

# Media Development

1/2019



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## In the Next Issue

The 2/2019 and 3/2019 issues of *Media Development* will explore the relationship between communication rights and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

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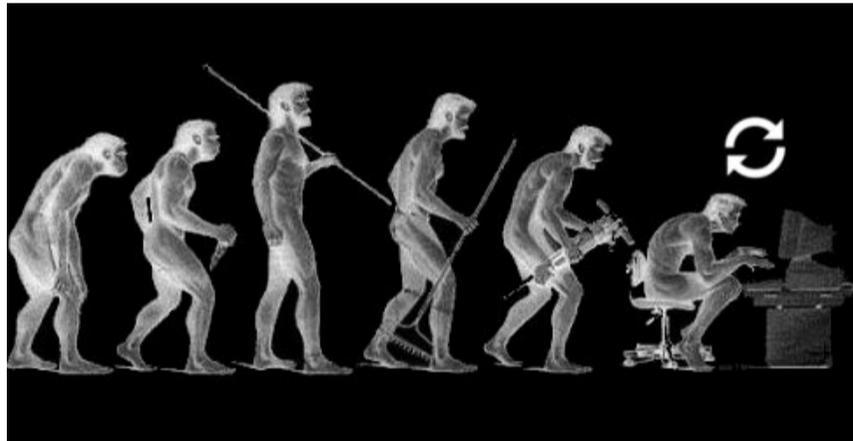
Towards the end of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Miranda says,

“O, wonder!  
How many goodly creatures are there here!  
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new  
world,  
That has such people in't!”

She does so with a mixture of awe and naivety. Recalling that Shakespeare's use of the word “brave” merely implies “worthy”, Miranda is seduced by what she imagine she sees, which seems to presage the future. And so it is in today's world: we are seduced by the apparently limitless possibilities and opportunities offered by digital technologies and their networks of connectivity. Yet, for Miranda and ourselves, the reality is likely to turn out somewhat differently.

Communications technology is astounding. It continuously evolves with applications that range from the military to the medical to the social. Its interconnectivity and rapidity create the illusion of 24/7 information and news, instant personal relationships, and multitasking in an ever more media saturated world. At the same time, it is indifferent to issues of objectivity and balance, nuance and fair-mindedness. In fact, soundbites, catchy images and sensationalism rule.

As with all such technologies, oversight and regulation are sorely needed: ethical principles that apply equally to everyone – including those working in the communications and media industries – and that protect everyone, especially the most vulnerable. As Clifford G. Christians points out in his overview published in this issue of *Media Development*:



“I contend that when serious work is done that accounts for initiatives in ethics worldwide, an agenda of three major principles emerges that are explicitly global and make media ethics intellectually sustainable. These three issues for media ethics in the digital era – truth, human dignity, nonviolence – encompass the whole technological range from Twitter to ICT's. These ethical principles are theoretically substantive and international, multicultural, and gender inclusive.”

Of course, many people and institutions are turning their attention to this urgent question. In 2018, the Ethics Advisory Group (EAG) of the European Data Protection Supervisor, the EU's independent data protection authority,

[published a report](#) that aims to contribute to “a constructive debate about the future of ethics in a full-fledged digital society”, identifying and clarifying “some of the ethical questions that emerge in the application of data

protection regulations to the new forms of data collection and processing and to the new economy that has rapidly formed around it.”

At the end of 2018, the [Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace](#) was issued by the French Government. Noting that, “Cyberspace now plays a crucial role in every aspect of our lives and it is the shared responsibility of a wide variety of actors, in their respective roles, to improve trust, security and stability in cyberspace”, it reaffirms support for “an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful cyberspace, which has become an integral component of life in all its social, economic, cultural and political aspects.”

Elsewhere the picture is not so rosy. In China, social media posts featuring sensitive keywords are often taken down and users who

share photos with sensitive imagery often have their posts blocked. Authoritarianism has been on the rise as the nation's internet regulator imposes new rules on what is banned. Chinese activists have resorted to blockchain technology that enables the creation of a list of records, called blocks, linked using cryptography.

Blockchain experts say it would be challenging, if not downright impossible, retroactively to censor such embedded messages. Without the ability to delete these stories, the Chinese authorities have issued new rules requiring people to verify their identities when signing up for blockchain services. Previously anonymous users now have to reveal themselves, similar to how other social media platforms in China work.

For years, social media companies have claimed that they were merely owners of “neutral” platforms and that they could not be held responsible for what was posted using their technologies. But as the articles in this issue of *Media Development* point out, tough decisions will have to be made on issues of freedom of speech, privacy and security. In a globalised society, accountable public institutions, not opaque tech companies, will have to regulate and monitor this brave new world in ways that are universally agreed. It's not going to be easy. ■

# New digital technology and global communication ethics

**Clifford G. Christians**

*In the emerging digital era of electronic networking and massive databases, the first challenge for communication ethics is to establish the agenda for this new media system. Collaborating on a credible agenda will help ensure that we emphasize the major issues in global digital ethics and not be distracted by the secondary and superficial. This article proposes for discussion that the ethical principles of truth, human dignity, and nonviolence have priority because they are global in scope as are the internet and cyberspace.*

**A** new information age is taking shape, with upheavals worldwide. There are 31 billion searches on Baidu and Google every month. 350,000 years of online video are watched every day. More than 500 websites are created every second. The six billion mobile phones worldwide are the new technology leader, accounting now for 10% of all internet usage on the planet. China leads the world with more mobile phones than citizens, and this technology is similarly a phenomenon in Africa: “The unprecedented diffusion and pervasiveness of the mobile phone across social classes in Africa remains one of the most significant exemplars of the impact of digital technologies on the continent. It has proved critical in shaping everyday life” (Mabweazara, 2015, p. 2).

In Grant Kien's book length study of mobile phones in Asia and North America, there is a “seis-

mic shift” in the global citizen’s media to transit and fluidity – what Zygmunt Bauman (2005) calls “liquid modernity” (Kien, 2009, p. 2). Our basis of knowing on six continents is now changing to an interactive, anytime, anywhere global experience with human participants the facilitators and weavers of networks instead of participants in intersubjective dialogue. The Twitter existence is everywhere always and nowhere never. The globe is being newly organized by the Web 2.0 phenomenon.

The explosive growth of the digital media gives us communication abundance but the complications and contradictions are cooling our enthusiasm. Schools teach computer literacy, while terrorists on four continents use online networks to coordinate planning. The growth of sectarianism and fundamentalism is making stable governments nearly impossible. Finance and banking are the most advanced information systems in history; they led the world into an economic depression. The new technological landscape has created unprecedented opportunities for expression and interaction, while the elementary distinction between fact and fiction erodes. The unlimited amount of electronic data is a golden resource for public information, but management techniques by governments and business redirect big data toward surveillance and consumerism.

Print and broadcast technologies become secondary when the human experience is multi-sensory and multi-networked. Digital media have distinctive features as a technological system. Every medium has its own grammar, that is, the elements enabling it to communicate. What are the properties of the online revolution? The Canadian communication theorist, Harold Innis (1951), introduces the concept “monopoly of knowledge” to describe the shifts from one medium to another. The new technologies that come to dominate – in his day, radio and television over print – are not merely additional instruments for a society to use. History shows us that the new forms of communication tend to monopolize the previous ones. They do not simply exist innocently alongside one another. The new technologies organize our time and space in a new way. We

still read, listen to radio, watch television and attend movie theatres, but they have no distinctive authority for us.

Canadian communication theory tells us that the history of communication is central to the history of civilization, because social change results from machine transformations. Therefore, those of us concerned about media ethics must apply our thinking to this new technological world, fully aware that it has its own distinctive properties that represent a shift in history – from oral to print to broadcast to digital. Thus I make this the basic question: What is the ethics agenda for this new technological universe; what topics reflect the distinctive properties of today’s digital revolution?

Historically, mass communication ethics arose in conjunction with print technology that emphasized news. The intellectual roots of the news media were formed when print technology was the exclusive option, so most of the heavyweights in media ethics centred on newspaper reporting. Many of the perpetual issues in journalism ethics – invasion of privacy, conflict of interest, sensationalism, confidentiality of sources, and stereotyping – received their sharpest focus in a print context.

The technology of news systems changed in the late 20th century. With the decade of the 1990s, television became the primary source of news and information radio was vital. Even as television established itself as the principal arbiter of news, the principle of truthfulness from print set the standard for broadcast. Some research began to emerge that took visual media seriously in terms of their own technological properties. Despite the scattered efforts to make the new technology an independent variable, the content of the news profession remained the preoccupation of communication ethics.

As academic media ethics developed and was internationalized during the era of print and broadcast, technology was an epiphenomenon. Only rarely did media ethics redefine itself with self-conscious attention to the transformation in technology. The preoccupation with news in print journalism carried over into radio and television.

The list of ethical issues that emerged in broadcast was not fundamentally different from print.

For communication technologies, the early 21st century is a period of spectacular growth and substantial change, with only limited intellectual resources from the ethics of print and broadcast to address them. In the digital era, a major challenge for communication ethics is to establish its agenda in terms of the distinctive properties of this new technological system.

Following the standard categories of agenda setting: a) some issues continue ethical concerns of the past, b) some issues are new, and c) others create levels of complexity heretofore unknown. A content analysis from around the world – of academic textbooks, journal articles that survey the state-of-the-art in media ethics, and the assessments of professionals – identifies eight issues, two each from the first and second categories, and four in category three (Christians, 2019).

### **Identifying the ethical concerns**

1) In today's preoccupation with digital, the ethical problem of social justice continues as before. Justice is the defining norm for all social institutions, including the policies and practices of media organizations. In terms of the ethical principle of just distribution of products and services, media access ought to be available to everyone according to essential needs, regardless of income or geographical location. Comprehensive information ought to be assured to all parties without discrimination.

The new technologies cannot be envisioned except as a necessity, so the issue of just allocation continues. Global media networks make the world economy run, they give access to agricultural and health care information, they organize world trade, and they are the channels through which the United Nations and political discussion flow. Therefore, as a necessity of life in a global order, information and communication systems (ICTs) ought to be distributed equally.

However, the offline inequities of print and broadcast technologies still exist in the digital era. Information technology confronts the injustice of the digital divide – understood in a narrow sense as between rich and poor (Norris, 2001), and on a

deeper level in terms of social divides. The world's nearly one billion in urban slums are largely disenfranchised. Technological societies have high levels of computer penetration and most non-industrial societies do not. In fact, "the internet media do not just perpetuate social inequalities, but often multiply them. In reality, the global village is a gated community" (Debatin, 2008, p. 260).

2) Harold Innis' *Empire and Communication* (1952) identified political empire as an issue with print technology, and it remains for digital ethics today. Printed documents enabled the control of geographical space, and for Innis, strengthening the power of the political elite by print technologies was a profound moral issue. Print enabled governments to standardize, administer and hold accountable their political regimes.

With digital technology, the empire problem means state surveillance in unprecedented terms. Six weeks after the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York's World Trade Center, the U.S. Congress shifted the Department of Justice's goal from prosecuting terrorists to preventing terrorism. Within U.S. borders, it commenced a relentless campaign to tighten security. Fearful rhetoric about the dangerous world has allowed secret information-gathering not for probable cause but for any alleged reason. In the revelations of Eric Snowden, the U.S. National Security Agency is abusively intrusive into private affairs at home and into government affairs internationally.

Expanded judicial authority to detain and profile also appeared after 9/11 in Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act, in the United Kingdom's counter-terrorism laws, and in France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, and Singapore. India's Home Ministry now has the right to monitor and decrypt digital messages whenever it considers eavesdropping vital to national security. Aggressive data gathering for surveillance, defended as necessary for the "war on terrorism", is being used by decent societies everywhere.

3) Regarding the second category, some issues result from computer-mediated technologies themselves and are therefore new. The digital news phenomenon is only possible in the networked era driven by computational algorithms.

“Online Creator” is the general label, with blogger, video blogger, podcaster, microblogger, online journalist the subunits. Big-name news blogs such as *Salon.com*, *Politico.com*, and *Buzzfeed* have credibility, with search engines tending to favour these highly rated sites and leaving over 99% of blogs largely invisible. *IsraelPolitik* is a national government’s weblog that enables it to hold microblogging press conferences with Twitter.

Bernhard Debatin refers to the paradox of media complexity. “Each and every increase in complexity causes a loss of transparency” (2008, p. 259). In the profusion of blogging technology, deep structures and sources are easily hidden and difficult to recover. With anonymity where is accountability and without transparency where is responsibility? The interactive character of this technology requires ethical principles that are appropriate to it, instead of following the linear objectivity of print and broadcast. The Online News Association recognizes the paradox and recommends the best practices approach instead of legal restrictions.

An additional approach to responsibility in the blogosphere is establishing codes of ethics. *Digital Dilemmas: Ethical Issues for Online Professionals* uses codes of ethics as a framework for resolving online dilemmas such as internet sources, privacy, and speed versus accuracy. Rebecca Blood included a “Weblog Code of Ethics” in the first edition of *The Weblog Handbook*. Jonathon Dube, founder of *Cyberjournalist.net*, maintains a code for online journalism patterned after the Society for Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. Norway’s Morten Rand-Hendriksen of the “Pink and Yellow” digital media company, proposes a Code of Ethics for “Online Content Creators” that parallels the Norwegian Press Association Code. Martin Kuhn argues for a broader code that is helpful to political blogs but also credible to bloggers more generally. His “Code of Blogging Ethics” focuses on abuses that result from anonymity and lack of accountability ([blogethics2004.blogspot.com](http://blogethics2004.blogspot.com)).

4) Another new issue in the computer-driven digital age is global citizenship. The character of citizenship has always been a concern for public life; but the global citizen mandate for com-

munication ethics signifies a fundamentally new era in history. As Charles Ess (2014) describes it, in a world of networked digital media that “interconnects our lives in ever-expanding webs of relationships with others throughout the diverse cultures of the globe, like it or not, we are all increasingly cosmopolitan, citizens of the world, not simply citizens of a given nation” (p. xv).

As Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) observes, the idea of a “citizen of the cosmos” has existed since the fourth century B.C., but the concept could not be meaningfully implemented across the centuries until today’s worldwide network of information has made it possible. Our ways of knowing in the era of digital media need

## Recent issues of *Media Development*

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to be redirected from our immediate and national circles to a respect for humanity’s moral capacity as a whole. Our understanding of our place in the world must be broad and strong enough to match the digital media’s international scope.

News media managers, editors, and reporters today need a world mind. As Stephen Ward’s *Global Journalism Ethics* (2010) puts it, media professionals need “a cosmopolitan commitment to humanity” (p. 213); they ought to “pursue the good within the bounds of global justice” (p. 5). When professionals see themselves as citizens of the world, this should not be the neoliberal globe of economic strategies or the contested globe of nation states, or the confusing arena of diverse cultures and unknown languages. Doctors Without Borders is the leader in demonstrating the global mind in an increasingly borderless world, with Reporters Without Borders expanding in size and substance. For the global imaginary, a society’s ethnic languages are considered essential for a healthy planet. The media’s ability to represent those languages well is an important area of professional development and for enriching communication codes of ethics.

### Previously unrecognized ethical issues

There are four issues in the third category. These ethical issues are made so much more complex by the media revolution that the standard classic approaches of print and broadcasting are no longer appropriate.

5) The longstanding issue of violence in television and cinema is compounded by interactive violence in video games, and made nearly unmanageable by the 40,000 to 60,000 web-based hate sites scattered around the globe (estimate of researcher Marc Knobel of the Council of Jewish Institutions in France).

While the United States leads the world in the amount of violence on television, television programming in all parts of the globe contains excessive violence, including a high percentage of guns as weapons, and the brutal consequences only hinted at or not even depicted. For communication ethics, there is special concern about the sexual violence in video games and in music video, and the sadistic torture of slasher films delivered online to home media centres. A hideous new dimension of violence has emerged with hate speech on the internet.

While media ethics promotes the common good, violent cinema illuminates evil. Violent

video games teach skills for annihilating others; hate sites are sectarian. Raphael Cohen-Almagor is undoubtedly correct that the public's most strategic action is to engage and reform ISPs (Internet Service Providers) and WHSs (Web-Hosting Services).

6) The ethics of privacy was a major moral issue during the print and broadcasting eras. Privacy was defined as the right of humans to control the time, place, and circumstances of information about themselves. Legally it meant that citizens have freedom from government control over what they themselves control. Totalitarian societies have used the near absence of privacy to produce a servile population. Jiang Zhan of Beijing Foreign Studies University includes invasion of privacy as a continuing moral problem in China's media, with coverage of private affairs akin to reckless journalism.

But the appeal in this definition of privacy to a sacred self is not credible for the social networks of Facebook and Twitter. ICTs have increased data collection and with it the invasion of privacy. Micromedia such as podcasts, blogs, mobile phones, and social networking sites are increasingly used to publicize personal and intimate information within the so-called anonymity of the digital environment. Legal safeguards do not match the challenges of powerful new media technologies for storing data and disseminating information. Abuse of personal data by third parties, as well as harassment and identity theft, are typical side effects of data networks. Privacy as a moral good in the digital age needs new theorizing and application beyond national boundaries.

7) While definitions of sexuality differ widely across cultures, pornography is generally considered illegitimate and ought to be censored. The issues of pornography were not resolved during the eras when print and broadcast technologies were dominant, and the abundance of pornography online complicates any resolution now.

Intelligent discussion is buried under the "technological blurring of the once clear lines between the actual or the real (as primarily material) and the virtual (as grounded in diverse computational technologies)" (Ess, 2012, p. xiii). Mediated

sex online is typically bizarre and oppressive. But virtual technology does not create children; it does not spread AIDS; it does not draw women into the agonizing decision to abort. The proliferating exchange of sexual images via smart and cell phones has required a new term "sexting", but whether it needs more laws is debatable. Sexting nude photos among teenagers is typically considered harmless fun but not immoral; when is it cyberbullying and, therefore, of no redeeming value?

The pornography and censorship debate faces a fundamental question: Does online pornography presume that real persons are communicating or does it represent this argument: "What happens is all just pixels on a screen, radically divorced from real persons in the real world, and hence nothing to be concerned about" (Ess, 2012). In this virtual-real debate, for example, what ethical judgments are valid regarding virtual child pornography? Digital ethics has a complicated dualism to overcome. It needs a third way between the virtual and personal.

8) The ethics of representation faces the demand to specify how gender, ethnicity, and class are symbolized in networked cyberspace. Multiculturalism in the era of broadcast technology was a key socio-political issue. This issue continues in the digital, complicated by the contradictory trends of cultural homogeneity and resistance to it. Digital media technologies are globalizing rapidly, but local identities are reasserting themselves at the same time.

For communication ethics, the integration of globalization and multiculturalism is the extraordinary challenge. Contrary to an ethnocentrism of judging other groups against a dominant Western model, other cultures are not to be considered inferior, only different. For multiculturalism, the communication ethics that is legitimate is not rigid and formal, but respects the diversity of the human race even while seeking commonness among peoples everywhere.

## Conclusion

At this historic juncture of computer-driven big data, with its specific media tools such as Renren, Twitter, Sina Weibo, Facebook and Friendster,

identifying the core issues has priority. Agenda lists around the world include the eight items summarized above: social justice, empire, blogging, global citizenship, violence, privacy, pornography, and multiculturalism. But a definitive agenda is needed, one that advances agreement on the major issues and where to concentrate our teaching and research. I contend that when serious work is done that accounts for initiatives in ethics worldwide, an agenda of three major principles emerges that are explicitly global and make media ethics intellectually sustainable. These three issues for media ethics in the digital era – truth, human dignity, nonviolence – encompass the whole technological range from Twitter to ICT's. These ethical principles are theoretically substantive and international, multicultural, and gender inclusive.

In Media Development's project of internationalizing communication ethics, the West's rational being is considered parochial for a global age. A thin parochial ethics is obviously inadequate for confronting today's global technologies. While media ethics historically has depended on the ethics of rationalism, this version is not viable for establishing a universal foundation in a global world of structural change. The autonomous individual is the core idea in print and broadcast ethics.

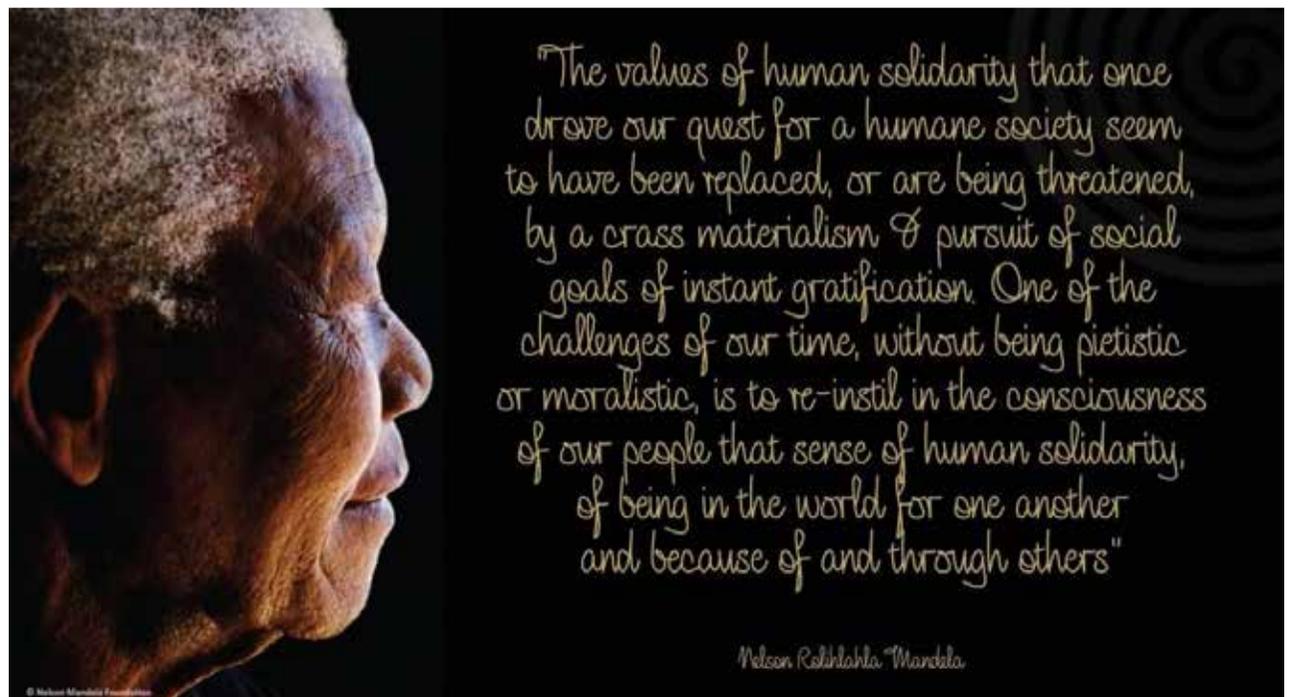
But for digital technology, both concepts need to be turned on their heads. Instead of the individual autonomy of ethical rationalism, ethics begins with its opposite – universal human solidarity. This enables us to start over intellectually with the holistic notion of humanity's distinctiveness, rather than a truncated concept of rational individualism. It is held together by a pre-theoretical commitment to the sacredness of our common humanity. In reflecting on this underlying perspective, three ethical principles emerge from it: truth telling, human dignity and non-violence, each of

these principles grounded in the purposiveness of life.

These three principles are not metaphysical givens, but propositions about human existence. Rather than abstract and absolutist, they are historically embedded and can therefore be identified by such research strategies as comparative studies of media systems. The three principles entailed by universal human solidarity, highlight the distinctive character of any society and are the basis for distinguishing the human community and virtual networks from each other.

In the digital world of fragmentation and its unrelenting conflicts, we face a monumental challenge in producing a legitimate communication ethics. On the theoretical side of this difficult task, we need to be certain of our moral foundations. Without a defensible conception of the good, our social practices are arbitrary. Without fundamental norms and the ethical principles derived from them, how can we argue that ransacking the earth's ecosystem is evil? On what grounds are terrorists condemned for trying to achieve political ends by violence? Intercultural conflicts among communities, and disputes between nations, need principles other than their own for reconciliation. The political power that protects outrageous government corruption ought to be contradicted by moral power.

Societies can continue to debate gun violence, immigration reform, trade policy, economic disparity, and racist nationalism – but need a



rational foundation for our moral convictions to avoid being hopelessly inconclusive. Media ethics must define the central issues but also determine the authentic grounds of ethical standards. If no such grounds exist, what can the public accomplish? Without a commitment to norms that are beyond one's own self-interest, moral claims are merely emotional preferences. Without ethical principles on behalf of human solidarity, history is but a contest of arbitrary power.

With a philosophical and theological foundation in place, the difficult choices can be made more responsibly. The ethics of truth, human dignity, and nonviolence hold the promise of establishing a universal foundation in a global world of structural change. The global principles become a crucial step toward a communication ethics that is actionable and pluralistic.

Czechoslovakia's playwright and president, Václav Havel, understood more clearly than most of us that today's historic juncture requires a new vision cosmic in scope. "We are rightly preoccupied," he said, "with finding the key to ensure the survival of a civilization that is global and at the same time clearly multicultural" (Havel, 1994, p. 614; cf. 1989). We fret over the possibility of "generally respected mechanisms of peaceful co-existence" and wonder "on what set of principles they are to be established." Many believe that this central political task early in a new century "can be established through technical means. But such efforts are doomed to fail if they do not grow out of something deeper, out of generally held values" (Havel, 1994, p. 614; cf. 1997). In Havel's terms, appeals to international forums for human rights are meaningless if they do not derive from respect for "the miracle of Being, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of nature, the miracle of our own existence" (1994, p. 615).

An agenda for the digital age of truth, human dignity, and nonviolence contributes to Havel's project. Through human solidarity rooted in a universal reverence for life, we respect ourselves and genuinely value the participation of others in an increasingly technological age where "everything appears possible, but almost nothing is certain" (Havel, 1994, p. 614). Collaborating on

a credible agenda will help ensure that we emphasize the major issues in global communication ethics and not be distracted by the secondary and superficial. ■

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# The personal is political

Cheryl A. Leanza

*U.S. society is obsessed with social media and online networks while a deep unease is pervading our use of these tools. What should the faith community's response be to this phenomenon at the local, regional, national, and transnational level? This article explores faith community and civil rights advocate approaches to net neutrality and ethical blocking of hate speech in the U.S.*

In the U.S. the public is beginning to recognize that ethical and religious values should be brought to bear on personal and community use of social media and technology. This recognition could be used more extensively to, not only assist people in their individual and community-level dilemmas, but also bring people of faith and moral conscience to advocacy. In the words of the U.S. women's rights movement—the personal is political. Connecting individual experience to broader values would meet individual needs and also facilitate challenges to the unjust structures of media and technology.

Faith-based activism on two of the most critical media justice issues in the U.S., net neutrality and reducing hate speech online, offers onramps into media justice work. These are two good examples of the faith-based communities' unique role and also demonstrate why multiple policies and campaigns are essential to support social justice. Some might view these two campaigns as contradictory in that net neutrality prohibits content moderation while hate speech proposals require it. But in fact both efforts promote maximum participation and fairness in our online public square. Both rely on values and teachings of great importance to the faith community. A look at the current personal ethical questions sur-

rounding technology and the faith-based activism in these areas offers a template for additional work around the U.S. and around the world.

## **Importance of media and technology policy**

Although the value of media and technology policy may be self-evident in a publication produced by the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC), it is nonetheless important to keep in the forefront their importance to civil rights and social justice. As the WACC's core principles affirm, communication builds and shapes community, enhances participation, promotes freedom and demands accountability, celebrates cultural diversity, and affirms justice and challenges injustice.<sup>1</sup>

Media and technology policy – whether they be policies adopted by corporate entities or public policies and laws requiring particular action – shape communication the world over, including all of the things that communication facilitates. For example, the U.S.-based Leadership Conference on Civil and Human rights has long placed importance on media policy “because meaningful protection of civil rights and advancement of key policy objectives rely on an accurate, independent, and diverse media that serve civil rights constituencies.”<sup>2</sup>

## **Emerging moral techniques to aid with personal technology use**

Around the U.S. several faith-based and secular organizations and movements are emerging to encourage people, at the individual level, to be more ethical and mindful in their use of technology. Much of this work originates from a recognition that the overuse of technology is detracting from the quality of life rather than enhancing it. While in some cases the work is merely outcome driven, in many cases the efforts are drawing on long-held religious and ethical practices. For example, Sabbath Manifesto, a project of Reboot – which aims to bring Jewish traditions to millennials and make them their own – aids Jewish organizations and synagogues in participating in a #techsabbath and a national day of unplugging.<sup>3</sup> These events help individuals gain a sense of distance from their

use of technology and creates an opportunity for a moral discussion about technology use.

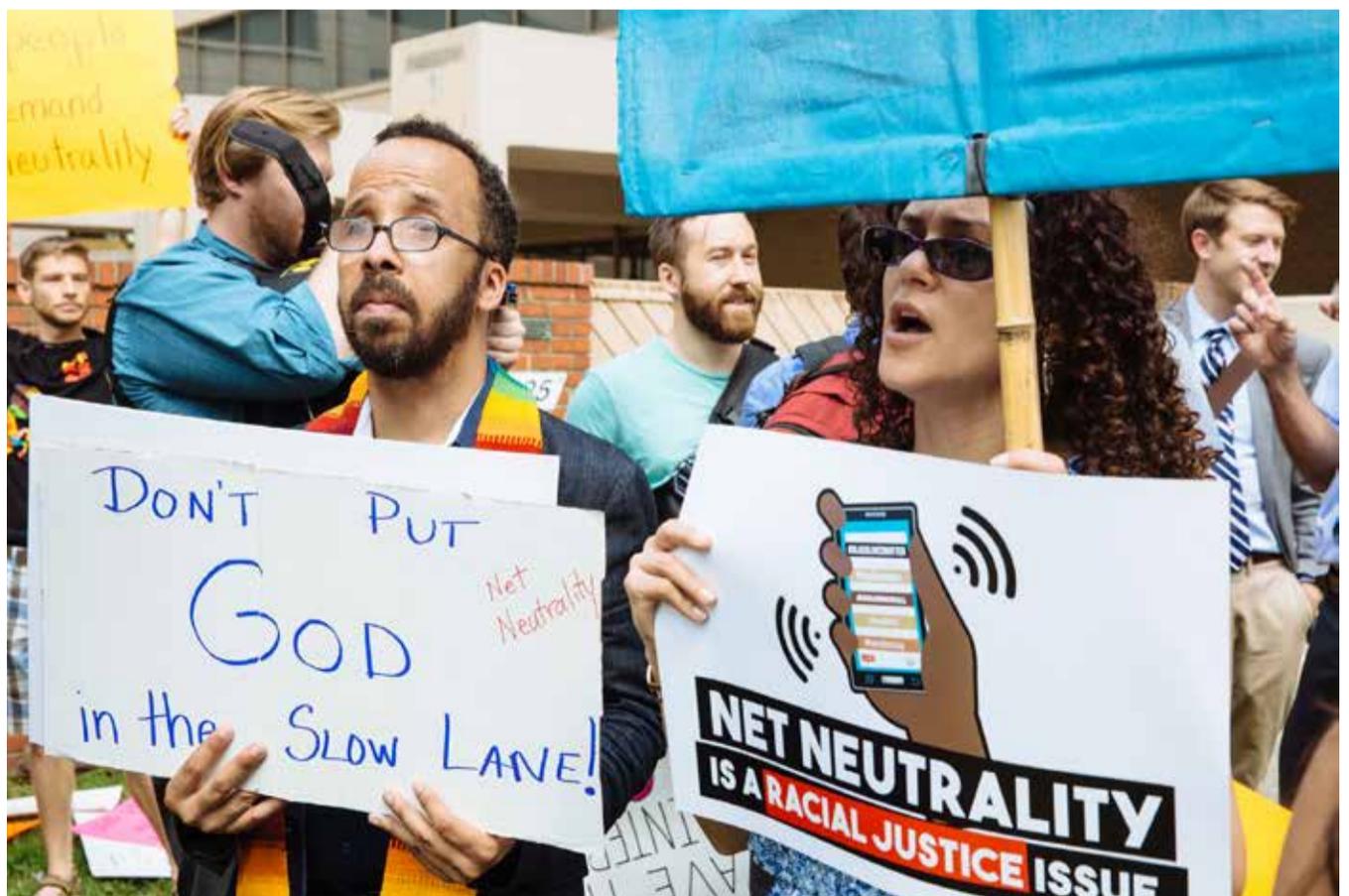
In a parallel vein, a secular “humane technology” movement is emerging from the very engineers who helped to create huge companies like Google. This effort prompts individuals to re-evaluate their personal technology use – in everything from setting smartphone screens to black and white to limiting notifications.<sup>4</sup> Another source of wisdom comes from the current efforts to bring mindfulness (often based in the Buddhist tradition) into technology use and other sectors.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, popular education techniques have produced toolkits and demonstrated real opportunities for teens and adults alike in how to understand both the technology and broader economic forces at work surrounding their use of mobile phones and other devices.<sup>6</sup>

This is a key opportunity for local faith communities. In fact, one digital leader wrote, “If the churches came to understand that the greatest threat to faith today is not hedonism but distraction, perhaps they might begin to appeal anew to a frazzled digital generation.”<sup>7</sup> In an era when loneliness rates have skyrocketed in the U.S. – and when loneliness has been equated with as much harm to one’s health as smoking 15 cigarettes per day – the role of the appropriate use of social media appears to have an impact not only on loneliness but also empathy.<sup>8</sup> Faith-based and morally based individual work with adherents and congregants could provide a meaningful connection to others, apply ethical teachings in a modern setting, and meet a serious need in modern society.

## Importance of net neutrality

As early as 2000, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission began considering the implications of new technologies that could do more than transmit the still-early Internet. At the time, it became clear that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) could favour some content over others, and charge for beneficial treatment. Thus, advocates began to call for protections against these kinds of practices, which eventually became known as “net neutrality”. In short, net neutrality requires ISPs – the companies that connect a business or residence to the Internet – to treat all content equally and fairly. Specifically, the most recent iteration of net neutrality policy prohibited blocking, throttling, or paid prioritization.

With net neutrality protections, a user can reach any web content she wishes without concern that her ISP is favouring some content over others. Because in the United States a little more than one-third of the population has more than one internet provider and almost no one has more than two or three,<sup>9</sup> the importance of net neutrality is paramount. This policy is sometimes called the “first amendment of the Internet”<sup>10</sup> because it protects speech and communication from every source, no matter its financial resources or identity.



One harm is a good example for the faith community. The Associated Press was able to verify that Comcast was blocking large file transfers by repeatedly interrupting the AP's attempt to transmit the King James Bible.<sup>11</sup> Because most users could not choose a provider that did not block the Bible, any effort to transmit large files would face significant costs and barriers. Further prohibitions on paid prioritization stop a monopolistic provider from accepting payments to favour some content over other content, thereby forcing into a "slow lane" faith-based content, or civil rights, or any manner of less-well-financed content.<sup>12</sup> Net neutrality protects content no matter its source or the financial assets.

### **Hate speech on social media**

Since just before the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, a rise in hate speech, abusive speech, and other media manipulation has been widely noted. The phenomenon has been difficult to document because no social media companies have released consistent – or in some cases any – data about their own platforms. Nonetheless, several organizations have conducted studies to document examples and statistics. For example, the Anti-Defamation League documented a total of 2.6 million tweets containing anti-Semitic language on Twitter between August 2015 and July 2016 reaching an estimated 10 billion impressions.<sup>13</sup> Data & Society, a research institute based in New York, found that "almost three-quarters (72%) of American internet users have witnessed online harassment or abuse, and almost half (47%) of Americans have person-

ally experienced one [of three] harassing behaviors."<sup>14</sup> Research by Amnesty International found similar results for women around the world.<sup>15</sup>

Even worse, harassing behaviour limits people's speech. For example, Data & Society found that "more than a quarter of Americans (27%) say they have at some point decided not to post something online for fear of attracting harassment."<sup>16</sup>

Addressing hate speech in the U.S. has often been complicated by misunderstandings about the scope and limits of free speech protections in the U.S. Constitution. While the First Amendment places high barriers around government regulation of speech, some kinds of speech – such as words that incite violence, harassment, threats or defamation – can be regulated,<sup>17</sup> and the First Amendment does not apply to private companies' moderation of speech at all<sup>18</sup> even though principles of due process and fairness should apply to corporate content policies, as described below.

### **Calling for corporate accountability: Change the Terms Campaign**

Over the course of a year of deliberations, several leaders in the fight for technology rights and against hate groups convened to develop proposed terms of service – if adopted by social media platforms – that would reduce the amount of hate speech on those platforms. The proposed policies not only offer a definition of hateful activities grounded in First Amendment jurisprudence, "activities that incite or engage in violence, intimidation, harassment, threats, or defamation," but also lay out careful recommendations for due process, transparency, training and accountability to protect users whose content is flagged as violating these policies.<sup>19</sup>

Some groups have claimed that hate speech policies would be a danger to free speech, harming the very voices targeted by hateful activities.<sup>20</sup> But these groups do not consider that many companies have already voluntarily adopted content moderation and are not likely to abandon it<sup>21</sup> and research demonstrates hate speech suppresses speech. Because the model terms' creators were painfully aware that often the targets of hate speech can also be victimized by people using the





## faithful internet

Many Beliefs. One Internet.

very tools designed to stop hate speech,<sup>22</sup> the model terms insist on transparency and the opportunity for users to challenge decisions and understand the reasons for company action.

Just as important, the model terms insist on the release of data quarterly so that outside groups can monitor the overall impact of the decision, such as the total number of appeals and reversals. If social media companies are going to adopt terms of service related to content, it is imperative that they are done in a transparent and fair manner. Further, the model terms originated in the experiences of people of colour and religious minorities who were best positioned to balance the harms to their own speech versus the harms of being subjected to hateful activities.

### **Commonalities among the two campaigns**

Net neutrality prohibits ISPs from moderating content and Change the Terms other promotes a careful, transparent intervention by internet companies: but the two policies have more in common than might appear at first glance. Both policies are designed to maximize the number of people who are able to both share and receive information over communications technology. In one case – net neutrality – the concern is that monopoly owners of infrastructure will block or disadvantage content that has less financial backing or is otherwise disfavoured. In the other case – hate speech – activities that threaten or defame others, and thus reduce their willingness or ability

to participate in public dialogue – are clearly and transparently prohibited in a fair and even-handed manner. In fact, in some ways, the two policies go hand-in-hand. With net neutrality, the government ensures that all speech – no matter how abhorrent – can find an audience on the web.

The hate speech policies, in contrast, are recommended for company adoption – most of which have already chosen to curate content on their platforms – and push them to enforce these policies fairly, transparently, and with adequate due process so that no group suffers unfairly from their enforcement. Advocates have always urged companies to live out their values in their advertising, marketing, and in the provision of the products themselves. Boycotts are a long-standing civil rights technique often focused on improving the behaviour of corporate entities. Responsible terms of service for content moderation do the same.

### **Faith community's part of media policy advocacy**

Perhaps because of its moral approach to social justice, faith-based organizations are critical players in the dialogue about digital rights. A few faith communities, particularly the United Church of Christ's (UCC) media justice ministry, OC Inc., and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, have been key players in net neutrality advocacy from the beginning.<sup>23</sup> The National Council of Churches adopted a resolution in support of net

neutrality.<sup>24</sup> And the Faithful Internet campaign, developed by a UCC leader and a Sikh leader, successfully brought home the importance of net neutrality and its relevance to people of faith and moral conscience. For example, during one action a video produced by Valarie Kaur for Faithful Internet, titled “First We Pray, Then We Organize” attracted more than 1 million views.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, advocates against hate speech online are deeply rooted in the faith community because of centuries of religious discrimination and recent horrific attacks<sup>26</sup> – for example, the Anti-Defamation League, Muslim Advocates, MPower, and the UCC have each played important roles in the current advocacy against hate speech.<sup>27</sup> These organizations have done a good job in pressing companies to improve their policies, dialoguing with policymakers, and developing resolutions.<sup>28</sup> A number of faith-based groups signed up to support the Change the Terms campaign, including Muslim Advocates, Church World Service, Faith in Public Life, Franciscan Action Network, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations. More can be done to bring in the faith community and offer leadership in this space. This is a particularly potent area for inter-faith work.

### Next steps

As the worldwide Christian community prepares for the World Council of Churches’ Assembly in 2021, several lessons and opportunities for action present themselves. Net neutrality has already been and will continue to be debated across the globe.<sup>29</sup> International faith-based bodies should follow the lead of the National Council of Churches and develop their own policies supporting Net Neutrality. Similarly, these same bodies should join forces with existing efforts to demand accountability and civility of the modern public square and adopt policies that endorse the work of the Change the Terms campaign and similar efforts.

Moreover, these organizations should follow the lead of civil rights organizations insisting that social media companies conduct civil rights audits and routinely test their new products and services to determine whether they could overt-

ly or inadvertently violate civil rights or promote hateful activities.<sup>30</sup> Such pronouncements could also be adopted at the national and denominational level around the world.

On a parallel track, local churches and denominational resources could be put toward collecting and synthesizing the existing efforts to bring ethical and moral teachings to personal technology use. These local efforts could develop a personal experience for participants necessary to create a connection to a worldwide effort to pressure governments and corporations to ensure media and technology support social justice. Through personal experience and popular education many people could learn, as the UCC’s media justice ministry often says, “media justice is necessary to achieve social justice”.

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# Transforming religion and politics

**Knut Lundby**

*How new and how brave is the “Brave New Digital World”? When I had to clean up my office as I was retiring from university, I came across a 50-year-old UNESCO paper raising the same issues we are discussing today.*

In 1969 the term “digital” was not in common use, although it literally does not refer to anything else than something using digits, which could be as simple as a counting frame, an abacus. With technological development from such mechanical to electronic devices – to computers – the road was opened to what we regard as a “digital world”. In 1969, the early pioneers of the internet were at work in the US and England for military and academic purposes, but none of the digital applications the world is familiar with today, like e-mail, World Wide Web and social media, had been thought of.

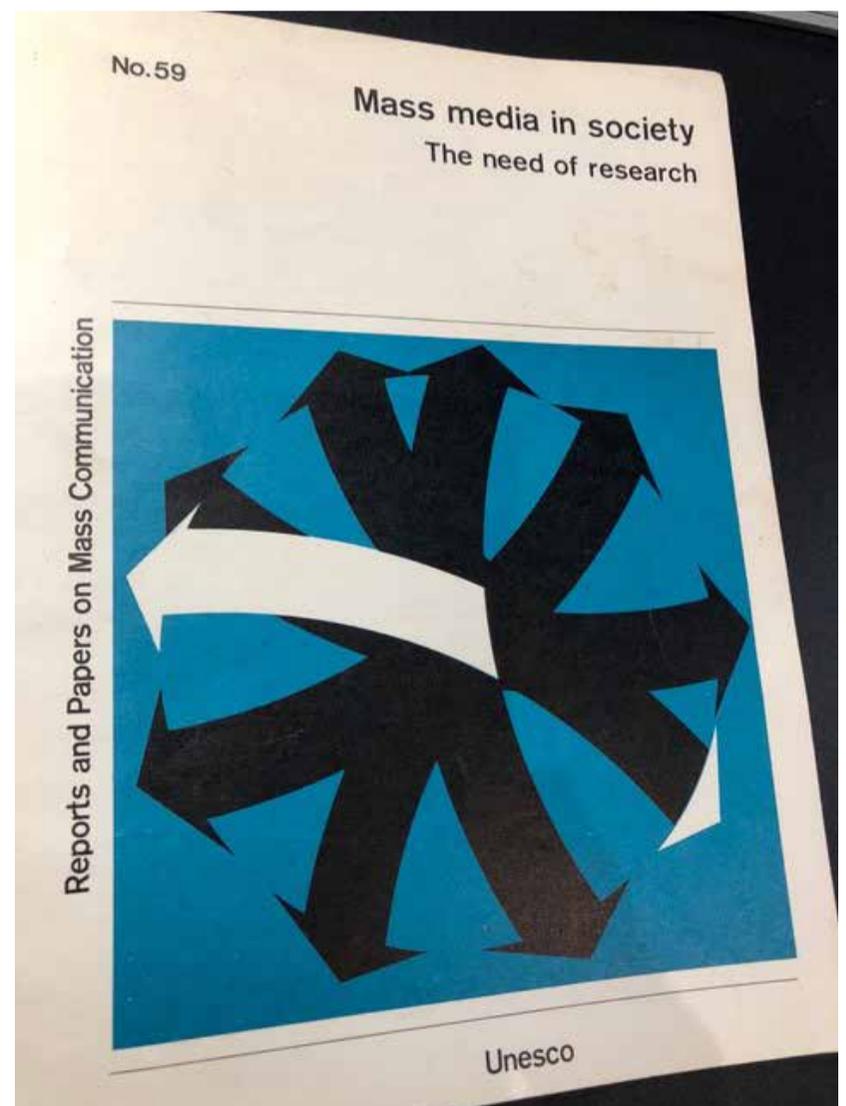
However, at UNESCO they were thinking. Ahead of an expert meeting on mass communication and society in Montreal, June 1969, they asked Professor James Halloran of the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the University of Leicester in the UK, to outline the state of knowledge. He sketched the “optimistic view” of a communications world of the future:

“which is characterized by miniaturization, flexibility, complete accessibility and personal control – one in which pocket-size personal computers, video telephones, television receivers and transmitters will be as common as transistor radios are today. We hear of space communication satellite systems capable of transmitting simultaneously to every part of the world, capable also of linking every home and every office in the world □ Computers will make the total sum

of world knowledge freely available □ The communication system will be a public utility service with sufficient capacity to supply each subscriber ... with electronic mail, magazine and newspaper delivery, and the subscriber will be able to transmit as well as receive information. There will be freedom of choice across an unprecedented range, for the individual viewer in his [sic!] multi-media home.”

Professor Halloran expected this forecast to become possible in the 2060s. His imagination was quite precise, but the world is 50 years ahead of his prediction. The options he envisaged are already here, in a digital, electronic and networked environment.

Halloran’s forecast was certainly optimistic. There is “freedom of choice across an unprecedented range” but at a price, as global companies like Facebook and Google are formatting much of the exchange. Hence, there is “personal control” on the premises set by such big players. The “total sum of world knowledge” is not freely available for all, digital devices come with a cost and internet providers may charge more than many are able to



pay. The communication system is not a guaranteed “public utility service” as telecoms fight net neutrality and discriminate between those who are able to pay for maximum access and those who are left behind.

The ethical challenges of our contemporary digital world were implied in the outline taken up by UNESCO 50 years earlier. Although they could not know the exact forms of digital technologies available today, their ethical awareness is relevant to the contemporary situation. In that sense, the “Brave New Digital World” is not so new and may not even be that brave either.

Halloran showed a particular concern for media and communication in “the developing countries”, which was the dominant term in 1969. Nor was Halloran content with the work of his contemporaries:

“Researchers tend to dwell on potential, optimum educational use, untold benefits, and overall improvement. They rarely mention exploitation. ... The influence of the media in the wider socio-cultural field has not been given the attention it deserves.”

This is still the challenge in “developed” as well as “developing” parts of the globe. Halloran was criticizing the then common linear thinking of communication, occupied with the cause and effect of new technologies. New digital tools may even today spark such simple ideas about consequences, although more usually among journalists and the general public than among researchers. For example, to ask for the influence of social media on a certain social practice may miss the wider technological infrastructure as well as the social, cultural, political and economic context of use.

### **Mediatization**

We need to look at the wider communication environment and the transformations on a broader scale. In my own research, this approach has led to mediatization theory. The core of this theoretical take is an attempt to grasp the interplay between changes in media technologies and the media

system on the one hand, and social and cultural change on the other. The focus is on long-term changes that should rather be termed transformations.

The conception of a “Brave New Digital World” does not signal a simple change due to digital technologies but a deep transformation of the communication environment. Professor Halloran’s reading of the signs of future 50 years ago reminds us to be careful in assigning the contemporary situation as “new” and “brave”. There is a considerable continuity in the deeper ethical challenges. But there are definitely changes in the media landscape as well as in the social and cultural landscape during these decades.

The ongoing communication by the help of technical media could to an even lesser extent be grasped as a chain from sender to receiver than was the case 50 years ago. There are so many crossing routes and alternative media. Citizen journalism and social media publishing sidestep the gatekeepers in editorial media. The various media themselves make a connective communication environment.

There is a “poetics of digital media”, says Paul Frosh in his new book *The Poetics of Digital Media* (2019). Media are generators for constructing and revealing worlds, he holds. This work is performed as a matter of routine, in a “poetics of media”.

This ongoing, mediated communication makes a difference, as the formatting of messages taking place with different media technologies do matter. This occurs in the daily poetics of media for everyone but becomes more visible on the big scene. A Twitter message from President Trump differs from the same topic covered by *The New York Times*, not just because of different views on the issue under discussion, but also because of the different formats of these media. The choice of medium put restrictions on as well as opens up possibilities for the message.

The transformations that characterize mediatization depend on repeated formatting tendencies in ongoing mediated communication. Donald Trump’s intense use of Twitter in political debates together with his claim that the editorial media

bring “fake news” has during his campaign and presidency transformed political communication in the US and beyond. I regard this change as a mediatization of the political environment.

Mediatization depends on changes in patterns of mediated communication. But changes in available media technologies and their uses do not in themselves shape processes of mediatization. There is an ongoing dynamic: Over time, mediation processes may contribute to transformation in mediatization, which again creates new conditions for mediated communications. Furthermore, in mediatization, changes are interrelated with changes in the wider environment, as with the political shift in the case of Trump and the US.

### **Religion in the “digital world”**

Take religion as a cultural and social field in the “digital world”. We learn from the US case, and also from European countries like Poland and Hungary, that religion is heavily involved in the populist political domain. The close link between the Orthodox Church and president Putin’s reign in Russia adds to the list. The uses of conservative religious references in nationalist policies and discourse do something to the understanding of the religious communities and traditions involved and also with the category of “religion”.

The media practices of those in power to support their political aims and to counter and suppress other voices with arguments from religion, extensively draw upon digital affordances. As do counter-voices from within religious communities. Digital technologies offer new ways to argue politically with religion. These technologies also change the communication patterns of religious communities and of individual believers in relation to established religious traditions.

A mediatization of religion takes place to the extent that religious conceptions, practices and institutions over time are changed – or transformed – in the ongoing uses of digital media and technologies. Such changes may be initiated by conscious actors. However, with the expanding datafication and role of algorithms in digital communication, transformations are built into the systems provided by Facebook, Google or other institutional

players. The digital affordances and practices then contribute to change religion.

We are in the midst of the digital “revolution”. We know very well how printing technology in a historic period of unrest between Catholics and Protestants in Europe contributed to changing the religious and political landscape. It is difficult to gain oversight of the consequences of the digital transformations in the contemporary social, cultural and political environment as it happens. To look for mediatization processes may give some clues to the changes.

The 1969 UNESCO conference on mass media or mass communication in society was followed by a call for research. Today, that is also needed on the new digital world. There is a need for research on the ongoing transformations as well as attempts to understand and act by conscious citizens and believers. ■

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# Social media intoxication – time for a detox?

Lorenzo Vargas

*Could connecting the next three billion people to the Internet contribute a global decline in mental health? Another argument for a rights-based approach to connectivity.*

According to a recent research report from the Pew Research Centre on trends in social media use in the United States, 74% of Facebook users in that country visited the platform at least once a day, and 51% did so several times a day. The numbers are similar for those using Snapchat (63% once a day; 49% several times a day) and Instagram (60% once a day; 38% several times a day).<sup>1</sup>

The study also found that approximately 88% of adults aged 18-29 in the United States use at least one social media platform on a regular basis. And while that share is smaller among older age groups – 78% among those aged 30 to 49, 64% among those ages 50 to 64, and 37% among those 65 and older<sup>2</sup> – the numbers suggest that social media is increasingly at the heart of the way people communicate in that country, a trend also seen in other developed countries with high rates of internet penetration.<sup>3</sup> Whether it is to state a political position, inform friends about a job change, or share photographs from a recent vacation, people, particularly younger people, increasingly view social media platforms as *the* main avenues to express themselves.

However, alongside the growing centrality of social media platforms in everyday life, a new trend is emerging. The idea of occasionally taking a temporary break from engaging with social media platforms, often referred to as a “social media detox”, is gradually becoming more popular. For example, a 2017 study showed a staggering 71% monthly trend increase over the previous

year number of searches and mentions of “social media detox/breaks” in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

This trend has emerged as the body of evidence about the mental health implications of excessive social media use has continued to grow. Research has shed light on the relationship between social media use, low self-esteem – especially as people compare the reality of their lives with the curated portrayals of the lives of their social media contacts – and feelings of dissatisfaction.<sup>5 6</sup> Studies have also shown that taking a temporary break from social media may in some cases result in higher reported levels of well-being.<sup>7</sup>

## Connectivity as a development benefit

This growing awareness about the mental health implications of excessive social media use comes at a time when connectivity for people in developing countries is being increasingly understood as one of the building blocks of economic growth and sustainable development. For example, the World Bank’s 2016 World Development Report,<sup>8</sup> which focused on the development benefits of the adoption of digital technologies, emphasizes the need to increase reliable internet access and establish the right policy frameworks in order to unleash a new wave of innovation and growth.

Similarly, Huawei’s Global Connectivity Index<sup>9</sup> underscores the need for developing countries to invest in key technological developments, such as broadband internet and cloud computing, in order to catalyse GDP growth. This understanding is, of course, also reflected in the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which highlights the importance of internet access and digital infrastructure under Goals 9 and 17.

This would not be so concerning if people in developing countries who have only recently been able to become Internet users – about 250,000,000 people came online for the first time in 2017, though about 3.5 to 4 billion people still lack access<sup>10</sup> – were all able to access an open and transparent version of the Internet. Instead, many of the people coming online for the first time are doing it through their mobile phones<sup>11</sup> and using data packages – called “Zero-Rating” plans<sup>12</sup> – that

privilege social media platforms<sup>13</sup> and make access to other internet sites extremely expensive. It is estimated that around 45% of mobile service providers around the world offer zero-rating services.<sup>14</sup>

Consider the following example: you are offered a basic mobile plan for \$10 a month that allows you to make calls and receive SMS. Each time you use your phone to connect to the internet, you have to pay a \$1 fee per 100 MB. However, the plan allows you to access some parts of the internet, such as your Facebook and Snapchat accounts, and other pages included in the plan, without having to pay that fee. Sounds like great deal, right? Well, if you are someone on a tight budget, as most working people in developing countries are, what is likely to occur is that you would simply limit your usage to Facebook, Snapchat, and the few other pages you can access.

As a result, you would have the illusion of being a user of the internet, and your government's Ministry of ICTs would likely count you

as such in its statistics, but you would actually be merely a user of a very small part of the internet and would not really be able to capitalize on all the possibilities offered by 21st century digital communications. All of this while your mobile plan provider pockets a bonus from Facebook and Snapchat for privileging its content over the content offered by an up-and-coming technology company from your own country. This example is of course a very simplistic characterization of Zero Rating plans, with far more comprehensive analysis available elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> and is only used to better inform the reader.

But while the governance and policy issues related to Zero Rating plans have been explored at length, there are other dimensions to take into account. In addition to violating the notion of net neutrality (the concept that all online traffic should be treated equally by internet service providers), undermining fair competition,<sup>16</sup> and representing a serious challenge to freedom of expression and information,<sup>17</sup> we must also consider the mental health implications that

Zero Rating plans can have on new internet users.

This is because for many of the people accessing the internet for the first time, their experiences are being heavily mediated by social media sites as a result of the availability of these types of plans. If we are to take the mounting evidence about the relationship between excessive social media use and a deterioration in mental health seriously, we should be asking the question of whether people accessing the internet through Zero Ratings plans are unwillingly being put at greater risk of suffering mental health disorders.

There is limited comparative research on

# 30 DAY SOCIAL MEDIA DETOX

<b>day 1</b> no facebook until 12 pm.	<b>day 2</b> no social media updates today!	<b>day 3</b> no social media scrolling till 11 am.	<b>day 4</b> call 3 friends today. - don't just stalk!	<b>day 5</b> spend 2 hours phone free with someone.	<b>day 6</b> twitter free day!
<b>day 7</b> meditate 15-20 min. phone free	<b>day 8</b> limit of 20 min. social media today.	<b>day 9</b> no facebook today!	<b>day 10</b> no status updates today!	<b>day 11</b> 1 hour of an activity you've never done.	<b>day 12</b> limit of 20 min. social media today.
<b>day 13</b> no SM until 2 pm today.	<b>day 14</b> first hour of today phone free.	<b>day 15</b> halfway there! no SM ALL day.	<b>day 16</b> no phone at meals all day.	<b>day 17</b> laptop closed and off by 6 pm!	<b>day 18</b> exercise phone free today.

the impact of Zero Rating plans that would allow us to truly understand how these types of plans affect users across contexts. However, one very focused study from South Africa found that use of Zero Rating plans was tangibly shaping low income users' behaviours by increasing the amount of time they spent online, especially on Facebook, even if they were not first time internet users.

Examples of users' feedback included "It's an everyday thing. I'm addicted I can't sleep without being online" and "I feel like if am not on [the internet] and not checking often, I would feel I am out of the world, and not in tune with what's happening"<sup>18</sup> This echoes the argument currently being studied by researchers and activists that many social media platforms were designed to contain features that may contribute to some users experiencing addiction, restlessness, and a pervasive "fear of missing out".<sup>19 20</sup>

While it is clear that the effects of increased social media use vary according to contextual and cultural factors, the mere possibility that people's mental health may be being put at risk is cause for concern and should spark greater attention from researchers and policy-makers. It also presents another argument for a rights-based approach to communication policy that upholds net neutrality, privacy, and accessibility, as advocated by the Web Foundation's recent "#ForTheWeb" campaign, which among other things calls for "technologies support the best in humanity and challenge the worst so the web really is a public good".<sup>21</sup> ■

#### Notes

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# Homo sapiens or homo algorithmus?

## Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm

*The digital revolution is one of the megathemes of our times – if not the one megatheme. It certainly stands for the most fundamental cultural revolution I have experienced in my own life-time.*

When I became a university student in the early 1980s, I was very proud to actually use a typewriter. I never took a typewriting class, which I regret to this very day, but I wrote my seminar papers with my typewriter feeling very important just because of the technology I used. When I later arrived in Berkeley for an exchange year in theology, for the first time I came across fellow students who used computers for their studies. I received invitations for the peace group I got involved in, which were written and printed using computers.

My image of these technologies was transformed. I had thought of computers as stuff that was used by snobby students trying to copy the corporate world in order to look really cool, but I started realizing that I'd been wrong. I began to develop a sense that these new technologies could perhaps be used for very good things such as effective involvement in civil society.

When I got back to Germany, I soon began work on my dissertation and bought a computer to do so. And I realized how important it had become for me when I got arrested for blocking a truck carrying nuclear weapons and was condemned by the court to pay a fine as a substitute for serving a few weeks in prison. I refused to pay until they threatened to confiscate my computer, the only valuable thing I possessed. I paid because I realized that losing my computer simply was not an option for me.

At that time, I still would have never been able to conceive of how much the computer and

the digital technology at its core would ultimately change my life. How it would change all of our lives. How it would change our communication patterns. How it would change our patterns of discourse. How it would change lives in work and industry. How it would change our view of what technology could make possible. And, finally, how it would maybe even change our image of the human being itself. The title of one of the most discussed books of these past years illustrates this: *Homo Deus* by Noah Yuval Harari.

In history, there have always been progressive optimists that welcome all things new, and sometimes promise a golden age along with it, or even predict the ultimate liberation of humankind and the end of all worries and care. And then there are the prophets of doom, like those who predicted that the railway would destroy the human soul if it exceeded the speed of 15 miles an hour.

We in the Protestant Churches in Germany are in the thick of these discussions about what may come: some see digitization as the fulfillment of a biblical vision. You can certainly sense a little of the Pentecostal spirit blowing in the new possibilities of the digital world and its non-hierarchical communication model of all-to-all. But for equally good reasons we are also pointed to the dark side of ourselves. Some of the algorithms we use daily serve to reinforce our opinions and preferences.

I have the impression that we all associate the catchword “digital revolution” with a sense of fundamental change, sometimes slightly sinister. But when we ask again and again and dig down to the core of the matter, we sense in almost every area, at the end of the day no one really knows what is to come. Therefore, conjectures about the impact of the digital revolution may reflect more the hopes and concerns of the beholder than a truly objective situation.

### **What are human beings?**

When we look at the human being from a theological point of view, we must reflect upon what the biblical testimonies say about human beings.

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.”



These verses are from Psalm 8, a prayer in the Psalter of the Old Testament, which in its own way replies to this eternal question: What are human beings?

Naturally there are many different ways of answering this question and whole libraries that try to do so: a human being is a “zoon logikon” or “rational animal” as Aristotle said, to stress the difference compared to animals. Today, some understand humankind more “biologically” as one animal among many other similar animals or as a somewhat complicated chemical algorithm machine, as a plaything of complicated biochemical accidents whose freedom is only deceptive. Yuval Noah Harari’s fundamental thesis in *Homo Deus* is based on his view of the human being as fundamentally governed by algorithms rather than by free will.

“I sense that a certain desire comes up in myself, because this desire is being generated by biochemical processes in my brain. These processes can be deterministic or coincidental, but in no case free.”<sup>1</sup>

In his new book Harari soberly states,

“Our emotions are not some specifically human spiritual attitude or mirror any kind of ‘free will’. Emotions are rather biochemical mechanisms

used by all mammals and birds to quickly calculate probabilities of survival and reproduction. Emotions are not based on intuition, inspiration or freedom – they are based on calculation.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet biblical tradition did not define humankind through itself but first and foremost in relation to, and being different from, God. Biblical anthropology starts by praising God. Humans are “little lower than God”, but still lower. On the one hand, that reflects their amazement that God has given them “dominion over the works of God’s hands” – creation, including all sheep and cattle, wild animals and birds and fish. On the other hand, the psalmist is immediately reminded – despite this dominion over the created world – that he is lower than God, and is not homo deus, but homo sapiens. If humans are really homo sapiens then it is revealed in their ability to distinguish themselves in their relation to God, even though they have been given so much power and dominion in God’s creation.

This brings us to another central aspect of Christian anthropology: The affirmation of human dignity does not rest on human perfection but on God’s love. It is crucial that, in a theological view, affirmation of human dignity is based exclusively on God’s action and not on human action. To have shown this, is the special merit of the Lutheran doctrine of justification which, in 1999, was officially accepted by the Roman Catholic church as well when the Vatican signed the statement on the justification doctrine developed together with the Lutheran World Federation.

Accepting our finiteness and laying it in God’s hands is one of the most liberating promises of the biblical justification idea, especially based on Paul’s writings. If we are justified by our faith in Christ and not by our good works, we do not have to base our certitude of salvation any longer on achievement and perfection. We can live from plenitude.

## Responding to the digital revolution

How can these theological considerations give orientation for our very concrete responses to the digital revolution?

Theology affirms the dynamic relationship between God and human beings. On the basis of Michael Welker's introduction of the concept of emergence from physics into theology one can see the work of the Holy Spirit in the creative and sometimes surprising turns which the history of a human being or human communities or even of nature can take. No algorithm can predict such turns. History is open. Visions of a world in which algorithms take over are human power phantasies denying both human and divine agency.

The close link between human and divine agency, however, points toward human responsibility. Human beings respond to God's action by living responsibly. As a consequence, the use of digital technology must be sensitive to the conditions of human agency. There is a necessity for human self-limitation to make sure that responsible action continues to be possible.

We must not wait, and hide or delete fake content only afterwards. With this method, we are always too late. The algorithm is a central component of the business model, so it must be also the focus of our interest. The big challenge is consciously to deal with algorithms and responsibly shape them. Simply leaving these powerful shapers of public culture to commercially driven selection mechanisms is as wrong as subjecting them to pure state control and, thus, potentially to authoritarian censorship.

Public accountability could be achieved by boards, which would include representatives of various political and societal groups and thereby guarantee the pluralistic character of such accountability. One could maybe learn from the experience of public broadcasting structures in different countries.

If the dignity of the human person is the basis for such public accountability, there is no risk of censorship in the name of some ideology. On the contrary, it would be a firm barrier to such ideological takeover efforts. It is worth imagining what would happen if an information search automatically meant that well-researched and presented quality content was made available and given priority.

The extreme concentration of power, which

we experience in the digital business world, implies of course a call to responsibility aimed at those who control this power. Self-critical assessment of their role in shaping society and being the source of serious threats to fundamental conditions for the discourse in civil society must be a central part of digital corporate culture.

Nevertheless, of course trusting in responsible action by the corporations is not enough. We need international institutions that control corporate power. To ground international regulation for the digital world we need to intensify the human rights-based global discourse on this theme in order to find a common understanding of rules that can become binding for everyone on the globe. Effective international anti-trust legislation would be needed. One step to hold digital corporations socially accountable would be international laws which prevent tax evasion by using tax havens like Ireland to circumvent appropriate taxation elsewhere.

In a recent study, the Bertelsmann Foundation has explored a field of ethical reflection which deserves to get much more attention than it has so far. How can those who give birth to the algorithms, which increasingly shape so much of our reality, be taught to reflect on the moral dimension of what they are doing? While business ethics has been an established discipline at the universities for a long time, algorithm ethics is a new discipline.

Responsible shaping of digitization preserves us from being seduced by false internet gods. It is not Google but God to whom we can say with the words of Psalm 139: "You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and are acquainted with all my ways." (Psalm 139, 2f.).

Despite all digitization, despite all algorithms and artificial intelligence, God knows me better than I know myself. Ultimately, that does not depend on the quantity of data produced about me but on the depth of the relationship that grows through love and leaves me my mystery, my specialness, my uniqueness. God remains the first counterpart. But among all humans, it is my wife

who knows me best – and that is how it should stay. ■

#### Notes

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Heinrich Bedford-Strohm is Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Bavaria and Chairman of the Council of Evangelical Churches in Germany. From 2004 until 2011 he held the Chair of Systematic Theology and Contemporary Theological Issues in the Faculty for Human Sciences at the Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg, Germany. Since 2011 he is Honorary Professor at the University of Bamberg. He is also, since 2009, Extraordinary Professor at the Theological Faculty in Stellenbosch, South Africa. In 2008 Bedford-Strohm was the Founding Director of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Research Centre for Public Theology in Bamberg, which is a member of the Global Network for Public Theology. His books focus on themes of social justice, the ecumenical discussion on creation, bioethics, civil society, migration and asylum, and Public Theology. His newest book is on the church: *“Radikal lieben. Anstöße für eine mutige Kirche der Zukunft (2017).*

# Churches taking positions in the digital age

Christoph Anders

*In the German church setting of today, two main positions regarding the challenges of the Digital Age can be found: either a rather defensive rejection or a more enthusiastic welcome. What might be the elements of an adequate and theologically rooted approach upcoming transformations in communication? This short article will discuss key points leaving others – no less important – for another occasion.*

Two months ago. Morning Prayer in the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). The theme of the meeting was “The faith of young people”. Therefore, young church representatives guided the devotions and a student lady started reflecting on the relationship between older and younger generations in the life of the churches. Most of the synod members switched off their Smartphones, settled back in their chairs and waited for inspiration. Instead, the audience was explicitly called to make immediate and active use of their Smartphones looking for a special link with options to comment on the key issues and what was being said on the floor.

Quite hesitantly at first, I decided to join in this initiative. However, a certain panic ensued, because – far from being either a digital native or a master of digital literacy – I seemed to be the only one to fail to open the link. The first comments appeared on the huge screen of the conference hall, while I was trying to hide my ignorance from my neighbours. Finally I got it, offered my 40 characters worth of thought and some seconds later it appeared as one part of a huge puzzle on

the screen.

It turned out to be exciting to read and interpret the growing synopsis of the reflections of others. So I felt at the same time hesitance and enthusiasm, exclusion and inclusion. Later I asked myself: could I possibly make meaningful use of such an instrument in a youth-service in a local parish?

Christmas Eve at home. As a long and time-honoured tradition the united family starts singing Christmas carols. Since hymnbooks don't include all the popular songs and choices come up spontaneously, there have been no copies prepared but a collection of different books is offered. This causes a time-consuming search for songs and agree upon verses.

This year's big surprise was the quick and easy consensus we came to, due to the children's internet based access to an endless reservoir of songs on respective platforms. Even grandmother was included since one iPad offered texts in huge letters, readable even in a Christmas tree candle-light atmosphere. The family choir, supported by different electronic instruments, sounded as moving as in years gone by. The only person working in an analogue way was the old man playing the piano

### **Different dimensions of a complex issue**

Just two moments in time and I am aware that such experiences do not reach an adequate level of looking at the problems and promises of digitalization in our times. But they helped me to examine some ambivalent dimensions of this complex issue in a personal and a more matter of fact way. My own ambiguities seem to be symptomatic for other groups in the churches. Simplifying the issue a bit, two main positions seem to dominate with regard to the impacts of Digitalization: A more traditional one would insist on the risks and challenges of those processes. It advocates reducing the influence of electronic devices and social media on people's lives and on the churches to an inevitable minimum.

A more progressive position emphasizes the inevitable dynamic of a radical digitalization and its positive impacts on the lives of persons,

communities and churches, trying to establish the churches as part of the digital avant-garde. The pros and cons of both positions need, however, to be related to one fundamental point: since the churches' core mandate consists in communicating the Good News to all people, it is crucial whether churches and church-related actors merely react to the changes in our lives created through the digital culture or whether they adopt and implement proactive positions and behaviours. What matters in the end is to what extent the churches' ways of communicating the Word helps people to receive and understand it and let their lives be transformed through the Holy Spirit.

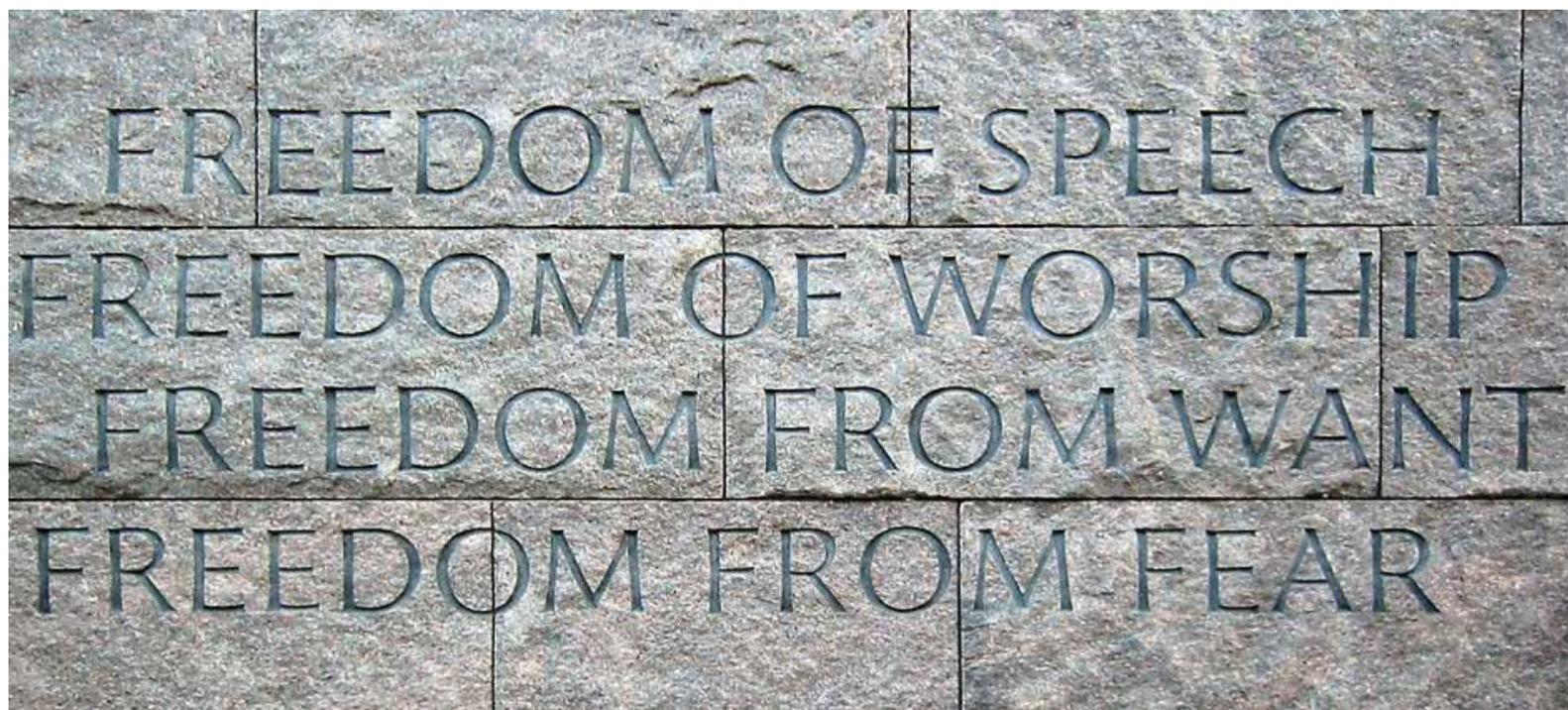
### **A backward glance**

Here it might be helpful to look quickly back into our own history, starting some 500 years ago.

Without the invention of printing with mechanical, movable type, the ideas of the Reformation, born in different regions in Europe and carried all over the world, might have gone under in the blink of an eye. But thanks to clever mechanics and equally gifted business men, those revolutionary thoughts were in the world to stay, despite cruel punishments. Not only was the word a sword, so was printed paper and both were used to fight for and against the reformation and the new forms of freedom that eventually followed.

In retrospect, it is not only theological aspects of the reformation that owe printing a certain amount of success. So, too, does education, pillar of the protestant house and, consequently, everything we connect today with individual responsibility, democracy and human rights. In the beginning of the era of affordable printing, churches were at the forefront of the movement using it to spread the Gospel. In the 19th century, when prices were dropping due to even faster and cheaper methods, the mission societies led the creation of pamphlets and fundraising materials to further their cause, using their own machinery.

One hundred years later and with incomes dwindling, the mission societies embraced digital technology, axing postage and expediting communication between the continents. They were also prepared to purchase the necessary equip-



ment for their partners abroad. This might help us to understand how, at particular moments in the history of the church and for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel in a relevant way, there has been an alliance with technical revolutions in the area of communication.

In the 1990s the call for a “netiquette” – rules on how to behave and speak while online – seemed necessary. Since then, the world has had to come up with new words to describe unwanted behaviour: fake news, hate speech, body shaming and many more. Behaviour, that formerly was not shown openly or only when disguised, is now displayed with names and faces visible. It is good to notice that churches are among those who are clearly speaking up against hate and other forms of communication denying the human dignity of individuals and groups of people. The defence of human dignity will continue to be a major task of churches, whose voices will be heard when they act in a truly ecumenical way.

### **And so to truth telling**

“What is truth?” This old question is nowadays highly relevant again, since battles between different understandings of truth, of facts in history, science and culture are becoming more and more polemical in tone. Churches cannot avoid these battles but they have to learn and to teach reading the signs of the times in new ways. Whenever propaganda, hate, intolerance and aggression, division and destruction of community are

promulgated, the churches’ voices have to insist that learning the truth has to do with humble authenticity, precise discussion, constructive dialogue and constructive action based on signs of solidarity. There is enough evidence already that the going will not be easy when trying to unmask falsity and to defend openness and confidence in authentic communication.

In spring 2018, at the World Council of Churches’ Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, there was hardly anyone without a smartphone or tablet. Apparently, without fears regarding safety and privacy, Christians from all over the world corresponded, talked to and shared their impressions with “friends” and on different platforms. On the positive side, travelling to be physically present is not that necessary any more. One can take part in conferences at any place or time wherever one is located and electricity is provided: filming and immediate broadcasting, i.e. streaming, takes one right into an event. Like online chatting with friends, for many people video conferences are state of the art.

Looking at larger meetings and conferences within the worldwide ecumenical movement, we may insist that direct encounter between people of different churches and confessions needs to be preserved. At the same time nobody can deny the obvious benefits for participation and inclusion provided by modern social media in such ecumenical settings. Sharing of hope and suffering is possible when new forms of mutuality and dialogue

come into being, the bond of love is extended between brothers and sisters near and far, and the fruits of the Spirit's work can be seen inside and outside the wall of conference centres at the same time. Digitalization has to be a top priority on the agenda of the Ecumenical movement.

Freedom is one of the promises communication is based on. Together with the spread of social media use worldwide, today we also face all over the world shrinking spaces in civil societies. Missions and church-related development agencies together with many of their partners are worried. Especially in non-democratic societies, meta data produced from the internet are utilized to spy on users. It is no longer men and women candidly sniffing out private behaviour, as we remember from former times. Now algorithms read, connect and react. If a person visits the website of a mission agency that is advocating protecting human rights and propagates those rights on international social media platforms against a government, he or she might be declared an enemy of the people or even a terrorist. Soft- and hardware developers seem to be forced by governmental linked forces to leave entry points for spying and industrial interest.

Enjoying freedom of religion and speech in many countries today, churches advocate for human rights together with people and organizations of goodwill. This is another impact of digitalization, where the well-established cooperation in development and mission between ecumenical actors in the Global North and in the Global South has to stand the test of being helpful in difficult situations. We see new power constellations and it is no coincidence that in many places alliances grow between autocratic governments and international media corporations. There seem to be mutual benefits in widening the range of power. Therefore, new forms of confronting those global and regional centres of power will be needed in the digital age. The authority of the discourse of the churches however is not based on loudness and power but on the truth-generating loving force of the Holy Spirit.

In times of trouble, justice and peace for all are costly, involving digital means has its price.

Who, but the worldwide church has it in itself to connect Christians – and other people of good will – to tackle the challenges the whole world is facing. It seems to be an important time for churches and church-related organizations to call upon those among their members who want to turn the digital realm and consequently the analogue world into better places. This time, challenges can be addressed and problems solved and, thus, wars avoided! It would prove that humans can learn from their mistakes and work together for life in all its fullness.

The above-mentioned discussions in the EKD-Synod bear signs of hope. The young people lit fireworks of different ideas and programs that churches, parishes and individuals should do to welcome in the transformations of the digital age – without neglecting the many risks. And they found resonance in the auditorium since at the end a voluminous package of short- and long-term measures was adopted. Priority areas for action have been determined and sisters and brothers expressed confidence and hope that in the digital age, as in any age before, there are many ways to discern signs of the Spirit's actions in the world and to react firmly and joyfully in the life of the churches. ■

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# ¿Radio para los sin voz o radio para los sin voz pública?

Rodrigo Araya

*El movimiento de lo que hoy llamaríamos Radios Comunitarias inicia su acción en Latinoamérica en los tiempos en que el sector popular comienza a adquirir presencia pública. Fines de los 60, principios de los '70, fue una época que en diversos países se comenzaron a producir modificaciones institucionales que buscaban integrar a sectores populares a la sociedad, hasta entonces marginados de cuestiones laborales, sindicales, e incluso electorales. Un dato: en Chile, los analfabetos recién pudieron votar en la Parlamentaria de marzo de 1973.*

**E**n este ambiente de ampliación de derechos, la radiodifusión ofreció una tecnología pertinente para que el sector popular pudiera comenzar a expresarse. Muchas de estas experiencias fueron auspiciadas por entidades no populares, como la Iglesia Católica. De allí que el lema “Dar voz a los que no tienen voz”, obtuviera una amplia recepción, pues logró dar cuenta del espíritu que movilizaba a quienes impulsaron estas iniciativas: permitir que quienes eran vistos como sin voz (el sector popular) adquirieran voz.

Una distinción simple pero demoledora: Mientras la información la entiende como el envío de mensajes sin posibilidad de retorno no-mecánico (algo así como solo reciprocidad de informaciones-estímulo y no diálogo), a la Comunicación la ve como el intercambio de mensajes con posibilidad de retorno no-mecánico entre polos igualmente dotados del máximo coeficiente de comunicabilidad.

Por ello, le atribuye el carácter “privativo de

las relaciones dialógicas interhumanas o entre personas éticamente autónomas, y señala justamente el vínculo ético fundamental con un “otro” con quien “necesito comunicarme”; el “estado abierto” como apertura a, o descubrimiento-aceptación de la alteridad en la interlocución, y, por reflejo, de una conciencia de mí mismo” (Pasquali, 1990: 50).

Así, los medios de difusión (ya no los podemos llamar de Comunicación) quedan instalados precisamente como medios, no como fines en sí mismos. El desafío quedó operacionalizado: ¿cómo poner estos medios al servicio de la expresión del sector popular? Esto, en el entendido que la comunicación (la verdadera comunicación), no ocurre en la relación medios-audiencia, sino en la relación entre las personas. Por lo tanto, la pregunta orientadora fue cómo poner los medios al servicio de la comunicación dialógica entre las personas. Ello, en el entendido que gracias a la comunicación dialógica, los territorios se transforman en comunidades.

A esta nueva comunicación fue necesaria bautizarla, para hacerla distinguible de la comunicación otra, masiva y alienadora, contra la que se quería luchar. Ello, aunque implicara encontrar un nombre redundante, como el de Comunicación Dialógica (Huesca, 1994). Este ejercicio no resultó fácil: Fuentes Navarro (1991) documentó la convivencia de al menos 33 denominaciones para esta comunicación-otra. Ello a pesar del consenso amplio sobre el significado de esta práctica: la búsqueda de la transformación social y el requerimiento de la participación de los actores sociales (1991: 178).

## Tres posibilidades

No obstante la dispersión, tres fueron las denominaciones más empleadas: popular, alternativa y participativa (Fuentes Navarro, 1991: 163). Abordarlas temporalmente, permite explicar la atracción que ellas generaron.

Así, la primera que surge es Comunicación Popular. Su origen es tautológico, dado que se trata de una propuesta de comunicación que busca dar voz al sector popular (reitero: considerado como sin voz). Por lo tanto, la denominación Comunicación Popular encierra aquella que emerge desde

el sector popular, la que, en consecuencia, permite instalar los temas, intereses y las voces del sector popular en el espacio público.

La segunda, cronológicamente hablando, sería Comunicación Alternativa. Su propuesta resulta bastante clara: dado que el sector popular está alienado, los contenidos que emite a través de la radio no escaparían de esta condición. Eviden-



temente, la gran influencia que en América Latina alcanzó la Escuela de Frankfurt y su diagnóstico sobre la industria cultural, está detrás de esta conclusión. Por lo tanto, la Comunicación Popular no ofrece garantías suficientes, pues no resulta evidente que los contenidos que produce el sector popular estén libres de alienación.

Por ello, la voz *Alternativa* añade una complementariedad imprescindible: se trata de entregar contenidos alternativos a los oficiales. En consecuencia, emerge una pregunta obvia: ¿qué sujetos o actores sociales están en condiciones de producir contenidos alternativos? La respuesta va a depender de lo que entendamos como antídoto que permita a los sujetos mantenerse libre de la alienación que la Industria Cultural tiene capacidad de provocar.

Para identificar el antídoto, tomo un breve desvío. Como observa Torrico (2000), la teoría crítica frankfurtiana y la escuela funcionalista estadounidense (Mass Communication Research, o MCR), comparten una sobrevaloración del poder

de los medios respecto de la capacidad de los individuos de resistir a estos contenidos. Así, estas dos opuestas escuelas, atribuyen una capacidad similar a los medios, aunque con diferentes resultados. Para la MCR, los mensajes emitidos por los Medios tendrían la capacidad de que las personas tradicionales pasen a ser modernas (Rogers, 1962), con lo cual se daría el paso de subdesarrollo a desarrollo. Para Frankfurt, tendrían la capacidad de alienar a las personas (Horkheimer y Adorno, 1969), permitiendo el predominio del capitalismo.

Por lo tanto, emerge una segunda coincidencia entre ambos (opuestos) paradigmas: la condición letrada inmuniza a los sujetos del poder de los medios. Ello, por cuanto los letrados o ya están desarrollados, o en posición de prevenirse de las capacidades alienantes de la industria cultural.

En adición, los contenidos alternativos sólo podrían ser elaborados por personas letradas, condición que sí ofrece garantías de que no están afectadas por los influjos alienantes de la industria cultural. De este modo, la Comunicación Alternativa lograría sus objetivos al difundir contenidos alternativos a los de la Industria Cultural, contenidos que debieran generar los efectos esperados: un sector popular movilizado y sacudido de la alienación.

### **Contenidos alternativos**

Así, la denominación Comunicación Alternativa centra su énfasis en la emisión de contenidos alternativos (como ya fue señalado, alternativos a aquello o a quienes buscan impedir tanto la transformación como la participación del sector popular). A pesar del riesgo de ser reiterativo (peor aún: aburrido), insisto en que esta opción (alternativo en los contenidos) implica tener confianza en la capacidad transformadora de los mensajes en una audiencia dada.

Por lo tanto, no se pregunta si además de los contenidos, la comunicación radiofónica puede ser alternativa en alguna otra dimensión.

Nuevamente, un breve rodeo, esta vez para apelar a uno de los cinco conocidos axiomas de Watzlawick (1979): todo mensaje tiene una dimensión de relación y otra de contenido, siendo la relación la que confirma o desmiente el contenido. El uso de la ironía ofrece un ejemplo para graficar esta afirmación: mientras la persona no haga un gesto facial delator, será difícil comprender el contenido, pues no está definida la relación (¿estará ironizando o no?).

Esta propuesta de Watzlawick permite sostener que se puede ser alternativo no sólo en los contenidos sino también en la relación.

Así llegamos a la tercera detención de este breve recuento: la Comunicación Participativa. Como las anteriores, esta denominación aspira ser autoexplicativa: el acento está puesto en la participación, lo que en palabras de Prieto (1985), se produce en el proceso, y no en el producto.

En el plano radiofónico, centrarse en el proceso consiste en ofrecer una alternativa en la relación emisor-audiencia. Esto no significa pasar de una relación vertical a una horizontal, pues ello es tecnológicamente imposible: en la comunicación masiva, inevitablemente habrá un emisor y muchos receptores. La nueva relación florece de una pregunta: ¿cómo poner la comunicación masiva al servicio de la comunicación grupal? La distinción entre ambos niveles (masivo y grupal), incorpora la advertencia que se colige de la diferenciación entre Comunicación e Información propuesta por la Escuela Latinoamericana de Comunicación: la comunicación no se da en el nivel masivo, sino en el nivel grupal, pues sólo aquí la relación dialógica si es posible.

¿Cómo se relaciona esto con lo participativo? Al poner el énfasis en el proceso, y no en los productos, la pregunta que orienta la Comunicación radiofónica Participativa, es ¿cómo usar el proceso de producción radiofónica para posibilitar diálogo en el territorio?

Aunque la respuesta es metodológica (se requieren formatos radiofónicos participativos), su alcance es político: ya no se trata de dar voz a los que no tienen voz, sino de contribuir a que quienes tienen únicamente voz privada adquieran voz pública.

La denominación Comunicación Participativa presupone que todos los actores sociales tienen voz, pero solo algunos poseen la voz legitimada para aparecer en el espacio público.

De allí que bajo esta denominación, el comunicador no sea visto como un productor de mensajes, sino como un agente capaz de generar condiciones para que la comunicación (dialógica) sea posible. De este modo, las identidades pueden construir el relato que les permitirá obtener el reconocimiento que estimen adecuado, y así contar con un nosotros fuerte y movilizador.

Esto tiene una potencia política, pues la política nace simultáneamente con el nosotros: si los problemas radican en el yo, basta con un buen terapeuta. Pero si radican en el nosotros, se requiere un cambio político, es decir, en las condiciones estructurales que afectan a nuestra identidad, marginándola de lo público.

### **Ampliando el número de voces que tienen legitimidad**

En conclusión, tras estas denominaciones, lo que observo es la disputa entre dos proyectos de democratización del Espacio Público. Uno que entiende como suficiente dar voz a los que no tienen voz, sin preocuparse de sí para hacerlo hay subalternos que tienen que hablar con la voz del hegemónico; y otro que entiende que se logra ampliando el número de voces que tienen legitimidad para aparecer en el espacio público.

El segundo tiene presente una advertencia: “como si bastara con el rechazo a ciertos episodios autoritarios para autodenominarse “político”, pero obviando la construcción colaborativa de un tejido social” (Mondada, 2016: 12). Y para ello, nada mejor que la radio, pues ella “habla básicamente su idioma –la oralidad no es únicamente resaca del analfabetismo ni del sentimiento subproducto de la vida para pobres- y puede servir de puente entre la racionalidad expresivo-simbólica y la informativo-instrumental, puede y es algo más que un mero espacio de sublimación: aquel medio que para las clases populares está llenando el vacío que dejan los aparatos tradicionales en la construcción del sentido” (Martín-Barbero, 2003: 325).

Para alcanzar este propósito, no podemos ob-

viar que la mayor parte de los formatos empleados en la radiotelefonía están al servicio de la emisión, y no de la comunicación grupal. Lo anterior puede explicarse por el fuerte influjo que en la región ha tenido la noción de periodismo propia de la modernidad eurocéntrica, noción que incluso ha permeado a los equipos directivos de radioemisoras comunitarias chilenas (Araya, 2014).

Afortunadamente, en América Latina hay experiencia y conocimiento suficiente en formatos participativos. Revisitar los trabajos de WACC, ALER, AMARC es una necesaria estrategia. Ello además nos permitirá descubrir posibles fallencias en nuestra radiodifusión comunitaria. ■

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## Fake news: A threat to digital inclusion?

Grace Githaiga

*Communication among peoples of a nation is critical to understanding how people think, how they exchange their ideas, how they understand issues, and how they articulate their perspectives. But that's not the end of the story.*

The current digital context has seen a proliferation of communication platforms that offer citizens, who are not necessarily journalists, an opportunity to give their views on practically any topic that they are interested in. These platforms range from social media networks, blogs, to vlogs and many others.

Views are usually shared with followers of those generating ideas who may not be necessarily "experts" in the topic, and who in turn comment, or debate on the topic sometimes creating serious disagreements, or even generating further topics. In these engagements, citizens enjoy the right to expression and opinion, which are key in any communication process.

It is important to note that communication rights belong to all citizens as provided for in Article 19 of the Universal declaration on human Rights. This states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."<sup>1</sup>

Further, these Communication rights are linked to other rights such as "the right to vote, free assembly and freedom of association".<sup>2</sup>

The availability of social networks through the Internet has allowed for a multiplicity of engagements on topics by both experts and non-experts so that we now talk of digital inclusion. And

with the proliferation of digital platforms where anyone can associate with anyone and therefore communicate or disseminate messages, it can be argued that there is an attempt of inclusion happening digitally. People are increasingly benefiting from the knowledge society as well as creating knowledge.

Digital inclusion can be interpreted to mean:<sup>3</sup>

- \* Access: Availability, affordability, design for inclusion, and public access. Meaning that communication platforms are not only available but less costly for users.
- \* Adoption: Relevance, digital literacy, and consumer safety. In other words, that users have some level of understanding and can therefore make use of information tools. Further, these users are able to apply communication for civic engagement or social connections. This means that a definition of digital inclusion, needs to take into consideration some of these requirements.

There is recognition of communication rights and the attempt to digitally include all those willing to share their thoughts to the extent that they have access to communication platforms including digital platforms.

However, there are emergent threats to communication rights and digital inclusion namely hate speech online, fake news, and misinformation just to mention a few. This article focuses on fake news as one way that is threatening communication rights and digital inclusion especially in Kenya.

### **Understanding fake news**

When thinking of fake news and how it can it can confuse those who consume it into believing that it is true, a classic example comes to mind. The story *The polygamy hoax that spread from Iraq to Eritrea*<sup>4</sup> reported that the government of Eritrea had made it mandatory for each man to marry two wives. This story which initially sounded genuine, was shared in at least four countries namely Kenya, Nigeria, Eritrea and Sudan. And what made it look like it was real, was that it was carried by mainstream media.

In Kenya, the story trended on twitter with all manner of jokes and disinformation, which were presented as genuine. This prompted a response from the Eritrea Embassy in Nairobi, which refuted the story and termed it “appalling”.

There have been many other fake news in Kenya, in particular during Kenya’s 2017 general election. A case in point is a story that was purported to have emanated from the BBC on Kenya election: Fake CNN and BBC news reports circulate.<sup>5</sup> A fake video supposedly produced by BBC in its Focus on Africa Program was circulated, showing that President Uhuru was bound to win in the August elections. This fake story was even backed by fake surveys that had been “conducted” by the BBC. The logo looked genuine and it was only those with domain names knowledge who were quick to point out that the story was not a genuine BBC story.

But there were many readers who were duped into believing the fake story. And this is not the only story that has been used to get citizens into thinking that some lies are presented as the truth. This then continues to raise the debate on availability of digital platforms to communicate versus what sort of information is shared and its authenticity.

What then is considered as fake news? This is misinformation, disinformation, and falsehoods. Fake news refers to fabricated news. It usually has no basis in fact but is presented as factually accurate. The spreading of fake news, disinformation, is done deliberately to deceive.

In the period leading to and after Kenya’s 2017 general election, there was a marked increase in the publication and sharing of fake news through social media. A lot of the fake news posts amounted to hate speech, ethnic contempt, and inflammatory messages. And in a country that is polarized along ethnicity, some users of social media platform would be targeted just based on their second names as they would be judged to be supporters of either the ruling party of the opposition. In Kenya, it is easy to tell which ethnic community an individual is drawn from based on their second name. However, the name of a person does not necessarily mean that they support

a leader who happens to come from their ethnic group.

As a result, some people felt afraid to share their views as sometimes there would be what people would consider innocent expressions, only for them to attract flak based on their ethnicity. This was obviously an outright threat to the right to right to communication, as well as digital inclusion since there were those who kept away due to this fear of being attacked.

### **But is fake news new?**

It definitely is not. Before digital platforms and social media, there was yellow journalism and the pink sheets. These would be used to churn out fake news and propaganda aimed at influencing audiences in a certain way. They would purport to “expose scandals” or share a “scoop”.

As such, fake news is comparable to propaganda in its popularity as a tool during electioneering. It is therefore not a new phenomenon. The only difference is that we have many and faster ways of spreading misinformation instantaneously, and which have zero costs in terms of advertising.

Social networking in particular has had a major impact on the way we communicate especially for personal use. Fake news is therefore a threat to factual information in particular due to the viral nature of how it gets spread out or shared.

Communication rights come with a responsibility at least to share what is factual. The phenomenon has grown and continues to develop. The fact that people can be anonymous online also provides a cover for the creators of fake news making any accountability efforts futile.

### **Credibility of information**

Fake news creators take advantage of impressionable and already prejudiced audiences who are likely to share the same posts with their networks thus keeping the posts alive. It is sometimes not easy to distinguish fake news sources from legitimate ones with good examples being faked BBC or CNN.

There are Domain names that look like popular ones, and parody accounts such as @

UKENYATA on twitter. This has a single t as opposed to double t. It requires a keen eye to notice this difference. Users therefore need to look out for social accounts that were created a few weeks ago, but have thousands of followers. These are robots at work!

There is also CNM.com as opposed to CNN.com. Such use legitimate logos of news organizations mostly the popular ones which easily dupe users into thinking that they are getting information from the real organisations.

Prevalence of fake news leads to the loss of trust in mainstream media, in social media platforms and detrimentally the Internet.

### **Impact on citizen engagement and policy formulation**

Fake news is then a threat to communication rights as well as digital inclusion as it attracts measures from authorities, which are hinder citizens from enjoyment of expressing themselves. The approaches to combat fake news from the authorities include surveillance, which leads to self-censorship. Further, some governments have been known to control the Internet through internet shutdowns or taxation of internet bundles and airtime.

In addition, others have proposed unjustifiable regulation that is a threat to freedom of expression all in an attempt to disrupt the spread of online falsehoods. Some have legislation that makes creation of fake news unlawful and compel social media platforms to pull down fake news posts. However, it is important to point out here that some of these regulatory routes must be mindful of the human rights and freedoms guaranteed online.

Content control by governments usually restricts the freedom of expression, the freedom of the media, access to information, freedom of opinion and freedom of association. It is important to point out that laws are only justifiable to the extent that they are necessary, proportional and legitimate. And their effect should be to make genuine news media focus to on truth. Considering that fake news is not a new thing, there is no need to use a hammer to kill a fly.

## Fact checking

The first step to take to the practice of communication in this digital era is fact checking. There is need for those communicating to be conscious of what fake news is, its impact, how to spot it and how to stop it. Mainstream media is a casualty of fake news due to the belief that it needs to break news, or beat deadlines to complete a story sometimes compromising credibility. This has seen fake news posts being cunningly passed off as genuine posts from established media outlets. ■

### Notes

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# Fake news, truth and trust

## Mark Beach

*America is addicted to fake news. What “appears” to be a new phenomenon and social concern influenced by the pervasiveness of social media, is actually deeply engrained in the American psyche and political, media, social and religious landscape since the founding of the country.*

The church in America may also be equally indicted in this addiction. From the sordid battle of words during the 1800 presidential campaign between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, to the precipitation of the Spanish-American War through yellow journalism in the late 1890s, and today, internal and external forces attempting to sway elections, fake news is on the verge of or may have already trumped truth.

Don't tell readers what they need to know, tell them what you want them to know. Some call it persuasion, others propaganda. Or different points of view and perspectives, alternate facts, the list goes on. There is nothing new about that.

American journalism has a rich history of jumping back and forth across the line between bias and accuracy. In the same town an afternoon newspaper might peddle the conservative viewpoint while the morning paper might serve up a more liberal viewpoint.

For the discerning reader this may mean subscribing to both newspapers to find out if the glass is half full or half empty and of what significance that may be.

Democracy is built on differing views respecting one another and coming to agreement.

During the 1950s, 1960s and up to the present day, radio and television a plethora of preachers have not only preached the Word, but many have also mixed the Gospel with Patriotism and turned the church into a political battle ground. What is

different today?

## **Social media**

At the outset the age of social media unleashed the opportunity for all voices to be heard, which is supposed to be good. But it hasn't turned out that way.

Expectations that the voiceless might find a voice and the church may find new ways to speak to power, have been eclipsed by the onslaught of incendiary content.

Social media's intensity, their nearly omnipotent presence in society, and the ability for every opinion under the sun to be offered has created a playground for stealthy messaging, voices hidden in the shadows and verbal assaults with the assailant able to hide.

Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook along with Internet trolling have become cafeteria food fights where truth is buried beneath alternate realities, distortions, racist commentary and, more simply put, lies and bullying. Serious journalism and factual reporting are replaced with feelings. Often passionate feelings.

Unfortunately, the promise of social media has ushered in the age of the weaponization of information at new and monumental levels.

Today's post-information age has run into a headwind of information leading to more confusion rather than clarity as was hoped.

There is less evidence instead of more evidence, less understanding and more prejudice. Discernment and accuracy are passé.

For the church, the time-honoured process of discernment, second only to the need for community and fellowship, has flipped to Christ's followers being attracted to information weapons.

In the world of social media reactions to news come in seconds. Truth is irrelevant. The cat is out of the bag and let it go where it may. Whoever can pluck a response fastest on their smartphone wins the war of words, influence and ideas, for that round.

## **Truth has become expendable**

In the U.S. the two primary political parties have ingloriously adapted the strategy that truth is ex-

pendable. Winning is all that matters. And this is nothing new, except perhaps for the degree and intensity of emotions.

Despite a long history of electoral mudslinging, once the election is won or lost the hope for political compromise and doing what is best for the country lay on the horizon.

Today, these qualities appear to have been suspended.

In one corner is President Donald Trump who has repeatedly said most, if not all media, except Fox News, is fake news. He adds, the media are the "enemy of the people".

In the other corner is The Washington Post newspaper and other fact checking organizations documenting the number of lies, misleading claims, exaggerations, and distortions Trump delivers on a daily basis.

As of late November 2018, a few months before Trump completed two years in office, the Post counted nearly 6,500 false and misleading claims on the part of Trump from the day he entered office in January 2017.

Trump counters that the Post is nothing but fake news, so it doesn't really matter. Case closed.

Closing down the free press, or at least a perceived unfriendly press, is a primary building block for authoritarian rule around the world. For the United States this sort of move is antithetical to its core values, as alien as a Star Trek Andorian.

In the middle are readers wondering what is true and not true. Long trusted resources are held with suspicion often with no evidence they are distrustful. And when these institutions are collectively discredited through a broad brush stroke of hatred and bitterness a void is created.

Fake news dilutes truth which in turn erodes trust. Nature abhors a vacuum.

While there has always been an acrimonious relationships between the press and sitting presidents, none have referred to the media en masse, as the enemy of the people. The exclusion goes to certain news outlets speaking highly of the leadership.

## **Is it new that news is now relative?**

What is new is that the majority of Americans

receive their news from online sources, social media hubs and read usually while on the run. Should a fake news hit first, it will take time to undo the damage. For that sites such as Snopes and [FactCheck.org](http://FactCheck.org) have emerged to separate the wheat from chaff. Often their good work is too late. Heads have already been turned, opinions shaped and emotions sparked.

In Gallup polls done after the 2016 election, more than 60% of Americans say they can identify fake news. Yet, another 25% say they have knowingly shared fake news.

There is little exclusivity in who is creating fake news. While the commonly held belief is that right-wing fringe groups are responsible, ironically, there is a liberal based website creating satirical false narratives, even stating the narratives are false. Right wing pundits, however, latch on to this “counter fake news” and release it as real news or perhaps “real” fake news.

Everyone is scoring points. The liberals are making fools out of the conservatives. And the conservatives are swaying public opinion their way. And all are well aware it is fake. And most are making good money at it.

The era of fake news has found church congregations struggling to find ways for parishioners to discern the fake from the real while finding a new path for speaking truth not only to power, but to each other.

And not unlike the world at large fake news polarizes congregations and tears at the fabric of fellowship and community.

“Truth has become individualized,” said Benjamin KL Simon of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches in the Kairos journal. Simon was addressing fake news and Christian freedom.

That individualization has led to entertaining behaviour that was once deemed unacceptable becoming the norm.

What has been the church response to fake news and the impact it has had on communities?

From the Pope through the local pastors the issue of fake news in being addressed, although the efforts are to some degree nascent, and perhaps behind the curve and not direct enough.

Pope Francis wants the Catholic Church to promote “professional journalism which always seeks the truth”. That is good. But how?

The Catholic church has begun to train church communicators on how to identify what is fake and what isn't. But, according to polls a majority of people say they can already identify fake news.

In a sermon at the Lutheran church in Washington state, the pastor urged her congregation to recognize that fake news is not all that different from, well, church gossip. It can be hurtful. That is a good starting place.

In American evangelical churches training materials are pointing toward the fact that the church has the ultimate truth. That message is, of course, salvation and redemption. In America a sizable percentage of Trump's support comes from the evangelical church.

### **Fake news is an addiction.**

The proliferation of fake news means truth is cast aside. And when truth is gone, trust disappears.

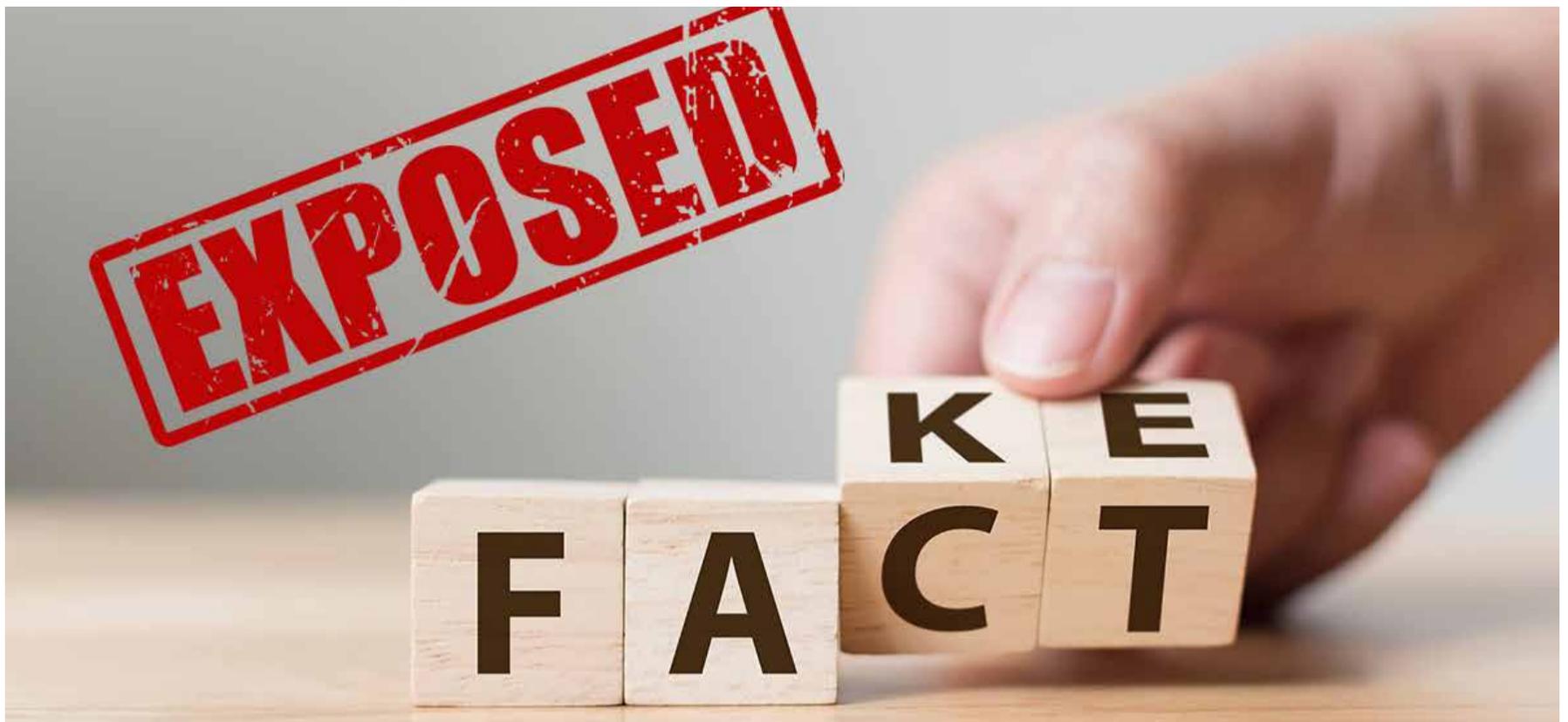
“Facts are tied to trust,” Lee Rainie, director of Internet, Science and Technology Research at the Pew Research Center said. “Trust is what binds people together.”

In a report on public views related to facts and trust after the 2016 U.S. election, Rainie says that trust means overcoming uncertainty and vulnerability and cementing interdependence to achieve collective action. Facts are the atomic unit of truth, drive outcomes for individuals and societies, underlie justice and are democratic.

During the administration of Barack Obama, Trump and the birther movement kept alive the lingering doubt that Obama was born in the U.S., despite the irrefutable evidence of a birth certificate from Hawai'i where Obama was in fact born.

Was it that Trump actually believed his own lies? It is hard to say what he and his other partners really believed. The truth was no longer as important as the “new” fact, and the fanning of the fire to discredit truth.

For the Jefferson/Adams presidential campaign of 1800, party line newspapers and politicians at the time tossed around rumours, lies and



innuendo, even hiring “hatchet men” to denounce the other.

The yellow journalism of the 1890s was in actuality a circulation competition between publishers Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. The facts be damned, many articles came with little or no research done, emphasizing exaggerations, fear-mongering and sensationalism.

Does that sound a bit like the Fake News of today?

Except the Pulitzer/Hearst approach to increasing circulation swayed the American population to back rebels in Cuba battling Spain, eventually leading to U.S. involvement. The impact of Fake News in 1898 on the war is indisputable.

Great headlines and sensational stories sold lots of newspapers for the two publishers.

### **Loss of trust**

Much in fake news today is meant to deflect readers from the truth. It is not only an assault on facts, but filled with personal attacks on others. Who is willing to trust a person with dubious yet unproven credentials?

The story of fake news runs parallel with the unbridled nature of social media. Hatred bombs can be lobbed into the public square causing panic, fear and distrust.

Gallop and Pew Research surveys following the 2016 election showed that Americans trust in

everything from the government to the church plummeted in the decades following World War II and today are at their lowest points in history. In the 1960s more than 70% of population reflected strong trust in government, church, media, education systems, and other crucial institutions.

Can this all be blamed on social media?

Social media are meant to be a personal experience, but they are also able to destroy the person. The exact thing the church is meant to build up, fake news is tearing down, the individual who God created.

The breakdown of persons means the disintegration of the community. The weakening of the community means the weakening of the church and the power it provides to bring justice.

The tide of fake news coming through social media is so quick there is little time to do as the folks at [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org/) suggest: consider the source, read behind the headline, check the author, what's the support, check the date, is this some kind of joke, check your biases and consult experts.

At the end of the day Abraham Lincoln may have a message a hundred and fifty years too late, “Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe.” ■

Mark Beach is former director of communications for Mennonite Central Committee, USA, and former director of communications of the World Council of Churches.

# The struggle for community radio in the Philippines

Ilang-Ilang Quijano

*The challenges facing community radio remain similar all over the Asia-Pacific region. That much was evident, during the 4th AMARC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of Community Radios held 16-19 November in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. With the theme “Community Radio for Resilient Communities”, the conference gathered over 200 community radio broadcasters, networks, and civil society organisations and individuals supporting community radio, including WACC project partner AlterMidya – People’s Alternative Media Network.*

The AlterMidya Network is a national network of independent, progressive, and community-centred media organizations, institutions and individuals in the Philippines. Founded in 2014 during the 1st National Conference of Alternative Media, the network has over 30 member organizations from print, online, and broadcast media, including several community radio stations and programs in the major Philippine islands of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

In Mindanao, the Radyo ni Juan network is present not just in major cities, but even in second and third class municipalities that large commercial radio stations usually ignore. While itself a commercial outfit, Radyo ni Juan has a strong community radio component, helping to set up stations for underserved communities of farmers and indigenous peoples. An example is Radyo Lumad 1575 AM, a community radio run by the Higaonons, an indigenous group in Central Mindanao. Transmitting on 1,000 watts to

cover the provinces of Bukidnon and Misamis Oriental, Radyo Lumad disseminates traditional knowledge, music and chants; as well as national and international news. Radio dramas about and participated in by the indigenous Lumad are also produced by our member outfit Resource Center for People’s Advocacies in Southern Mindanao (RCPA Productions).

Meanwhile, in various radio programs of member outfits in Western and Central Visayas, as well as the Bicol region, fisherfolk and farmers often take the microphone to air concerns on issues affecting their livelihood – such as delays in government livelihood assistance, the buying price of agricultural produce, no fishing zones, etc. They also relate cases of human rights violations brought about by militarization, which the public would otherwise not be aware of. In the Cordillera region, Radyo Sagada broadcasts in mountainous areas that are underserved by the mainstream media, and is run by mostly indigenous women. These women are also active in community affairs such as disaster risk reduction management and campaigns to end violence against women and children.

The national secretariat of the AlterMidya Network, which is based in Metro Manila, produces news and public affairs shows that feature contributions from members around the country. Unlike corporate media newscasts, the stories which appear in our newscast, ALAB Alternatibong Balita (Alternative News), are deeply rooted in the daily struggles of communities of workers, farmers, indigenous peoples, migrants, urban poor, women and youth. The ALAB newscast and public affairs shows are broadcasted to member community radio stations and programs throughout the Philippines. Being an archipelago, a newscast that spans diverse communities in several islands, and which is told in various local languages, is invaluable. Our aim is to unite people from various marginalized communities through the propagation of cultural knowledge, news, and discussion of social issues relevant to the people.

Through our stories, many similarities in problems faced by communities have emerged: land-grabbing, demolition, environmental de-

struction, militarization and human rights violations, labour violations, violence against women, high prices of goods and commodities, etc. Through community radio, AlterMidya provides discussion platforms that reveal the nature of such problems, and links communities to ideas and practices on how these problems can be solved or are being solved in different localities throughout the Philippines.

### **Making it easier for community radio**

At the 4th AMARC Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, AlterMidya participated in a panel discussion on Policy, Regulation and Media Laws and Impacts on Community Radio, together with representatives from The National Press Council of Thailand, Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal, Institute of Advanced Media Arts and Sciences-Japan, and Myanmar Radio and Television.

Before that, an interesting discussion had taken place during one of the workshops – participants from all over the region expressed the need for AMARC, as an international organization of community radio practitioners, to craft a policy paper that would map the community radio media policy landscape in the Asia Pacific, and come up with a set of recommendations that could be used as tools in lobbying for policies that will strengthen community radio in each country.

In the Philippines, broadcasting laws and regulations are not conducive for the proliferation and growth of community radio. Practically only public and private or commercial broadcasting companies are provided for under Republic Act (RA) 3846, or An Act Providing for the Regulation of Radio Stations and Radio Communications, which furthermore requires companies to secure a legislative franchise to operate. Imagine the tedious process one has to undergo to be granted a broadcast franchise, since it is given the same way as laws are enacted in the Philippines: a lawmaker has to sponsor the measure, it has to go through committee hearings and a discussion in the House plenary, it has to gather enough signatures from lawmakers, from where, if approved, it goes to the president for signing.

As if that were not enough, once granted a license, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) has to issue permits for the use of frequencies. Local Government Units also impose additional requirements for radio stations to operate.

Such a system is highly vulnerable to corrupt practices and threats of harassment and actual closure, especially in a political climate of tyranny and fear. For instance, Philippine President. Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly threatened not to renew the franchise of the broadcasting giant ABS-CBN and the Catholic Church's Catholic Media Network, due to media coverage critical of his administration. The NTC also decided this year to close down 30 radio stations in the Davao region for allegedly lacking permits to operate. There have been several incidents wherein the closure of radio stations was ordered by local government officials under the pretext of lacking permits, but in reality, was due to the said station being owned by a rival politician, or having exposed corruption.

If commercial broadcasting companies experience difficulties in acquiring government permits to operate, then it is doubly difficult for community radios. In the Philippines, there is no special law, nor a provision in existing laws, that mandates the government to allot airwaves for non-profit, community broadcasting; neither is community broadcasting formally defined and given recognition in law. While the NTC has issued a set of guidelines allowing the establishment of FM broadcast stations using transmitters with power of less than one kilowatt "to allow localities to have broadcast services with programming that recognizes their local needs and preferences," it does not exempt such stations from going through the same rigorous process as that of commercial broadcast stations. This makes it highly improbable for communities to set up and run their own stations. The more common practice is for community and people's organizations to buy time and hold programs in commercial radio stations.

In this regard, the media policy landscape in other Asia Pacific nations is more conducive for community radio. In the AMARC panel that

AlterMidya participated in, it was revealed that in Thailand and Myanmar, the law explicitly states that 20% of broadcasting frequencies should be allotted for community radio. In Indonesia's broadcasting law, community radio is recognized as one of the three types of broadcasting, together with public and private broadcasting. However, such formal recognition in law does not automatically translate to a thriving community radio practice.

According to Imam Prakoso of AMARC-Asia Pacific, there needs to be a "change in perception" towards community radio, which is still not seen as a major media actor but only as a "complement" to corporate mass media. He also related that it takes an average of six to seven years to get a community radio license; and since their broadcasting law was passed in 2002, only 200 new community radio licenses have been given. He also observed a downward trend in the number of CR stations in Indonesia – from more than a thousand stations 16 years ago, it is now down to around 500.

Meanwhile, Supinya Klangnarong of Thailand said that, while the government has a broadcasting development fund, there are many political and economic pressures that hinder the use of these funds for strengthening community radio. Subas Khatiwada of ACORAB Nepal also mentioned how narrow political interests hinder the genuine development of CR. Recently, provincial governments were given the authority to set up their own radio stations; however, it is the same authority that gives them the power to clamp down on stations.

Khatiwada made a good point regarding media policy: that at the end of the day, "It is not enough to have a community radio policy. It's the quality of the policy that matters." Everyone agreed that lobbying should focus on greater access to public funds, lower fees and less requirements for the acquisition of broadcast franchises, and other measures that generally guarantees the common people's right to communication.

The AlterMidya Network, with the assistance of the World Association of Christian Communication, in 2017 crafted a draft Community Radio Broadcasting Act, which aims to strength-

en people's communication rights through community radio broadcasting in the Philippines. The proposed law formally defines community radio broadcasting, and stipulates that "concerned government branches and agencies shall make it easier for communities to establish community radio stations through the repeal and/or amendments of laws and ordinances that impede their establishment and operation."

While the proposed law has yet to see the light of day in the elite-dominated chambers of Congress, it is at least a step forward in forging a clear policy on community radio. Local broadcasters in Mindanao, including AlterMidya members, are also doing lobbying efforts with the NTC for the issuance of special community radio permits.

Perhaps a coordinated, regional-level study and campaign for strengthened community radio policy would help community radio broadcasters and advocates in each country to more effectively face the political and economic challenges that hinder people's voices from being consistently heard on the airwaves. ■

# Media and conflict in Cameroon today

**Kome Epule Abel**

*Cameroon is on the verge of a separation. Two sets of people; the French and the English – speaking can no longer dialogue. The ugly head of division violently arose in 2016 plunging Cameroon into civil strife. At the nexus of this melee is the media, which play an important role in uniting the nation but also with vast differences between the French and English communication cultures.*

The highhanded and arbitrary manner by which state authorities respond to the actions of the media can serve as a barometer to measure freedom of expression in a country. So, is it easier to punish the Anglophone media culprit in Cameroon? The answer lies in the stories of these journalists, Mancho Bibixy (known as Mancho BBC) of *Abakwa FM*, and Mimi Mefou of *Equinox Television*.

Mancho Bibixy works for a local radio broadcasting in Anglophone North West region, Bamenda. He reports on the rights of the Anglophone minority in Cameroon with a focus on social and economic marginalisation. Working in close collaboration with the civil society groups, Mancho documented and reported on human rights violations in North-West Cameroon. He became a fire-spitting questioner of Cameroonian authorities by probing subjects such as, Cameroon's crude oil and mineral resource management.

In 2016, frustrations over marginalization boiled over amongst English-speaking professionals, lawyers and teachers. They decided to protest on the streets for rights in courts and schools. This was met with firm military and police repression. Discarding the comfort of armchair journalism in the *Abakwa* radio studio, Mancho Bibixy,

joined the demonstrations in-person in the City of Bamenda in what was called the "Coffin Revolution".

Using the radio to galvanize the people, many English-speaking youth joined the protests. This attracted the wrath of authorities and on January 19, 2017, the journalist was arrested in Bamenda and transferred to the national capital, Yaounde, where he was detained in the Kondengui Central Prison and tried by a Military Tribunal.

On May 25, 2018, Mancho Bibixy was sentenced to 15 years in prison and a hefty fine of over 268 million francs CFA (approximately 600,000 CAD) on charges of "acts of terrorism", "hostility against the state", "secession", "revolution", "propagation of false information", "contempt of public bodies and public servants", "resistance", "failure to possess his national ID card" and "insurrection" under the Law on the Suppression of Acts of Terrorism of 2014 and the Criminal Code.

The Cameroon media reported the case of Mancho Bibixy timidly, in fear of government reprisal and as lip-service to freedom of expression while leaving the bulk of human rights fight for his release to protests by civil rights organizations such as the Central Africa Human Rights Defenders Network, Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, and the World Organisation Against Torture.

Ideally, the Cameroonian media could pitch for peace by building local and international alliances with these advocacy groups to call for the release of the journalist. However, local journalists are often scared to be identified as accomplices to acts that propagate insurrection, which is heavily punished in Cameroon. The case of Mancho therefore serves as a deterrent to daring journalists who eye the opportunity to be similarly critical of the state.

## **The Mimi Mefou saga**

Mimi Mefo, is a young journalist who has grown into a reference point in the reporting of the atrocities in the country's restive Anglophone regions. She was arrested on charges of "endangering state security" and publishing false information about

clashes between the army and English-speaking separatist militias. On October 30, 2018, she posted a tweet @Mimimefor237 that attributed the death of an American missionary gunned-down in Bamenda to the Cameroonian army.

She wrote: “American missionary Charles Trumann Wesco shot today by Cameroon soldiers near Bamenda, North West Region of Cameroon. He is an Indiana. This is not the first case, soldiers three months back, killed a Ghanaian pastor on pastoral mission in the North West region.”

This tweet became a fireball. She was summoned to the Douala Military Court on November 7, 2018 and summarily imprisoned in the New-Bell Central Prison. Anglophone and Francophone activists, media and human rights groups such as the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders called for her immediate release by launching the #FreeMimiMefo online campaign. She was freed on November 10, 2018 after two days behind bars. All charges were later dropped by the military tribunal.

The difference is that, unlike other arrested and tried journalists such as, Mancho Bibixy; Mimi Mefo is employed by *Equinox TV*, which is based in Cameroon’s economic capital Douala, a French region. She is the Deputy Editor-in-Chief and star news presenter and received huge support from both French- and English-speaking Cameroonians who pressured the government for her release.

In addition, Mimi Mefo’s parents hail from both French- and English-speaking Cameroon. This possibly gives her a more acceptable profile on both sides of the English and French-speaking population. Her case demonstrates, therefore, that peaceful cohabitation and collaboration among the people of Cameroon can bring about peaceful solutions. If the Cameroonian government can be pressured by a wide alliance of French and English citizens and media, it can give in to demands and social change can become effective.

### **Internet blockade**

A place of English-speaking eminence is Buea, the former capital of German and British Cameroon. Today, backed by a thriving university, the town

has gained the status of a technology hub in the country and been dubbed the “Silicone Mountain”. High above sea-level at more than 1200 meters and on the foot of Africa’s second highest mountain, “Mount Cameroon”, the University of Buea became the site of assault and brutality by police and soldiers in early 2016 when students joined the Anglophone protest for education reforms. True to the budding technological overflow, atrocities were graphically recorded on simple devices such as, mobile phones and portable cameras and livestreamed, uploaded and broadcast to the world.

The acts ranged from female students dragged in the mud, stripped naked, beatings and police aiming their firearms on defenceless citizens, among others. This enraged English-speakers who multiplied the viewership on social media, drawing further attention to issues and proving the complaint of marginalization. This was bad public relations for the government.

On January 17, 2017, the Government of Cameroon instituted a three-month blackout of internet in English-speaking territories, South West and North West regions. Just a day before internet services disappeared, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications issued a statement in which it warned social media users of criminal penalties if they were to “issue or spread information, including by way of electronic communications or information technology systems, without any evidence”.

The statement also confirmed that the authorities had sent text messages directly to mobile phone subscribers, notifying them of penalties, including long jail terms, for “spreading false news” via social media. Several Cameroonians posted screenshots on Twitter showing the various warnings they received.

The major mobile phone providers MTN, Orange and Nextel stayed silent while the rights to access to communications was shutdown to millions of English-speaking customers. To communicate, English-speakers had to travel to the French-speaking areas to have full access to the Internet.

This shutdown emboldened dissent rather

than crushed it. The hashtag *#BringBackOurInternet* spread rapidly in Cameroon and beyond, with WikiLeaks's Edward Snowden among the high-profile supporters. The campaign also attracted the support of campaign groups such as, Internet sans Frontières (ISF).

Behind this curtain of silence and blackout on instantaneous reporting, the government unleashed a more severe crackdown with the world shutout and precluded from knowing the extent of the atrocities. During this period, more active communications were mobilized by the government to control the message and tell a different story. Hence, new tactics were used with more robust presidential communications on Twitter and Facebook. The number of Government Press Conferences hosted by the Minister of Communications increased. On April 20, 2017, Cameroon's government ordered telecommunications operators to restore internet access in the North-West and South-West regions.

The restoration of the internet was one of the three conditions for the protesters to resume dialogue with the government. The other two conditions were to release the more than a hundred arrested Anglophones and to withdraw the soldiers deployed in Anglophone regions. However, according to an official statement, the government reserved the right to impose further in-

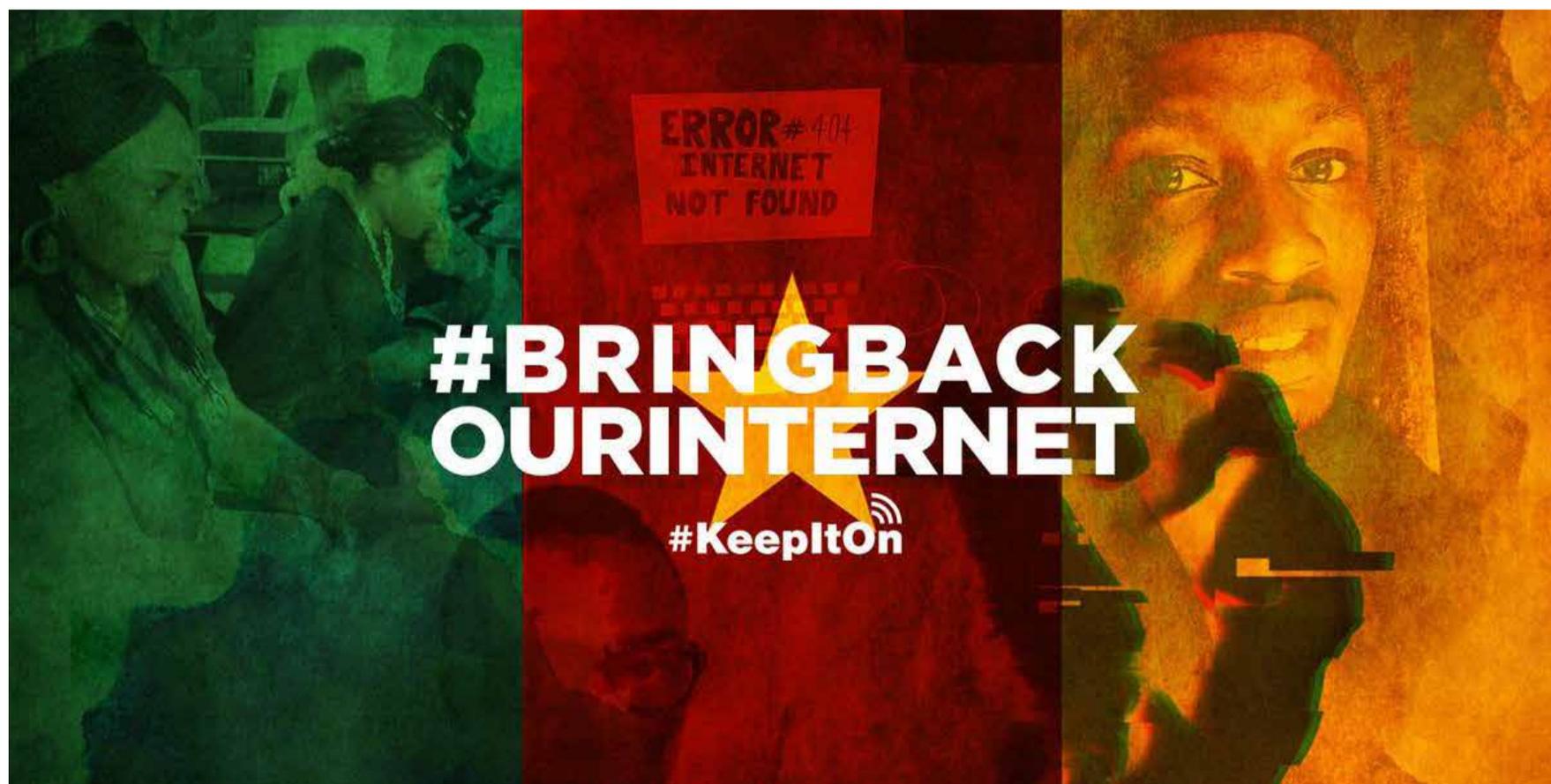
ternet shutdowns, "if the extremists calling for secession use it again to call for violent demonstrations."

Nevertheless, the internet tale brought out the best in the technological acumen and desire for social change of the affected English-speaking population. They researched and applied new strategies to post videos on Facebook and WhatsApp by outwitting internet providers. Although slow to load, with patience gory images of the realities on the ground escaped the Cameroonian internet dragnet.

In response to the internet shut down, community media-makers in Anglophone areas and abroad came together to create the Southern Cameroon Broadcasting Corporation Television, SCBC TV, using satellite technology to rally and broadcast information from around the world to English-speaking communities.

### **The Cameroonian "Tower of Babel"**

Apart from the national languages, English and French, there are more than 260 dialects in Cameroon. This makes Cameroon a melting pot of cultures, an epicentre for varied views and a challenge for dialogue. In the middle of this national melee is the state-owned media house - Cameroon Radio Television, CRTV. Cast in an aluminium tower in Yaounde, the building resembles



the biblical Tower of Babel. Created in 1985 as a harbinger of national unity, CRTV has reflected the quest to share the national cake as each of the more than 260 tribes attempt to be represented and have a slice.

The public-financed media is hence construed as a global-voice-of-all-voices, thereby, making it the Cameroonian Tower of Babel. Accordingly, the state-owned media represents the nation but works for the authority in power. Historically, it served as the media rostrum through which President Paul Biya launched his ruling political party, Cameroons People Democratic Movement, CPDM, in 1985 during its maiden broadcast. Hence, the fortified alliance between the state and the public broadcaster has been a long-established adjunct of the ruling party.

So, when the English-speaking minority started clamouring for equal rights, access and inclusion in Cameroon's decision-making, the monster of inequality in the treatment of Anglophone journalists in the state-owned media also showed its ugly head which has for long been struggling to emerge. From inception, English language programs on both radio and television such as, Cameroon Calling and Morning Safari have been most critical of the government and serve as a social enlightening corner to Anglophones. Often, these critical programs are suspended or scrapped from air especially during instances considered as subversive to the unity of the state such as, during this recent English-speaking uprising in the South West and North West regions. Earlier on, young and talented English-speaking journalists were banned from broadcasting, others were jailed for voicing anti-state commentaries such as, Johnny McViban, Emmanuel Tatah Mentan while others fled the country to settle abroad such as, Boh Herbert and most recently, John Mbah Akuro who are vocal leading spokespersons of the Anglophone cause in the diaspora.

However, French-speaking journalists have mostly succeed in toeing the state line and articulately serve as government mouth-pieces. CRTV has maintained a strong patriarchal broadcasting system that serves the master who pays for the tune of truth. The truth is at the behest of state

authority and the Board Chairman of the CRTV, who also doubles as the Minister of Communication, commandeers the decision-making.

Currently, CRTV is breaking new digital grounds with a new CRTV web which links to Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages. These have opened a certain level of information to Cameroonians in the diaspora, but it is still considered biased and one-sided. Remarkably, CRTV can become a pathfinder of peace if it explores its strategic position by creating grassroots communication networks, diaspora agencies and more expansion on digital platforms.

### **Diaspora command centres**

Enter the diaspora communicators. They are the English-speaking leaders commanding activities in Anglophone Cameroon. They inform, instruct, involve and direct the action. These are the diaspora internet juggernauts; Mark Bareta, Ivo Tapang, Nso Foncha Nkem, Ebenzer Akwanga, Ayaba Cho Lucas, John Mbah Akuro and Chris Anu, amongst others.

Although thousands of kilometres away from Cameroon, they lead millions of English-speaking Cameroonians into obedience and disobedience. Based in England, Germany, Belgium, Canada, South Africa and United States of America, they use free communication platforms such as, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp to launch hundreds of groups to discuss and share information on events in Cameroon. These active virtual forums have been at the forefront of the new quest for freedom in Cameroon, especially, the Anglophone identity. Many of these groups have robust cyber-militants abroad. Some of these foreign-based online activists have since proclaimed themselves to be "commanders" of armed groups fighting for the independence of a new country call Ambazonia and many have called for retaliation against Francophones and government security forces while accusing them of "genocide,".

Since the crisis began, activists living in the North America and Europe have used online platforms to urge the diaspora to support armed separatists through fundraising campaigns such as "Adopt a Freedom Fighter" for a minimum of

\$75 monthly, or “Feed the Nchang Shoe Boys.” In October 2017 for instance, the Maryland-based Southern Cameroons Youth League, Chairman, Ebenezer Akwanga published a press release stating that his organization “resolves that it is the right, the legitimate, legal and moral right of the People of the Southern Cameroons to take up arms to defend themselves from a brutal and demonic annexationists Cameroun Republic regime...”

On November 27, 2017, a video portraying Ayaba Cho Lucas, the self-exiled and self-styled “chief of staff” of the “Ambazonia Defense Forces”, reviewing a dozen armed separatists parading in uniform in a small Cameroonian town began to circulate on social media. The video was interpreted as a signal that the armed separatists were trying to assert control by force over Cameroonian territory.

Shortly after, on December 14, the Cameroonian army launched a raid on Dadi, a small locality in a densely forested area of the South-West region’s Manyu division, just three kilometers away from the Nigerian border, where it claimed the video had been filmed. According to Amnesty International, civilians were reportedly killed during the raid, which caused most of the town’s population to flee to the bush and to Nigeria.

However, these diaspora forums have also been blighted by fake news syndrome as every member is free to post information. Such unlimited digital bushfire sparks the need to verify information and consider graphic content before posting to a mass audience. For example, multiplicity of graphic and sensitive pictures is published everyday awash in blood of murdered people with a few erroneous cases of pictures taken from other countries or unrelated events. The corrective side is that these forums have moderators and administrator who correct and bring the members to order while verifying the authenticity of information.

In certain instances, there is heated debate and arguments which lead to sanctions by expulsion of recalcitrant members from the group. This process therefore makes it a challenge in managing a populist platform and exposes the grim re-

ality to the limits of freedom of information, even to these groups that are themselves professing the fight for freedom from a draconian regime.

Furthermore, the diaspora is passively insulated from the realities on the ground but instigates and supports the local masses in the homeland. It is therefore a challenge of responsibility to use the new tools of communication prudently, which may make or mar a cause for peace.

### **Hate journalism: Another “Radio Mille Colines”**

Ernest Obama is a Journalist and Director of Vision 4 Television, a Yaounde based channel. Through a program “Tour d’Horizon” on October 6, 2017, he made the following statement regarding Anglophones who are fighting for genuine reforms in the country.

“It’s time for government to stop playing with these people (referring to Anglophones). There is no country in the world that jokes with terrorists. Most of them are just making noise on Facebook. (A minority group) in Algeria is also asking for independence. Are people not killed there? They are killed. If it is necessary to restore order and if you are considered a terrorist, you should be killed. It’s time for the government to put in place extremely repressive measures (against Anglophones). I am also urging the government to decree a state of emergency in the two English-speaking regions of the country. From 7 pm, all bars should be closed. There are some Anglophones (in Yaounde) who are happy about what is happening over there (North West and South West). If a bomb is planted in a school, it will kill the Anglophones themselves. But what is this whole thing about ‘Anglophonie’? All my daughters are in Anglophone schools. We will no longer give room for dialogue with terrorists...I hold the opinion that all Anglophones are in support of the explosions in Bamenda. Even here in Yaounde, neighbourhoods which are predominantly Anglophone need to be put under surveillance. If they have already started implanting bombs in Douala,

then it's possible they can do same in Yaounde□”

On October 2, 2017, over 40 English-speaking journalists from television, radio, newspaper and online petitioned the National Communication Council, NCC. They denounced hate speech against Anglophones propagated by Ernest Obama. More than a week later, Obama, under legal pressure and diplomatic condemnation, asked for forgiveness:

“To all my brothers in the English-speaking community of Cameroon, if some of you were shocked and offended by my words that were only meant to unite. I sincerely present my apologies. In love we are all crazy about Cameroon. This love can sometimes lead us to use words that can go overboard.”

This is a gesture in the right direction as peace journalism implies the ability to forgive and reconcile. However, Ernest Obama of Vision 4

was suspended from broadcasting for two months by the National Communications Council for propagating hate speech. The sanctions according to the English-speaking petitioners is mild for preaching hatred while the likes of Mancho Bibixy, Mimi Mefou are arrested for upholding rights and freedoms. This has made French-speaking Ernest Obama a symbol of double standard in sanctioning of erring journalists in Cameroon.

### **Verification debunks the myth of fake news**

On June 25, 2018, the *British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC*, published a master piece on investigative journalism during a conflict. In a video report titled “Burning Cameroon: Images you’re not meant to see”, BBC assessed a total of 131 villages via satellite imagery for evidence of building destruction in the subdivisions of Mbonge, Kumba, Ekondo Titi, Konye, and Nguti, in the South-West region. In one of the videos of late April 2018 which had been widely circulated on social media, a man is shown calmly setting fire



to a house and watched by a group of at least 13 men dressed in fatigues. *BBC Africa Eye* went on to prove the perpetrators.

*BBC* confirmed the location as Azi, a village in Cameroon's Anglophone South-West region by matching buildings to satellite imagery and comparing the fire damage shown in a subsequent video from the same village. To *BBC*, these men appeared to be Cameroonian soldiers. Their uniforms, helmets and webbing were all consistent with those worn by Cameroon's Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), an elite army unit equipped and trained by the US and Israel.

However, the Cameroonian Government official version of the facts as stated by the Minister of Communications is that, "They (the separatists) are able to acquire military uniforms of the Rapid Intervention Battalion or any other brigade of the defence forces in order to perpetrate their crime and blame our defence and security forces for it." The army sought to minimize, but not deny, allegations that they burned homes. In an April 2018 interview with Agence France Presse (AFP), Brigadier Donatien Melingui Nouma, the South-West region military commander, said that the army was struggling to quell the rising insurgency by armed separatists and said that the army "only burns those houses where we find weapons".

To establish truthfulness, *BBC* experts analyzed videos originating from the North-West and South-West regions to identify the precise location in which they were filmed. These videos, largely posted online on platforms like YouTube and Twitter, were filmed by local people who witnessed the aftermath of the destruction of buildings and villages or in some cases by the security forces' personnel involved. The geolocation verification process centred around matching video footage with satellite images. By identifying distinguishing features – a bend in a road, different types of trees, shadows from buildings, or the shapes and colours of roofs – in both the video and the aerial image, the verification process enabled *BBC* investigative journalists to confirm where the video was shot by local people.

This investigative feat engages a new social communications importance that combines

geolocation to grassroots video recordings on mobile phones by villagers: Kwakwa filmed in January 2018; Azi filmed in April 2018; Munyenge filmed in May 2018; and Ekona Mbenge filmed in June 2018. The *BBC* investigation crew also authenticated that these videos were not filmed months or years before these incidents were reported to have taken place by confirming that they were not uploaded online before the date that the destruction was said to have taken place.

With this new state-of-the-art authentication, tyranny can be monitored and checked. The notion that there is a satellite up there, always above Cameroon that can collect images and broadcast the truth may be a dissuasive ploy to nib-in-the-bud of human rights violations and restore peace in a country that is slowing sliding into a full-blown conflict. ■

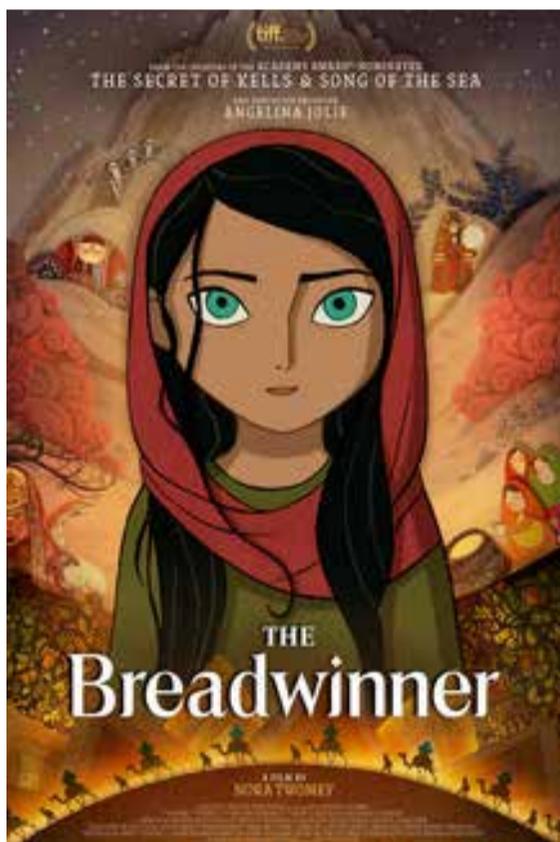
Kome Epule Abel is a Cameroonian journalist currently working in Canada. The photo on page 50 (courtesy of the author) shows Kome Abel discussing the media situation on air in Cameroon.

# On the screen

## Schlingel (Germany) 2018

The Ecumenical Jury at the 23rd SCHLINGEL international film festival for children and young audiences in Chemnitz (1-7 October 2018) awarded its Prize to *The Breadwinner* directed by Nora Twomey (Ireland, Canada, Luxembourg, 2017).

Motivation: The Ecumenical Jury awarded its prize to a film whose content and aesthetics are thoroughly convincing. The movie is set in the year 2001 and depicts a family's struggle for survival in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan from the perspective of an 11-year-old girl. The success-



ful connection of real events and a timeless fairy tale makes this animated film appealing to both younger and grown-up audiences.

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to *Meerkat Moonship* (Meerkat Mantuig) directed by Hanneke Schutte (South Africa, 2017). Motivation: The movie is particularly suitable for older children, because it manages to depict the fears of a 13-year-old girl in a cinematographically

and aesthetically convincing way.

Members of the 2018 Jury: Mara Feßmann (Germany), Théo Peporté (Luxembourg), and Holger Twele (President of the Jury, Germany).

## Warsaw (Poland) 2018

At the 34th International Film Festival Warsaw (October 12-21, 2018), the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to *Irina* (directed by Nadejda Koseva (Bulgaria, 2018)).

Motivation: The film raises the controversial bioethical topics giving cause for conservation about fundamental human values and still being an example of original approach of the artist.

It tells a story about rediscovering the world by bringing new life into it and as such is an affirmation of life itself. The main character, Irina, slowly learns how to love and forgive.

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to *Delegacioni* (The Delegation) directed by Bujar Alimani (Albania, France, Greece, Kosovo, 2018).

Motivation: By the high artistic quality displayed the film dramatises the theme of the struggle for truth and justice.

Members of the 2018 Jury: Domitia Caramazza (President, Italy); Peter Ciaccio (Italy); Adam Regiewicz (Poland).

## Lübeck (Germany) 2018

At the 60th Nordic Film Days Lübeck (30 October to 4 November 2018), the INTERFILM Jury awarded the Church Film Prize, endowed with € 5000 by the Protestant Church in Lübeck and Lauenburg, to *Kona fer í stríð* (Woman at War) directed by Benedikt Erlingsson (Iceland, France, Ukraine, 2018).

Motivation: The INTERFILM jury awarded its prize to a film that upgrades the creation order. The preservation of the environment and of the whole planet is made an intrusive and humorous as well as content-wise and formally convincing topic. In addition, the film asks what opportunities the individual has within the limits of democratic action or beyond.

The members of the 2018 Jury were: Thomas Damm (Germany); Antje Peters-Hirt (President of the Jury, Germany); Mikael Ringlander (Sweden); Anita Uzulniece (Latvia).

## Leipzig (Germany) 2018

At the 61st International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film (29 October to 4 November 2018), the Interreligious Jury awarded its Prize to *Avevo un sogno* (I Had a Dream) directed by Claudia Tosi (Italy, France, 2018).

The Prize is endowed with € 2500, donated by the Interreligious Roundtable Leipzig and the VCH-Hotels Germany GmbH in the “Verband Christlicher Hoteliers e.V.” including the Hotel MICHAELIS in Leipzig.

Motivation: According to our scriptures women and men are created equal as in Genesis 1:27 and in respect for each other as in Sura 9:71. Hope and the obligation never to give up are substantial parts of our religions. The film we have chosen not only contains hope but produces it. Our choice also fulfils the original requirements of a documentary. It shows a sense of responsibility to make the world a better place inspiring the next generations. Two lady politicians and a lady director had such a dream.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Special Prize to *#Female Pleasure* directed by Barbara Miller (Switzerland, Germany, 2018).

Motivation: The Interreligious Jury is entering Neuland according to the motto of DOK Leipzig 2018. It awards for the first time a Special Prize to a documentary film that has convinced

its members. It does not belong to the Official Competition but to the Late Harvest. In a well researched complexity it presents five brave women of five world religions who fight against violence and repression towards women.

Members of the 2018 Jury: Gisela Blau, Switzerland; Thomas Bohne, Germany (President of the Jury); Peter Marinkovic, Germany; Anders Rundberg, Sweden.

## Mannheim-Heidelberg (Germany) 2018

At the 67th International Film Festival 15-25 November 2018, the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize, endowed with 2500 € by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Catholic Film Organisation in Germany, to the film *Orange Days* (Rooz-haye Narenji) directed by Arash Lahooti (Iran 2018).

Motivation: The prize of the Ecumenical Jury goes to a film about having the strength to care for others when you risk losing everything and being a true partner and real family in the midst of adversaries. With simple but visually appealing images, close-ups that highlight the actors' talent and a narrative that includes suspense, tragedy and humour the director tells a unique and moving story about family, love, respect, and oranges.

The Members of Jury in 2018 were: Sofia Sjö, Finland – President; Annette Jungen-Rutishauser, Switzerland; Viktor Kókai-Nagy, Hungary; Ildima Nevelös-Forgács, Hungary; Lothar Strüber, Germany. ■

