logotipo de CNN o el título en español sobre la frase ‘America under attack’ generaba un exceso visual en torno de las imágenes captadas - legal o ilegalmente - desde el exterior. Hubo otros excesos, como el de Televisión Azteca, en México, que con discutible aunque oportuno sentido del negocio, se apresuró en utilizar la tragedia de Manhattan. Unas horas después de que las torres gemelas habían caído, los programadores de esa empresa decidieron transmitir en el canal 7 la película *Atentado al World Trade Center*. Se trata de una cinta filmada en 1997 para la televisión, donde se relata el atentado que pocos años antes había sufrido ese emblemático sitio neoyorquino.

Lo nuevo respecto de todos los conflictos anteriores, incluida la Guerra del Golfo, es que en este caso Internet se convirtió en fuente y circuito de información de las ideas de la gente. No sólo los medios alternativos, de alcance menor en el pasado, han ganado su espacio de circulación global gracias a Internet, sino también las personas se han convertido en sujetos potenciales de información y opinión. Más allá de los medios está la voz de quienes siguieron los foros en los periódicos y en sus propios sitios alternativos. La red fue espacio de comunicación y debate ciudadano como nunca antes respecto de un conflicto mundial.⁶

La ruta del siglo XXI para la comunicación muestra una ruta clara: ya no se trata de la expansión de los medios y la libertad de acción de los mismos, lo cual es muy positivo. Se trata también de las múltiples acciones comunicacionales que los ciudadanos – desde sus diversas inquietudes – pondrán en marcha.⁷ Es allí, en esa comunicación directa, donde se están gestando las nuevas preguntas sobre comunicación y democracia en el mundo y en este continente. ■

Notas

- 1 *Many Voices, One World*, Unesco-Kogan Page, Londres, 1980. El Informe fue publicado en más de 20 lenguas y es un libro clave para entender la reformulación del debate sobre la comunicación que produjo el debate en la Unesco. En español fue publicado como *Un Mundo, múltiples voces*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1981.
- 2 TELOS, N° 14, Madrid. Esta ha sido una revista esencial para entender los nuevos fenómenos de la comunicación durante la década de los 80 y 90 y su marcha hacia la globalización.
- 3 'Vivir en la sociedad de la Información', Raúl Trejos, *Revista Iberoamericana de Ciencia, Tecnología, Sociedad e Innovación*, N° 1, Diciembre 2001, Madrid, OEI. También autor de *La Nueva Alfombra Mágica*, Premio FUNDESCO de Ensayo, Madrid.
- 4 *Time*, 24 de abril, NY, USA.
- 5 *International Herald Tribune*, 28 de junio 2000, Editado en Paris, publicación global.
- 6 Fernando Reyes Matta, *Estudios Internacionales N° 136*, Universidad de Chile, Dic. 2001, Santiago de Chile.
- 7 Un libro clave, de reciente publicación, sobre los nuevos escenarios es *Global Communication: Theories, Stakeholders, and Trends*, Thomas L. McPhail, University of Missouri, Publ. Allyn & Bacon, 2002, USA.

Fernando Reyes Matta es Profesor de Periodismo Internacional, Escuela de Periodismo, Universidad de Chile. Ponencia al Congreso de ALAIC, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, junio 2002.

'In search of common values'

A series of studies from each of WACC's eight regions shows that in today's societies communicators have to be aware of the collective destiny of the human race. A great deal can be learnt from forging understandings that bridge the many divides of tradition, beliefs memory, history and culture.

One basis for exploring the common good through cross-cultural encounters is to recognise that there is a place for universals as well as for diversity, and that tolerance and respect are common to all cultures.

Four titles in the series have appeared to date:

1. *Communicating Difference – The Making and Unmaking of Common Values in India*, by Pradip Thomas. PAPERBACK, 86 pp.
2. *La Comunicación – Un acto de amor*, por Félix A. Posada Rojas y Amparo Beltrán Acosta. En rústica. 52 pág.
3. *Different Ships – Same Boat: A North American Perspective*, by Ken Bedell. PAPERBACK, 60 pp.
4. *Values For a Global Society*, by Albert van den Heuvel. PAPERBACK, 79 pp.

**Booklets cost £3 (US\$5) each.
Make cheques payable to: 'WACC' –
adding £2 (US\$4) for air mail postage.**

**Available from WACC,
357 Kennington Lane,
London SE11 5QY, United Kingdom.**

Multimedia conglomerates have hyped new communication technologies in order to create a grossly overinflated global stock market 'bubble' for the profit of the few and ruination of the many. What lessons can be learnt by the 'information society' and how can the 'new economy' be regulated to prevent recurrences in the future? The following article proposes setting up an international tribunal for information and communication with the power to judge and sanction such cynical manipulation of the global economy.

The information society: A case for setting up an international tribunal

Antonio Pasquali

The 'information society' – outcome of that maze of bits, chips, frequencies, cables, satellites, programmes and networks that have electronically unified all human codes and allowed the exponential growth of the message delivery service of the 'infosphere' in which we bathe – will be given the honour of a World Summit in December 2003 organised by the UN itself, with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) as its main host.

By then, with three preparatory conferences and the makers of equipment, programmes and channels licking their lips, a deluge of panegyrics, hymns, hosannas, apologies and other eulogies to the so-called information society will have fallen on our heads, even more copiously than in 1998 when they tried to make us believe that the Internet would rapidly bring to an end underdevelopment, poverty and hunger in the world. All this recalls the golden legend of what was christened, not so long ago, the network age; eulogies that, if one looks at things objectively, are to a large extent deserved. For it is on the back of the underlying technological revolution that standards of production, conservation and distribution of knowledge have been radically expanded and, to a

certain extent, democratised.

As with all history worthy of the name, these images of the 'information society' conceal on their reverse side a dark inscription that their protagonists would like to make vanish, but which will have to be brought to light at the time of the Summit. This dark inscription has to do with economics and it has to be told here, not with the Manichean intention of blackening or destroying the golden legend, but rather to weigh the pros and cons with full knowledge of the facts, what in this 'information society' is good and should be kept and what should be exposed and thrown out. Concretely, it's a matter of two gigantic economic speculations, to a large extent fraudulent, promoted by those who have already bought into the so-called 'information society', which have ruined its natural development, impoverished millions of investors, mortgaged the future cost of services and unleashed a global economic crisis that, according to certain analysts, could be worse than the one of 1929. For one thing is certain: as with the case of the 'global village', the 'information society' is already owned by a few, and there is the very real risk that the Summit will only serve to strengthen – behind a façade of democratic discussion – adapting the whole universe of consumers to the will of the huge multinationals, who this time have been officially invited to take part. (The verb 'adapt' figures in ITU official documents.)

The free and self-regulated market is, we are told, perfectly virtuous. It is the supreme expression of what the 19th century called 'the economic harmonies' . . . except when it loses its head because of overheating or when it takes on the syndrome of speculative priapism. Its prolonged crisis – which began in 2000 in the hi-tech sector of information/communication, astutely promoted to the status of 'new economy' and 'e-business' in order to swell the speculative bubble more quickly – today continues to threaten the previous economy which was behaving relatively well. This crisis broke out, it is important to remember, well before 11 September 2001. Nothing very new wrote *Le Monde* in an editorial: the development of railways in 1840 and universal electrification in 1920 engendered similar speculations. Except that, in that more unassuming epoch, the huge majority of human beings were born and died without knowing what a Stock Exchange was. (At the time of the 1929 crash just 1% of North Americans owned shares, as opposed to 50% today.)

Most technological innovations in the information/communication sector, from which we benefit every day of our lives, were born in military laboratories before being commercialised by civil enterprises

after their 'declassification'. This was the case with Arpanet used by the Pentagon and later to become the Internet, with one of the Reagan programmes from Star Wars which became the Iridium Motorola project for mobile telephony via satellite, and the US army's Global Positioning System, today, among other applications, trivialised into a finder of stolen cars. The commercial transformation of inventions and discoveries often constitutes the only means of placing within everyone's reach innovations that otherwise would remain untapped. But this time, the *auri sacra fames* (terrible hunger for money) excited by the new information and communication technologies went beyond all bounds. It only ended after incalculable economic losses (the largest in the history of the world's economy and with the disappointment of many unkept promises: telephony everywhere and practically free for everyone, high definition television on cinerama screens, Internet business growing exponentially and genuine multimedia interactivity).

The 21st century has started and the picture is quite different. Mobile telephony has supplanted cable telephony, but this growth has largely taken place by saturating areas that were already connected, peopled by financially solvent consumers, leaving the world's poorer parts and marginalised zones in a situation unchanged for decades. Tariffs have remained scandalously in the hands of cartels and very high in the countries of the South, which continue to finance a huge part of the growth of multinationals that have available an astonishing cash-flow that allows them to buy each other out. Iridium went bankrupt in 474 days, \$5 billion¹ in debt and 55,000 subscribers instead of the 1.6 million that had been estimated. The US Defence Department refloated it. Globalstar followed suit several months later. Mobile telephony has been the object of such scandalous speculation that I shall devote the last part of this text to it.

High definition television (HDTV) and digitalisation of images have for now remained in limbo, officially because of drawbacks in image compression technology, with a good number of European operators on the verge of bankruptcy owing to disproportionate investment. The enormous interests in play decided, by all accounts, to place the much publicised 'multimediality' on hold; PCs incorporating voice telephony mysteriously disappeared from the market; and some 'authority' continues to delay the marriage of TV and PC. Thanks to its usefulness, the Internet survived the voracity of those who had to try to turn it into the mother of all speculations, even though the net is compromised up to the hilt by the present crisis in 'technological indices' on the stock market. Twelve

hundred of its largest firms collapsed in the USA alone between 2000 and 2001, and analysts have predicted for 2002 'a catastrophic year'.

The diagnosis is unanimous: the current malaise of the global economy originated in a colossal speculative bubble – supported by various governments – inflated on two huge technological advances sequestered by the market: the Internet and mobile telephony.

Internet speculation

Internet speculation was a mix of never-before-seen stock market delirium and a good dose of political Machiavellianism. Its origin, the USA, *de facto* owner of the network. (Thirteen major providers; the quasi-monopoly of Cisco over switchboards or 'routers'; the largest portion of the almost 2,000 million sites; 70% of all electronic addresses reserved in advance and available under the IP4 code; the global assignment of addresses and identification tags; the Échelon, Carnivore, Fluent and Oasis systems that spy on practically all content; and, it is hard to believe, at one time the platforms for 95% of the intra-European and intra-Asiatic links are North American.) The industrial, Governmental, stock market and media conglomerate, with President Clinton at its head, launched a huge offensive aimed at making humanity believe that the future was called Internet, that greater part of investments would take place over the network and that only e-business would take off exponentially.

Simultaneously, more good news was spread by the UNDP and the World Bank: even the safety of poor people was no longer a question of water, health and protein, but of a good connection to the network. It was the beginning of an era of gigantism without precedent in the history of the global economy. Between 1998 and 1999 six of the 12 largest business mergers, totalling \$465.3 billion, took place among firms linked to the Internet. Microsoft capitalised 471 billion in 1999, Intel 285, Lucent 211, Yahoo 188, AOL 164, MCI 162, Oracle 85 . . . In March 1999 Cisco's capital reached the monstrous sum (is there any other epithet?) of \$555 billion, almost half the annual GDP of France. In the face of this the largest enterprises in the old economy – of whom it used to be said that every time they sneezed they gave the country a cold – appear derisory. The tycoons of the new economy bragged of having multiplied by four the world rate of stock exchange movements. One of the great American myths reappeared, that of a Far West, with new freedoms to conquer. It was supported by a political-economic attempt to turn the global economy for all time into a satellite of Wall Street.

This gigantism only lasted a few months. In January 2001 Walt Disney Co. – quite a symbol – shut down Go.com, which amalgamated all the company's activities, after having declared a loss \$1 billion. On 24 April, in order to sweeten the bitter pill of 12,000 redundancies created by the loss of 400 out of the 555 billion dollars capitalised the previous year, John Chambers, manager of Cisco, reduced his annual salary of \$157,000,000 to one symbolic dollar. Shares in Lucent went up in smoke; 210 American dot com companies collapsed in just a few weeks; speculative enterprises of the 'hit and run' kind robbed millions of savers of their savings. A veritable e-crash said *Le Monde* in one of its editorials in January 2001.

The catastrophe did not end there and got worse. In January 2001 Teligent, 360 Network, PSInet, Covas, Exodus and Excite@Home had to submit to chapter 11 of the American bankruptcy law and 2002 began with a similar trend for Qwest, Carrier 1, Level 3, Viatel and Globalstar. Simultaneously, Alcatel announced losses of 4.96 billion Euros (the largest in the history of the French economy), Vivendi Universal (the new French-American Pantagruel) cumulative debts of 10 billion Euros at the end of April 2002, and AOL-Time – the biggest media group in the world – losses for the first quarter of 2002 of 54.2 billion dollars (the highest deficit in US history). In June 2002 optimists were estimating 1,000 billion dollars lost in Nasdaq speculations. The pessimists, like *Scientific American* (in its May issue) carried this already astronomical sum to 4,000 billion.

These extraordinary figures give some credence to the hypothesis that the WSIS might even represent an attempt by the UN (now imbued with an eagerness to privatise) to help refloat its once lucrative businesses.

Enron and Global Crossing

All of this would seem to have its greatest symbol in the Enron affair, the energetic superstar of the new economy that fronted the largest case of fraudulent bankruptcy in US history. The scandal resounded so widely that it eclipsed that of Global Crossing, the fibre optics giant, with 165,000 kilometres of fibre optics in 200 cities in 27 countries. Until Enron, it had been the biggest single failure in the US telecom sector and the fourth largest in the US economy. This speculative meteor (I have to say so), only created in 1997, capitalised 50 billion dollars in 2000 and came to be considered one of the most respected players in the new economy. On 28 January 2002, after declaring losses of 4.6 billion dollars and debts of 12.4 billion dollars for the first nine months of

2001, its shares fell from \$65 to thirty cents.

Every rescue scenario – a lesson to be learnt by the 'information society' – anticipates that shareholders lose the whole of their investment. In the Enron case, worse still. The upper echelons of management, many accused of insider trading, encouraged their employees to buy shares in the company while they themselves were selling. In the same way, at Global Crossing appeared the figure of General Manager Gary Winnick, who sold his shares just before declaring bankruptcy. Here too the auditing firm of Arthur Andersen popped up, whose passion for insider trading, tax evasion and massive destruction of compromising documents had made page one of the newspapers a few weeks before during the Enron case.

William Cohen, former Secretary of State, was a member of the board of directors of Global Crossing, while its vice-president, Joseph Perrone, had been chief auditor of telecommunications businesses for . . . Arthur Andersen. Moreover, most of the big banks that risk not coming out unscathed, were simultaneously creditors, share-holders and consultants of the firms that went bankrupt.

These financial mega-scandals and complicities between auditors and those audited have ended up drawing the whole world's attention to three huge and very respected economic-financial groups:

- (a) Investment banks. Merrill Lynch, the premier US investment bank, lent 400 million dollars to Enron when they knew it was collapsing. In his internal memos Henry Blodget, one of the stars of the bank, labelled Excite@Home shares 'pieces of crap' while telling his faithful clients to buy them. (Merrill recently tried to recoup even a bit of its prestige by recruiting the former mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, as a consultant. And in May 2002 – by one of those legal transactions at which the Americans are past masters –succeeded in whitewashing itself by paying a penalty of 100 million dollars.)
- (b) The great and very influential financial analysts. Sixteen of the 17 leading bureaux in the USA were recommending buying Enron shares in September 2001: Goldman Sachs, Lehman Brothers and others persisted in doing so even after the firm had announced a first loss of 600 million dollars.
- (c) The no less famous American audit and financial advice firms. The five giants, until then considered above all suspicion: Pricewaterhouse Cooper (22.3 billion turnover in 2000); KMPG (13.5); Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (12.4); Ernst&Young (9.9) and Arthur Andersen (9.3) had all been found guilty in recent years of

felonious collusion.

A former head of accounting at the Security Exchange Commission (which supervises the US stock exchange) recently said that this was a matter of a veritable armed attack and that one could estimate stock exchange losses occasioned by irregularities and fraud by the large audit firms at 200 thousand million dollars.

The Enron bankruptcy, in particular, threatens to set a gigantic financial tsunami with terrifying consequences. This enterprise charged 100 billion dollars a year to provide energy and, one now knows, acted in a loathsome way. It created artificial shortages and blockages in the electricity networks in order to manipulate prices, exported energy from California that it then re-imported in order to charge transport costs, and closed generating stations to simulate lack of funds. It collapsed in six weeks with the scandalous complicity of bankers, auditors and even the Security Exchange Commission (to say nothing of the political parties it had financed or even the White House itself).

To complete this aberrant picture of inter-linked complicities, 212 of the 248 Congressmen who were members of the eight commissions of enquiry about Enron, had received from that same company (while its business was still flourishing) financial support for their electoral campaigns, including Justice Secretary Ascroft, who declared having pocketed 57,000 dollars.

Without an international tribunal capable of judging those responsible for the mega-speculations that have impacted on new technologies, the former have given rise to plentiful literature with remarkable works such as *Boo-hoo, a dot.com history from conception to catastrophe* by Ernst Malmsten, *Millionaires for a day* by Gregoire Biseau, and *How my start-up misfired* by Nicolas Roui.

Two indisputable facts remain: (1) the 'information society' has engendered the greatest stock exchange speculation in all economic history, ruining millions of people, and (2) Internet users, among others, will have to pay for these speculative frenzies out of their own pockets, the providers of services that were previously free will be obliged, one after the other, to charge for them and prices will not go down for several years. Once again the poor will have to be patient, at least for a generation, before gaining better access to the net.

Telephony speculation

If Internet speculation was an American cocktail of mythomania and hegemonism, its twin was born of the worst European greed.

The Internet as we know it would obviously not

have existed without the telecommunications boom. In 1990 there were 530 million telephones (fixed and mobile) in the world; in 2000 the number had increased by 325% to 1,720 million and today we are getting close to 2,000 million. In ten years more submarine cables have been laid than in the previous century, and hundreds of millions of kilometres of fibre optic cable and hundreds of satellites set up, each more powerful than the last. The UNDP, in its Human Development Report 2001, said that the latest generation of fibre optic cable can carry in just one second all the information circulating on the Internet in one month in 1997.

But let's not forget that, in the same period, some of the world's countries that were already communication-poor became, paradoxically, even poorer: while Switzerland reached a telephone density of 99/100 inhabitants, the people of Cambodia dropped to 0.07/100 inhabitants – one in 1,400!

This time, the 'Ciscos' for fixed and, above all, mobile telephony were European, a chance for the old continent to impose its own rules of the game on one of the most important and profitable areas of the new economy. Europe, with its GSM digital standard, superior to the American standards, granted itself the wireless markets of Asia, Australia and Latin America. Sales of shares in Nokia, Ericsson, Alcatel and Siemens took off and the exchanges in London, Paris, Frankfurt and Milan created their own Nasdaq for technological stock. Like the self-made men of Saxon mythology, a modest Sardinian employee created the giant Tiscali out of nothing, which is on the point of becoming the second largest European provider of mobile telephones and Internet services.

In 1997 the telephone hardware industry, European in the main, which at that time produced a mere bagatelle of 550 million pieces of equipment a year (Nokia alone controlled 40% of global sales) found itself facing saturation point in the market, leaving only replacements. So it became a matter of urgency to come up with a new technology capable of waking the market. The next step, therefore, was to integrate Internet capability into mobile telephones, one already taken by the Japanese DoMoCo NTT with its I-mode technology with disappointing results. Europe followed the same path by adopting two intermediary technologies, WAP and GPRS, which would leave it time to put the finishing touches to a Universal Mobile Telecommunications System (UMTS), capable of assuring it unflinching superiority for several years in the field of nomadic multimedia (a technological superiority today partially threatened, even before birth, by the WLAN standard of wireless access to the Internet).

Having failed in its first attempt to get the

European Union to adopt the Japanese standard, the Nokia/Ericsson lobby got Brussels to agree that the 15 EU nations would auction national UMTS concessions as if its marketing were imminent. Two gracious governments, Sweden and Finland, gave them away freely. The governments of the other countries, greedier and scenting good business, took advantage by conceding licences to use UMTS at breathtakingly high prices. The dizzying sum of 340 billion dollars was placed on the table in order to obtain so-called third generation licences and this in countries among the most telephony saturated in the world. The cost per inhabitant paid by franchise holders reached \$625 in the United Kingdom, \$620 in Germany, \$361 in Spain, \$270 in France, \$242 in Italy . . . (by way of comparison, the price paid for the whole of fixed telephony, plus a mobile network, plus a guaranteed monopoly for nine years in a country of 22 million inhabitants, avid for telephones – as was the case in Venezuela – was just \$75 per inhabitant.)

A few months later, Europe was copying the American crisis, adding to its setbacks in 'new technologies' those of WMTS. Hundred of companies facing bankruptcy, Nokia undercapitalised by 60%, France Telecom by 72%, Deutsche Telekom by 75%, Ericsson declaring losses of nearly 2 billion dollars . . . a scandal and bankruptcy over which an embarrassed silence quickly fell. On 16 March 2002 Deutsche Telekom announced the redundancy of 30,000 of its 260,000 workers. Its shares, in March 2000 worth more than 100 Euros, sank to 13.1 Euros and its losses increased in the first quarter of 2002 to the Croesus-like sum of 67.2 billion Euros. It thus beat the world record held until then by AOL-Time for the largest deficit in economic history, only to be caught up with and passed by France Telecom, which announced in June 2002 losses close to 70 billion Euros. At the end of May, the English Vodaphone, the most powerful mobile telephone operator in the world, also announced a deficit of 19.7 billion dollars in the course of the last fiscal year. As if by chance, these were the three countries that paid most dearly for UMTS licences and now found their telephony the most in debt in the world.

What really happened in the European section of the 'information society'? An International Economic Tribunal – today hypothetical but much needed – with the power to punish the great economic crimes against humanity, would surely have condemned this fraudulent 'escape in advance'. Indeed, what the Scandinavians sold to the European Community in 1999, the Community to its fifteen member-States and finally the member-States to its operators, was nothing but smoke – a purely theoretical UMTS technology, perhaps half-operational in 2004, more

probably in 2008, and moreover without a guaranteed market. Commonsense suggests that the true Internet, where we can consult complete pages of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* or *Le Monde*, will never fit onto the micro-screen of a portable phone.) Only two French companies suspected trickery and withdrew in time.

If only in its economic dimensions, the 'information society' has started off very badly. Marshall McLuhan dreamed of a global village woven of reciprocities, without local bosses or speculators. Things turned out differently. Giant speculative bubbles of the Internet kind; frankly dishonest schemes of the UMTS kind; fraudulent and hyper-corrupt bankruptcies along Enron and Global Crossing lines; serious conflicts of competition of the Berlusconi kind, with flagrant abuse of a dominant position in private and public communication; colossal and antipluralist concentrations in the domains of production, sending and spying on messages, etc. raise many legitimate doubts about the chances the 'information society' will have to become a genuine society that is democratic and plural.

All of this compels us to think seriously (and the World Summit on the Information Society may be the place for this) about the need for a kind of International Tribunal for Information and Communication capable of judging the economic crimes and attacks on pluralism and private life that will surely happen again and again in this domain in future. This is an idea that may only come about in ten or twenty years' time. Too many tribunals, you might say. Plato said that justice might well be an invention of the poor to defend themselves against the rich. Who knows? We must expect of globalisation that it also globalises judicial powers, so that no one can again commit injustices at the global level and that the administration of justice comes to be universal and democratic. ■

Presentation given at the Latin American encounter on 'And why not a communication society?', Quito, Ecuador, 10-12 June 2002. Part of the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) campaign supported by WACC. The encounter was co-organised by Unesco, WACC-Latin America and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Note

1 Throughout the article one billion refers to 1,000 million, not one million million.

Antonio Pasquali was former Assistant Director General of Unesco for Communication.

It has become common practice to describe modern societies with the concept 'information society'. This concept refers in a general sense to increases in available volumes of information, the significance of information processing in ever more societal domains and the fact that information technology provides a basic infrastructure upon which societies become increasingly dependent. The following article argues that this concept is flawed and contested. It is questionable whether one can adequately describe societies with one encompassing

Moral challenges in the information society

Cees J. Hamelink

variable only and, even if this were possible, whether information is a more precise category than money, crime or aggression. In any case it should be noted that societies pursue very different paths of development and if one insists on the reference to information, the plural notion of 'information societies' should be used.

There are undoubtedly 'informational developments' in modern societies and through interaction with other social developments these will have an impact on how the future of such societies shape up in different ways dependent upon different historical circumstances. In much of the current literature it is suggested in 'utopian scenarios' that these developments have positive effects, whereas negative effects are highlighted in 'dystopian scenarios'. In both cases the analysts are driven by a deterministic perspective on social development: technological innovations have a direct impact on social processes. There is no space for the reflection on the myriad complex ways in which technology and society are dialectically interlinked.

One specific advantage however of the current information society discourse should not be overlooked. The reference to 'society' inspires good old

sociological questions of power, profit and participation: who benefits, who decides, who participates, and who is accountable?

Here the first moral challenge is posed: are societies open to pose these key questions of classical sociology vis-à-vis the emergence of information societies?

Information

Essential to the notion of the information society is obviously 'information' itself. Much thinking about the future of information societies is based upon a series of popular myths. Such as: more information is better than less information; more information creates more knowledge and understanding; open information flows contribute to the prevention of conflicts, more information means less uncertainty and more adequate choices; if people are properly informed they act accordingly; more information equals more power and once people are better informed about each other, they will understand each other and be less inclined to conflict. All very attractive assumptions but none is necessarily true!

A very popular assumption claims that information equals power. Information becomes a source of power only if the necessary infrastructure for its production, processing, storage, retrieval and transportation is accessible and when people have the skills to apply information to social practice and to participate in social networks through which information can be used to further one's interests. The assumption proposes that people were never able to exercise power because they were ill-informed and ignorant. However, too often people knew precisely what was wrong and unjust, and they were very well informed about the misconduct of their rulers. Yet they did not act, and their knowledge did not become a source of power, because they lacked the material and strategic means for revolt!

A very attractive line of thought proposes that once people are better informed about each other, they will know and understand each other better and be less inclined to conflict. However, deadly conflicts are usually not caused by a lack of information. In fact, they may be based upon very adequate information that adversaries have about each other. As a matter of fact one could equally well propound the view that social harmony is largely due to the degree of ignorance that actors have with regard to each other. Many societies maintain levels of stability because they employ rituals, customs and conventions that enable their members to engage in social interactions without having detailed information about who they really are. There may indeed be conflict situations because adversaries have so much

information about each others' aims and motives. There are situations in which more information is not better than less information. If we all had detailed information about other people that we live and work with, the chance of raging civil war would be very great.

Most assumptions about the role and effects of information and knowledge are based upon seriously flawed cause-effect models. Information and knowledge are conceived as key variables in social processes and dependent upon how they are manipulated certain social effects will occur. Social science research has taught us however that information and knowledge sharing do not occur in the linear mode of simple stimulus/response models that propose linear, causal relations between information/knowledge inputs and social outputs.

The second moral challenge is then for societies to adopt a realistic approach to what information can do while fully recognizing the importance of information production and provision.

Technology

Basic to informational developments are innovations in the development and application of information technology. These innovations are part and parcel of the contemporary technological culture which is characterized by a very troubled human/technology interaction. This interaction is largely determined by irrationality and irresponsibility and which can be summed up with the help of three metaphors: the Titanic, Cassandra and Dr Frankenstein.

- The Titanic represents a strong belief in the perfection of technology: the ship cannot sink and it is not necessary to stock enough life boats on board. As a result the real risks of technological innovations are not taken seriously. The modern technological culture demonstrates a strong drive towards a risk-free society. This aspiration to achieve a risk-free control of social processes is seriously hampered by the unpredictable, fickle human actor. Actually, the human being is increasingly seen as the real risk factor. As a result modern societies develop all kinds of activities to reduce this risk, like the expansive monitoring of human conduct through the ubiquitous camera surveillance and the electronic registration of people's movements. The logical next step in this process is the replacement of human beings with humanoid robots.
- Cassandra is the daughter of the Trojan king Priamus, who warned the Trojans that there were Greeks in the wooden horse. She was gifted with the ability to foresee the future, but she was also cursed by Apollo with the punishment that no one

would listen to her warnings. This is characteristic of the technological culture: warning voices are ignored. In situations where decision makers experience a new era, a winning mood, and the pressures of time and competition: all traffic lights will be ignored, dissidents will be silenced and technology choice becomes a matter of flying blind.

- Dr Frankenstein features in the novel written by Mary Shelley in which the doctor who creates a monster flees from his laboratory and is haunted by the monster who challenges him to take responsibility for what he has created. The metaphor raises the critical question about accountability for technological innovation. Who is accountable when things go wrong? Who takes responsibility if we resolve the digital divide and subsequently face insurmountable environmental problems: the exceedingly high levels of global energy consumption, the rate of CO2 emission from printers and computers and the volume of electronic waste caused by the rapid rate of obsolescence of mobile phones and computers.

In addition to these characteristics, the modern technological culture is inspired by a strong belief in historical moral progress. In the writings of social thinkers such as Joachim di Fiori, Lessing, Hegel, Comte, and contemporary information revolution authors (Toffler, Negroponte, Gates), history proceeds in progressive steps: through enlightenment and rationality, and particularly through science and technology, humanity is on the road towards harmony and peace. This myth of moral progress in modernity was however exposed by Auschwitz and Hiroshima. These events confirmed that there is no linear progressive process and thus the suggestion of moral progress is misleading. History is circular and the human species is locked into the recurrent waves of both gross immoral conduct and refined moral reflection. Inhumanity is eternally part of the human condition. Only the creation of a new Brave New World species could realize the utopia of a risk-free society. But the characters of Brave New World are no longer human.

The third moral challenge is to be realistic about human moral improvement resulting from advances in science and technology, to take the risks of technology seriously and to store sufficient numbers of life boats on board.

From information to communication

There is in current public debate, policy and practice a strong emphasis on the importance of information and information technology. The forthcoming United Nations World Summit on the Information Society

(Geneva, 2003) stresses the prospect of future societies as 'information societies'.

It is disconcerting that most of the preparatory documents for the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (2003, Geneva) 'communication' has practically disappeared. There is a real danger that the Summit will make the same mistake as the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), which in its Final Declaration did not refer to communication, but only mentioned information and news. Yet, the real core question is how to shape 'communication societies'. In fact for the resolution of the world's most pressing problems we do not need more information processing but the capacity to communicate. Ironically as our capacity to process and distribute information and knowledge expands and improves, our capacity to communicate and to converse diminishes.

In complex modern societies we need urgently to communicate with each other. For the resolution of our most urgent social problems the capacity to communicate is much more critical than the capacity to inform. It is a very disturbing prospect indeed if we manage to develop information or even knowledge societies in which people are incapable of conversing with each other.

The fourth moral challenge is thus that the world does not need 'information/knowledge societies' but 'communication societies'

Dialogue

To solve the world's most pressing problems, people do not need more volumes of information and knowledge, they need to acquire the capacity to talk to each other across boundaries of culture, religion and language. Dialogue is absolutely essential and critical to the encounter between civilizations. Globalisation without dialogue becomes homogenisation and hegemony. Localisation without dialogue becomes fragmentation and isolation. In both cases the sustainability of our common future is seriously at stake.

The plea for dialogue sounds obvious and facile. In reality, however, dialogue is an extremely difficult form of speech. In many societies people have neither time nor patience for dialogical communication. Dialogue has no short-term and certain outcome. This conflicts with the spirit of modern achievement-oriented societies. Moreover, the mass media are not particularly helpful in teaching societies the art of conversation. Much of their content is babbling (endless talking without saying anything), hate speech, advertising blurbs, sound bites or polemical debate. The requirements for a meaningful discussion begin with the need for internal dialogue. This implies that

all participants question their judgments and assumptions. The critical investigation of our own assumptions is however a major challenge, as we are often ignorant about our basic assumptions. Assumptions are the mental maps that we tend to follow uncritically. We all have different and often conflicting assumptions, and certainly when we come from different cultures. Equally difficult is the suspension of judgment since we are strongly attached to our opinions and assessments and prefer them to uncertainties.

Dialogue requires the capacity to listen and to be silent. Learning the language of listening is very hard in societies that are increasingly influenced by visual cultures, whereas listening demands an ear-centred culture! The mass media offer 'talk shows', no 'listen shows'. Moreover as Krishnamurti says 'we listen really to our own noise, our own sound, not to what is being said' – we listen defensively most of the time and not receptively! 'We listen to discover what will help us – we listen to anticipate possible danger' (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998: 103). Dialogue can only take place where silence is respected. This borders on the impossible in modern societies where talking never seems to stop and where every void needs to be filled with noise as silence should be avoided at all costs.

The fifth moral challenge is thus learning the art of dialogue.

The right to communicate

Effective dialogue cannot take place between people whose lives are threatened, who are not free to speak or to assemble, who have no means of expressing their voices, who cannot speak in confidentiality and privacy, or who are denied basic forms of education and cultural participation. Today there is an urgent need for the adoption of a universal declaration on the right to communicate. At present this right does not exist as a provision of international law. As early as 1969 Jean d'Arcy introduced the right to communicate by writing, 'the time will come when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will have to encompass a more extensive right than man's right to information... This is the right of men to communicate' (D'Arcy, 1969). The motivating force for this new approach was the observation that the provisions in existing human rights law (like in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) were inadequate to deal with communication as an interactive process.

The right to communicate would encompass information rights such as:

- The right to freedom of thought, conscience and

religion.

- The right to hold opinions.
- The right to express opinions without interference by public or private parties.
- The right of people to be properly informed about matters of public interest.
- The right of access to information on matters of public interest (held by public or private sources).
- The right to access public means of distributing information, ideas and opinions.

Part of the right to communicate would also be cultural rights such as:

- The right to promote and preserve cultural diversity.
- The right to freely participate in the cultural life of one's community.
- The right to practise cultural traditions.
- The right to enjoy the arts and the benefits of scientific progress and its applications.
- The right to the protection of national and international cultural property and heritage.
- The right to artistic, literary and academic creativity and independence.
- The right to use one's language in private and public.
- The right of minorities and indigenous people to education and to establish their own media.

There are protection rights such as:

- The right of people to be protected against interference with their privacy by the media of mass communication, or by public and private agencies involved with data collections.
- The protection of people's private communications against interference by public or private parties.
- The right to respect for the standard of due process in forms of public communication.
- The right of protection against forms of communication that are discriminatory in terms of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin
- The right to be protected against misleading and distorted information.
- The right of protection against the systematic and intentional propagation of the belief that individuals and/or social groups deserve to be eliminated.
- The right of the protection of the professional independence of employees of public or private communication agencies against the interference by owners and managers of these institutions.

There should be rights for communities such as:

- The right of access to public communication for communities.
- The right to the development of communication infrastructures, to the procurement of adequate resources, the sharing of knowledge and skills, the equality of economic opportunities, and the

correction of inequalities.

- The right of recognition that knowledge resources are often a common good owned by a collective.
- The right of protection of such resources against their private appropriation by knowledge industries.

And a variety of participation rights should be recognized such as:

- The right to acquire the skills necessary to participate fully in public communication.
- The right to people's participation in public decision making on the provision of information, the production of culture or the production and application of knowledge.
- The right to people's participation in public decision making on the choice, development and application of communication technology.

The sixth moral challenge proposes that the international community adopts and codifies the human right to communicate.

Conclusion

These six moral challenges – if taken seriously – should be essential topics on the agenda of those communication practitioners, scholars and decision makers who are concerned about the future of communication societies, the governance of which is inspired by the respect for the standards of international human rights. ■

Presentation given at the seminar on 'Virtual ethics in Europe – Challenges for Christian communicators', organised by the European Regional Association of WACC. It took place 1 March 2002, in Geneva, Switzerland.

References

- D'Arcy, J. (1969). 'Direct Broadcasting Satellites and the right to communicate', in *EBU Review*, 118: 14-18.
- Ellinor, L. & Gerard, G. (1998). *Dialogue: Discover the Transforming Power of Conversation*. New York, John Wiley & Sons.
- Hamelink, C.J. (2000). *The Ethics of Cyberspace*. London, Sage
- Webster, F. (1995). *Theories of the Information Society*. London, Routledge.

Cees J. Hamelink (PhD) is professor of international communication at the Universiteit van Amsterdam and also professor of media, religion and culture at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. He holds visiting professorships at the Catholic University of Leuven and the City University of London.

Language rights in Kenya

In August 2000 President Moi of Kenya called on his Attorney General to draft a law limiting broadcasting by private radio stations to English and Kiswahili. Alarmed by this threat to communication rights, opinion leaders, language scholars and journalists took part in a seminar on 'Language, culture and human rights' held in Nairobi, 27-29 August 2002.

The seminar generated considerable interest and was covered beforehand by the Kenya Television Network (KTN), during the event by *The People Daily* newspaper, and afterwards by the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). Sponsored by WACC's Global Studies Programme, the seminar was coordinated by Dorothy Kweyu Munyakho, director of Interlink Rural Information Service (IRIS). Thirty-four people participated.

The seminar began with an open session to discuss various causes of the death of languages. They included:

- Some minority ethnic groups languages are not documented thus endangered. Religion has also influenced language in the sense that the colonialist promoted the use of certain dominant languages at the expense of others. However, there are translations of the Bible into minority languages. The Kenya Institute of Education is writing books in the vernacular, but the process is rather slow.
- There are minority groups that

are diminishing and could be extinct because of factors such as diseases, hunger, drought, poverty, conflicts, banditry, massacres and tribal clashes. Under such difficult circumstances, the death rate has been higher than the birth rate.

- Some minority tribes have been assimilated, such as the Suba, El Molo and Malakote. The Luo through domination and intermarriage has assimilated the Suba. The Malakote were assimilated during the colonial period when the chief, in an encounter with colonialists said that the only ethnic group in Tana River District was the Pokomo. Malakote women married into neighbouring groups and were easily assimilated. Their language is not documented, the community is largely illiterate and they have no politicians to fight for them. They also feel sidelined by other people and government.

- At another level, wealthy people assimilate the poor. The colonisers assimilated much of Africa due to their advanced technology. Africans have had to proceed technologically and our languages have been sacrificed. Our technology cannot influence other people and therefore we cannot export our languages. Our languages are on the periphery of globalisation. In the light of this, the smaller tribes will all be assimilated unless they are assisted to preserve their language through literacy and, ultimately, documentation of the languages that are endangered. Pastoral groups like the Orma have been able to pre-

serve their language and culture because of their nomadic lifestyle and the fact that they do not mix with other people.

- There is dire need for an institute of languages to store and preserve our languages. People cannot be respected without a language and a culture.

- Western civilisation was instrumental in destroying African culture. In the colonisation process, inferiority set in. Remnants of colonialism are still very strong in Kenya. However, all is not lost because there are small nationalities the world over that have struggled to survive and have documented their languages, which have also been translated into English. In Kenya politicians abandon their minority tribes for political interests. In the process, their people lose their language and culture. Consequently, most minority groups lack pride especially because of the arrogance of the dominant tribes that feel superior. Illiteracy is another factor that causes inferiority among the minority groups. Often, they are not given identity by the government, being simply referred to as 'other groups' in national registration documents.

Several presentations were made during the seminar. Professor Okoth Okombo, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nairobi, addressed 'Language, culture and human rights: A policy lacuna in Kenya's human rights agenda'. He argued that 'language and cultural rights are part of human rights; that the current Constitution of Kenya does not

cater for such rights; that the constitutional neglect of such rights has led to a situation where a number of Kenyan languages and cultures are endangered, not to mention the suffering of Kenyan children in education programmes; and that the necessary policy guidelines can be effective only if they are based on a constitutional pillar, which recognises and protects the language and cultural rights of all Kenyans.'

Yobo Rutin of the Centre for Minority Rights Development argued that endorsing English and Kiswahili as official or national languages was an affront to Kenyans' linguistic rights. He stated that 'The politics of language is closely attached to the overall question of identity. It is provided, therefore, that the necessity of the state to facilitate the development of indigenous peoples and minorities, indeed all ethnic assemblies depends on it affirming their identities. Culture, is seen to be crucial if only in legalising the intention towards a democratic nation-state.' Furthermore, 'recognition of peoples' languages as a fundamental component of their cultural rights is in itself an affirmation of genuine democratic vision. This is especially so since democracy has long been assumed to encapsulate various values such as tolerance, pluralism, freedom of expression, participation and accountability.'

The General Secretary of Bible Translation & Literacy, Rev. Micah Amukobole, offered evidence that bible translations are an agent of minority language preservation, giving examples from the Sabaot, Suba, Tharaka and Boni language groups. Christiana Saiti Lowa, of the Indigenous Information Network, described 'Death of language and its implication for biological diversity'.

Herman Morton Igambi, editor-in-chief of Citizen Radio and TV Network, explained 'The role of

the media in promoting indigenous languages. He made the following recommendations:

1. Introduction of vernacular languages should be one of the conditions for issuance of broadcast licenses and allocation of frequencies. This will be nothing new in the industry because in countries like Britain an entrepreneur cannot get a license unless he conforms to similar conditions.

2. The delineation and articulation of national communication policy will ensure that national aims and objectives are well covered in the media output. Advocacy for allocation of adequate communication resources for messages to reach a cross section of Kenyans is essential.

3. The issuance of licences must dictate less dependence and reliance on irrelevant foreign programmes to fill airtime. Producers involved in producing programmes should participate in identifying suitable materials and bid for more airtime for their products.

4. There is great need for stations to undertake research before introducing new programmes that may be irrelevant and contribute nothing to promotion of vernacular languages.

5. Clear career development structures must be put in place cognisance of the fact that you need to recruit producers from various ethnic backgrounds to take the challenges and demands of vernacular languages.

6. Training institutions should train vernacular producers especially from stations that are already broadcasting in vernacular.

7. Vernacular languages should be re-introduced in primary schools, because the current generation of producers can hardly communicate in vernacular.

8. Advertising agencies and other companies should be approached to participate in the production

and sponsorship of vernacular programmes.

Radio stations should be encouraged to include vernacular programming to assist in the difficult task of presenting and promoting indigenous languages.

'Primary education and the teaching of mother tongues' was tackled by Professor Irweri Maabu of the Department of Kiswahili and African Languages, Kenyatta University. He concluded that, 'Culture is a total way of life, and language is an integral part of culture. However culture can only be learned by staying among the people who practice it or learning the language thoroughly. In view of this, teaching of mother tongue has to be adequately done to preserve culture. Tanzania is making an attempt to preserve their culture by recording the oral and visual aspects of culture. There is an urgent need for us to do so.'

In 1999 WACC organised a public hearing on 'Languages and human rights'. Its judges said that 'States and international organisations are insufficiently aware of the fact that respect for linguistic rights is essential to cultural and personal identity as a cornerstone of human rights protection, tolerance and in conflict prevention. All too often States parties to human rights conventions are not prepared to allocate resources for the implementation of linguistic rights.'

The seminar on 'Language, culture and human rights' held in Nairobi has gone a long way towards drawing attention to the plight of indigenous languages in Kenya. Linguistic rights are a concern shared by many other countries in Africa (and elsewhere) and should find a place on the agenda of next year's World Summit on the Information Society. ■

The complete report of the seminar can be found on the WACC website at www.wacc.org.uk

ON THE

SCREEN...

Locarno 2002

To the joy of the organisers, the 55th Locarno international film festival (which took place 1-11 August 2002) was re-classified in the general festivals category, which puts them into the same bracket as Cannes and Venice. But this also means that they will compete for films with them, Cannes being a few months before and Venice one month later. According to the Festival Director, this year's festival unique because of its 'special mix of curiosity, passion, a resolute desire to explore and seek out what is not obvious, friendliness, informality, whilst masking effort with style.'

The Official Jury was composed of seven people, whose president was Cedomir Kolar, a producer from Serbia/France. It included Bruno Ganz, the well known Swiss actor, but only one woman, Nelofer Pazira, from Afghanistan/Canada. Amazingly the Ecumenical Jury never met the Official Jury, although at some viewing sessions the Ecumenical Jury sat behind the International Jury.

The presence of an Ecumenical Jury at the Locarno Film Festival began in 1973. Over two decades, its prizes have been awarded to directors who 'have shown genuine artistic talent and succeeded to express actions or human experiences that comply with the Gospel, or to sensitise viewers to spiritual, human or

social values.'

This year, the Ecumenical Jury at this rich cultural event was composed of three men and three women from five different countries: Carlo Tagliabue (Italy) president of the Jury; Peter Ciaccio (Italy); Dalmazio Ambrosioni (Switzerland); Linde Fröhlich (Germany); Viviane Borderie (France); and Julienne Munyaneza (Rwanda/Great Britain).

The working language was French although Italian, German and English were also used.

The Ecumenical Jury was asked to view 22 films 'in competition' and four documentaries in the *Semaine de la Critique* – (Critics' Week). Although there was a good selection of films in competition, remarkably none would really qualify as outstanding. Maybe that's why, to the great surprise and disappointment of the Ecumenical Jury, press and public, the Official Jury awarded the Golden Leopard to one of the German films *Das Verlangen* (The Longing), a film the Ecumenical Jury and the German press considered to be in bad taste!

A general criticism of the Festival is that there were too many films to view, some of them only repeated once or not at all, or shown in small places with only a hundred seats. Some newspapers also criticised the fact that, although Locarno is classified as an 'A' festival, many stars whose films were being featured and who would have made an effort to

attend Berlin or Cannes, did not bother to visit Locarno. Not even Al Pacino, whose movie *Insomnia* attracted the largest number of viewers (about 11,000 people) to its screening in the famous open air Piazza Grande.

In general terms and without setting too specific or rigid limits, most of the competition films dealt mainly with issues of living or surviving, with a particular emphasis on family life, relationships between parents and children, or peers, or partners. In short, the search for personal fulfilment.

Take for example *Tan de Repente* (Suddenly) by Diego Lerman (Argentina). It 'focuses on relationships with other people and their transformations as seen via a journey' undertaken by six characters where, in a process of tentative reaching out and confrontation, initial distrust is replaced by a relationship of complicity and tenderness. In the film all the characters change for the better and grow. *Tan de Repente* won the Silver Leopard, the second prize of the Official Jury, and the Don Quijote Prize of the FICC Jury.

Meisje (A Girl) by Dorothee Van den Berghe (Belgium) tackled relationships between people of different generations. It 'charts the complex and problematic relationships between parent and child and portrays three women at key moments in their lives. In turn, they become, quite unconsciously, a kind of catalyst for one another.' There was a kind of new beginning for each

one at the end of the film. The mother was there when she was really needed by her daughter and the fact that they finally talked about their fears to each other was the start of a new life. *Meisje* won the first prize of the Junior Jury, the CICAIE/ARTE Prize.

Oltre Il Confine (Beyond the Border) by Rolando Colla (Switzerland) explores situations in which different nationalities and destinies meet with each other because of war; where illegal immigrants face the problem of prison, harassment and/or repatriation; where they try to overcome a variety of borders, country, language, generations, cultures and personal experiences. According to the director, the film 'is an attempt to preserve a record, a record which relates as much to the war in Bosnia as it does to the World War Two.' All wars are bad and their effect is still felt years after they are over. Horrific memories remain indelible.

In *Secretary* by Steven Shainberg (USA) some scenes are shockingly overdone when 'a sado-masochistic love affair blossoms between the boss and his hapless new employee.' The viewer comes face to face with the daily working relationships between a secretary and her boss, going to extreme lengths to please or attract attention. Surprisingly, their relationship became an act of healing for both.

Aime ton Père (Love your Father) by Jacob Berger (France), is a typical family drama in which father and son are estranged. The father is feared but also admired, loved without knowing how to express that love. 'Although it is indeed about settling scores, the price father and son have to pay for their freedom is an exhausting confrontation between their respective perceptions of the past.' Many sentiments are expressed: feigned politeness, regrets and reproach-

es, violence and anger. The director commented, '*Aime ton Père* is intended as an energetic and educational entertainment for all those boys who have wanted, at one time or another, to kill their father. But also for all those little girls who have believed, that one day, they will be able to marry him.' But the strongest lesson is the search for reconciliation.

Gerry by Gus Van Sant (USA) shows two young men, bearing the same name, two carefree friends 'on a sudden whim, a desire to enjoy their freedom for a moment by losing themselves in nature.' They wander aimlessly in the desert, walk together, near each other, or apart from each other, one behind the other, slowly or quickly. In good or bad weather they never give up. In the middle of nowhere, they still joke and laugh at themselves. Then they realise that they are lost, can't retrace their steps back to their car. They are very hungry and thirsty. 'Suddenly thrust into a survival situation, isolated in a sublime and deeply hostile desert, they yearn for the civilised comfort they wanted to escape.'

Mr. and Mrs. Iyer by Aparna Sen (India) is a story of an ordinary woman, Meenakshi Iyer, travelling with her son by bus back to her husband after visiting her parents. On the same bus travels an ordinary man, a wildlife photographer, Raja Chowdhury, who was introduced to the woman and was asked to help her during the bus journey – which he did gladly. The journey is a pleasant one, without incident until 'the bus is stopped by an angry mob of Hindu extremists on the prowl for Muslims. They are out to avenge the burning of a Hindu village.' Raja, a Muslim, is in real danger. Confronted by violence and horror, Meenakshi, an orthodox Hindu, saves his life by lying to the extremists that she and Raja are a married Hindu couple.

In the face of peril, what started as a 'Good Samaritan' act develops into a mutual attraction, and life is more valued than religion and other traditions. 'Humanity reshapes their old, conventional beliefs and religious differences are soon forgotten.'

Man, Taraneh, Panzdah Sal Daram, (I'm Taraneh, 15) by Rassul Sadr-Ameli (Iran) tackles the issue of young girls who become pregnant and are ostracised by the rest of society. The simple solution agreeable to all is to abort or give away the baby. In this particular film the heroine, abandoned by her fiancé while she is pregnant, with a father in prison, does neither. She keeps the baby, fights for her own and her baby's rights and survival. By so doing, Taraneh has to bear alone the weight of social scorn, without protection and support in a hostile environment. Taraneh won the prize for best actress.

Ecumenical Jury prizes

The two movies that won the Ecumenical Jury's prize and special mention were respectively *La Cage* (The Cage) by Alain Raoust (France), and *Diskoli Apocheretismi: O Babas Mou* (Hard Goodbyes, My Father) by Penny Panayotopoulou (Greece). The Jury had a hard time choosing between the two. Both films met the set criteria because they contain very profound messages reflecting the Gospel (more obviously in *Diskoli Apocheretismi* and more subtly in *La Cage*).

La Cage won the prize for its 'coherent cinematic/cinematographic construction, but also because it underlines a painful but necessary process which hopes to achieve reconciliation, as a crucial step towards a true new life.' It was rewarding to see that the FIPRESCI Jury (Presse Cinématographique) had unanimously awarded their prize to the



Caroline Ducey appears as Anne Verrier in La Cage, directed by Alain Raoust (France). The film won the Ecumenical Jury award at Locarno 2002.

same film and almost for the same reasons: 'for its cinematographic expression which relies more on images than on words in creating a young woman's portrait in search of inner peace, after having committed a crime.'

The main character, Anne Verrier, 25 years, who spent seven years in prison for homicide, embarks on a journey of social integration, self-discovery and self-understanding, before she can face the father of her victim to make peace and reconcile with him. 'At the end of their bitter duel, an impossible encounter, both have found new resources with which to escape the cage that had imprisoned them.'

Along Anne's journey, we see different people, be they the judge or her boss, or even her family attempting to facilitate her integration but without success. Anne has one goal in mind, to release herself from her past before confronting the future. The director purposely reversed the classical order in which the victimised person (Jacques Delieu, father of the deceased young man) pursues the

victimiser (Anne Verrier) for revenge. In *La Cage*, the killer takes the first step to find the wronged party for a confrontation hoping against hope for reconciliation. In itself, Anne Verrier demonstrated rare courage. Her action led to a kind of freedom for both of them

Diskoli Apocheretismi: O Babas Mou was given a special mention because 'it confronts us with the reality of death as experienced by a young boy who, step by step and thanks to his inner vision, learns to accept what seemed unacceptable.' Elias, the main character, played by Giorgos Karayannis, won the prize for best actor. In the film, his father dies when Elias is only 10. He is left with his mother and older brother but also uncle and grandmother. Each one tries to cope with their loss. Not Elias. Because he cannot grasp what has happened, he refuses to accept that his father is gone forever. He keeps waiting for his father's return from one of his routine business trips.

Meanwhile, Elias uses his imagination to deal with the situation:

'He lies, sends letters to his grandmother as though they are from his father. He continues to play their favourite games with him, acting out both roles of the game. And worst of all he is absolutely sure that his father will return as he had promised so that they can both watch the Americans' landing on the moon for the first time on television.'

The landing on the moon takes place. Daddy cannot keep his promise. This is the only promise he did not keep. But little Elias grew up. It is only after this event that Elias admits to himself that his father is physically gone for good but very much alive in his mind. And now he can go through a period of mourning.

Middle East documentaries

A final word on the Critic's Week. Considering the importance of events unfolding in the Middle East, three of the recommended documentaries were about that region: *Guerre Sans Images, Algérie Je sais que tu sais* (War without Images – Algeria I know that you know) portrays the pre-

vailing situation in that country as seen and interpreted by Mohammed Soudani, a Swiss of Algerian origin. It is very interesting. *Gaza Strip* by James Longley (USA) is a very vivid presentation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with special focus on its impact on young children and women. Some phrases were very revealing: 'We throw stones to defend our homeland. What have we done to them? Arafat is a spy and all superpowers are traitors. If only God could send an avenging angel! I want to leave this life into Paradise. The only solution is to live apart. If it were up to me, I would change the whole world and the people in it. No country would have us, so where do we belong?' Rage born out of powerlessness was felt by all who spoke.

Lastly *Forget Baghdad*, by Samir, a Swiss born in Iraq, tells the story of Iraqi Jews, also known as the Oriental Jews. The documentary reveals the contradictory situations and feelings of those special Jews. The film was made after the Gulf War. Where do these people feel more at home? Who do they give their sympathies to? It told of a very complex situation indeed.

Report by Julienne N Munyaneza

Venice 2002

The Signis Jury made the following awards at the Venice International Film festival. Its main prize went to *Oasis*, directed by Lee Chang-dong (Korea). 'Through the story of two marginalised people, physically and mentally handicapped, the director draws out their full humanity, so different from the self-centredness and the moral and spiritual barrenness of the moral and spiritual barrenness of their families. The film style succeeds in



Giorgos Karayannis in *Hard Goodbyes: My Father*, mentioned by the Ecumenical Jury at Locarno 2002.

combining both naturalistic and poetic sequences. The director is able to offer a positive way out of their situations, strong hope and an implicit plea for understanding of others.'

The Jury commended *Far from Heaven*, directed by Todd Haynes (USA). 'A well-crafted American melodrama evoking the glossy, idealised and sheltered world of the 1950s. A suburban wife undergoes a disturbing journey, discovering the underside of middle-class

society and its prejudices concerning race and sexual identity.'

It also commended *The Tracker*, directed by Rolf de Heer (Australia). 'A beautifully stylised exploration, with sung ballads and paintings of issues of law, justice and possibilities for reconciliation between aborigines and white Australians, using the symbolic story of tracking a fugitive in the 1922 outbreak.'

The Jury consisted of Peter Malone (Australia), Ivan Corbisier (Belgium), Massimo Giraldi (Italy), Geraldine Pare (USA), Olivier Rahayel (Germany), Alberto Vicente Ramos Ruiz (Cuba), and Marco Vanelli (Italy).

Statement on *The Magdalene Sisters* winner of a Golden Lion at Venice 2002

Scots actor director, Peter Mullan, has made an expertly-crafted but grim film about the Catholic Church in Ireland in the mid-60s. He has researched the laundries that were run by sisters who took in young women who had had children out of wedlock or who were considered wayward in sexual behaviour. Often they were called Magdalenes.

In recent years, in the English-speaking world especially, stories of physical and sexual abuse in Church parishes and institutions have surfaced with many priests and brothers facing civil courts and imprisonment. *The Magdalene Sisters* includes a priest character, the chaplain, whose behaviour reflects this kind of sexual abuse. Fewer sisters have been in court although many stories have been reported of physical cruelty rather than sexual abuse. Much of this cruelty took place during the 1950s and 1960s. The nun characters in this film were trained in the 1950s or

earlier. The action takes place during the 1960s.

The film will certainly cause sadness in audiences who have been disturbed by the experiences of the 1990s, the revelations, the court cases and sentences. It will cause sadness for those who have positive memories of education by sisters and for those who want to see pleasant images of the Church and Church personnel. However, this story, which makes more impact perhaps because it is being seen rather than merely being read, is no less true than many of the recent stories that have been reported even in the Catholic press.

Is the film an attack on the Catholic Church? Peter Mullan says no. That was not his intention. It is a critique of a religious culture. Obviously it is an attack on and a critique of much of the harshness of the Church which has often been seen as characteristic of a stern Irish Catholicism. It is a critique of the abuse of power and authority in the name of the Church. (An apposite Gospel reference would be Matthew 20: 24-28 with Jesus' words on power, authority and service.)

Mullan's comment is that Ireland was a theocracy. He has pointed out that in a theocracy, those who accepted this situation were prone to dominating behaviour in God's name. This means that the sisters themselves were victims of this religious-civil collaboration. While priests (as in the film) would make judgments about the young women who were to be sent to the laundries to keep them disciplined and under control, it was also the families who sent their daughters. The latter situation is seen in the film with the young woman who is raped by a cousin. She is either not believed or is blamed and is the innocent scapegoat for the wrong done by the man.

At his Venice Festival press con-



Described by L'Osservatore Romano as an 'angry and rancorous provocation', The Magdalene Sisters, directed by Peter Mullan, won the top award at Venice 2002 and the critics' prize at the Toronto Film Festival.

ference, Peter Mullan discussed other theocracies and the example was given of the Taliban – which led to some absurdly exaggerated press reports that he had likened the nuns in the film to Taliban leaders.

Although the film does not touch on it – except perhaps in the scene where a benefactor brings the first film to the convent (The Bells of St Mary's) and in the blessing of the new washing machines – this was the period of the Second Vatican Council and the call to rethink religious life and ministry. At what stage this reform was introduced in Ireland, those who remember can tell us, but it might have given some greater nuances to the characters and the behaviour in the film to make it even more compelling drama.

One British press reviewer remarked that the film was a 'one-note' film with no variation on its grim storytelling. However, this is the film that Mullan has made. The performances of the girls are first-rate. The nuns are less clearly drawn, mainly being seen in supervision sequences or in the

refectory where their meal was more lavish than that of the girls. It is Geraldine McEwan's performance as the superior that demands attention. She has inherited a tradition of the Superior being strong, that her word is final and that she expresses God's will. She is shown to be cruel at times.

Much as we might regret it, we can all probably remember religious who acted in this way. We might want to hurry to add that not all religious were like this. That is right. But, this film is a drama rather than a documentary. Most audiences will appreciate, as they would with a film criticising the police or politicians, that the majority of members of the profession did not act in this way.

The Magdalene Sisters can be seen as part of an honest examination of conscience by the Church and a request for repentance, an expression of sorrow and an apology, something which Pope John Paul II has exemplified and encouraged in recent years. ■

Peter Malone, President, SIGNIS, International.

'The greatest future of journalism in Africa lies in educating young journalists to understand and put into practice the moral principles of journalism ethics.' These words come from the book Journalism Ethics in Africa, written by Francis P. Kasoma, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Zambia, who died suddenly on 7 June 2002. The book originated in a WACC-sponsored seminar held in December 1992, and demonstrate his life-long quest to promote professionalism in journalism and

FORUM

*In memoriam
Francis P. Kasoma
(1943-2002)*

his commitment to its development in Zambia and Africa as a whole.

Kasoma's journalism career goes back to 1967-68 when he set up and edited *The Lever News*, a Lever Brothers house magazine in Zambia. He went on to work as a *Times of Zambia* reporter 1969-76 and rose to the position of assistant news editor. He was also seconded as a reporter for *The Standard* newspaper in Tanzania and was a correspondent for the *Sunday Nation* of Nairobi, in Kenya.

In 1985, Kasoma was elected president of the Africa Literature Centre (ALC) in Kitwe, Zambia. He became president of the Press Association of Zambia (PAZA) from 1994 to 1996. He published six books: *The Press in Zambia* (1986); *Communication Policies in Zambia* (1990); *Communication Policies in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland* (1992); *Rural Newspapers in Africa* (1993); *Journalism Ethics in Africa* (Ed) (1994); and *Community Radio: Its management and organisation* (2002). He also contributed several chapters to various books and wrote articles for journals and magazines.

At the international level, Kasoma worked on behalf of several organisations. From 1986 to 1988 he was president of the African Council for

Communication Education (ACCE) for mass communication scholars and practitioners; a member of the board of directors of the Nordic/SADC Journalism Training centre in Maputo, Mozambique; a member of the regional board for SADC for the FAO communication for development project based in Zimbabwe; a member of the educational committee of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR).

At the academic level, the early death of Professor Kasoma has been described as a tragedy. University of Zambia Vice Chancellor Professor Mutale Chanda said the University has lost a prolific writer and academician who contributed to the development of mass communication studies. He said Professor Kasoma was a great leader and an external examiner at many universities in the region and overseas, adding that he was the country's academic ambassador.

Professor Kasoma scored a lot of notable achievements to his credit both on the local and international levels. He was instrumental in the establishment of the current Department of Mass Communication at the University of Zambia and in 1984 became its first head of department. He served as a member of National Development Planning sub-committee of the ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services (MIBS). Among other institutions in Zambia he was a member of the board of governors of Multimedia Zambia, and a member of the board of directors of the Africa Literature Centre and Sun Newspapers.

Dr Pradip Thomas, Director of Studies and Publications of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) said that the passing of Francis Kasoma was more than just a sad event. Dr Thomas said he will be missed in the fight for media rights and ethical norms in Africa. 'That he has been instrumental in nurturing some of the best and brightest media scholars in Africa stands as a tribute to his life and work,' he wrote in an e-mail tribute sent to Professor Kasoma's family.

Africa stands in need of more communication scholars and practitioners with the skills and devotion of Francis P. Kasoma. ■

Should media education be refocused on moving image media alone? This important question is the subject of an intense controversy following recent proposals by the British Film Institute. The following short article sets the scene.

When the Film Council was established by the British Government in 2000 it provided an unparalleled opportunity to develop a dynamic and integrated film strategy for the UK. Its funding was generous though not without controversy. The Council was guaranteed a minimum of £27 million per annum from the National Lottery, a huge 12.2% share of the

The Film Council, the British Film Institute and media education

Len Masterman

entire arts budget, which together with a substantial Treasury grant gave the Council an annual budget of £54 million. It was a major investment to underpin an important industrial and cultural project – to regenerate the British film industry and begin to challenge the 85% market-share claimed by US films in the lucrative £1.5 billion UK film and video market.

Education was an integral part of this strategy on the grounds that an informed cine-literate audience was a necessary pre-condition of the industry's long-term success. The goals set for the Film Council by the Government were, therefore, a curious amalgam of the 'hard' economic and the 'soft' cultural and educational. The Council was enjoined to 'help maximise inward investment', but also to 'improve education about the moving image'. It must 'help maximise exports' but also 'extend and improve access to film culture and film heritage.' Almost 30% of the Council's budget, £16 million p.a., has been given to the British Film Institute (BFI) to carry out its educational objectives, some £3.3 million of this going to its Education Department, primarily to improve standards of teaching about film and the moving image.

Less than two years in, it is apparent that there are major problems both with this expensively conceived

educational strategy and the ways in which it is being implemented. First of all it is a hierarchical top-down model in which government policies and ideas are 'cascaded' down to classroom teachers for implementation. In its crude instrumentalism it is an affront to most professional educators. It is as though English teachers were being directed to teach about literature in order to keep the British publishing industry afloat.

Secondly film education as envisaged by the Government and The Film Council has been dead in the water for over twenty years. Film Studies in schools had virtually collapsed by the early 1980s. Some analysis of this *débat* should certainly be undertaken before large tranches of public money are spent in repeating it. Much of the energy which had fuelled film studies in the '70s was channelled into media studies in the '80s. Whilst cinema attendances were in long-term decline, television was an increasingly important and influential medium in the lives of children. The ideological power of television and the press in particular were seen by most teachers as raising far more pressing issues than the more narrowly aesthetic concerns of film studies. These priorities have remained intact to the present time. They account for the popularity and growth of media studies over the past twenty years. The new AS and A level specifications in media studies have this year attracted nearly 30,000 students.

Within this context the Government's emphasis upon 'film culture and film heritage' is badly out-of-touch with the priorities of teachers and students. To its credit the Film Council immediately recognised this by recasting its priorities in terms of what it now calls 'moving image education', a phrase that allows it to include television in its remit. There is an element of the Trojan horse about 'moving-image education', however. Whilst it is television which will give the concept of its credibility with media teachers, in practice it is film which will be given the front seat and the major financial backing in terms of the Film Council's own policies.

Controversial decisions

The anomalies and disjunctures of the Government's policies can be crystallised in a single sentence: The Government has created a mono-medium institution (The Film Council) to oversee the educational work of a bi-media institution (the BFI, whose remit includes both film and TV), which acts at the interface with an expanding (multi-) media studies movement. As an example of joined-up Government thinking or a structure for achieving a coherent national educational policy – the rationale for The Film Council – it leaves much to be desired. As a former Chief Examiner at

A Level I have first-hand experience of how energetically and imaginatively many grassroots media teachers are working, with little financial backing, no infrastructural support, and, often, in the face of ill-informed criticism. Now we have two lavishly-funded institutions which could provide just such support, but which will find it difficult, because of their remits, to connect with or meet the needs of teachers and students in the field. What is urgently needed, if any meaningful policy is to emerge from the Government's largesse, is careful management, allied to a realistic analysis of what will be possible in schools and colleges.

Instead, in an act of monumental folly, Cary Bazalgette, one of the chief architects of BFI policies over the past decade, has turned against media education as it is currently practised, describing it as confused, contradictory and incoherent, and urging that it should be refocused upon moving-image media alone. This attempt to re-align a whole educational movement with the BFI's own narrower institutional priorities is unconvincing, not least because it involves a volte-face of Stalinist proportions. For the BFI has been the principal lobbyist for media education for the past twenty years. Has the subject *suddenly* become incoherent? Or has the BFI led teachers up the garden path for all of this time? And if there are legitimate criticisms to be made of media education, might not the BFI itself, as the most generously-funded public institution working in this area, bear just a smidgen of responsibility for them?

Bazalgette's current position is both intellectually and morally untenable. Teachers will need some convincing that it is not a product of political and economic expediency rather than educational conviction. Ironically, what is being undermined is the very curriculum area within which moving image education has its securest home. It is proposing a 'media education' in which the study of the press, radio, advertising and magazines, for example, would play no part, and in which the links between different media at the level of ownership, institution or ideological influence would not be permitted. How credible is that? And how destructive? It would remove at a stroke the possibility of students making those vital connections between the economic, the cultural, the linguistic, the sociological, and the institutional – spheres normally kept apart by the traditional academic disciplines – which gives to the subject most of its value and power.

Media Studies has not been without its critics, of course. But none of them has ever shown the slightest awareness of the major intellectual and pedagogic leap-forward signified by the subject. It was the achievement of British media educators to

have produced a conceptual framework for understanding the media which is now internationally accepted, light-years ahead of the content-orientation of most other subjects, and enables students to read, question and respond critically to any media text they will ever encounter. This was a major breakthrough in the 1980s, and has since been consolidated by almost two decades of teaching, action-research and a formidable corpus of published work.

The media education movement is now an international one with solid intellectual and educational foundations. By contrast no coherent rationale has been offered for moving image education by the BFI. It is a top-of-the-head proposal, quite devoid of any appeal to wider purposes and issues, and for which not a single argument of any substance has been offered. No field-work has been attempted and no feasibility studies carried out. Even the basic relationship between the study of film and television themselves has not been analysed or theorised.

In short, the BFI's proposals for moving-image education have all the makings of an educational Railtrack. What is proposed is the fragmentation, on the flimsiest of grounds, of an integrated working system, carried out at great expense via centralised political and bureaucratic (albeit well-meaning) dictat, over the heads and without the consultation of the professionals who have to make the system work. Will the media teachers and students of the future suffer the fate of present-day rail workers and commuters, hapless victims of a system which has almost irretrievably broken down? Perhaps not. Few teachers will be prepared to teach a subject on the insubstantial basis proposed by the BFI, even given the lavish resources with which to do it. Nor do I know any who would use their students as guinea-pigs in order to reveal the problems which will inevitably arise from the implementation of the BFI's ideas. So sanity will prevail within the classroom. But where does this leave one of the most generously funded cultural education policies in this country's history? ■

Len Masterman's monograph *Down Cemetery Road: Why the BFI's Proposals for Moving Image Education are No Good* is available from Alpha Media, Upper Heath Cottage, 90 Downham Road South, Heswall, Wirral CH60 5SQ, United Kingdom. It costs £4.99 (plus £1.25 p&p).

Len Masterman is Research Fellow in Politics and Communication at the University of Liverpool and visiting Professor of Media Studies at the University of Central England, Birmingham, United Kingdom. His books include *Teaching the Media*, *Teaching about Television*, and *Television Mythologies*.

What are the sources in international and regional law of the right to information? How these sources are applied in Southern Africa? What conclusions can be drawn about refugees' right to information? The following article comprehensively explores these questions, drawing a number of theoretical and practical conclusions.

The topic of the information rights of refugees in Southern Africa is, of course, an important issue encompassing such questions as whether refugees in a camp may be forbidden to publish a newspaper

bers are found in Botswana (4,085), Malawi (3,900), and Zimbabwe (4,127). Large numbers of refugees are found in Angola (12,222), Namibia (17,740), and the Republic of South Africa (15,063). Of course, dwarfing these refugee numbers but still very much in need of information are the estimated 4,000,000 internally displaced persons (hereinafter IDPs) in Angola. The condition of these people, separated from their families and friends, away from home, fleeing the turmoil of civil war is very much like those of refugees with the exception of not having crossed and international border and therefore not technically within the mandate of the UNHCR.

Sources of the right to information

It may come as a surprise to some that the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees makes no mention of information rights of refugees. A moment's reflection, however, reveals the unexceptional nature of this omission. As a product of the wartime traumas of massive displacement and unspeakable barbarity the convention's focus on refugee protection was reasonably limited to provisions of physical safety, non-discrimination and subsistence. The Convention anteceded the flowering of human rights treaties of the late 1960s and beyond and in certain respects was a precursor of these latter conventions. Apart from its guarantee of the crucial right of non-refoulement in Article 33, the only individual right not subject to State suspension or reservation accorded to refugees in the convention is contained in Article 4. This article guarantees to refugees the right to the free exercise of religion and the right to religious education on a par with the inhabitants of the host country. The fact that this provision was not included in the Text of the Draft Convention, but was added at the eleventh hour further reinforces the point that the convention was not intended to provide a catalogue of individual rights and liberties. At the time of the writing of the 51 Convention the protection of individual rights and liberties such as the right to information were, for the most part, the business of municipal law. Indeed, in a recent report to the General Assembly, the UNHCR notes that the convention has been complemented and 'buttressed by the progressive development of international human rights law.'

It is, then, to the field of international human rights law that we must now turn to find the legal foundations for the refugees right to information. This inquiry must begin with reference to the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which announces that 'everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom

Information rights of refugees in Southern Africa

Michael S. Gallagher, S.J.

and whether in such a paper articles or opinion pieces could be published which criticized both the government of the home country as well as the treatment accorded refugees in the country of asylum? A good place to begin is with definition of terms to be used, in this case 'information' and 'Southern Africa.' I will use the term 'information' to include both access to relevant data of whatever kind as well as the ability to disseminate the data once obtained – in short both news gathering and news distributing activities will fall under the broad umbrella of 'information'. For purposes of this paper Southern Africa will be the following ten countries: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Republic of South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

What is the refugee population we are talking about in this area? The Population Data Unit of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) latest figures on refugee populations reveals a total of 326,801 refugees in this ten state region. Zambia, with 268,767 or 82% of all refugees in the region, has the greatest number and Lesotho, with no listed refugees, has the fewest. Small refugee populations are found in Mozambique (207) and Swaziland (690). Moderate refugee num-

to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.' Regrettably, the Declaration is not a legally binding instrument since it is merely a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly and thus provides no force of law to the principle of a persons right to seek and disseminate information. It was not until 1976 with the entry into force of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (hereinafter ICCPR) that a foundation in international law was provided.

The ICCPR contains six articles which touch upon the refugee's right to information. Article 2 provides that all the rights enumerated in the ICCPR must be extended to all individuals, and not just citizens, present in a state. Article 18 guarantees the freedom of thought, religion and belief which would ensure persons the right to maintain opinions which might be contrary to the prevalent ideology of the host state. This article is one of the seven articles of the Covenant to which States are not permitted to file reservations nor are they allowed to suspend obligations arising from this provision even in time of emergency. Article 19 further explicates the freedom of thought ensured in Article 18. It states explicitly that all persons present in a State have the right to hold opinions without interference, express them, and the right to 'to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds'. The method of expression of opinions is to be limited only by the imagination of the one holding them and not by any governmental sanction. One application of this right to refugees is found indirectly in ICCPR Article 13 which states that refugees may be expelled from a state only 'only in pursuance of a decision reached in accordance with law'. Ideally, since a refugee has the right to seek information and express it he or she could never be subject to a lawful expulsion on those grounds. We shall see later on in this paper the ways in which real state practice departs from this ideal.

In a pattern which we will see repeated in the other documents of international human rights law, the ICCPR also places limits on the content of information to be sought or expressed. Article 19 allows states to restrict expression of information which affects the rights or reputation of others, and on grounds of national security, public health, order or morals. Thus a government can legitimately prohibit a person from divulging or disseminating copyrighted or patented information, slandering or libelling his neighbour, printing instructions for constructing a hydrogen bomb, or methods for spreading anthrax, to provide only a few examples of permissible government censorship.

More problematic are the limitations on free

expression found in Article 20. This article requires states to outlaw war propaganda as well as speech which advocates violence or discrimination based on nationality, race or religion. Not surprisingly, more states (15) filed reservations to this article than to any other provision in the covenant. Moreover, all the reserving states with the exception of Thailand were from the West and were long time liberal democratic states including both the U.K and the U.S. Finally, Article 4 of the ICCPR permits states during times of public emergency to suspend or 'derogate' from the rights granted to its inhabitants under the ICCPR. While there are certain non-derogable provisions in the ICCPR, and the Secretary General of the United Nations must be notified of a declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of rights, the right to information contained in Article 19 is one of the rights which may be suspended.

A companion treaty to the ICCPR, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereinafter CESCR), contains one provision which recognizes that all persons have the right to education. Since this right is not restricted to children but extends throughout a person's lifetime, it implies a continuing right to receive information, especially information useful to building up democratic states.

Three other multinational human rights treaties contain provisions affecting refugees' right to information. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) each contain provisions pertaining to information. The Racial Discrimination document commits State Parties to criminalize 'all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination' as well as prohibiting groups public or private which promote such an agenda. On the positive side the convention requires State Parties to guarantee non discriminatory rights to thought, opinion and expression. In a similar fashion the convention against discrimination against women provides that all State Parties must ensure that all women should have equal access to information as men, especially in matters of adult education and literacy programmes, family health and planning information. Finally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child contains provisions guaranteeing free access to information for children which are substantively identical to those contained in the ICCPR.

In addition to the multilateral human rights treaties, Southern African refugees and internally displaced persons rights to information may be affected by regional human rights instruments as well. Chief

among these are the 1969 Convention on the Specific Aspects of Refugees Problems in Africa (hereinafter the OAU Convention) and the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (hereinafter the Banjul Charter). Both of these documents arose in the context of Organization of African Unity (OAU) meetings and each has provisions which touch upon information. It would seem that the manner in which information is treated in each of these documents must be understood in light of the struggle to overcome colonial powers, racist ideologies, and internal tribal or ethnic divisions brought about by the arbitrary borders imposed on African territories by European powers in the 19th century which formed part of the creation story of most modern African states. The documents while seeking to support human rights also seek to promote peace among African states.

The OAU Convention provides the clearest indication of this background. In its preamble it recites the factual conditions which have led to the convention. Among these are the perception that some refugees are the source of tension and conflict between African nations and use their sojourn in the host country as a means of organizing attacks against their native lands. Thus the OAU convention is quite explicit in its condemnation of subversive activities. The Preamble recites that the leaders are:

- Aware, however, that refugee problems are a source of friction among many Member States, and desirous of eliminating the source of such discord.
- Anxious to make a distinction between a refugee who seeks a peaceful and normal life and a person fleeing his country for the sole purpose of fomenting subversion from outside.
- Determined that the activities of such subversive elements should be discouraged, in accordance with the Declaration on the Problem of Subversion and Resolution on the Problem of Refugees adopted at Accra in 1965.

One of the methods for dealing with the problem of subversives among refugees was to place limitations on the information. Thus Article 3 of the OAU convention prohibits subversive activities and lists among such activities attacks on other OAU members 'through the press or by radio.' The consequences of failing to abide by these prohibitions can be quite severe. The OAU convention provides for cessation of refugee status for those who have 'seriously infringed the purposes and objectives of this Convention.' Since one of the purposes of the convention was 'eliminating sources of friction' between member states subversive activity even in the form of providing information critical of another African gov-

ernment would seem to leave a refugee susceptible to loss of refugee status and refoulement. Moreover, among the exclusion clauses of the OAU convention is one which bars a person from refugee status who 'has been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the Organization of African Unity'. Persons who in the past have engaged in political speech which called for a replacement of their home country's government would seem liable to exclusion under one reading of this provision. The implementation of both the cessation clause and the exclusion clauses of the OAU convention will most likely vary among states depending upon its relations with the refugee's home country. Thus if the host country is funding a guerrilla movement in the home country it is unlikely that information critical of the other country will trigger either clause.

The Banjul Charter contains provisions similar to those of the both the ICCPR and OAU convention. Like ICCPR Article 19, Article 9 of the charter states that 'every individual shall have the right to receive information' and guarantees 'the right to express and disseminate his opinions.' The information right of the charter are explicitly subordinated to municipal statutes since all communications must be 'within the law.' Like the OAU convention Article 23 of the charter prohibits refugees from engaging in 'subversive activities' while in the host country. The ostensible reason for this provision is to promote 'solidarity and friendly relations' among member states. As is the case in the OAU convention the terms 'subversive' and 'subversive activities' are not defined in the document or elsewhere rendering them open to a variety of interpretations including various types of communication of information which is critical of another African country.

A final, non-treaty source of regulation which can impact on refugees rights to information comes from the policies of the UNHCR itself. While the UNHCR Manual is not publicly available, the *Handbook for Emergencies*, provides some insight into its contents. In the chapter on Protection, under the heading of 'Basic Refugee Standards' there is a statement that refugees 'should not become involved in subversive activities against their country of origin or any other state.' Again, while no definition of 'subversive activities' is provided the presence of this provision in the handbook shows that there are some institutional constraints on refugees ability to communicate information.

Application of international law in Southern Africa

Just a few words as a preface to this section about the application of international law generally would

seem appropriate. As a general rule, States as a function of their sovereignty are not obliged to obey international laws to which they have not consented. The exception to this rule is what is known as customary international law which is thought to oblige all states whether or not they have explicitly consented to them. Examples of such a customary international law would be the rule that civilians may not be used as hostages in international armed conflict or that a vessel in distress may enter territorial waters in search of safe haven.

A second point to keep in mind is that international law is generally the law between nations, not between a citizen of one state and a nation. Thus disputes that arise in international law are disputes between states or, in some instances, intergovernmental agencies and states. In the area of international human rights law this raises difficulties because many of the rights guaranteed are in favour of individual persons dwelling in states. What human rights treaties generally require is some type of local enabling legislation in addition to the treaty which permits persons whose rights have been violated to seek redress either in the domestic legal system or before an international body. The more recent human rights treaties contain provisions requiring the passage of enabling legislation and for monitoring state compliance with the treaty. These latter provisions generally entail some type of self-reporting mechanism to a committee of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

From the preceding remarks we can see the questions which need be asked of each of the ten nations in our region. Is it a party to the treaties we have mentioned? Have they enacted enabling domestic legislation on the topic? Is it in compliance with the reporting provisions where such exist in the treaties? Finally, and most tellingly, what has been its record in permitting freedom of expression?

The ten nations of the regions have been enthusiastic signers and ratifiers of most of the international and regional human rights treaties we have mentioned. Angola is party to all except for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. Botswana and Mozambique are party to all except for the Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe are parties to each of the documents we have referred to. South Africa is a party to all the U.N. sponsored human rights treaties as well as the OAU refugee convention but is not as yet a party to the Banjul Charter. Swaziland is the exception to the rule for the region. It is only a party to the OAU Refugee Convention, the Convention on Racial Discrimination, and

Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The question of compliance with the reporting requirement which followed upon ratification of the various human right instruments presents a different picture of the region. The nine regional signatories of the ICCPR, for example, are expected to report upon municipal enabling legislation in the course of their report to the Human Rights Commission of the U.N. Angola has failed to file its initial report and now owes for the subsequent reporting cycle as well. In addition it owes 6 reports on other human rights treaties. Botswana only ratified the treaty in September of 2000 but has yet to file its first report which is overdue. In addition, it owes a total of twelve reports on other human rights instruments to which it is a party. Lesotho is current in its reporting for the ICCPR, but owes two reports on its CESCRC obligation, one on the racial discrimination convention, two on discrimination against women, and one of the rights of the child. Malawi owes a total of twelve reports on its treaty obligations including two on the ICCPR- it has yet to file its initial report on this treaty. Mozambique owes twelve reports over all and has never filed on ICCPR compliance. Namibia owes seven reports over all and has never filed on ICCPR compliance. South Africa owes its initial ICCPR compliance report and four other treaty based reports. Swaziland which is signatory to only two human rights treaties owes a total of three reports on its compliance. Zambia owes a total of ten reports including one on ICCPR compliance. Finally, Zimbabwe owes five reports. Although it filed its initial report under the ICCPR more than four years late, it along with Lesotho are the only southern African nations current in their ICCPR reporting requirement.

On the specific issue of right to information be it for refugees or citizens the region again presents an uneven picture some states are reported as having tolerant practices on information others are said to be quite restrictive. One manner of assessing the rights accorded refugees to information in a Southern African State is to see what rights it accords its own citizens. Carver and Verdirame made the point succinctly in 'Voices in Exile': 'it is highly improbable that a Banda, Mobutu or Taylor—so casual about the fundamental rights of their own citizens—will care very much about the rights of non-nationals who enjoy no political leverage at all.'

Angola which has the largest number of IPDs in the region also has one of the poorer records for protecting the right to information. According to a 2002 report by Human Rights Watch freedom of expression in Angola 'remained a concern.' While the constitution provides for freedom expression and of the press without censorship on 'ideological, political, or

artistic' grounds, there are very broad defamation laws protecting the 'President or his representative' which have been invoked against journalists. The U.S. Department of State notes in a recent report that media freedom 'increased incrementally' in 2001.

As we noted at the outset of this presentation, Zambia has the largest number of refugees in the region. Like Angola its constitution promises freedom of expression, but, again like Angola its penal laws put great restrictions on this alleged freedom. Many here are aware that the Editor of the independent newspaper, *The Post*, was recently arrested on a charge of defaming the president. The United States Department of State notes that 'the Government infringed on press freedom.' The government moreover controls many of the media outlets in the country including the major television provider and two of the three national daily newspapers.

With respect to information rights of refugees specifically, a point that Carver and Verdirame make in connection with refugee settlements in Tanzania is also relevant to Zambia: the isolation of the camps and settlements and the requirement that most refugees reside in settlements and camps is a further impediment to the receipt of information. For example in Nangweshi Camp in the Western Province and Meheba Camp in the Northwestern Province there is no direct phone communications nor is there electricity. This means that there is no easy radio, television, or internet access to the refugee populations residing there. The same conditions are likely to be present in Mayukwayukwa and the camps in the North.

As to the concomitant right of refugees to provide information to one another or to the outside world, Zambia also presents an ambiguous picture. On the one hand there are copies of camp newspapers published in Meheba in my office dating from the late 1990s which are indicative of some degree of information distribution. On the other hand, such materials need approval of the government of Zambia before they can be distributed to refugee groups. Moreover, there are statutory limits on refugee's speech rights. The Refugee Control Act states explicitly: 'No person other than the Commissioner or a refugee officer may in a refugee settlement address an assembly or meeting of more than ten refugees whether or not such meeting is held in a public place.' While it is clear that the provision, which is of dubious legality under international law, is intended to forestall riots and rebellions occurring in refugee camps, as it is written it would apply to any gathering, including church services, which as a matter of fact occur regularly and without government supervision at all the refugee camps in Zambia. Nonetheless, the structure is present to limit refugee

information imparting activity. Were some form of blatant illegality occurring in a refugee camp, for example, food intended for refugees being sold to villagers by camp authorities, this provision of law could be invoked to prohibit refugees from reporting such abuses to higher authorities or to the media. The provision is also illustrative of the power imbalance which characterizes the relationship between refugees and all agencies and government structures which are ultimately not accountable to the refugee for the services they provide to them.

Namibia which holds the third highest number of refugees in the region has a somewhat better record with respect to the right to information. The U.S. State Department notes that there are privately owned newspapers in the country which freely criticize the government and do not practice self-censorship. There is occasional invocation of defamation laws to attempt to curb the independent press and private expressions of opposition. For example, the 2000 World Press Freedom Review of Namibia reports that one man was arrested for making a thumbs down signal to the presidential motorcade and that in another case a newspaper editor was being sued for claims published in his paper. The government does restrict the movement of refugees and requires them to live in a camp which is located in a remote area of Namibia some 200 kilometres north of the capital Windhoek. It is most likely that the remoteness of the facility restricts the information available to the refugees there.

In South Africa refugees are permitted to move about the country and thus have easier access to information than do many of their regional counterparts. Nonetheless, while there is a vigorous and free press in South Africa there remain old laws which can dampen its ardour. The U.S. State Department report notes 'several apartheid-era laws that remain in force pose a potential threat to media independence.' The 2001 press freedom report states 'pressure from political parties, the question of subpoenas, assaults on the media and repressive legal provisions have all been confronted by the media when attempting to report the news.' One additional factor which may influence refugees access to information in South Africa is the widespread anti-foreigner sentiment. In one incident in October of 2001 over 120 Zimbabwean dwellings were burned following the death of a South African. Fear for physical safety might lead some refugees not to attempt to express their opinions in the present South African climate.

Botswana, Malawi and Zimbabwe have moderate numbers of refugees. In each country refugees are required to live in camps which, for the most part are

in isolated areas. Dukwe camp, in north eastern Botswana is located some 400 kilometres from Livingstone, Zambia. Dowa camp in central Malawi is located some 50 kilometres from Lilongwe in an area which shows no developed roads. Tongagara camp in Zimbabwe is some 350 kilometres south east of Harare in a province bordering Mozambique. Thus in each instance the refugees will suffer from the lack of access to information that isolation brings with it.

Botswana is generally recognized to have an independent media and press corps which reports without government interference. According to the U.S. State Department the independent press 'has a long tradition of vigorous, candid, and unimpeded discourse.' Access to information because of government action should not be a problem to Botswana's refugees. One attempt to punish independent newspapers in 2001 by withholding government advertising was declared illegal by Botswanan Courts.

On the other hand Zimbabwe's problems with press censorship and expulsion of journalists critical of the government is well documented. The International Press Institute notes that it is 'worried that the Zimbabwe model of simultaneously weakening the rule of law while suppressing the media may be adopted in other countries in the region.' It is doubtful that any refugee who dared to communicate an opinion critical of the present government would be tolerated. Carver and Verdirame site a case of a refugee being detained for nine months because it was believed that he was fund raising for the opposition political party. The State Department's summary of press freedom in February 2001 bears repeating in full:

The Constitution provides for freedom of expression but allows for legislation to limit this freedom in the 'interest of defence, public safety, public order, state economic interests, public morality, and public health,' and the Government restricted this right in practice. Security forces arbitrarily detained journalists, disobeyed court orders to release journalists, and refused to investigate or punish security force members who tortured journalists and opposition members. Journalists practice self-censorship.

Malawi's picture of the right to information lies somewhere between the extremes of Botswana and Zimbabwe. In February 2001 the State Department noted that there were over two dozen independent newspapers in the country who generally present a wide spectrum of opinion 'usually without government interference.' In March 2002 the Press Freedom Review pointed out instances of journalists being arrested and editors threatened for publishing stories critical of the government.

Swaziland, Mozambique and Lesotho have less than 0.2% of the region's refugee population. Swaziland has the largest of the refugee populations and they undoubtedly have as little access to information critical of the government as do the citizens of the country. Political parties are forbidden by law and the King reacts 'harshly to journalists practicing their profession.' Since the land mass of Swaziland is so slight it is doubtful that refugees even if confined to camps suffer from isolation to a greater extent than the rest of the populace. A decree of a state of emergency in June 2001 included a provision for banning publications without providing reasons justifying the ban and without legal redress. Anyone who 'insults, ridicules, or puts into contempt the King or Queen in whatever way or form' is subject to a prison term of up to ten years. An international outcry followed the publication of the decree and it was subsequently withdrawn. The access to information, however, remains precarious in Swaziland.

Mozambique provides a better atmosphere for receiving and imparting information. While there are defamations laws protecting the president to which truth is not a defence, they have not been invoked and the president is criticized in the press. One journalist was killed in late 2000 and his murder has not been solved but there is no evidence of government involvement in crime. Refugees are kept in camps in isolated areas of the country. The U.S. Department of State reports that in 2000 a group of refugee protested the conditions in the camp outside the UNHCR offices in the capital.

Lesotho is home to no refugees. Its press is said to be free and unhampered by the government.

Conclusions on refugees' information rights

It should be clear from this review of international law and state practices that the conclusions to be drawn are of two orders. One level of conclusions will be those on the theoretical order and concern the right to information and its boundaries within the law; the second level of conclusions will assess the practical order and application of any rights to information which are found to exist.

On the theoretical order the first conclusion to be drawn is that there is a legal right to information in Southern Africa. This right arises from a fundamental human right and is recognized and embodied in a number of international and regional instruments to at least one of which all the states of the region are parties. In particular it is expressed in Article 19 of the ICCPR to which nine of the ten states in the region are parties.

A second conclusion is that the right to information is not based on political status but adheres in all per-

sons present in a state, young or old, male or female, citizen or non-citizen. Thus refugees have the right to information, to inform and be informed, as well as other denizens of the state.

A third conclusion is that the right to information, as it applies to all person, is circumscribed by other individual and national rights. As the American Jurist, Oliver Wendell Holmes put it the right to free speech does not permit one to falsely shout 'fire!' in a crowded theatre. So the right to information is correctly limited by considerations of national security, public health, safety and morals, though in each case the justification for the inhibition of the right to be informed must be clear and the least restrictive means of limitation must be employed.

A fourth conclusion is that refugees right to information is further limited by the need of their host countries to maintain peaceful relations with their neighbours thus the right to subversive speech, for example a recruiting speech for a guerrilla group can be prohibited in the camps of the region.

A fifth conclusion is that the right to information provided in international instruments lacks an effective structure for redress. The treaties depend upon the parties to provide municipal redress for violations of the rights granted. Where, as in the case of the ICCPR and the Banjul Charter, there are specific provisions which permit individuals to bring complaints of violations to an international commission the remedies available to that commission are limited since neither the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. nor the OAU has an enforcement arm.

A sixth conclusion is that the power imbalance between refugees and their host nations and service providers can result in severe limitations on the right to provide information to one another and the outside world, as shown by the provision in Zambia's Refugee Control Act.

On the *practical level* one can conclude refugees in southern Africa have little practical ability to exercise their right to information. Zambia and Angola, where the overwhelming majority of the refugees and IDPs reside, have failed to bring their domestic law into compliance with their treaty obligations. Both nations have severely restricted the right to information of their own citizens and there is little doubt that they would do so for refugees.

A second practical conclusion is that in Zambia the UNHCR might find it politically expedient to remain silent about any restrictions on refugees rights to information. As we noted at the beginning of this talk, the 51 refugee convention contains no provision granting such a right to refugees. Secondly, the UNHCR is indebted to Zambia for its willingness to continue to receive refugees – and thus provide them

protection for their lives—such that complaints about the abridgement of other rights might not be judged to be in the overall best interest of refugees. A third reason for this is that Zambia has in the past permitted a degree of freedom of information to refugees and has allowed newspapers to printed in camps and settlements and pamphlets explaining refugee rights distributed to new arrivals.

A third practical conclusion is that where the host country does not follow the practice of restricting the movements of refugees to camps and settlement, but permits them to integrate into the local population, as is the case in South Africa, the refugees' exercise of the right to information becomes on a par with those of the citizens of the nation.

A fourth practical conclusion is that the structure of refugee camps and settlements in and of itself impairs the right to information. Unfailingly, these are located in remote and inaccessible parts of the region. Often there is no possibility for receiving information other than from satellite sources — which are beyond the financial capacity of most refugees.

A final practical conclusion is that the present assessment of restricted information rights for refugees and inhabitants of Southern Africa need not be the picture for the future. International Human Rights law is in its comparative infancy and might be analogised to the status of contractual or commercial law in the eighteenth century. Just as the principles of those areas of law have gradually become the accepted practices embodied in most commercial activities in the present era, so to the rights set forth in human rights law may with time become embodied in state practices and international protective structures. Certainly, conferences such as the present one are a step in the direction of ensuring the right to information to all peoples in Southern Africa. ■

Paper presented at the WACC-sponsored workshop on 'Refugees' rights to information/communication in Southern Africa', held in Lusaka, Zambia, 18-20 March 2002. The original included copious footnotes, which have been omitted in order to save space.

Michael S. Gallagher, S.J., Policy Officer, Jesuit Refugee Services, Zambia. B.A. Spring Hill College, M.A. University of Toronto, J.D. Georgetown University, M.Div. Weston School of Theology, S.T.M. Jesuit School of Theology, M.Stud. Oxford. The author wishes to express his gratitude to his colleague Dr Raul Gonzalez-Fabre, S.J. for his criticism of an earlier version of this paper.

Around the world today there are over twenty million people 'of concern' to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) – people who have fled their homes because of war, disaster or human rights abuses. It seems an overwhelming number. How can journalists translate this figure into stories that can touch people, and explain the situation of refugees? The following article gives an overview of refugee issue in Australia and the Pacific region, beginning with a story about one refugee family.¹

FORUM

Refugees' right to information and communication in the Australia and Pacific region

Nic Maclellan

Ahmed Al Zalime, a history teacher, fled Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq with his family. In 1998, he left his wife Sondos Ismael and three young daughters, Fatima, Zahra and Eman in neighbouring Iran. Mrs. Ismael's father had been executed by the Iraqi authorities when she was a child and the family feared persecution by Saddam's regime. After many adventures, Ahmed arrived in Australia. He spent eight months behind the wire in Curtin detention camp, and then was released on a temporary protection visa.

He sent for his wife and children, and they made their way to Indonesia. Waiting for months without gaining a visa, in October 2001 they paid thousands of dollars for a people smuggler to transport them by boat to Australia. But the boat sank, with 350 people aboard. Mrs. Ismael was one of only 44 survivors. The three girls, Fatima aged 5, Zahra

aged 6, and Eman aged 8, and their aunt all drowned.

Mr. Al Zalime hoped to fly to Jakarta to comfort his wife, who waited alone in Jakarta, mourning her children and sister. But under the terms of his temporary protection visa, he would have been refused re-entry to Australia if he had left the country. Sondos Ismael, recognized by UNHCR as a refugee, waited alone in Indonesia for five months, until Australian immigration officials allowed her to fly to Sydney to be reunited with her husband.

This tragic tale is but one of thousands. When we talk about refugees, it is important to remember the humanity and dignity of all the people who are routinely criticised as 'illegal immigrants' or 'queue jumpers'. I'll start by giving a few definitions, then outlining the key elements of the Australian government's refugee policy, including the so-called 'Pacific solution'. Next, I'd like to focus on the role of the Australian media in promoting, investigating or challenging this policy. Finally, I'd like to look at the implications for media workers in the region.

Who is a refugee?

The term 'refugee' is often used broadly, to refer to vulnerable persons who have fled their homes because of conflict or natural disaster, or to escape human rights abuses. However, under international law, the term is more clearly defined in the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and its *1967 Protocol*. Refugees are people who have fled their home countries because of 'a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group', and who cannot or, due to their fear, do not want to return.

The term 'asylum seeker' is used to refer to such a person who has not yet found a country where he or she is guaranteed safety and protection.

Internally displaced people (IDPs) have fled their homes, often for the same reasons as refugees. However, unlike refugees, they have not left their home countries. Thus, for an example in the Solomon Islands, Malaitans fleeing from Guadalcanal to their home island are 'internally displaced', but when they cross the border into neighbouring Papua New Guinea they may be refugees.

So although 'refugee' is often used to mean people fleeing their homes, not all people claiming refuge in another country are guaranteed asylum under international law. The current Refugee Convention does not cover environmental refugees for example, and people fleeing human rights abuses must show that their fear of persecution is well founded. If not, they can be deported from the

country in which they are seeking asylum.

Part I: The 'Pacific Solution'

Since the *Tampa* crisis in August 2001, the Australian community has been wracked with debate over the Australian government's policy towards refugees, 'border protection' and the so-called 'Pacific solution.'

Australia does have a humanitarian component to its migration programme - each year there are 12,000 places for humanitarian and refugee resettlement from other countries. Australian officials process the visa applications for people fleeing from conflicts in Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and other regions of the world, or provide resettlement for refugees identified by UN agencies such as the UNHCR.

But over the last decade, successive Australian governments have toughened their attitude to people arriving under their own steam, by paying people smugglers to transport them to Australia. The method of arrival is crucial, as Radio Australia journalist Peter Mares explains: 'Asylum seekers who enter Australia unlawfully (that is, without a valid visa) are detained in privately run immigration detention centres. Those who enter lawfully (for example, on a tourist or student visa) are usually not detained and can live freely in the community.'²

Since 1992, people who arrive 'illegally' by boat in Australia are locked up indefinitely in detention centres, many in extremely isolated parts of the outback. Since 1997, detention camps like Woomera, Port Headland and Curtin have been run by private corporations such as Australasian Correctional Management (ACM), a subsidiary of the US company Wackenhut Corrections Corporation. Wackenhut is involved in running prisons for profit, and providing security for military and intelligence facilities in the United States and other countries.

In 1999, the Liberal/National Party coalition led by Prime Minister John Howard introduced new measures, such as Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for refugees arriving without a valid visa. The TPVs last for three years and TPV holders are restricted from receiving the full range of housing, education and welfare benefits that other refugees receive. TPV holders cannot leave the country without the visa being cancelled.

In the midst of the election campaign leading to last November's Federal elections, the Howard government again introduced significant changes to Australia's refugee policy, especially for people fleeing from conflict and human rights abuses in central Asia and the Middle East.

This political and humanitarian crisis first erupted

when Australian SAS troops were sent aboard the Norwegian vessel *MV Tampa*, to stop the captain sailing to the Australian territory of Christmas Island with 433 asylum seekers rescued from an Indonesian boat.

On 28 August 2001, Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock told Parliament that new legislation was necessary because 'generous interpretations' of Australia's obligations under the 1951 Convention were 'adding to perceptions that Australia is a soft touch'. In September, the government introduced significant legislative changes to strengthen border control and the management of unauthorised arrivals.³ Vessels of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) have been deployed to the waters between Indonesia and Australia. Their job is to 'deter and deny' entry by boats carrying asylum seekers, turning the boats around and sending them back to Indonesian waters.

Along with changes to Australian procedures and the excision of Ashmore, Carter, Cocos and Christmas Islands from Australia's immigration boundaries (as 'prescribed excised offshore places'), the new legislation also allows for people who arrive in an 'excised offshore place' to be taken to a 'declared country'.⁴ Rather than land the asylum seekers on Australian territory, the government sought out countries in the Pacific willing to establish detention camps to hold the asylum seekers while their applications for refugee status are processed by Australian immigration officials.

Thus, asylum seekers reaching Australian territory such as Ashmore Reef or Christmas Island can now be relocated to another 'declared country', to be held in an overseas detention camp while their application for refugee status is processed, rather than be sent to the Australian mainland. This is why over 1,500 asylum seekers are currently held in detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, even though they were seeking refuge in Australia.

The stated policy of the Australian government is to discourage further people smuggling, by relocating arriving asylum seekers to another country, rather than Australian territory. Another stated justification for the Australian policy is that it strengthens Pacific island capacity to process refugees and internally displaced people.

Aotearoa/New Zealand, Nauru and Papua New Guinea agreed to take the *Tampa* refugees and others who arrived in Australian waters in subsequent weeks. Nauru and Papua New Guinea agreed to establish detention camps to hold the asylum seekers while their applications for refugee status were processed. Other island countries including East Timor, Fiji, Palau and Kiribati were also approached

to take asylum seekers, but have not done so.

There are over 1,500 people currently held in detention centres in the Pacific: 1,155 asylum seekers are in detention in two camps on Nauru, with a further 356 on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. Another 131 people were sent via Nauru to Aotearoa/New Zealand, where they have been declared as refugees and have obtained residency in the community.

The costs of establishing and maintaining camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, and processing applications for refugee status, are met by Australia. Application processing is being conducted by Australian immigration officials in Papua New Guinea, and by Australian officials and the UNHCR in Nauru.

Independent visitors to the camp in Nauru have noted the harsh physical conditions, and the trauma and uncertainty faced by the asylum seekers. Under the policy of mandatory detention, people can be held for an indefinite period while their refugee application is processed, and any appeals considered. Families with young children are held for months or even years while their cases are processed and appealed. Human rights activists in Australia are concerned that the camps do not have adequate education, welfare or psychiatric facilities for young people, women at risk and asylum seekers suffering from prolonged trauma and hardship. In recent months, these conditions have sparked protests, riots and acts of self-harm in detention camps in Australia such as Woomera and Curtin, as people wait for 'the lucky country' to determine their fate.

The cost of Australia's refugee policy

The exact cost of sending asylum seekers to the Pacific has not been fully revealed, though it will amount to hundreds of millions of dollars.

Official government figures state the cost of setting up and running the detention centres in the Pacific at \$114 million in 2001-02 (\$72 million for the two camps in Nauru, and \$42 million for the detention centre in Papua New Guinea). The Royal Australian Navy has spent further millions on transporting the asylum seekers, and there are numerous other costs.

Nauru has been pledged a further \$30 million for taking the asylum seekers, which is being spent on a range of development programmes and Papua New Guinea another \$1 million. Some of these programmes in Nauru cannot be sustained (e.g. purchase of fuel and payment of hospital bills) and others (e.g. tertiary scholarships) will require funding beyond 2002.

In the Australian aid budget for 2001-2, Nauru was scheduled to receive just \$3.4 million through

the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). Therefore the pledge of nearly \$30 million to Nauru is a major shift in policy for the Australian government – the amount is greater than all AusAID funds provided to Nauru between 1993-2001. It is also more than 18 per cent of the total AusAID budget for the Pacific Islands (excluding Papua New Guinea), which is budgeted at \$164.6 million in 2001-02.

Aid agencies are raising questions about the sustainability of the so-called development initiatives in Nauru. They fear the financial inducements offered to Nauru have distorted Australian development assistance priorities in the South Pacific, which are supposed to focus on poverty alleviation and governance programmes.⁵

Closing the camps?

Initially, Pacific governments were told that the so-called 'Pacific solution' was a temporary measure. Nauru officials have repeatedly stated that the camps are temporary and that they have been told that the refugees will be gone in four to six months. President Rene Harris has stated: 'I have an arrangement with John Howard that there won't be anyone left behind.'⁶

However, the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) establishing the camps states that all persons entering under this arrangement will have left after six months 'or as short a time as is reasonably necessary'.

The Australian government successfully lobbied to extend the MOU for Manus Island until October 2002, to avoid a crisis that would fall in the middle of an election campaign for the June 2002 PNG national elections.

There will be difficulty meeting the supposed 6-month deadline for all asylum seekers to leave Nauru, especially as there are many refugees already waiting for resettlement in other countries. There are serious questions about what will happen next, given that there are conflicting messages about the future of those assessed as refugees, as well as those who do not gain refugee status.

Exporting the policy of mandatory detention

Australia's bi-partisan policy of mandatory detention is being exported to the region, distorting the policy and practice of countries that have not even signed the 1951 *Convention on the Status of Refugees*.

Australia is a signatory to the Refugee Convention (ratified on 22 January 1954) and the 1967 *Protocol of the Convention* (ratified on 13 December 1973). However Nauru is not a signatory to the Convention

and has limited expertise in processing applications for asylum. Other Pacific countries investigated as possible locations for detention camps, such as Palau and Kiribati, have also not signed the Convention.

While Papua New Guinea has signed the 1951 *Refugee Convention*, it has placed on it significant reservations, and does not accept Convention obligations covering: Wage-earning employment (Art.17); Housing (Art.21); Public education (Art.22); Freedom of movement (Art.26); Refugees unlawfully in the country of refuge (Art.31); Expulsion (Art.32); and Naturalisation (Art.34).

Some legal experts fear that the detention of asylum seekers in Papua New Guinea and Nauru breaches the Constitutions of the two countries. A legal challenge has already been launched in Port Moresby to test this issue.

The Australian government has said that its Pacific programme for asylum seekers is developing the capacity of Pacific neighbours to address the refugee issue. But most developed countries do not have mandatory and indefinite detention for asylum seekers (using instead a mix of short-term initial detention and release into the community while applications are processed). UNHCR guidelines state: 'The detention of asylum-seekers is, in the view of UNHCR, inherently undesirable.'

A policy of mandatory detention is inappropriate in Australia, and it should certainly not be exported to the region. With security and other tasks sub-contracted to private corporations, there are concerns over accountability and transparency (a key issue in Australian governance programmes in the Pacific islands). Most of the processing of refugee applications is being done in the Pacific by Australian immigration officials, but not under Australian law. Asylum seekers are disadvantaged, as neither Nauru nor Papua New Guinea have the full range of welfare and legal assistance required for asylum seekers.

Australia's standing in the islands

It's noticeable that the two Pacific island countries that agreed to take the *Tampa* refugees had strong colonial ties to Australia. Nauru was under Australian administration until 1968. Papua New Guinea was an Australian colony until 1975, and today receives over \$320 million annually in development aid.

While government leaders from these countries have supported Australia's refugee policy in the Pacific, and many people have expressed humanitarian support for the refugees and their plight, there has also been extensive regional criticism of the Australian policy – from Prime Ministers and

Presidents, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, church leaders and non-government organisations. The criticism has been sharp, with Australia accused of being 'big brother', of 'human trafficking,' of 'dumping' people in the Pacific, of breaching the 'dignity' of small island states.

Leaders such as Prime Minister Edward Natapei of Vanuatu, the Tui Vuda Ratu Sir Josefa Iloilo, President of Fiji, and Ratu Epeli Ganilau, chair of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* (Great Council of Chiefs) all stated that their country should not accept detention camps.

There has been significant political fallout, such as the sacking of PNG Foreign Minister John Pundari and the suspension of public servants in Nauru, such as the Presidential Counsel and senior medical officer, after they opposed aspects of the Australian policy.

The focus by the Australian government on the so-called 'Pacific solution' is seen as overshadowing other key priorities in the region. The Australian government is actively promoting accountability, transparency, equity and sustainability as key principles for governance in the Pacific, so the lack of transparency and sustainability in the current programme has sparked widespread anger. At a time when other Australian policies (e.g. on climate change) are stretching relations with island countries, I fear that the refugee crisis has further damaged Australia's image in the region.

It's worth noting that in spite of significant community support, the Howard government's asylum policy has been criticised by eminent Australians such as former Governor General Bill Hayden and members of his own Liberal Party, such as former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and former Victorian Premier Sir Rupert Hamer. Many former ambassadors and senior public servants, such as Richard Woolcott and John Menadue, have criticised the damage to relations with Asian neighbours. Tony Kevin, a former ambassador to Cambodia with thirty years working for the Department of Foreign Affairs, notes: 'The past six years have been the least successful period of Australian foreign policy since we began to have our own foreign policy . . . It will be hard to rebuild Australia's global standing and influence. Negative images – like our self-centred exceptionalism over Kyoto and our administrative harshness and misrepresentation of the Tampa crisis – will stick in international memories.'

Critics such as Mungo MacCallum argue that Howard has moved into political space cleared by Pauline Hanson's One Nation party. Hanson herself certainly thinks so. After the Tampa crisis in October 2001, she stated: 'A lot of people have been actually saying I'm John Howard's adviser because he's pick-

ing up a lot of policies and issues I've raised over the years.' When you compare statements, there's some common rhetoric and symbolism between the conservative government and the extreme right. Hanson's comment: 'If I can invite who I want into my home then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country', preceded Howard's 2001 election campaign statement: 'We will decide who comes into this country and the circumstances in which they come.'

After the April 2002 electoral success by the racist politician Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, it's a little worrying that an official from Le Pen's anti-immigrant National Front states that Australia 'was heading in the right direction', unlike most countries that were failing to deal with the issue of illegal immigration.

Culture of fear

One striking feature about the post-September 11 climate of fear is that Australia currently has troops serving in Afghanistan and naval forces maintaining sanctions against Iraq. The former Taliban regime and Saddam Hussein's government are denounced as murderous terrorists who commit human rights abuses against their own citizens, yet the tough new refugee policy is directed against Afghans and Iraqis refugees who are fleeing those regimes!

This is a fundamental change to the late 1970s, when Vietnamese and Cambodian boat people arriving on Australia's northern shores were warmly greeted and integrated into the community with extensive government support. But during the 2001 Australian elections the politics of fear succeeded. It's worth noting that in Anglo-Australian culture, there's long been anxiety about invasion from the north. Indigenous Australians have ironically noted the arrival of boat people in January 1788, and the damage done to local inhabitants ever since! The arrival of boats carrying asylum seekers in recent years has tapped a chord of anxiety amongst many Australians, even though it has also mobilised strong humanitarian support from a significant minority in the community.

By playing on deeply held popular emotions, government ministers have fanned this fear. Then Defence Minister Peter Reith warned that unauthorised arrival of boats on Australian territory 'can be a pipeline for terrorists to come in and use your country as a staging post for terrorist activities.' Just days before the November election, John Howard repeated the terrorist theme, saying 'You don't know who is coming [on the boats] and you don't know whether they do have terrorist links or not.'

The humanitarian plight of people fleeing torture and repression has been described as an issue of

'border protection', 'defence against terrorists' and 'national security.' The issue is increasingly militarised, with the Royal Australian Navy now responsible for border patrol, turning leaky boats back to Indonesian waters (a policy causing discontent in the military, as Australian defence forces are stretched thin participating in conflicts in Afghanistan and the Gulf, and peacekeeping in Timor Lorosa'e/East Timor).

As well as the armed forces, intelligence agencies have gotten into the act. Australia's Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) maintains intelligence and satellite installations that monitor email, fax and phone communications throughout the region. At the beginning of the Tampa crisis, the DSD monitored conversations between the captain of the *MV Tampa* and the Maritime Union of Australia and International Transport Federation.⁷ An investigation has found that the DSD 'accidentally' listened in to conversations of four Australians during the operation, in breach of its charter. Under new laws introduced in October 2001, in the wake of the September 11 attacks, there are now fewer restrictions on the DSD spying on Australians.

Part II: Role of the media

What is the role for journalists reporting in this climate of fear? Radio Australia journalist Peter Mares argues: 'Media reporting can shape public perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers. Compassionate and sympathetic coverage can help to promote public understanding and encourage generous assistance to refugees and others in need. Negative reporting can generate and intensify feelings of fear.'⁸

Mares has highlighted the contradiction for journalists covering refugee issues: 'The level of concern and empathy expressed in the media for the plight of refugees and asylum seekers is in inverse relation to their proximity to the place where any given report appears. Viewed from a distance, displaced people are often portrayed as helpless victims of circumstance, deserving of compassion and assistance. This imagery changes dramatically when refugees and asylum seekers make their way to the developed world to seek protection under the 1951 Convention. Refugees and asylum seekers who display this level of agency suddenly shed the veneer of innocence and become a threat to the order and security of the receiving state. They are transformed from passive objects of compassion, into untrustworthy actors who provoke a sense of fear.'

As journalists, how can we avoid negative reporting that encourages well-off people to turn against 'others' fleeing from tyranny, while maintaining our

responsibility to accurately report on a crucial issue facing the country and the region? A worrying feature of the Tampa crisis was that talkback radio and sections of the press often uncritically accepted statements from senior political leaders, without checking their truth.

The most obvious example was the 'children overboard' crisis. Senior government ministers claimed that refugees had thrown their children into the sea, supposedly to blackmail the Navy into halting its efforts to return their boat to Indonesian waters. On October 10, then Defence Minister Peter Reith released photographs of children in the sea wearing life jackets, supposed to be evidence of the criminal behaviour of the refugees. Prime Minister John Howard declared on radio: 'I certainly don't want people of that type in Australia, I really don't.'

In spite of a few media challenges to this story, the 'children overboard' story was maintained right through the 2001 election campaign. Subsequently, it was proven that the government statements were a lie, and that Royal Australian Navy officers had informed senior ministers and their staff within days of the story first being released by Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock. The so-called evidence – photos of children in the water, supposedly thrown in by their evil parents – were in fact taken the next day after the boat had sunk and everyone was in the water.

A Senate Committee is about to bring down its report on this 'certain maritime incident', detailing exactly who knew what and when. But it's clear that senior government ministers and their staff – including former Defence Minister Peter Reith – knew the story was a lie or didn't want to listen to the truth when contrary information was sent up the chain of command from the military through the public service bureaucracy.

In the midst of this Senate inquiry into the 'children overboard' fiasco, government members continued to make allegations which damage the reputation of the asylum seekers now detained in Nauru and Manus Island.

One government senator accused refugees of a 'particular evil' to stop Royal Australian Navy sailors from the *HMAS Arunta* from boarding their ship and returning them to Indonesian waters. He claimed that there was documentary evidence that refugees had threatened to strangle their own children. Naturally, these sensational claims made front page headlines – *the Australian* stated: 'Boatpeople tried to kill child: Libs.' The reports were repeated on talk back radio as a defence of the government's tough stand and the 'evil nature' of the asylum seekers. Days later, however, the Navy admitted that documents about

the alleged incident could not be found, with an Admiral admitting that the *Arunta's* commander 'has advised me that those documents do not exist.'

Government censorship

Beyond such headline grabbing statements, there were attempts to censor information and images of the refugees' plight that might weaken public support for the government's hard-line stand.

One reporter, Mike Bowers, got a photo of the refugees huddled on the deck of the *Tampa* when he chartered a plane from Jakarta. The Howard Government then imposed a no-fly zone over the ship. According to the ABC's Media Watch programme: 'planes taking photographers out from Christmas Island were stopped on the runway and journalists who tried to get there by boat were threatened with arrest.'

Journalists were frustrated in trying to get information about the Tampa crisis, after the Defence Public Relations Unit were ordered that all questions on the asylum seeker operation were to be referred to the Defence Minister's office. Defence information officials were not happy, as Tim Bloomfield told the Senate Select Committee on 17 April: 'Under the meaning of what censorship is then yes, it would be a form of censorship. . . . Had Defence been responsible for making the comment through to the media, most definitely the misinformation would have been terminated immediately.'

The Defence Minister's media advisor ordered that Navy photographers not take pictures of the asylum seekers. The military were given guidelines to ensure 'no personalising or humanising' images were to be taken. As the ABC's Media Watch programme has noted: 'Australians were not to see the suffering, the hope, the despair of these people. They were to remain faceless, and at times violent 'queue jumpers'.'

The level of control exerted by senior ministers and their staff worried senior Canberra journalists. In an unprecedented move, press gallery journalists from rival media organisations banded together to put in a submission to the 'children overboard' Senate hearings, complaining of 'censorship and misinformation', 'deliberate deception' and 'government falsehoods.'

The government has also been sensitive to criticism from media organisations about the asylum policy, with Liberal Party President Shane Stone criticising journalists in an April 2002 speech, and Prime Minister John Howard complaining that programmes on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) such as *Lateline* were running a 'strong campaign against the government' on asylum seekers, and

objecting to the 'emphasis' put on this issue (The complaint came after Lateline broadcast a harrowing video of asylum seekers protesting in despair at Curtin detention centre, and other ABC programmes had criticised the 'Pacific solution').

Weaknesses in journalism

However, journalists can't simply blame government censorship as an excuse for a failure to do the job properly. Some journalists uncritically accept government press statements, without doing any homework or even using some basic mathematics.

One example: the Australian government and UNHCR released the first results of the refugee determination process in April 2002. Of the more than 1,500 people on Manus and Nauru, 311 were found to have valid claims for asylum, while a further 127 claims were formally rejected. At this date, a further 1,073 people in Nauru and Manus Island were still awaiting initial processing of their applications.

Immediately, media headlines misstated that that only seven Afghans had been found to be refugees from the hundreds on the *Tampa*. One headline even said that: 'Only seven on Nauru found to be refugees.' Not true.

Of 292 Afghans processed so far in *Nauru and Papua New Guinea* only seven have currently been accepted as refugees. However 131 Afghans sent to New Zealand as part of the so-called 'Pacific solution' have already been granted refugee status and resettled into the community.

The other Afghan applicants have not been formally rejected, as media reports in Australia and internationally stated. Rather, the remaining Afghans in the Pacific detention camps are being given the opportunity to resubmit information before their cases are finally determined. Many are Hazaras who fear persecution by forces apart from the Taliban, and may yet be granted refugee status in spite of the regime change in Kabul.

When you do the mathematics for the 'Pacific solution' applications processed so far in New Zealand, Nauru and Papua New Guinea, 442 out of 569 have been accepted as refugees – over 77%. In misstating the number of successful applications, reporters seem to have fallen prey to the Australian government's spin-doctors.

In testimony to the current Senate Inquiry, senior journalist Geoffrey Barker from the *Australian Financial Review* has reflected: 'I think we are probably open to criticism that there were times when too much was accepted too uncritically. This comes about partly because of the attempted manipulation by the government and partly because of the rush with which newspapers are put together and printed

every day. Journalists themselves are flawed and imperfect people. I think at times we do go for the quick 'good story' without pausing long enough to think critically about what we might do. There is enough blame to go around in all this, but I do think that on these particular issues, the primary reason for what went wrong was the campaign, which was sustained right through the period, to hide and misinform.'

I would argue that a key responsibility for journalists is not simply to report the news, but to develop stories that analyse the events of the day. While we should accurately report statements by government officials, NGOs or the asylum seekers themselves, they should not be accepted uncritically. This may be a truism for the experienced reporters in the room, but it's surprising how a climate of censorship or government intimidation can allow the most outrageous statements to be issued without correction or critique.

Another responsibility is to give background information and context, so that readers, viewers and listeners can make sense of fast breaking news. One interesting example is Radio Australia's Internet website 'Unfinished Journeys.' It provides up to date news reports on refugees and migration in the Asia-Pacific region. It also has background articles, opinion pieces, definitions of unfamiliar legal terms and copies of international conventions relating to refugees, written in accessible language.

Scoops and ethics

Media coverage of the Australian government's 'Pacific solution' has sparked a complex debate over ethics and secrecy. I'd like to give one example, which is detailed in a story on Radio Australia's GoAsiaPacific website.

The debate was raised by an Australian television journalist, who says the PNG government has deliberately denied foreign journalists visas, to avoid scrutiny of the asylum-seeker detention centre on Manus Island. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) television journalist Evan Williams says he was forced to visit Papua New Guinea 'clandestinely' to obtain pictures of the Manus Island detention centre. However PNG Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta attacked the ABC reporter for entering the country without a journalist visa. The television report, aired on the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* programme, has also attracted criticism from some journalists in Papua New Guinea, who fear the illegal entry into the country could lead to a government backlash. An editorial in the PNG newspaper *The National* criticised the Australian reporter's action:

'Why enter PNG clandestinely when visas are readily

available, and having done so why boast about breaking the laws of a friendly, independent neighbour? PNG enjoys press and information freedoms that are the envy of the region. Foreign journalists who can't be bothered applying for the appropriate visas and enter our country illegally are putting those freedoms at risk.'

Foreign Correspondent's Evan Williams defended his decision to visit Papua New Guinea without a journalist visa:

'My case is that for the past 18 months or almost two years, we've been applying to get a journalist visa for Papua New Guinea. I believe that Papua New Guinea is running a black-ban on visiting journalists, particularly from Australia. If you look at how many Australian journalists have visited over there in the last two years – particularly since the first military uprising last year – you'll notice the nobody's gone up there. We consider that this is a matter of such importance for both Australia and Papua New Guinea, that the secrecy surrounding the detention centres, and the secrecy to maintain them, over-rode what we are being told by one journalist in one newspaper so far, is likely to, or could, limit people's access in the future.'

A similar problem arose when Immigration Minister Phillip Ruddock and Opposition counterpart Julia Gillard flew to Nauru to visit the detention camps in February 2002. Journalists were refused seats on the plane, and when they tried to travel to Nauru on commercial flights, they were unable to obtain visas from the government of Nauru to report the story.

Unpacking the language

I don't really like the media shorthand of 'Pacific solution' to describe the current policy for asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus. It's not a sustainable solution to a major global crisis! That's just one example of the way that spin-doctors can distort a sensible discussion about refugee issues. For journalists reporting the statements of government officials, it's important that we unpack the language used, especially terms that demonise asylum seekers as 'illegal refugees', 'queue jumpers' or even 'terrorists.'

The Howard government has suggested that people arriving by boat are 'jumping the queue', taking places from people who are waiting patiently for one of the 12,000 places in Australia granted to refugees each year. However in a world where there are 20 million people facing danger and persecution, and only 100,000 places a year for refugee resettlement in the developed world, it's a pretty long queue! Australia does not even maintain consular staff in Afghanistan or Iraq, so it's difficult to see how refugees can join a queue to apply for a visa.

Many asylum seekers who have applied formally to come to Australia are waiting more than three years to be processed by immigration officials. In Pakistan, 75% of cases take 149 weeks to be processed. In Iran, the wait is 148 weeks. One estimate suggests 60,000 people are waiting for the 12,000 places that Australia grants each year.

The focus on boat people arriving on Australia's northern shores also ignores the fact that most asylum seekers arrive in Australia by air! In 1999-2000, two thirds of asylum seekers arrived by plane with a valid visa, claiming asylum after they had cleared customs at the airport. These people, who may not succeed in their asylum claims, are not detained like the boat people, and their presence in the community is not a source for banner headlines or talk back radio.

It's also important to keep a sense of perspective about people who are illegally in Australia. According to the Immigration Department, 4,174 people arrived by boat in 2000-2001. However each year about 20,000 people illegally overstay their visas. Because most are tourists and the greatest number are from the United Kingdom and United States, there is not a media outcry against them, as has occurred against Muslims fleeing from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The very idea that people arriving by boat are 'illegal' entrants to Australia goes against provisions of many international human rights instruments to which Australia is a signatory. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says: 'Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution'. Article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention says states: 'States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened' as long as 'they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence.'

Refugees and internally displaced people in the Pacific

Another problem with Australian media coverage of the 'Pacific solution' has been its narrow focus: did the government lie about the 'children overboard issue?'; how much does the policy cost?

There have been some attempts to break the silence on the plight of refugees in Manus and Nauru. But it's rare for the Australian media to focus on the broader picture, at a time when there are tens of thousands of refugees and internally displaced people from crises in West Papua, Bougainville, Solomon Islands and Fiji. The conflict in Bougainville in 1988-1998 meant that thousands of

Bougainvilleans were internally displaced, and many fled as refugees to the neighbouring Solomon Islands.

In Solomon Islands, the migration of people from outlying islands to Guadalcanal and the capital Honiara contributed to a major social crisis in 1998-2001, leading to armed conflict between rival militias. An estimated 15-20,000 people evacuated from Guadalcanal in 1999 (mainly to Malaita), and at least 3,000 more hiding away from their villages by July 2000.

Some 12,000 West Papuan refugees crossed into Papua New Guinea in 1984 from Indonesian-ruled West Papua fleeing Indonesian military operations against the independence movement *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (OPM). Eighteen years later, there are still over 6,000 of people living in both official and unofficial camps along the border at Vanimo, lowara (East Awin) and other locations. Many of the West Papuans living at lowara have been given temporary residency status by the Papua New Guinean government, but are still residing there as they have nowhere else to settle. Others living in the unofficial camps are not recognised as refugees by the Papua New Guinean government (due in part to a tradition of border crossing for indigenous communities that have land on both sides of a frontier that is simply a line drawn on the map).

A new wave of refugees and temporarily displaced people arrived in November 2000, as Indonesia increased military operations against the newly mobilised West Papuan nationalist movement. Papuan New Guineans and West Papuans are asking why Australia is spending millions on the Manus Island camp when there are desperate humanitarian needs along the border with West Papua.

The problem of 'asylum seekers' is also evident in the French colony of New Caledonia, after a group of 110 Chinese arrived in November 1997 aboard two 40-metre wooden boats. The group was due to be sent back to China in March 1998, but the operation was cancelled after 48 hours of protests in Nouméa. Some 300 French New Caledonians gathered at the Noumea airport to protest the forced repatriation, and 60 of the asylum seekers staged a 48-hour rooftop protest at their detention centre, before being dispersed by police firing rubber bullets. Most of these refugees were issued with temporary identification cards. By September 2001, there were still 45 of the group awaiting final determination of their status.

What are the alternatives?

The Australian government has recognised that tangible progress on the intertwined issues of people

smuggling, unauthorised migration and refugees can only be achieved through international cooperation. Yet the placement of the asylum seekers in the Pacific in late 2001 was conducted in an ad hoc way, involving no co-ordination and planning with key regional institutions.

A major focus for Australia's development assistance programme in the Pacific region is the strengthening of regional multilateral agencies. Through AusAID's Pacific regional programme, the Australian government gives strong financial and political support to regional inter-governmental organisations, such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

The capacity to assist asylum seekers and process their claims should be developed in a planned and orderly manner, but hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent by Australia for a relatively small number of refugees, without long term planning or co-ordination. There should be regional consultation on refugee policy. Pacific societies are willing to contribute what they can to address the global refugee issue.

A key step is for international governments and agencies to provide support for Pacific Island governments to sign and ratify the *1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees*, the *1967 Protocol* and other relevant human rights instruments, and to fully meet the relevant obligations.

It is important that Australia develop new policy on asylum seekers in the Pacific region, based on humane and sustainable alternatives:

- An end to mandatory detention of asylum seekers in the Pacific islands;
- Increased support to address the situation of refugees and internally displaced people in the Pacific islands in West Papua, Bougainville, Solomon Islands and other countries;
- An increase in Australian development assistance to meet the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GDP, with special programmes targeted at peace-building in areas of conflict, assistance to countries hosting millions of refugees (such as Pakistan and Iran) and long-term sustainable development programmes;
- Detention of asylum seekers only for short periods to allow health, security and identity checks, followed by release into the community, with adequate funding for services such as English language training, employment assistance and trauma counselling; and
- Review of resettlement policies, with Australia to increase the numbers of refugees accepted each year.

I shall end by quoting from a submission to the

Australian Cabinet, which was released to the public in January 2002. This Cabinet paper, discussing Australia's political relations with the South Pacific, notes:

'Although it may be argued that there is a basic fund of goodwill towards this country [Australia] in many of the islands, we have to recognise that particularly in Fiji, persistent criticisms arise from a combination of factors: Australia's restrictive immigration policy (in the face of island over-population and limited employment opportunities, especially for educated islanders)...Australia's heavily and in most cases increasingly favourable balance of trade with the region; the association of individual Australians with racially discriminatory practices in the islands themselves. In all, there is a tendency to feel that Australia's attitudes to the islands are dominated by selfish concentration on its own interests in the region, principally commercial profit, and that Australia takes too little account of the wider interests in the welfare and progress of the Pacific community.'

The Cabinet paper went on to tell Australia's senior ministers:

'While the South Pacific remained a collection of colonial dependencies, Australia's unforthcoming image may not have mattered a great deal in real terms. *Relations with the island authorities could be conducted over the heads of islanders.* With the constitutional developments of recent years, the situation has changed. The maintenance of our own place in the South Pacific now depends increasingly on the goodwill of island governments and their recognition that we are sincere in seeking to co-operate on the basis of respect and equality.'

Astonishingly, this Cabinet paper comes from April 1971, not April 2002. It was released under the 30-year rule, where the Australian public is allowed to access Cabinet papers after sufficient time has lapsed. It's sobering to think that, thirty years on, the concerns outlined in the paper ring pretty true today.

The Cabinet paper was prepared after the formation of the South Pacific Forum in 1971, as the Australian government attempted to come to terms with a newly assertive political leadership in Pacific island countries. The issues are just as relevant today. In the last decade, there have been many examples where relations between Australia and its neighbours have not been built 'on the basis of respect and equality.' Australia's relations with neighbouring countries have been stretched, to say the least, due to differences over climate change and global warming, to debates over development assistance aid, sanctions on Fiji after the coup, or the provision of military aid and training for the conflict in

Bougainville.

The topic of refugees and asylum seekers is the latest example where the 'Australia's attitudes to the islands are dominated by selfish concentration on its own interests in the region'. Indeed, the lack of transparency in Australia's asylum seeker policy suggests it's an example of 'relations with the island authorities being conducted over the heads of islanders'.

I think that as reporters, and as citizens, we have a responsibility to find out what's going on behind the barbed wire – what's going on in our name. I began with the story of Ahmed Al Zalime and Sondos Ismael. There are 1,500 refugees in detention in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. That's 1,500 stories waiting to be told. ■

Paper presented at the WACC-sponsored consultation on 'Refugees' rights to information/communication', held in Nadi, Fiji, May 2002. The original included copious footnotes, which have been reduced in order to save space.

- 1 The family's story is drawn from the fine work of reporter Kelly Burke from *The Age* in Melbourne – Kelly Burke: 'Reunited, three years and a tragedy later', *The Age*, 22 March 2002.
- 2 Peter Mares: *Borderline – Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers* (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2001). I am indebted to Peter for his advice and knowledge on Australian refugee policy, as this paper shows.
- 3 For details, see 'Australia's border integrity strengthened by new legislation', Media release, Minister Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 26 September 2001.
- 4 A 'declared country' is a country that the Minister declares in writing under s198A of the *Migration Act 1958*.
- 5 See for example, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad: *Adrift in the Pacific – the implications of Australia's Pacific Refugee Solution* (CAA, Melbourne, February 2002)
- 6 'Going it alone – how the UN rebuffed John Howard', *The Age*, November 2001.
- 7 'Spy claims shake ministry' *The Australian* 13 February 2002; 'Government must answer spy allegations', Editorial, *The Australian* 13 February 2002
- 8 Peter Mares, *Distance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder: Media images of refugees and asylum seekers* (Forthcoming).

Handbook of Disability Studies, ed. by Albrecht, Gary L., Seelman, Katherine D., and Bury, Michael. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 2001. 852pp. including author and subject indexes.

It is intriguing to consider. this hefty and valuable volume edited by in light of Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary's (1993, p.526) definitions of 'handbook'. First we learn that a handbook is 'a book capable of being conveniently carried as a ready reference.' If you focus on portability, the term is a colossal misnomer in this case. At more than 850 pages, 8.5' by 11' dimensions, a sturdy hard cover, and weighing in at - well, no, I did not actually weigh it- this book can be conveniently used only by carrying it as little as possible.

Fortunately, I can recommend that you should clear a space on or near your desk for your copy of the *Handbook of Disability Studies* (henceforth, The Handbook) to remain, serving as a 'ready [albeit non-mobile] reference.' The book's physical heft is matched by its, intellectual content; thus, it comes closer to meeting the latter half of the dictionary's second definition of 'handbook', i.e. 'a concise reference book covering a particular subject'. The following review attempts - within the limits, of this reader's disciplinary competence applied to a robustly multi-disciplinary compilation - to assess the book's coverage of the domain that has only recently emerged under the rubric 'Disability Studies'.

Interdisciplinary perspectives

My intent should be defined even more modestly. I will mainly describe rather than assess the book's adequacy of covering its domain. My few evaluative observations necessarily concern relatively narrow issues, given the scope of this document. Nothing short of a team of reviewers could do justice to assessing the material from as many disciplines as inform the book's 34 chapters, contributed by nearly 50 authors. At the risk of overlooking some ways that the authors' disciplinary expertise could be labelled, here is an overview of its diversity: Anthropology, Bioethics, Communications, Cultural Studies, Demography, Economics, Education, English,

Epidemiology, Information Science, Law, Philosophy, Physiotherapy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Rehabilitation Counselling, Rehabilitation Engineering, Social Work, Sociology, and Special Education.

Arguably, a plurality of the authors could be classified as sociologists, which is this reviewer's field of training. However, the diversity of methodology and substance represented among even that subset of authors is such that my disclaimer. still applies. Clearly, students and researchers in. at least the array of specialties just itemised will find some issue or question stemming from their own domain to draw them into this Handbook. They will probably be rewarded with answers but, perhaps more importantly, with new questions to guide their further reading and research. The editors have done a thorough job of ensuring that authors offer. explicit suggestions for research directions in the future as part of each chapter's concluding section.

No matter how broadly defined is the group of academic disciplinary specialists (including students) who can find material directed to their expertise in this book that could be a too narrow way to define the potential audience. Staying with the academic group for the moment, it should be obvious that the value they can find is not limited to reading chapters by their fellow specialists, but expands to the extent they take advantage of cross-cutting treatments of the same general material by authors from other perspectives.

Does it make sense to go beyond the academics and encourage others also to dip into this Handbook? I would say 'yes', advisedly, in declining order of assurance when it comes to the following categories of potential readers: applied researchers, policy makers, disability activists, and professional service providers. Why 'advisedly'?

First, being realistic, the operative phrase of that recommendation is 'dip into'. In other words, however much one might exhort non-academic readers to partake of the enlightening riches offered throughout the book, that would be a hard sell given both the action-oriented culture and related time pressures they work within. However, it is not hard to argue

that one or a few chapters could provide truly useful general orientation and/or specific insights for readers whose prime interest rests in pursuing action – especially in the policy areas of health care, income benefits, employment and technology (see below).

Having said that, the heft of both the physical document and its price could be deterrents for the reader with highly selective interests. The logical solution in that case is to hope that the Handbook will become widely available in libraries that are accessible in every sense of the word. For potential readers among disability activists, that could mean that Centres for Independent Living would see this as a worthwhile investment.

International perspectives

Besides academic disciplinary variety the expertise required to assess information in the Handbook would need to be diverse in international terms as well.

Starting with 'Acknowledgments', where the genesis of The Handbook is attributed both to the civil rights movement in the U. S., and to the international human rights struggle (p.ix), right up, through the closing chapter (Ingstad's 'Disability in the Developing World,' pp.772-792), an international perspective pervades. However, in some chapters – such as Lollar's 'Public Health Trends in Disability: Past, Present, and Future', (pp.754-771) – the international angle refers mainly to international bodies like the World Health Organisation and the World Bank, rather than comparatively to specific countries or world regions. Lollar's chapter analyses the U. S. public health sector as it has been influenced by its home-grown disability community; the chapter's framework, one hopes, will stimulate comparable analyses stemming from other countries with different public health and disability structures and contexts.

But many chapters do undertake a comparative approach in which national or regional and cross-national cultural and/or economic processes are identified. In fact, most chapters in the third and last section of the book, titled 'Disability in Context', take up that challenge.

Treat the structure lightly

As just indicated, The Handbook's structure consists of three broad sections: I 'The Shaping of Disability Studies as a Field'; II 'Experiencing Disability'; III 'Disability in Context'. The editors' explanation for this set of categories is satisfactory, but in practice it seems to me many chapters could just as well be placed in one or both of the other sections. On reflection, that comment refers less to a weakness of the classification than to the strength of a quite consistent

framework that pervades most chapters. In other words, throughout most of the writings, experiential information is valued and disability phenomena are viewed as deriving from contexts external to the individual. Furthermore, a case could be made that all the chapters contribute to shaping the new field – and the authors undoubtedly were aware of that as they constructed their papers.

Having pointed out that the themes highlighted in the section headings are pervasive, I nevertheless detect a slight imbalance: the experiential perspective seems less well represented than the contextual one, even in chapters placed in Part II. But I offer that judgement with considerable hesitancy, recognizing that what qualifies, as 'truly experiential' or 'truly contextual' is debatable. Certainly Chapter 18 ('Health Care Professionals and Their Attitudes toward and Decisions Affecting Disabled People') powerfully develops both perspectives. The physician-author Ian Basnett, incurred spinal cord injury years after he had been in practice, and pinpoints how professional socialisation of typical non-disabled health care professionals creates a negative context for patients/clients with disabilities.

And Gill's chapter. On 'Divided Understandings' undertakes a needed systematic review and development of how academics and service providers have characterized 'the disability experience'. She sets a solid stage for future research on the still radical notion of positive disability experience.

These and other examples demonstrate that the experiential perspective is certainly not absent from the compilation.

Examples of the contextual perspective

The remainder of this review touches on a consecutive set of chapters in Part III, chosen rather arbitrarily. Ostensibly, these chapters were grouped in the Handbook because they all illustrate comparative cultural analysis, but I also detect a useful progression from one to the next that can contribute to understanding institutional linkages affecting disability policy. Indeed, I suspect this selection of chapters would be especially appealing to non-academic readers – consumer, activists and/or policy-makers seeking to inform themselves with action goals in mind.

DeJong and Basnett in 'Disability and Health policy: The Role of Markets in the Delivery of Health Services' (Chapter 26) invoke the comparative approach as applied to national economic systems. Although the approach may be familiar in health services research, the authors offer an innovative angle by starting from the perspective of the social movement around disability issues. They point out that the movement's leaders in many countries 'bring conflict-

ing views about the role of health care in the lives of people with disabilities' (p.610) This leads to a review of historical changes and cultural factors affecting disability activists' role in formulating health policy before the chapter plunges into its main substance – cross-national comparisons of recent policy developments.

O'Day and Berkowitz in 'Disability Benefit Programs: Can We Improve the Return-to-Work Record?' (Chapter 27) provide a concise comparison of national income benefits programs, highlighting the rationale and aims of recent U. S. legislation. promoting return-to-work. The disability movement perspective is acknowledged with reference to the changed policy environment regarding employment and health insurance because of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Next, Schriener's chapter. (28) 'A Disability Studies Perspective on Employment Issues and Policies for Disabled People: An International View', uses the disability movement's perspective to inform an extensive discussion of factors that support or challenge the emergence of 'transformative rehabilitation practice' – rehabilitation that addresses societal barriers rather than individual limitations.

And finally, for this selective review, Seelman's 'Science and Technology Policy: Is Disability a Missing Factor?' (Chapter 29) provides a contextual analysis that might at first glance seem more academic than practical, in part because of its impressive scholarship. But it would be a mistake not to realize that policy makers and even consumer. advocates equipped with insights that this chapter provides about, e.g. the role of gender, culture and class in professional training of scientists and engineers, or changing models of research, can much more effectively ensure that science and technology will serve the self-defined needs of people with disabilities.

Usability

Especially for, academic readers but not only for them, The Handbook is potentially a resource to which they may turn often. That leads me to comment on two features that can greatly affect a book's utility as a reference: the bibliography and the index, and to close with the practical question of accessibility for people with print-reading disability.

In regard to the bibliography, the book is a goldmine. Authors generously reference their sources, which include not only other scholarly publications but also consumer advocacy outlets, e.g. Disability Rag (now called Ragged Edge), legislative acts, and other primary documents of significance to this emerging field of study. Almost like mining for gold, the reader has to do a bit of work, since each

chapter has its own listing of references and there is no overall bibliographic list. There is, however, an 'Author Index' that runs to almost 20 two-column pages.

Finally, the 'Subject Index' – 28 pages of double-column entries – is almost doomed to be somewhat disappointing. One can imagine that a truly comprehensive index of terms and concepts used in the nearly 800 pages of text would fill a large volume in itself. I have used the index for several topics and did find relevant mentions, but of course I was not able to assure myself that all relevant mentions were indexed. I have also attempted to find a topic that did not appear in the index, leading me to think it was not discussed at all, whereas at a later time I encountered it while reading a chapter. (To be specific, the topic is 'Adjustment to disability', or, 'Disability Adjustment'; the discussion appears in Carol Gill's chapter.) Probably the solution to the indexing problem for such a large volume will come only when such documents are disseminated electronically.

That point leads to the question of how potential readers of The Handbook who have print-reading disability will be able to access the volume. (Authorisation to use an electronic version could be a solution.) Since some of the authors are blind or visually impaired, one might presume, or at least hope, that a print-alternative version of the whole document exists, but this reviewer found no reference to what it is, or. how to get it. From the point of view of creating an accessible version, it is fortunate that there is very little non-text material (e.g. charts, graphs, pictures).

Indeed, the only picture is the striking reproduction from classic art that adorns the handsome cover. The editors anticipated that the choice of art could be controversial, and explain their perspective. Their rationale reflects the theme for. the whole undertaking and is a meaningful note on which to close this review: 'This painting signifies that disabled people have a value and place in society, that disability and intergenerational relations have been important across history, and that disability is to be understood in its historical and cultural context . . . Continuity and hope are expressed . . .' (p.4). ■

Review by Corinne Kirchner (PhD), Director of Policy Research & Program Evaluation, American Foundation for the Blind, USA. This review was first published in Disability World, 2002, the bi-monthly web-zine of international disability news and views, Issue no. 13 April-May. Reprinted by kind permission of author and editor. <http://www.disabilityworld.org>

ON THE PAGE...

Médias et foi chrétienne: Deux univers à concilier, by Guy Marchessault. Ottawa: Editions Fides, 2002. Paperback, 183pp. ISBN 2-7621-2464-6

'This book is the result of many years of preparation, covering the three careers that were mine since I entered the world of media: journalist, media educator, and research professor in communication sciences who is particularly interested in the relationship between media and religion.' Guy Marchessault is currently professor at the Université Saint-Paul, Ottawa, Canada.

The aim of *Médias et foi chrétienne* is 'to provide some humble paths for reflection, both for Christian men and women at the grassroots and for those working in church-related institutions, on the complicities and hostilities between Christian faith and media culture. All this in the context of a larger questioning of the media and faith education.'

The introduction asks how Christian men and women should situate themselves in relation to mass culture, particularly in relation to media culture? 'What I am going to defend in these pages is that, from a cultural point of view, the media can favourably, and in every desired way, welcome, convey and evoke the real-life experiences of Christian faith' (pp.16-17). In addition, Marchessault explores the ethical dimensions of the media in relation to the temptation of media images to promote idolatry; entertainment as play; and the moral behaviour

of communicators (owners, artistes, journalists, technologies and audiences).

Chapter 1 is called 'Withdrawn into oneself or open to the outside world?' In the years after Vatican II the church's efforts to bring itself up-to-date were focused on renewing the liturgy and internal church structures. The results were disappointing: disaffection with the church as an institution and a seeming inability to communicate faith to new generations. The author argues that the church must look outward and discover what characterises the people of today, how today's world looks, what its challenges are, and what Christian men and women are doing in it.

Marchessault points to several transformations. 'We live in a media or communication culture in which new information technologies radically change our relationship to knowledge. We are in the midst of abundance, diversity and immediacy . . . In such a context everything becomes relative, commonplace, feeding religious indifference or indeterminacy . . . Ways of religious belonging have changed proportionately . . . Media culture, for its part, leads towards fragmented, splintered information that lacks any relation to an interpretative whole that puts things into perspective' (p. 22).

Chapter 2 situates faith education in the context of 'Culture and cultures', arguing that 'cultural mediation is the very basis of all human communication and, therefore, of all communication of faith.' Drawing on the work of Jacques Ellul (*La Parole humiliée*,

Virginia Stem Owens (*The Total Image*), and Robert Schreier (*Constructing Local Theologies*), Marchessault asks if it is possible to acculturate to the mass media with the aim of inculturating the Gospel? His answer is yes, but with the caution that 'we shall have to respect the stages of acculturation/inculturation that favour finding a place in media culture.' To do so, 'is not a question of content, but a question of presentation [*mise en forme*] and product placement [*mise en marché*]' (p.46).

Two digressions – 'A picture of our culture' (Chapter 3) and 'Some characteristics of media culture' (Chapter 4) – lead to a discussion of 'The main media languages' (Chapter 5). Marchessault identifies persuasion (ideas and values; goods and services; public images and events) and the imaginary (games; entertainment; partial fiction; and total fiction) as the two main types of media languages. He draws on the work of Marshall McLuhan and Pierre Babin, advocates of the impact of the medium, rather than the message, the 'ground' rather than the intellectual content. A comparison follows in Chapter 6 between media languages and 'The classic languages of Christian faith'. Marchessault distinguishes between the 'self-implicative' nature of the Bible, liturgy and spiritual languages and the descriptive or ascertainable nature of theology and dogma, both of which depend primarily on language.

Chapter 7, 'Divergence and convergence of the languages', tackles the key question. 'Are their

bridges, points of connection, that can be made to cross the gap that has been created down the centuries between media and religion? In particular, is there something to be expected from the languages that belong to each? Can they intersect at some point?' (pp.110-111). Marchessault is of the opinion that 'religions will have to readjust their aim in their approach to the media. If they succeed in twinning the good languages on both sides, while at the same time respecting the rhetorical and metaphorical rules of the media, religions too can play a part in agenda-setting and set up shop in the public media forum' (p.123).

A comparatively long chapter is devoted to 'Internet and faith education'. Apart from language, the author touches on the 'delicate question' of virtual communities on the Internet, sacraments, dangers and potential benefits. He concludes that the Internet can reach out to people and encourage them in their spirituality and Christian faith. However, he warns that this cannot be done at the expense of interactivity and dialogue.

Chapter 9 pursues 'Media culture and faith education', drawing lessons from preceding arguments. Marchessault claims that the media can have a transformative shock effect, that media culture allows real or imagined evangelical witness, and offer Christians 'a chance to move towards energising utopias and fruitful myths and gives them a forum for offering them to society.' But he warns that 'mediated relationships will never dethrone the quality of communication and communion that one can reach through successful interpersonal or group relationships, for example in Christian communities' (p.165).

Finally, the author affirms that in order to remain alive and to blossom, faith must ceaselessly acculturate and inculturate itself, includ-

ing in relation to media culture. He believes that Christians can guarantee witness at the heart of media by means of 'great transparency: providing quality information that respects facts and the evidence for them; authentic emotion, by virtue of meaningful persons of transparent sincerity; and a presence in beauty: by virtue of new symbolic productions, artistically well balanced languages, and carefully prepared images' (p.172).

The old controversy between word and image needs to be read-dressed. How to reconcile these two antagonisms in a mass mediated world is a highly relevant and urgent theme for today. The church and religious communicators everywhere have much to learn from this authoritative and sympathetic account of the relationship between faith and the mass media.

Review by Philip Lee, WACC.

Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency. Mahwah, New Jersey: London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999, 215pp.

The common understanding of cultural globalisation is that imported US media products have so displaced indigenous media that there is now a danger of a global monoculture.

Yet why are US movies and TV so dominant in most of the world? *Hollywood Planet* attempts to answer this question by combining two methodologies. First, relying on work by Porter, the author outlines the competitive advantages that the US media industries enjoy. The fact is that in most media markets US media face little serious competition.

And it seems that consumers all round the world have an appetite for US products. To explain this demand, the author draws upon

cultural and reception studies which examine the bond between media 'texts' and their audiences. His thesis is that audiences find US popular films and TV programmes attractive because they are more immediately intelligible in different cultural contexts than other rival offerings. A US TV series like *Dallas*, for example, is able to cross cultures more easily than a British soap opera like *Coronation Street*. The US programme is in some sense more culturally 'transparent'.

To explain how certain media 'texts' are transparent, Olson draws upon the work of Blumberg who argues that myths are constructed out of underlying simpler elements called 'mythotypes'. The author sums up his thesis thus: 'The textual apparatuses of transparency are mythotypes, human needs that precede myth and are found in myth systems everywhere, such as awe, wonder, purpose and participation. These needs are tapped through narrative devices that include open-endedness, virtuality, circularity, archetypal dramatis personae, elipituality, negentropy, inclusion, versimilitude, omnipresence, production values and synergy. They are identifiable in American media products and explain their success.' (Synergy refers to the ways in which films and TV are tied in with books, toys, videos, the Internet and other merchandising).

A good example of a highly successful transparent media production is Walt Disney's *The Lion King* (1994). It is open-ended: the story is continuing and the characters are available for 'spin-offs'; virtuality: though an animation it has been designed to have a feeling of being 'real' (it does not draw attention to itself as a work of fiction) and this makes it easier for the predominantly young audience to accept its significance for them on a personal level; circu-

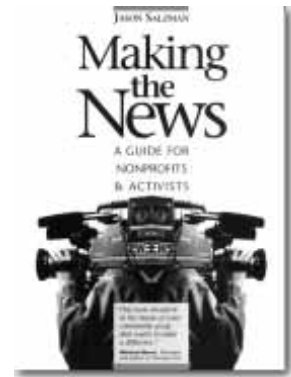
larity: it constantly refers to the Circle of Life and the cycle of birth/death/rebirth; archetypal dramatis personae: Disney's use of anthropomorphised animated animal characters transcends cultures and with 'no humans around, few readily identifiable cultural traits exist that would exclude the audience'; elipituality: it gives space for the audience to project itself into the film. The opening sequence embodies the strength of ellipsis, the presentation and anointing of the Lion King's heir refers to many rituals and allows different audiences to project their own particular cultural interpretations and thus identify more deeply with the action; negentropy: The Lion King uses similar narrative and mythic structures as those of Shakespeare, for example, to reinforce the sense that the story carries order and meaning; inclusion: the audience is invited to enter into the mythic narrative of the 'sacred king'; versimilitude: it looks and sounds real by employing a style which makes fantasy into naturalism; omnipresence and synergy: for a huge hit like *The Lion King* these two terms are almost synonymous.

While it was in cinemas the potential audience was bombarded with products and ideas (including music, CD Roms, video games, websites, TV specials, books, reviews, magazine features, toys, T-shirts and other souvenir merchandise etc) associated with *The Lion King*. This omnipresence 'guaranteed the narrative an ethereal myth-like quality, enabling further transparent projection;' production values: the high production values of *The Lion King* are, in Olson's words, 'a modern equivalent to the Taj Mahal or St Peter's Basilica: an opportunity to marshal extensive human and capital resources toward an object with mythic significance. The result in the spectator is awe, one of the

Making the News, a Guide for Nonprofits & Activists by Jason Salzman, published by Westview Press, 287 pages. Cost \$19.95.

News coverage about a social or political problem can be the first step toward a solution. Written for activists, non-profit organizations, or any concerned citizen who lacks big bucks for advertising, *Making the News* explains how to shine the media spotlight on any cause or important issue.

Drawing on interviews with over 50 professional journalists, *Making the News* describes how media-savvy activists devise stunts and create imagery to propel their causes into the news.



fundamental mythotypes'.

Olson also examines two examples of 'opaque' texts, the Polish satirical programme, *Polski Zoo* and the film *Breaking the Waves* (1997) in order to highlight the contrast with 'transparent' texts. *Polski Zoo* is just too rooted in a specific Polish political situation to be intelligible or interesting outside its immediate context, and *Breaking the Waves* is a film that challenges, disturbs and unsettles audiences rather than inviting them to project, and thus re-confirm, their own assumptions and beliefs.

Olson's book is a thought-provoking attempt to marry cultural and economic analysis to explain the success of US media products. His analysis of specific texts raises many questions and it would be interesting to test his methodology more widely. How does his emphasis on transparent media appearing 'real' or 'naturalistic', for example, account for the success of a series like *Buffy*, *The Vampire Slayer*, which often draws attention in a self-consciously post-modern manner to its own artifice? Different age groups with different expectations of media would have different understandings of what is 'transparent'. Can we observe different cultural inter-

pretations of 'transparency' too?

Olson also reflects upon the consequences of this dominance of 'transparent' media for cultural identity and diversity. His conclusion is pessimistic: 'Although subaltern cultures have some strategies and tactics to resist transparency, the onslaught of such media is daunting. It changes indigenous cultures in subtle but lasting ways, creating new hybrid cultures that progressively particularize so that they can hardly be called national cultures at all. This poses a serious threat to national sovereignty, democracy and identity. Transparency heralds nothing short of the utter fragmentation of culture and consequently culture's end. With its end, identity becomes unmoored, free to float from text to text.'

Olson's pessimism may be extreme, but if the attractiveness of transparent media is not to overwhelm cultural diversity then those devising cultural policies will need to reflect more deeply on the complex question of the interaction among culture, identity and media raised by this book.

Review by Jim McDonnell, former director of the Catholic Communications Centre, London.

