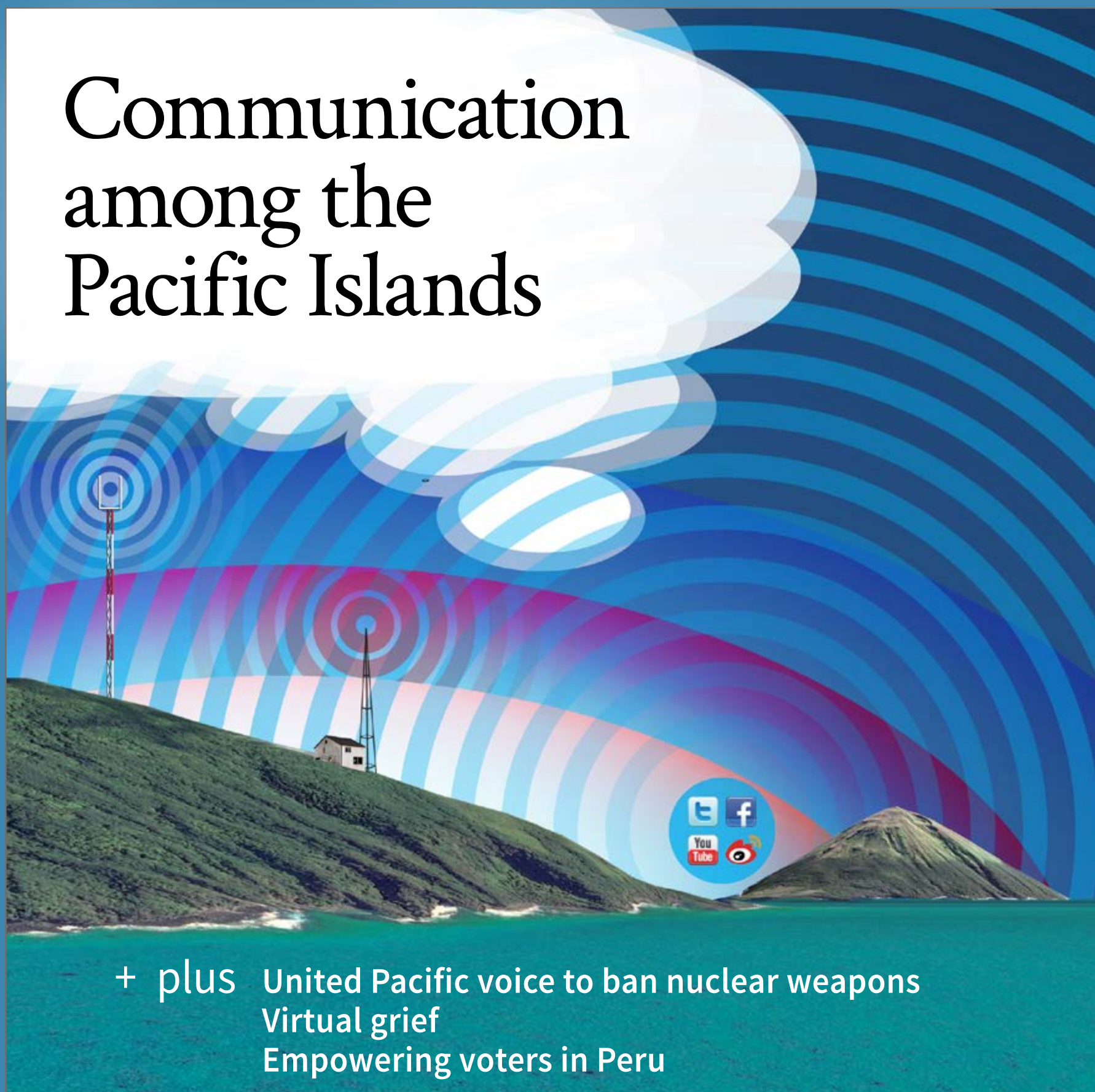


# Media Development

3/2014

WACC

## Communication among the Pacific Islands



+ plus United Pacific voice to ban nuclear weapons  
Virtual grief  
Empowering voters in Peru

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- 4 Editorial
- 6 Shooting the messenger,  
Pacific-style  
*David Robie*
- 11 A united Pacific voice to ban  
nuclear weapons  
*François Pihaatae*
- 12 Le Pacifique uni pour interdire  
les armes nucléaires  
*François Pihaatae*
- 13 What are the communications  
challenges facing Tonga today?  
*Viliami Falekaono*
- 16 Virtual grief  
*Kristina J. Morehouse and Heather  
M. Crandall*
- 20 “The Act of Killing”: truth,  
memory and reconciliation in  
Indonesia  
*Nubia E. Rojas G.*
- 26 Would you hire this person?  
Empowering voters in Peru  
*Amos Owen Thomas*
- 31 Cuando la religión se pone del  
lado de la gente  
*Entrevista con Rolando Pérez*

- 34 Poder político, tecnología y  
medios de comunicación  
*Carlos A. Valle*
- 36 Listening to the voices of  
those living in poverty and  
marginalization
- 38 Bonding & Bridging  
*Henk Hagoort*
- 40 Ecumenical Jury Prize at  
Cannes Film Festival 2014  
*Kristine Greenaway*

## In the Next Issue

The 4/2014 issue of *Media Development* will explore the world of hip-hop and protest songs.

WACC Members and Subscribers to *Media Development* are able to download and print a complete PDF of each journal or PDFs of individual articles.



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# EDITORIAL

There are some 20,000 to 30,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean. Most of these Pacific Islands are collectively referred to as Oceania and are traditionally grouped into Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

*Melanesia* means black islands. These islands, south of the equator, include New Guinea (the largest Pacific island and second largest island in the world after Greenland), New Caledonia, Zenadh Kes (Torres Strait Islands), Vanuatu, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands.

*Micronesia* means small islands. These include the Northern Marianas, Guam, Wake Island, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Most of these lie north of the equator.

*Polynesia* means many islands. Lying mostly south of the equator, this group includes New Zealand, the Hawaiian Islands, Rotuma, the Midway Islands, the Samoan Islands (divided between the Independent State of Samoa and American Samoa), Tonga, Tuvalu, the Cook Islands, Wallis and Futuna, Tokelau, Niue, French Polynesia, and Easter Island.

Oceania's islands are classified into two kinds: high islands and low islands. Volcanoes form

high islands, which generally can support more people and have a more fertile soil. Low islands are reefs or atolls and are relatively small and infertile. Melanesia, the most populous of the three regions, contains mainly high islands, while most in Micronesia and Polynesia are low.

On 25 September 1513, Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa became the first European to see the Pacific Ocean from the west of America. He called it Mar del Sur (South Sea) since he crossed Panama from North to South to reach it.

But it was the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan who named it the Pacific, having encountered its waters for the first time in 1521 on a particularly calm and peaceful day.

Covering 165 million sq km, the Pacific is larger than the entire land surface of the Earth and comprises half its water surface.

The only island kingdom in the Pacific is Tonga, made up of 176 islands under King Tupou VI.

Imperceptibly, and because of plate tectonics, the Pacific is shrinking about 0.5 sq km a year.

The Challenger Deep in the Mariana Trench plunges 10,911 metres, the deepest place on earth. If Mount Everest were put in Challenger

*Map: Pasifika Media Association*



Deep, its summit would be 2,000 metres underwater.

The point on earth farthest from land is in the South Pacific halfway between Pitcairn Island and Antarctica, 1,660 miles from land.

Most of the Islands of the world are found in the Pacific Ocean and most of them are found south of the Equator.

So much for the geography! Today, Pacific Island peoples and communities are facing unprecedented challenges to their economies and environment – at least some of them caused by the impacts of climate change.

Rising sea levels, tropical cyclones, floods and drought, combined with pressure from unsustainable fishing practices and coastal development, and modern consumption and production trends, are rendering the livelihoods of some 10 million people increasingly precarious. They are being forced to become migrants and refugees.

Despite great diversity across the Pacific islands – in terms of culture and economic structures – all of them face difficulties. These include narrow production and export bases, limited economies of scale, lack of diversification, and high fixed costs of government given the small size of their population.

Most nations are also heavily dependent on aid and their remoteness poses an additional constraint. For example, transportation costs are far greater when hundreds of islands are scattered across vast stretches of ocean. In short, Pacific Islands and their communities are vulnerable.

The theme of the *Human Development Report 2014* is “Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience”. It acknowledges that:

- \* Vulnerability threatens human development – and unless it is systematically addressed, by changing policies and social norms, progress will be neither equitable nor sustainable.
- \* Life cycle vulnerability, structural vulnerability and insecure lives are fundamental sources of persistent

deprivation – and must be addressed for human development to be secured and for progress to be sustained.

- \* Policy responses to vulnerability should prevent threats, promote capabilities and protect people, especially the most vulnerable.
- \* Vulnerabilities are increasingly global in their origin and impact, requiring collective action and better international governance.

The *Human Development Report 2014* goes on to point out that, “Development pathways that are not informed by voices of all stakeholders are neither desirable nor sustainable. But when societies create space for all voices to be heard, policymakers are more likely to be attentive to the concerns and needs of minorities and other vulnerable groups” (p. 83).

In the context of the Pacific, as articles in this issue of *Media Development* underline, journalists can play a key role in identifying and making public the global, national and local concerns and aspirations of vulnerable people and their communities. They can also tell success stories, and share knowledge and information that will contribute to greater resilience and long-term survival.

Of course, here as elsewhere, there are contentious questions of media ownership and control, and the accessibility and affordability of digital communications to address.

Just a few years ago, Internet access was limited in the Pacific, but it is now expanding quickly. As a result, use of social media is spreading – although unevenly – and many more people are gaining access to mobile telephone technology.

Together with web-based tools such as Facebook, Skype and Twitter, social media offer one solution to providing timely information to Pacific islanders, whether it be for awareness about natural disasters or something as simple as connecting rural farmers to their markets.

Democratizing all levels of communication – communication for all – can only help Pacific Island nations, their people and communities to resist, to survive, and to resume their rightful place in the region. ■



# Shooting the messenger, Pacific-style

David Robie

*Media freedom as an issue in the Pacific has been defined in far too narrow terms, as if Big Brother governments and politicians ignorant about the role of media are the only problem. Of course, they're not. There are many other issues that are vitally important in the region that impinge on media freedom yet are rarely mentioned – such as self-censorship, media ownership and convergence, poor qualifications and salaries for many journalists (which make them potentially open to undue influence and bribery) and lack of education.*

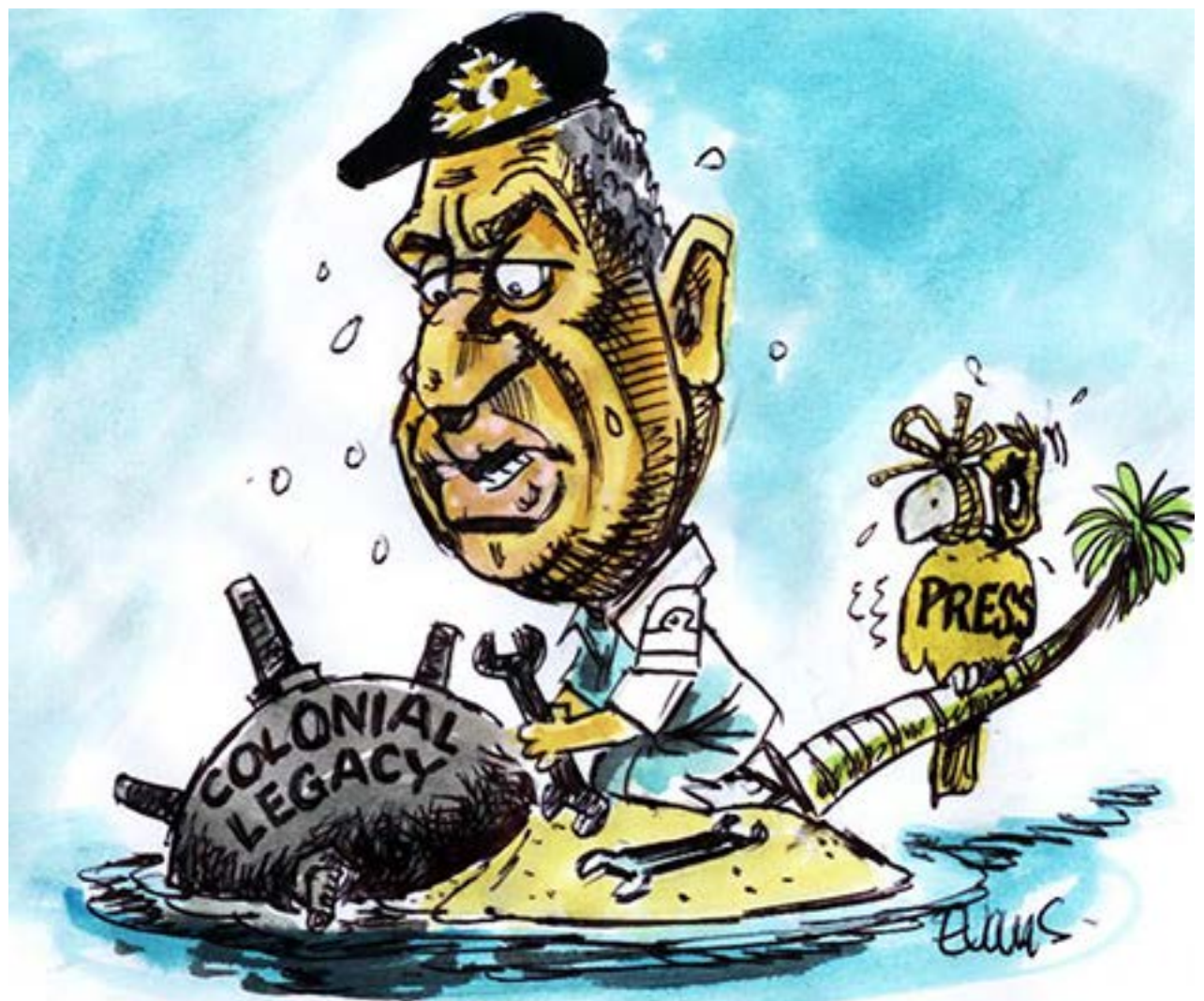
A former news magazine editor turned media educator at the University of the South Pacific, Shailendra Singh, has cautioned about not taking many of these issues more seriously. As he notes, criticisms of media standards in Fiji, for example, ought to be taken more constructively in a quest for improved standards and strengthening media freedom:

“The litany of complaints against the media cannot always be dismissed out of hand,” he says. “Concerns about unbalanced and unethical reporting, sensationalism,

insensitivity, lack of depth and research in articles and a poor understanding of the issues are too frequent and too numerous. Another common complaint is that the media is loath to make retractions or correct mistakes. It has even been accused of bringing down a government or two.”<sup>1</sup>

While the 1987 coups were a “watershed year” for the Fiji media (with one of the two daily newspapers closing, never to reopen because of censorship, and the other temporarily adopting self-censorship to survive), the media learned to be cautious in its reporting.<sup>2</sup> By the time the George Speight attempted coup happened in May 2000, many of the experienced journalists who had reported the 1987 political upheaval had left the country:

“A new generation of reporters found themselves in the frontline of another history-making episode. Again there are examples of courageous reporting, along with allegations that the media had fallen for the photogenic and quotable Speight, and his nationalistic message.”<sup>3</sup>



By the time of the 2006 coup by Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, the nationalist and indigenous paramountcy rhetoric had vanished. Instead, this coup was claimed to be a “clean up” campaign against corruption and racism” that the military commander alleged had become entrenched under the leadership of elected Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, a former banker who rose to political power after the Speight putsch due to Bainimarama’s patronage.<sup>4</sup>

The Bainimarama regime was just as critical of the media as the ousted democratic governments. Self-censorship by the media was replaced by the longest sustained censorship regime of any Pacific country, imposed when the 1997 Constitution was abrogated at Easter 2009. Failure by the Fiji Media Council to get its own house in order led first to a deeply flawed media “review” by Hawai’i-based former Fiji academic Dr Jim Anthony commissioned by the Fiji Human Rights Commission amid controversy, and then the imposition of the notorious *Fiji Media Development Decree 2010*.<sup>5</sup> Two *Fiji Times* publishers (Evan Hannah in 2008 and Rex Gardner in January 2009) and the *Fiji Sun*’s Russell Hunter (in 2008) were deported.

Although the Bainimarama regime never succeeded in closing *The Fiji Times* in a cat-and-mouse game, as it undoubtedly wished, the government did manage to force the Australian-based owner News Limited (a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation) to sell the newspaper to the local Motibhai Group in 2010. Chief editor Netani Rika, long a thorn in the side of the regime, and deputy editor Sophie Foster were also ousted and replaced with a more compliant editorship by Fred Wesley.

### **A change of direction**

It was a refreshing change from the usual back-slapping and we-can-do-no-wrong rhetoric by media owners to hear comments from people such as the then Fiji Human Rights Commission director, Dr Shaista Shameem, and media and politics lecturer Dr Tarcisius Kabutaulaka at a University of the South Pacific seminar marking World Press Freedom Day (WPFD) on 3 May 2002.

Shameem wants a higher educational standard

for Pacific journalists. In her view the region’s journalists need to know far more about history, politics, sociology, philosophy and the sciences.<sup>6</sup>

“Anyone can learn the technical skills of journalism – that’s the easy part,” she says.

“The hard part is to understand the worlds that you are writing about. My definition of a good journalist is someone with such in-depth understanding of the issues that the words, though simply written, virtually leap out from the page.”

Solomon Islander Kabutaulaka, who has written widely as a columnist as well as critically examining the profession of journalism, raises the issue of media monopolies: “This raises the questions such as: Who controls or owns the media? Whose interests do they represent?” he asks. “In the world of globalisation and with the advent of the internet we must realise that a variety of media does not always mean a variety of sources.”

Kabutaulaka also wonders whether Pacific media provide “adequate information that will enhance democracy”. As he points out, “it is not an impartial medium. Rather, many [in the media] also have vested interests.”

One of the problems in the region is that there is virtually no in-depth reportage of the media itself. While some sections of the media attempt valiantly to ensure power is accountable, there is little reflection about the power of the media. In fact, there is little media accountability to the public – nothing comparable to ABC Television’s *Media Watch* in Australia, or TVNZ7’s *Media7* (later TV3’s *Media3*) in New Zealand, and Radio New Zealand’s *Mediawatch* to keep news organisations on their toes. Most media councils are rubber stamps for their media members with little proactive action.

Most are “struggling for relevance” to the rapidly changing digital industry, according to a PAC-MAS-funded review of national media councils in 2013.<sup>7</sup> “They are politically and financially challenged to continue to uphold their advocacy role for a plural, independent and professional media ... A new generation of graduates and younger media



practitioners ... is challenging the ineffectiveness of media associations in several countries.”<sup>8</sup>

### Call for an independent Pacific Islands journalists’ network

Many challenges lie ahead in “navigating the future” of Pacific Islands media. In my experience, while there are a number of Pacific Islands media organisations and workshops around the region, rarely do they acknowledge the remarkable growth in the past few years of New Zealand-based Pacific media, both vernacular and English-language. Quality and informative programmes such as *Tagata Pasifika* on Television New Zealand and the Pacific Radio Network, the magazine *Spasifik*, and newspapers such as *Taimi `o Tonga*, which is now based back in Tonga, are just some examples.

There is a need for an independent Pacific Islands journalists’ network which nurtures and develops their needs and there is a need for more

Pacific Islands journalists working in the mainstream media in Australia and New Zealand. This is especially so in this age of globalisation. The large attendance at the inaugural Pacific Islands Media Association (PIMA) conference at AUT University in Auckland in October 2001, and subsequent conferences, was testimony to this. The establishment of the Apia-based Pasifika Media Association (PASIMA) resource website in 2010 is another example.<sup>9</sup>

However, more than a decade on, PIMA is now struggling to retain this leadership role in New Zealand and also needs to be more involved in the region in support of its sister and brother journalists. There is a vital need for a greater plurality of media voices and education if freedom of speech and the press are to flourish in the Pacific.

The late New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji, Tia Barrett, made an important statement about indigenous issues and journalism at the University of the South Pacific journalism awards presentation in Suva during November 2000, which riled the military-installed regime:

“What is difficult to accept in this dialogue on indigenous rights is the underlying assumption that those rights are pre-eminent over other more fundamental human rights. This just cannot be so, not in today’s world ... Nowhere is it written in any holy scripture that because you are indigenous you have first rights over others in their daily rights. You should be respected and highly regarded as an indigenous person, but respect is earned not obtained on demand.”<sup>10</sup>

As Tia Barrett said, information would make the difference in the process of cultural change for Pacific Islanders in the face of globalisation to improve people’s lives. This is where the journalist plays a vitally important role, always bearing in mind the needs of the people and their thirst for knowledge.

Since the fourth coup on 5 December 2006 by Commodore (now Rear Admiral) Voreqe Bainimarama, press freedom has been on a downhill slide in Fiji culminating in the draconian *Fiji Media*



**DON'T SPOIL MY  
BEAUTIFUL FACE**  
**MEDIA, MAYHEM & HUMAN  
RIGHTS IN THE PACIFIC**  
**DAVID ROBIE**



*Industry Development Decree 2010*. Although formal military censorship virtually ended later at the start of 2012, Freedom House's annual media freedom report in 2013 said the harsh penalties under the decree – such as FJ\$1000 fines or up to two years in jail for journalists and up to FJ\$100,000 for organisations breaching the law – had “deterred most media from criticising the regime”.

Defenders of the regime claim there is “freedom



of the press” and it is the media editors who are failing to take advantage of the freedom that they have. New director of the Fiji Media Development Authority (MIDA), Matai Akauola, former general manager of the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA), said in a Radio Australia *Pacific Beat* interview: “In the last few years, we haven’t taken anyone to task, so that speaks for itself ... We even have clauses in the new Constitution that have provisions for free media in Fiji. So for us everything is open to the media ...”<sup>11</sup>

But in February 2013, *The Fiji Times* was fined FJ\$300,000 and the editor given a suspended jail term for contempt of court for a news report critical of the Fiji judiciary published by the New Zealand *Sunday Star-Times* in 2011.<sup>12</sup> While this was not related to the decree, the harsh penalty added to a “chilling” climate for media, echoed by the experience of commentators on the ground such as US journalism professor Robert Hooper

who ran an investigative journalism course for Fiji Television during 2012:

“I stressed the coverage of controversial stories on issues of national importance that, if produced, would be banned under Fiji’s *Public Emergency Regulations* (PER) – an edict issued in April 2009 that placed censors in newsrooms – and the *Media Industry Development Decree 2010*, a vaguely worded law that criminalises anything government

deems is “against the public interest or order”. Under *PER*, overt censorship as well as self-censorship became routine at Fiji Television in 2009, in stark contrast to the openness and independence of the newly launched Fiji TV whose reporters I trained in the 1990s. Until *PER* was lifted in January 2012, military censors arrived at Fiji TV’s newsroom daily at 2pm and 5pm to suppress stories deemed “political” or “critical of government”. The arrest of reporters and confiscation of videotapes led swiftly to self-censorship in a de-

moralised newsroom.”<sup>13</sup>

In October 2013, the regime banned foreign journalists, media trainers and freelancers, and aid donors offering training from Fiji unless they were registered and sought approval from the state-run MIDA.<sup>14</sup> The self-censorship climate also impacted on academic freedom. At the University of the South Pacific in 2011, one of its most eminent professors, economist and former National Federation Party MP Dr Wadan Narsey, was gagged and ultimately forced out of the academy.<sup>15</sup>

Lamenting in one of his prolific columns that the Fiji media was no longer a genuine watchdog, Narsey added: “The real weakness in Fiji’s media industry currently is that Fiji’s media owners are not ‘dedicated independent media companies’, but corporate entities with much wider business interests which are far more valuable to the media owners than their profits from their media assets.”<sup>16</sup> He was later gagged<sup>17</sup> from giving an

address to journalism students on the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day event in 2013.<sup>18</sup>

In the inaugural UNESCO World Press Freedom Day lecture at AUT University on 3 May 2013, Professor Mark Pearson said that like teaching and nursing, a journalism career based on “truth-seeking and truth-telling in our societies had an element of a ‘mission’ “ about it. “All societies need their ‘*Tusitalas*’ – their storytellers,” he added.<sup>19</sup>

But he also warned that social media and blogging seemed to have “spawned an era of new super-pamphleteer – the ordinary citizen with the power to disseminate news and commentary” immediately. This raises the stakes for media accuracy, credibility and freedom. “It would be an historic irony and a monumental shame,” Pearson said, “if press freedom met its demise through the sheer pace of irresponsible truth-seeking and truth-telling today.”<sup>20</sup> ■

*An extract from David Robie’s new media freedom book Don’t Spoil my Beautiful Face: Media, Mayhem and Human Rights in the Pacific (Little Island Press, Auckland, 2014). The book is available from Little Island Press.*

*Professor Robie is director of the Pacific Media Centre at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand and convenor of the Pacific Media Watch freedom project.*

*The cartoon on page 6 is by Malcolm Evans/Pacific Journalism Review.*

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# A united Pacific voice to ban nuclear weapons

**François Pihaatae**

*2014 marks the 40th year of the Pacific Conference of Churches' efforts to bring justice to a region affected by nuclear testing.*

In 1967 the Young Women's Christian Association and the Student Christian Movement in Suva, Fiji's capital, convened a meeting on nuclear testing on Moruroa, Maohi Nui (French Polynesia). Two years later, a large march took place in Suva against nuclear testing, and after a further five years the PCC Executive Committee passed resolutions in opposition to tests in the region.

But for almost 70 years since the United States' first Pacific nuclear test on Bikini in 1946, church members have been forced to live with the legacy of this menace. Three of the world's major powers – the US, Britain and France – conducted nuclear tests in the Pacific with blatant disregard for human life and the environment. This unwanted activity has maimed generations of Pacific people and hundreds of European servicemen and their families. To this day, they continue the fight for justice, knocking on the doors of governments, pleading for compensation, yet their cries fall on deaf ears.

The families of Fijian servicemen who took part in tests as part of "Operation Grapple" near Kiritimati Atoll from 1957 to 1958 continue to wait for compensation from Britain. In Maohi Nui (French Polynesia), local landowners remain unpaid for the damage caused on Moruroa and Fangataufa during nuclear testing between 1966 and 1996.

Today, despite the end of tests in the region, the Pacific continues to face two specific nuclear threats: the persistent radioactive contamination from the tests and the newer issue of fallout from the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan.

In March 2013 the PCC General Assembly in Honiara, the Solomon Islands, agreed to remain steadfast in its stand against nuclear testing and for the compensation of victims of this Western influence. The churches recognise that justice is an integral part of peace. Many of the Pacific's communities do not have peace because they continue to battle for justice. This includes recognition of the intergenerational damage caused to the environment and human life by nuclear tests.

Our people remain in mental turmoil, seeking justice for the misuse of their lands and resources. The Pacific churches – through leaders such as Anglican priest Father Walter Lini of Vanuatu, Methodist Reverend Setareki Tuilovoni of Fiji, and John Doom of the Maohi Protestant Church – initiated the battle for justice and the end to nuclear testing. And with the resolution of the PCC General Assembly in 2013, Pacific governments have been urged to consistently call for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the just treatment of those affected by nuclear activities. This must continue despite the aid offered by Japan, China, France, the US and Britain.

To this end, it is necessary that our regional leaders – secular and faith-based – recognise the threats of nuclear weapons and speak forcefully for a ban. In international forums, including conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, the Pacific must speak with a united voice to bring about attitudinal change in the larger nations.

We must speak out, for if we remain silent the larger countries will be under the misconception that their testing, development and construction of nuclear weapons are acceptable. In this shrinking world, it is quite possible for the Pacific to be affected by nuclear fallout half-way across the world in less than a week. That is why we will continue to call for a global ban on nuclear weapons. These weapons are no good for the Pacific, and no good for the world. ■

*Foreword by Rev. François Pihaatae, General Secretary, Pacific Conference of Churches, Suva, Fiji, to Banning Nuclear Weapons: A Pacific Islands Perspective (ICAN 2014).*

# Le Pacifique uni pour interdire les armes nucléaires

François Pihaatae

*L'année 2014 marque le 40ème anniversaire de l'engagement de la Conférence des Églises du Pacifique pour promouvoir la justice dans une région affectée par les essais nucléaires.*

En 1967, à Suva, la capitale des îles Fidji, l'Association chrétienne des jeunes filles et le Mouvement des étudiants chrétiens organisaient une rencontre sur les essais nucléaires de Moruroa à Maohi Nui (Polynésie française). Deux ans plus tard, une grande manifestation contre les essais nucléaires a eu lieu à Suva et cinq ans après, le Comité exécutif de la Conférence des Églises du Pacifique adoptait des résolutions condamnant les essais nucléaires dans la région.

Mais pendant près de 70 ans après le premier essai nucléaire dans le Pacifique effectué en 1946 par les États-Unis à Bikini, les membres des Églis-

es ont été forcés de vivre avec la menace de cet héritage. Trois des grandes puissances du monde – les États-Unis, la Grande-Bretagne et la France – ont effectué des essais nucléaires dans le Pacifique avec un mépris flagrant pour la vie humaine et l'environnement.

Ces activités indésirables ont porté atteinte à des générations des peuples du Pacifique et à des centaines de militaires européens et à leurs familles. Aujourd'hui, ils continuent la lutte pour la justice, frappent aux portes des gouvernements, plaident pour des indemnisations, mais leurs cris tombent dans l'oreille d'un sourd.

Les familles des militaires fidjiens qui ont participé aux essais dans le cadre de l'« Opération Grapple », près de l'atoll de Kiritimati en 1957-58 attendent toujours des compensations de la Grande-Bretagne. En Maohi Nui (Polynésie française), les familles des propriétaires fonciers n'ont toujours pas été indemnisées pour les dommages causés sur Moruroa et Fangataufa au cours des essais nucléaires entre 1966 et 1996.

Aujourd'hui, malgré la fin des essais dans la région, le Pacifique continue à faire face à deux menaces nucléaires spécifiques : la persistance de la contamination radioactive due aux essais et les nouvelles conséquences de la catastrophe de la centrale nucléaire de Fukushima au Japon.





En mars 2013, l'Assemblée générale de la Conférence des Églises du Pacifique qui s'est tenue à Honiara (îles Salomon), a décidé de rester ferme sur sa position contre les essais nucléaires et pour l'indemnisation des victimes de ces décisions prises en Occident. Les Églises affirment que la justice fait partie intégrante de la paix. Beaucoup de communautés du Pacifique ne sont pas en paix car elles continuent de se battre pour la justice. Et cela implique la reconnaissance des dommages pour des générations causés par les essais nucléaires sur l'environnement et la vie humaine.

Nos peuples sont dans l'angoisse, en quête de justice pour l'utilisation abusive de leurs terres et de leurs ressources. Les Églises du Pacifique, par l'action de leurs dirigeants comme le pasteur anglican Walter Lini, « père » du Vanuatu, du révérend méthodiste Setareki Tuilovoni de Fidji et John Doom de l'Église protestante maohi – ont lancé le combat pour la justice et la fin des essais nucléaires.

Avec la résolution de l'Assemblée générale de la Conférence des Églises du Pacifique de 2013, les gouvernements du Pacifique ont été invités à appeler régulièrement à l'abolition des armes nucléaires et à un juste traitement des personnes touchées par les activités nucléaires. Cela doit se poursuivre même si des aides sont offertes par le Japon, la Chine, la France, les États-Unis et la Grande-Bretagne.

Dans ce but, il faut que nos dirigeants régionaux – laïcs et religieux – s'expriment, car si nous restons silencieux, les grands pays se convaincront faussement que leurs essais, le développement et la fabrication d'armes nucléaires sont acceptables. Dans ce monde qui se rétrécit, il est tout à fait possible que le Pacifique, au milieu du monde, puisse être touché par les retombées nucléaires en moins d'une semaine.

Ces armes qui ne sont pas bonnes pour le Pacifique, ne le sont pas non plus pour le monde. ■

*Avant-propos écrit par Pasteur François Pihaatae, secrétaire général de la Conférence des Églises du Pacifique, Suva, Fidji, du rapport Interdire les armes nucléaires : Une perspective du Pacifique (ICAN, 2014).*

## What are the communications challenges facing Tonga today?

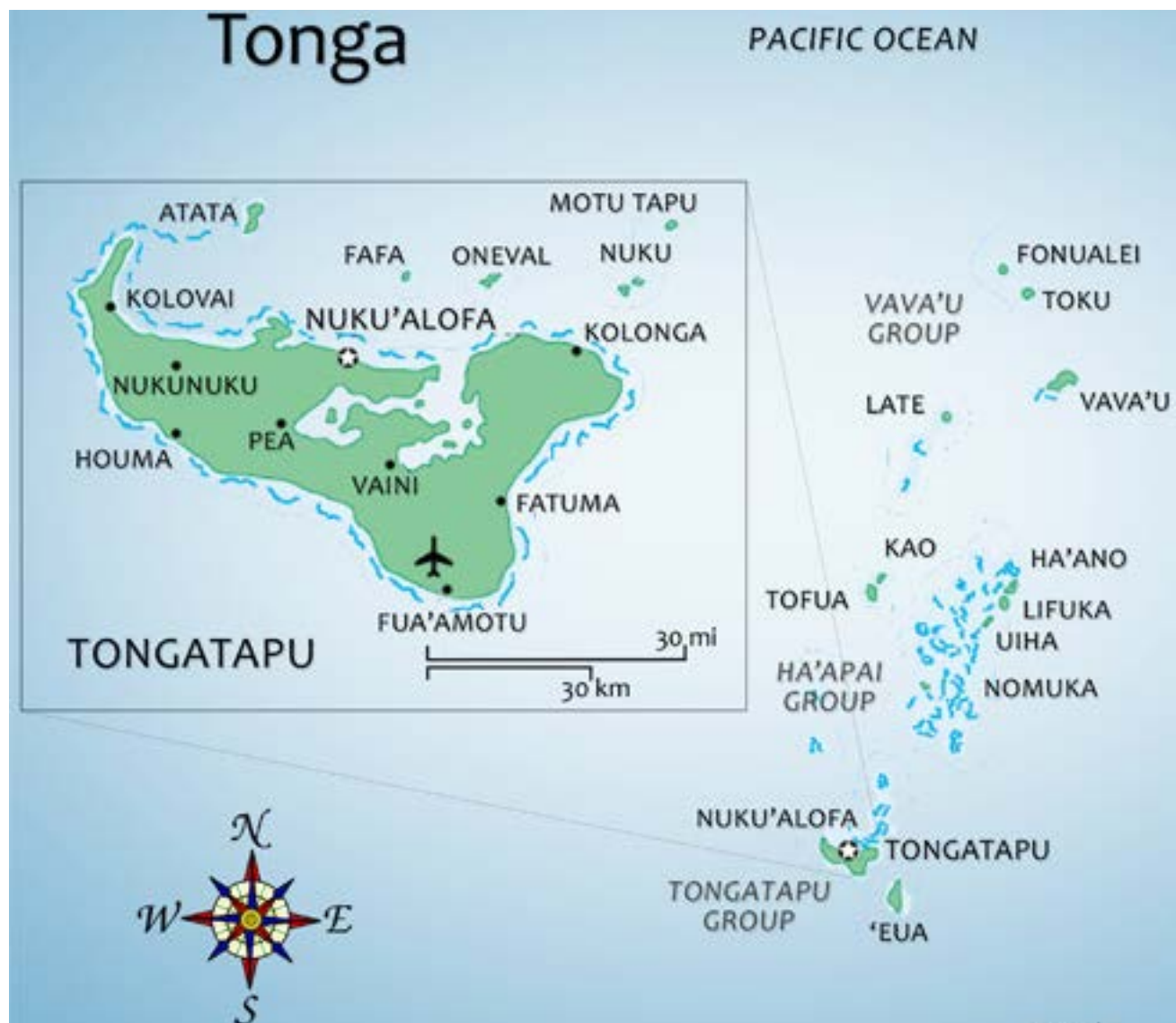
Viliani Falekaono

*It is difficult to treat communication separately from the other elements that have developed and sometimes become challenges in the society of today. If not all, most of the components of any society are subject to change and any change is a potential challenge.*

If there are challenges that communications face today, there must have been impacts on the old ways inherited from the past. In a family of eight – parents included – at meal times, everyone was quiet. I remember very vividly when I asked my mom, “Why aren’t we talking?” She replied, “You have only one mouth and that’s for eating.”

Normally after evening meals before sleeping, there was the family prayer time. Before the actual prayer time the father would speak to the family encouraging good deeds and condemning known misconduct. There was hardly any room for negotiation or defence for any alleged misbehaviour. If any member of the family spoke against or challenged the parents for any misfired accusation, that very action was considered bad manners. Parents and authorities seemed almost infallible.

The normal way of communication between two persons in Tonga depends entirely on the status held in society. If the intended communication is between two people of equal status, that is if they are children or parents, commoners or chiefs, they communicate normally. If a commoner tries to communicate to a chief or the king, he has to have spokespersons to do the communication. The king and chief do not talk directly to commoners. If ever the chief or the king makes a direct communication it is called “to ha Koloa”



(treasure is dropped from heaven). A commoner never challenges a chief or the king.

When the schools system started, teaching styles were almost delivered in the same way. The teacher taught; the student listened and learned. Asking questions was rather discouraged. As the school system changed, communication changed too. When teachers allowed students to raise questions and critically challenge the “status quo”, it revolutionized communication strategies.

### **Only equals communicate directly with each other**

In the Tongan Parliament, there exist the representatives of the people and representatives of the lords. It was hard to converse with the lords on a platform where only equal ranks can communicate with each other. In the ecclesial domain, the ministers or pastors preached, taught and catechized. The faithful listened and learned, but they did not challenge the pastor or the minister. It was assumed that pastors, leaders, and parents knew everything and they do the teaching and orientation of society and customary settings. Today,

attention is given to the needs of the needy.

Though women held a highly distinguished rank in society, they did not occupy the leading role of those who can communicate in public. Women were not among those who can vote in a parliamentary election nor they can be candidates for election to Parliament. On the very strict ground of asking for a date, only men were allowed to ask and propose to women. It was supposed that men were the only ones who could choose who to get married to. Today, women can ask men out. There is nothing wrong about it. A women can

communicate to any man of her choice and liking. But in the church and religious domain, only men were able to be ordained as ministers of the Gospel and Sacraments.

When it came to the moment of communicating to the one whom you choose to express your love and desire to be with, it took a lot of stomach to make such communication. Communicating directly on the subject at hand was considered irrelevant. It had to be with the artistic formula of poetic, pictorial language with metaphors and hinting at the real meaning of what was desired to be communicated.

For example, when a young man tried to express how he perceived and appreciated the beauty of a young woman, it would go something like this: “My eyes are not worthy to contemplate and gaze at beauty so much like the rays of the sun, for your face is so colourful and beyond the combination of the rainbow, the surface of your skin is finer than the clarity of the crystal clear.” And more would follow about the marvels of her mind.

Today, people no longer waste time in putting



their feelings into words, but hurry along to the ultimate objective and that is the business of jumping into bed. Communication has become direct and through e-texts and iPhones. No one is properly introduced any more and customary ways and protocols of communication are bypassed.

### **Key issues of media ownership and control**

What is significant about the ownership of anything? It matters because the owners have a certain beliefs and likes and a set agenda about the right thing to do. One of the main issues faced today is the heavy propaganda of major religious organizations or institutions and claims that the government is run under the guiding principles of that particular religion. Believing this other religions would certainly suffer and struggle especially when a doctrinal issue becomes controversial and opposed to the views of other religions. We find the media in a very similar situation when the owner sets the agenda.

The government-owned media houses have set priorities to serve and cover the activities of the

government. The only problem is when a critical situation arises; it is not easy for the government to be challenged by its own media. And because the government has the authority to issue licences to operate media, it can refuse.

For me, the measure of a media owner of quality is the ability to listen and to take criticism raised by its own media houses and entities.

### **The role of social media in communal life**

Critical media bombardment is a character test for those in authority and holding leadership roles. If the authorities and leaders confronted by media welcome and treat media as part of communal activities, the public will certainly read the situation as strengthening and empowering. If the leaders and those in power see media coverage as purely attacking and criticizing, it indicates an obvious sign of fear and incompetency.

When media appear to attack a leader or an authority, it gives that authority and leadership grounds to defend and explain reasons for holding back and not fulfilling expectations and prom-

*Wikipedia Commons: Tau'olunga*



ises. If the media do not handle such issues with the standard strategies, they are failing to execute their prophetic role and to expose the motives behind any action taken.

One of the leading media entities in Tonga is Taimi 'o Tonga, which is enjoying freedom of expression and the press under the guiding principles of the Tonga media law and media code of ethics. At the same time, it is reporting the news without challenging, predicting and anticipating the future based on the likely consequences of what we are doing or failing to do today.

Newspapers are not just for reporting what people already know. Media coverage involves the logic of investigating and identifying what the public may not see now, and some of the hidden truths which the people have the right to know and communicate. Even Tongan newspapers have the right to predict and to draw up a road map for the consequences of what we are doing.

Although this sometimes involves a high risk of being harassed by legal proceedings, quality journalism requires a stomach filled with vigour and the heart of a gladiator to pursue the truth and emancipate the mind from mental slavery.

### **Strengthening communication rights**

Communication rights in the Pacific can be strengthened with the support of international communication entities (like WACC and SIGNIS) who could organize regular workshops and seminars regularly on the different related topics.

There is a need to promote and implement the right to tell their own stories by the people of the region. We need to ensure that the law guarantees local people their communication rights. In addition, by telling the stories of the past we can remember what happened. Such stories sometimes boost our morale and sometimes humble us. With communication rights we can tell stories that not only tell others who we really are, but also shape the future for our descendants to enjoy the freedom to expressing their ideas and feelings. ■

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## **Virtual grief**

**Kristina J. Morehouse and Heather M. Crandall**

*The advent of social media has altered the communication of relationships in myriad ways. High school friends – lost years before to different colleges, cross-country moves, and growing families – are now back in contact via social networks. Communally speaking, social media relationships are held together by seemingly random posts about trips to the grocery store or a night at the movies that lead to days of commentary from family, friends, and acquaintances. Social media also appears to be changing the ways we grieve with one another, our communal expression and ritual of grief.*

**I**n years past, information about a friend's death most often moved from person to person by a visit or telephone call, where careful phrasing and a kindly presence or tone helped soften the news. What was commonly viewed as normal grieving occurred at a visitation and funeral attended by family and friends. Later, people brought food to a repast or reception and sent flowers and cards to the bereaved. Then, with the formalities ended, the bereaved continued with the process of recovery on their own.

Now, the popularity and ease of social networking sites such as Facebook have altered the way people hear about a death, with the news often shared in waves of postings that can quickly overwhelm a user's newsfeed. However, this on-line conversation doesn't stop at the initial revelation; instead, it can continue with family, friends, acquaintances, and now strangers online for days, weeks, months and even years afterward. Increasingly, the public and private spheres of life are blurring longstanding traditions of the boundaries between personal and shared information.



Changes in ritual communication practices have created different norms and traditions of grief in the context of social media and perhaps beyond. By looking at artefacts of mourning expressed through Facebook and other social networking outlets, this research considered what might be gained and lost in this new configuration of grief, both for those immediately affected by the death and those tangentially connected. Because the research dealt with what Walter Ong, S. J. called secondary orality, we used his thoughts to consider whether social media is moving grief into a third public digital space that shares characteristics of both orality and literacy.

When Ong (1982) talked about literate culture, he argued that written words take the author out of the discourse (p. 77). Referencing Plato's Socrates, Ong stated that "real speech and thought always exist essentially in a context of give-and-take between real persons. Writing is passive, out of it, in an unreal, unnatural world" (p. 78). A reader can't argue or even discuss the words with the author like he or she would in an oral culture. However, in the world of social media, a discussion does take place – an engagement in communal ways similar to those found in oral cultures. People comment and respond. They dialogue and, in some unusual ways that will be noted later, they disagree and criticize.

Social media, while clearly the work of a literate culture, shares a great many of the characteristics of orality that Ong discussed. For example, there are elements of the human lifeworld. People are talking about grief, a foundation of the human experience, and they are demonstrating empathy, digitally mediated but still meaningful. Also, like orality, the postings are agonistic in that social media creates a space for interpersonal interaction and impact and, occasionally, argument. However, social media exists in that literate sphere, as Ong said, where "written words are residue" (p. 11).

We found Ong's work a useful heuristic, then, as we conducted a pilot content analysis of Facebook pages that seem to memorialize the dead. Through this process, we found several ways that virtual grief appears in a social media context, sitting between oral and literate culture and giving

rise to the contours of this changing practice of collective mourning.

Broadly, we found that in this public and private sphere, everyone can participate in the grieving over someone's death – even the death of a person they didn't know. We also found a change in the amount of time spent grieving. Through social media and practicing virtual grief, the bereaved can subtly seek solace forever, reminding others through posts, keeping the loss in the present. Finally, we found "new" or emergent ways of coping with grief. Each theme is detailed in the next section.

### **Virtual grieving**

In years past, grief was more a private experience; now, increasingly on Facebook and other social media sites, the grief is public. Public and two-way communication means everyone can participate in the grieving over someone's death. For instance, in December 2013, a Washington state couple died on their way to Montana to celebrate their anniversary. In an online comments section opened up by local news station, people unrelated to the couple commented on the tragedy, responding to each other's posts and seemingly sharing in grieving a couple they didn't know.

This public opportunity easily derailed into irrelevant side commentary, such as in the case of this same couple that died. A random commenter criticized the grammar of another commenter. While the site was intended for condolences, it instead devolved into a verbal match wherein one person called the other a "whiner." In this way, what Ong described as the agonistic element of oral culture, takes place in written form, name calling that is "standard in oral societies around the world" (p. 44) but highly unusual in the context of death.

In a more intimate example, a wife lost her husband. The husband's Facebook page shows a post from a friend who writes about having a drink in memory of him. Another friend posted about having imagined she saw him on a street corner and commented about how much she missed him. In traditional ways of grief expression, the wife most likely would not know about all the public

grieving of her husband – particularly five months after his death. Now, the ability to post on a social media site is normalizing what might once have been considered trespassing on the wife's grief because most people would consider it rude or invasive to bring up another person's loss.

In a newspaper article about her recently published book about her daughter's death, author Hunt talks about how people avoid discussing loss. "To the dismay of many bereaved parents, after a brief time, people rarely want to talk about the dead child for fear this will be upsetting. These silences add another layer of pain" (as cited in Hval, 2014, p. D6). Possibly these postings from friends and family allow an outlet for the bereaved to feel that their loss is not forgotten and, in some possibly comforting way, shared.

Time spent grieving is also different virtually with possibly no end in sight. We saw many cases where those left behind have a lingering and public relationship with the deceased. In one instance, a woman posted a photograph of her husband at Christmas and mentioned how hard the holiday was without him. At least 50 people responded with words of comfort. As the author Didion wrote in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a book about losing her husband and daughter in quick succession, Americans view grief as something to be overcome and hidden.

"When someone dies, I was taught growing up in California, you bake a ham. You drop it off by the house. You go to the funeral. If the family is Catholic you also go to the rosary but you do not wail or keen or in any other way demand the attention of the family" (2005, p. 61).

Ceremonies such as funerals were divined to help provide closure, but with social media, the grief appears to be endless and shared. The woman whose husband died wrote recently that she planned to keep his Facebook page up forever. Her comment received 460 "likes" and 25 comments.

Another woman frequently comments on Facebook about the baby she lost 10 years ago in childbirth, and often what results is something akin to

a grief circle, where people add comments about their own lost children – some from people she obviously knows and some she clearly doesn't. Like Ong's oral culture, social media is "empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced" (1982, p. 45). While the written word "sets up conditions for 'objectivity,' in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing," orality focuses on the subjective, "encased in the communal reaction" (p. 45).

### Dealing with loss

Our final theme involved ways of coping with loss. In the past, people dealing with loss might have used tattoos and car decals as public grief displays, and these may have prompted discussions with strangers. However, any conversation that arose from these would go largely one way – now there is this new emotional outlet, this give and take, this reaching out and, often, receiving solace. This communal reaction often becomes aggregative, where people rely on similar – often the same – words to express their condolences.

Commenters repeat phrases: "Thinking of you." "So sorry for your loss." "Rest in peace." As Ong wrote, "Once a formulaic expression has crystallized, it had best be kept intact" (1982, p. 39). These repetitive phrases seemingly provide solace and support for the bereaved. In the instance of two teenage girls who died last fall in a car accident in Washington State, the Facebook page dedicated to them is maintained and *growing*. The mother of one of the girls regularly comments, and people interact with her – even people who often say things such as, "You don't know me, but ..."

The interaction is ongoing. In terms of time and in terms of interaction, this human lifeworld of oral culture takes place online. As Ong (1982) said, "oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings" (p. 42).

All these notations don't take into account the phenomenon of parasocial relationships, wherein one person knows a great deal about another,



while that person knows nothing of the first – such as with celebrities or public figures. Consider Nelson Mandela or the death of the actor Philip Seymour Hoffman. Many people learned about these deaths first via social media. Some posters reacted as if the loss were quite personal, sharing favourite movie scenes or quotes. In regards to Hoffman, who died of a heroin overdose, many commenters talked about the manner of his death and a small few criticized what they considered his poor choices.

Facebook has created a new grief support outlet – an online community, available at the publishing of a post. Social media allows for more intense and more frequent interaction with the bereaved, changing what people say and keeping the death more present. Recently, according to Dennis (2012) who examined self-help books meant to offer guidance to people experiencing grief, “grief theorists have endorsed the value of attaining new meaning(s) and continuing bonds with our lost loved ones instead of ‘moving on from,’ ‘letting go of,’ or ‘achieving closure from’ them” (p. 393). Apparently, according to Brody (2009), support groups for bereavement can be helpful to the grieving process, depending on who is in them. This raises questions about the effectiveness of public Facebook support.

Clearly, in the areas of public and private and interaction and time, the experience of grief and the ways of coping with grief are changing. What does not appear to be changing or even present in social media grief is expressions of anger, deep depression, guilt, disbelief, yearning or bargaining. In our sample, Facebook posts did not have comments that signal these “common” emotions from family, friends, or strangers, aside from the derailed conversation about grammar use.

These findings bring up some questions about the implication of these changing practices and norms of grief. While social media is a form of secondary orality with many traces of oral culture as Ong described, changing ways bring changes in consciousness that should not go unnoticed. It is intuitively good to have social support for loss. Is public support also good? We aren’t so quick to

leave the past behind, and our notion of getting over loss can linger indefinitely – maybe forever. Are we moving away from the closure that our ceremonies and rituals involving death provide?

Ong (1982) wrote that while written text is removed from the “living human lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by a potentially infinite number of living readers” (p. 80). His words seem prescient when considering Facebook and other social media sites that have seemingly endless potential in a digital and communal space and context. ■

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# “The Act of Killing”: truth, memory and reconciliation in Indonesia

Nubia E. Rojas G.

*The documentary film “The Act of Killing” reflects the ongoing impunity enjoyed by the paramilitary groups responsible for the crimes of Suharto’s regime in Indonesia in the late 1960s. Applauded by critics, internationally awarded and nominated for an Oscar in 2014 in the category “Best Documentary”, this movie creates a reflection on the recent past of a society that sees perpetrators as heroes and at the same criminalizes victims and justifies the atrocities committed against them. The film gathers stories about crimes against humanity with world-historical importance that had never been recorded before. “The Act of Killing” is a clue element in the national process of reconciliation and clarification of the truth about the dictatorship in Indonesia.*

One of the first scenes in “The Act of Killing” shows a man walking up stairs that lead to a roof where he begins to speak, without any emotion whatsoever, about the huge number of persons he killed up there. He describes how the victims were beaten to death, their blood flooding the floor. The foul odour filled the air in such a way that he had to invent a better method.

Accompanied by another person, this old man dramatizes how a victim was hung using barbed wire. He continues explaining, in a terrifyingly normal way, that he tried to forget how he murdered many persons by using drugs and alcohol

and just tried to amuse himself. Then he hums a song while he dances a cha-cha-cha with a smile on his face.

This man is Anwar Congo, considered one of the “founding fathers” of the paramilitary groups that supported Suharto’s dictatorship in Indonesia in the late 1960s. In less than one year, these groups assassinated more than a million people who were regarded as part of the regime’s opposition or who simply did not win the paramilitary’s sympathy, including communists, intellectuals, artists and Chinese immigrants.

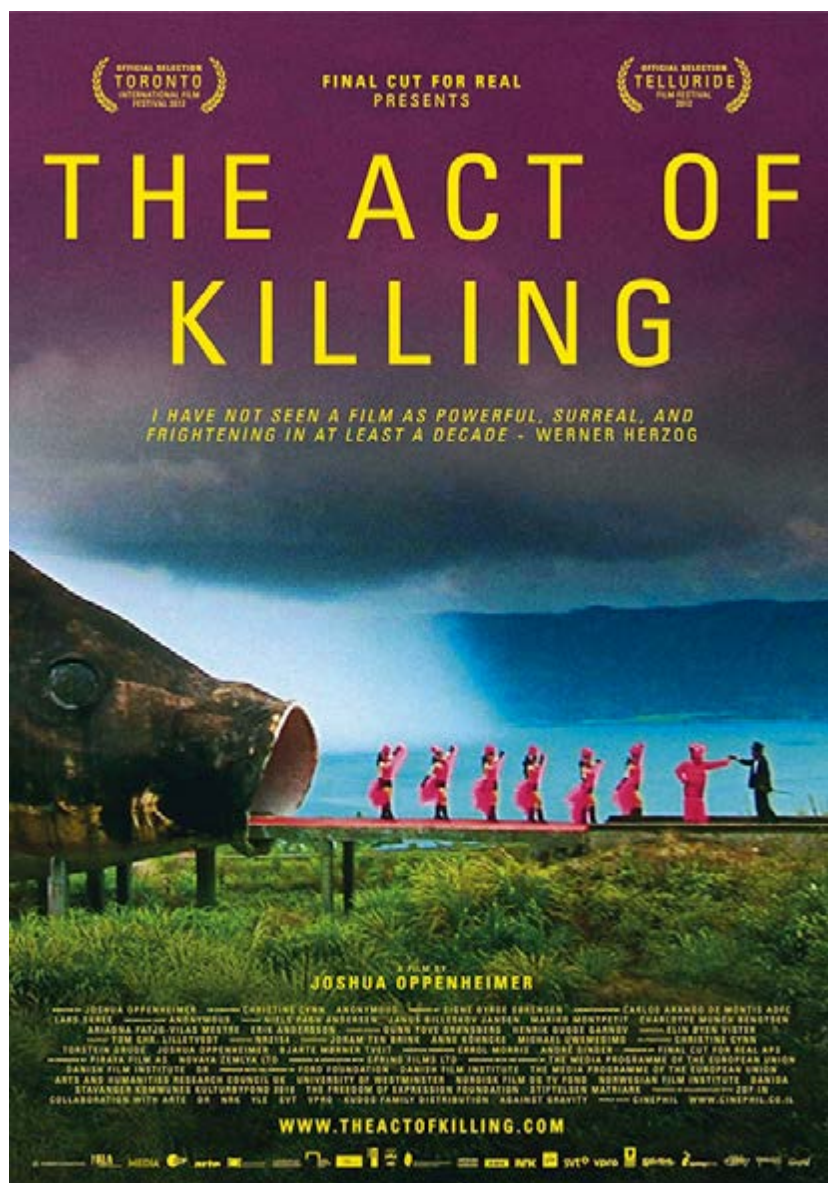
Congo is one of the protagonists of Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentary “The Act of Killing”. The film shows the absolute impunity still enjoyed by these death squads for the crimes committed, and the shocking admiration that a society can have, based on fear, indifference or ignorance, thus legitimizing the regime’s existence, justifying the crimes it committed and criminalizing its victims.

## Global resonance

The movie has thrilled not only Indonesian audiences but others worldwide, because it dug in the history of a country that refuses to revise its past and to take a critical position on it. At the same time, it revealed a reality that other countries in the world share and in which they are unfortunately involved. In an interview by the author with the American director Joshua Oppenheimer, published in a Spanish digital paper in 2013, he explained that he and co-director Christine Cynn had the intention to film a movie in Colombia about the work conditions of the cultivators of olive palms, but desisted because the presence of extreme-right paramilitary groups in parts of the country threatened the security of the film crew and the production of the documentary.

Instead they decided to film in Indonesia, where the situation is similar to Colombia, without yet knowing what they were going to discover there. “In Indonesia we started to film a movie, focusing on a community of survivors of the massacres of General Suharto’s regime whose members worked in an olive palm plantation. This community tried to establish a syndicate, but feared they may have





the same bad luck as their fathers and grandfathers, who had been sent to concentration camps or were killed in 1965, when the regime declared syndicates illegal”, said Oppenheimer.

Thus the documentary changed course, as the director explained. “In our conversations with the survivors we noticed the fear of the victims and the absolute impunity of the crimes committed by the paramilitaries, who celebrated the happenings. The victims we spoke to told us that some of those who committed the crimes were living nearby and asked us if we could speak with them to obtain information about what had happened to people they knew and how they could find their remains. It was then that I thought that we could directly address the perpetrators and ask them what had occurred.”

This was how Oppenheimer and his team came to know many of the perpetrators, Anwar Congo among others. One of the things that most impressed them was the shameless way they spoke about the murders they had committed – even in front of their wives, children and grandchildren

– without any repentance, as can be seen in the movie. This was “shivery, shocking and terrible” for the director.

### Premiere on Human Rights Day

“The Act of Killing” was released in Indonesia on 10 December 2012, coinciding with Human Rights Day, and since then it has been screened and acclaimed in many countries around the world. The film received multiple awards at events including the British Academy of Film and Television Award (BAFTA) 2014, the Berlin International Film Festival 2013, the International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH) in Geneva in 2013, and the award for the best documentary in critics circles from London, Vancouver and Toronto in 2013. It was also nominated for an Oscar in the category “Best Documentary” in 2014, but eventually did not win the award.

In Indonesia, special screenings were organized for film producers and directors, artists, human rights defenders, journalists, actors, educators and historians among other groups. Furthermore, free copies were distributed to citizens on September 30, the date when the genocide is commemorated.

Obviously, making such a critical film implied difficulties during and after the shoot. But during the screening at the National Human Rights Commission of Indonesia, everyone agreed that every effort should be made to make the movie as widely known as possible. Nevertheless, some movies are still banned in the country: “The human rights defenders and survivors told us, ‘We need to demonstrate the regime’s nature’, not because the Indonesians do not know it, but because they have so much fear that they are incapable of speaking about it”, the director affirmed.

Although supposedly a democracy since 1999, when the first parliamentary elections were held, Indonesia continues to be governed by a far-right ideology and there are still many remnants of the dictatorship, such as censorship. The regime members turned those who watched and spread the movie into a “military target” and included them on their persecution list. “We knew that the documentary had to be sent to the censors before it could be projected in public. Otherwise they

would forbid it and watching it would be an offense”, explained Oppenheimer.

“Without prior official authorization, the paramilitaries and militaries would have an excuse to attack the projections. In order to prevent this, we built up big domestic support and invited people to see the movie with their relatives and friends in private sessions”. On the release date, the movie was projected in 50 locations in 30 cities, and about 200 people attended each screening. Involving a society that is afraid but longing for justice in a reflection about the past has been the key to overcoming censorship.

Even so, “The Act of Killing” forced the team to adopt security measures. Oppenheimer said that he occasionally receives threats and the identities of the film crew in Indonesia are being kept secret in order to be able to protect their lives: “It saddens me that they cannot be involved in those changes that are so necessary for Indonesia, that they cannot travel with me to the premieres or screenings of the movie all around the world. I am dreaming of the day when things have changed and I can add the credits of all people to the film”, said Oppenheimer.

### **Encouraging social change**

Showing “The Act of Killing” in citizen networks that afterwards discuss what they have just seen and plan strategies to introduce structural changes, implies that the documentary transcends denunciation to become a key element in the mobilizing and reflecting on peace and development.

“The Act of Killing” clearly takes the side of those considered “the losers” by history, although it does not show them – an approach that is original. The story is told from the perspective of the perpetrators, who incriminate themselves more than any of the victims could have done: “We see the contrast between the survivors, who were living mired in silence, and the perpetrators, who were not ashamed to tell their stories”, said Oppenheimer.

The movie has a clear and plain intention to encourage and contribute to social change by seeking to uncover the truth about the serious violations of human rights under the Suharto regime,

to compensate victims, to make the perpetrators ask for forgiveness, to see that justice is done and a reconciliation process can start.

### **The film and reconciliation in Indonesia**

“The Act of Killing” is an element in the national process of reconciliation and clarification of the truth about the dictatorship in Indonesia. Oppenheimer affirms that he and his team felt that the stories to which they had access, about crimes against humanity that had never been recorded before, were of world-historical importance. Hence they created a vast audiovisual archive about the massacres as part of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Genocide and Genre project, with Oppenheimer as one of the principle investigators.

The contribution to public discussion that the movie is making sets a precedent about the importance that documentary film can have for social change by allowing Indonesian society and, by extension the world in general, to revise its past, change its present and build a new future: “What Indonesia needs is not only peace and reconciliation, but a popular movement that openly fights political corruption, that fights for freedom of expression and for the equal redistribution of national property among all the people that have been impoverished, victimized and excluded from social life and the economy,” affirms Oppenheimer.

In his view, “The Indonesian people must fight hard battles and perhaps the movie can help them face those with less fear, opening a space for them to talk about the problems of their country.”

### **“The other”: Friend or enemy?**

Telling the story from the perpetrators’ point of view, without them apologizing for the violence, and in this way giving relevance to the victims without needing to show them, is another interesting and innovative aspect of “The Act of Killing”, that provokes reflexivity among the killers themselves.

Even when they feel comfortable and safe in their impunity, it seems that the perpetrators are aware of the reactions that their confessions could provoke: “The children of the communists will try





to revise the history, but will not succeed. They will never be able to retaliate”, says one of them. “The government should ask for forgiveness, not us. It would be like a medicine, it will reduce the pain”, says another. “We could do it, the proof is that nobody punished us”, says yet another. The majority of them do not show the slightest sign of regret.

In this respect, the case of Anwar Congo is special. His personal journey of “realizing” the seriousness of the crimes he committed, thanks to the stories that he himself tells and recreates in the movie, runs parallel to the history of the massacres. Initially he says that he had tried to forget, while later he confesses that he had nightmares, as if he felt some remorse.

Congo recognizes himself in the mirror that the movie holds up to him. His attitude is critical. When “The Act of Killing” raises the moral and ethical dilemmas of the protagonists, it can lead the viewer to think that forgiveness is a necessary step to reconciliation. By appealing to the awareness of the perpetrators, and not only to that of the victims, while searching for peace and clarifi-

cation of the truth, the documentary can contribute to social change in an inclusive and progressive way.

“As a character, Anwar is interesting because his conscience is present from the beginning”, says Oppenheimer. “Perhaps the fact that he was dancing does not prove that he is proud, but instead that he knows that what he did was wrong although he does not want to show the world his guilt. He justifies his crimes, but does not want to look at himself in the mirror to see an assassin. The movie shows that impunity and corruption are inevitable when a regime of terror has been installed and that our apparent ‘normality’ is being built at the expense of others.”

It is interesting that, while “The Act of Killing” tries to return dignity to the victims, it also makes an effort to show that the perpetrators are human beings too. “The movie shows that the victimizers have done terrible things because they are human beings and therefore know the difference between right and wrong,” says Oppenheimer. “Precisely because they are moral beings, they are tormented by what they have done and try to run away from

it. They lie to themselves, justifying and celebrating.”

According to Oppenheimer, in order to understand what happened, we need to keep in mind the context in which these acts took place and in which those human beings were living: “I think that we are the product of the society in which we live, of our context, our past. If we refuse to look at our past, it’s like we do not want to know who we are. We have only one chance to live on this earth, and it would be a waste to live without asking ourselves anything about what it means to be a human being, without asking ourselves who we are.”

The personal journey of Anwar Congo through history was important for Oppenheimer, though it does not seem to have resonated with the other perpetrators nor to have promoted an immediate change in Indonesian society.

“I think Anwar changed to a certain extent, but he does not have the strength to recognize that what he did was wrong. He saw the movie on 1 November 2012 and he was really touched. He cried for a moment, went to the bathroom and then he came back. He said: ‘Josh, this film shows how it feels to be me and I am very satisfied and thankful for having had the opportunity to show these feelings which I had been unable to show for decades.’ He and I will keep in touch and that will not change, because filming the movie was like making a journey together. What happened during this process will always affect us”, says Oppenheimer.

“The Act of Killing” makes another contribution of utmost importance: it highlights the fact that it generated reflections about the shared responsibility between killers and a silent society that promoted the perpetrators to the category of heroes and at the same time denigrated the victims and justified violation of human rights, supported by the media.

### **Media as agents of war or peace**

Another interesting subject that the film raises is the role of media in the construction of imaginaries about good and bad, heroism, victims, violence and the truth. To understand dominant

narratives, it is very important to grasp the enormous influence of cinema and the press, especially in countries where there are totalitarian regimes supported by the media. “The Act of Killing” makes a very important contribution to critical reflection on the role of journalists and the media as collaborators in social conflict.

In some scenes, it is clear that the protagonists have built their identities as gangsters and executioners based on the fictional characters of Hollywood movies, from which they got much economic benefit by reselling tickets for screenings, and learned or improved their killing techniques. That leads to reflection about the vindication of violence in the media and the endorsement of ‘success’, ‘richness’, and ‘power’ acquired through violence, which are imposed like a model and shown as ‘desirable’.

In relation to the role of media as accomplices of impunity, the movie shows how the paramilitaries built a discourse around themselves that legitimizes the crimes they committed. This is especially noticeable in the scene in which some of the killers are invited to a talk show on the National Television of Indonesia where they are presented as triumphant in the genocide against communists and praised as national heroes.

The role of media as active promoters of violence during the conflict is perhaps most obvious in the scene in which Ibrahim Sinik, director of the newspaper *Medan Pos*, proudly tells that he used his work to gather or publish defamatory information about persons who later were assassinated by the paramilitaries. “My job as a journalist was to make people hate them,” he says to the camera.

But media can also be agents of reconciliation, historical memory, justice and truth. “The Act of Killing” and its impact on the Indonesian and international press exemplify this. In the same way that media can position themselves on the side of injustice, they can also contribute to the construction of a renewed society based on justice and truth.

One example is the Indonesian magazine *Tempo* that, in an act of courage, independence and journalistic ethics, published a special issue, in English as well as in the native language, in which they



make a revision of the country's history and talk about the massacres while referring to the movie.

### **Documentary cinema as a portrait of reality**

How could so many people have been killed? What keeps the regime in power and why do citizens apparently keep on supporting it? How is so much impunity possible? Why have those responsible for crimes against humanity not been judged, if they are fully identified? Who were the ones who wrote the history and how come their story became the dominant one? These are some of the many questions that a spectator might be faced with, wherever he or she lives, after having seen "The Act of Killing".

"The whole global south has been made that way. Perpetrators have won through massive political violence, with terror regimes; they prevent people from organizing syndicates, manage natural resources, and create unfair labour laws to obtain cheap labour. Many things that we buy in Europe are produced in countries like Indonesia", reflects the director Joshua Oppenheimer.

"Many people asked me 'Are you not getting tired of all this? Don't you want to leave it all and go back home?' But very soon I realized that there is no way to escape from it; there is no home to go to. When you visit a store to buy clothing, you are actually buying something that was made under terrible circumstances. In this way, in our daily lives we depend on people like the protagonists of the movie, and there are hundreds, thousands, if not millions like them who ensure that everything stays the way it is. In this sense, the developed world is not far from the reality of those countries."

"The Act of Killing" shows a reality that is happening in Indonesia, but the same reality exists in several other parts of the world. The reflections that it generates are not limited to a geographical area. The movie is a portrait of reality so it is impossible to be unaware of it. In a way, the personal journey of Anwar Congo through his own history and his country's history, which he helped to construct, are a metaphor for the transformation in Indonesia after "The Act of Killing": just like Congo, the country shifted from cynicism about

the past to "realizing" and reflecting about the seriousness of the facts and the need to speak about them.

The role that this movie plays as an agent of change is very clear to Oppenheimer: "I am very satisfied because every time "The Act of Killing" wins an award, there is a headline about Indonesia. That is very important because, in this way, the government has to stop looking the other way and will be forced to pay attention to issues of concern to the people and which are revealed in the documentary," says the director.

"I think the most important success of this film has been the fact that it helped the Indonesian people to look at their past without having fear," added Oppenheimer. I would feel very honoured when spectators everywhere see themselves reflected in people like Anwar and recognize that, in one way or another, we are all perpetrators, that each act of evil in history has been committed by human beings like us, that the world cannot be divided into good or bad. It would be an achievement if we could perceive the reality that "The Act of Killing" depicts not as a distant reality but as one in which we all are living." ■

*The present article is adapted from the author's work Documentary cinema, memory and reconciliation: An interview with Joshua Oppenheimer, director of "The Act of Killing" published in Glocal Times No. 20 (June 2014), University of Malmö (Sweden).*

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# Would you hire this person?

## Empowering voters in Peru

Amos Owen Thomas

*Democratic processes have seen a resurgence in many developing countries in recent years, but elections often remain a context for political manipulation and consequent alienation of the economically disenfranchised. Much political communications is about marketing of particular candidates, parties and/or platforms. This article documents the genesis of an innovative voter education campaign developed by an advertising agency in Peru having a strong social agenda. The campaign distilled political choices for national leadership into more manageable selection criteria via analogies from daily life. It was designed to cause citizens to examine their own political awareness and motivate them to utilise their voting privileges thoughtfully to further a public policy agenda they favoured.*

Most political education campaigns simply urge citizens to vote. There is an element of unenthusiastic effort by governments that run these campaigns so as to avoid jeopardizing their hold on power. Most political communications modelled on practices in North America and Europe are concerned about marketing particular candidates, parties and/or platforms. The mass of voters in developing countries, often the poorest of the poor, are justifiably cynical of their vote counting for anything, given their past experience.

Invariably the criticism is that politicians appear only around election time, promise the earth, attempt to bribe their vote, but no sooner are the results announced, no change for the better is seen. So while democratic processes appear to have improved in many developing countries and emerging economies in recent years, elections often remain a context for manipulation of the populace and invariably the alienation of the economically disenfranchised.

### Political context

Such a situation might be said to exist in Peru which, as with many developing countries in Latin America and beyond, has seen its fair share of political turmoil, including military dictatorships and ineffectual politicians, not to mention a home-grown terrorist scourge. In 2000 President Alberto Fujimori contested for a third term, like many politicians worldwide who find themselves unwilling to relinquish the reins of power and overstaying their welcome. It took a scandal over corruption via the drug trade by his close aides to see him flee the country and the establishment of an interim government.

Into the breach came President Alejandro Toledo, who held much promise as a former shoe-shine boy turned World Bank official and the first indigenous person to be elected to the presidency. But he struggled to deliver on populist promises of jobs and poverty alleviation and became immensely unpopular and beset with corruption towards the end of his term.

In the 2006 elections, Peruvians were faced with the unusual choice between Alan Garcia, a former left-of-centre president, who in his previous time in office had mismanaged the economy spectacularly (by his own admission and repentance), and a nationalist former army officer Ollanta Humala backed by the even more left-leaning president of neighbouring Venezuela.

### Approach to voters

In the Italian context, Caprara et al (1999) demonstrated that personality traits did explain actual voter behaviour beyond political



partisanship. Berman (1997) proposed the concept of political cynicism representing a distrust of aspiring politicians, political parties, incumbent office-holders and government in general. In the US context Schiffman et al (2010) found a strong link between the personality trait of trust and political trust, suggesting that political candidates and their parties seek to build bridges to build trust. Cynically, they seem to propose that the candidates listen and embrace the concerns of various segments of the electorate and thus capitalise on their apparent alignment, which seems more political market orientation than independent voter empowerment.

Various marketing scholars as far back as Butler and Collins (1994) have argued that market orientation ought to be adapted from commercial and non-profit sectors into political marketing beyond the election campaign, making the latter a profitable multi-billion industry in its own right. In seeking to research this, however, Ormond and Henneburg (2010) found that an internal orientation and one towards the public had the strongest influence on voter behaviour, more so than voter orientation of the political parties.

Most research on political marketing is US- or Europe-based and not necessarily transferable to other contexts. Nonetheless some findings such as those of Zaller (1992) that voters with low levels of political awareness have a greater probability of accepting a political message uncritically would seem to hold in other countries. Likewise Popkin's (1994) argument that voters are investing in collective goods about which there is imperfect information and under conditions of uncertainty, would seem to apply universally to democracies. Later Popkin and Dimock (1999) went on to affirm that less politically-informed voters were more likely to evaluate candidates on personal characteristics, rather than policy platforms.

In the U.S. context, such voters are often identified as being Latinos who Marcus, Neuman and Mackuen (2000) found relied on cues about the about candidates' personal qualities. Abrajano

(2005) confirmed that low-education Latinos tended to use non-policy cues in evaluating candidates. What would seem to apply to this significant minority in the U.S. is arguably true of majority of the populace in many Latin American countries. This was certainly the premise on which the voter empowerment campaign in Peru was based and sought to change.

### **The campaign**

At the prompting of civil society groups, an exceptional Peruvian advertising agency, led by a partnership of a creative person and an anthropologist, devised a political communications campaign to encourage voting. Most importantly, it addressed the scepticism of voters over the effectiveness of their vote and suggested a radical way to think of their role. Instead of seeing politicians as all-powerful leaders, it encouraged citizens to see themselves as their potential employers. Thus the voter was empowered to evaluate aspiring candidates by using the analogy of day-to-day experiences as a worker, a parent, a small entrepreneur, or even a student.

The billboard seen in figure 1 carries what might well be the theme of the campaign. The headline states in translation: "The current



candidates will be our employees” while the subheading says: “Let’s examine them”.

The corollary of this message seems to be embodied in another advertisement directed at politicians but with an indirect confirmation of the original message to the voter. The ad in figure 2 states plainly: “Seeking this chair?” accompanied by an ornate chair draped with presidential sash.

The ad goes on to say: “First take this chair”, illustrated with a humble chair typically used in university lecture rooms, especially exam halls. It implies then that any aspirant to high office needs to be highly scrutinized for competence.



The wall poster in figure 3 (in the next column) shows two elaborations on the theme. The one on the left reads: “Would you trust him/her with the future of your children?” It has overtones of whether you would be happy for them to be in his or her foster-care if you are no longer able to look after them. The other on the right reads: “Would you trust him/her with managing your business?” Again this has overtones of delegating control in one’s absence. One other elaboration not pictured is: “Would you trust your house to his/her care?” suggesting either house-sitting or home-management.

Included at the bottom of every advertisement



is the web address for the campaign which leads to an online test for politicians which can be printed out as a pencil-and-paper one. As seen in figure 4 (below), the preamble to the online test reiterates the thrust of the campaign, namely: The candidates are our employees to be; it is time to exercise the power of one who hires, and



ask these questions before voting someone to congress or the presidency.

The whole campaign as well as the questionnaire itself is called “Prueba ciudadana” or Civic Test. As shown in figure 5 (next page) the questions are classified as being about integrity, experience and capacity in three distinct sections, using the subthemes of the campaign. The questions are probing: “Do you know if the candidate has been involved in corruption?”, “Does he have an addiction to drugs”, “Is he recognised as a serious worker?”, “Has he experience in running a complex organisation?”, “Do you understand the proposed



**PRUEBA CIUDADANA**

Página 1 de 10. Imprimir

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INTEGRIDAD

¿ LE DEJARÍAS TU CASA PARA QUE TE LA CUIDE ?

1. ¿Sabes si tu candidato(a) ha estado involucrado en casos de corrupción?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
2. ¿Sabes si cumple cabalmente con sus responsabilidades familiares?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
3. ¿Sabes si es buen pagador(a) de sus deudas y sus impuestos?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
4. ¿Sabes si bebe en exceso o es adicto a drogas?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
5. ¿Sabes si le han descubierto mentiras en el pasado?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no

---

EXPERIENCIA

¿ LO CONTRATARÍAS PARA MANEJAR TU NEGOCIO ?

6. ¿Sabes si es reconocido(a) como un trabajador serio y cumplido?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
7. ¿Has leído su hoja de vida?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
8. ¿Sabes si entiende de presupuestos, balances y otras responsabilidades propias de quien maneja el dinero de todos?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
9. ¿Conoces si tiene experiencia en administrar organizaciones complejas?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
10. ¿Sabes si logra que la gente se ponga de acuerdo?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no

---

CAPACIDAD

¿ LE CONFiarías EL FUTURO DE TUS HIJOS ?

11. ¿Conoces las prioridades de su plan de gobierno?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
12. ¿Sabes si su equipo de trabajo tiene especialistas respetados?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
13. ¿Sabes si ha participado en alguna organización que busque mejorar la vida de otros peruanos?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
14. ¿Sabes por qué quiere realmente este cargo?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no
15. ¿Te sentirías orgulloso de tenerlo(a) como líder?	<input type="radio"/> sí <input type="radio"/> no

CALCULA TU PUNTAJE

  
Página 2 de 10. Imprimir

**¿CÓMO SALISTE?**

plans of his government?” and so on.

The voters-to-be using this questionnaire are then provided with a key for rating their ability to assess the preferred candidate’s performance on the various critical factors, as shown in figure 6 (below) If the candidate scores between 0-5 on the positives, the voter is warned: “Do not complain later” and advised to click through to a site advising him or her on how to improve on their knowledge of the candidate. If the voter

De 0 a 5 afirmativas  
De 6 a 10 afirmativas  
De 11 a 15 afirmativas

**Después no te quejes. Haz clic aquí para mejorar**

Estás en camino, **sigue informándote**

¡Felicidades! Ojalá hubieran más peruanos como tú que no desperdician su voto

PÁGINA PRINCIPAL

EL POR QUÉ

LA CAMPAÑA

LA PRUEBA

ENLACES

EL CONTACTO

scores between 6-10, then he or she is affirmed in making the effort and advised to keep being informed. If the voter scores over 19, then he or she is advised as a Peruvian not to waste the vote.

## The outcomes

It is not known and perhaps cannot be known just how many people were influenced by the advertising campaign not only to vote but to use the test or at least its criteria to evaluate politicians before voting. For one thing, Internet usage in Peru is quite limited at about 10% of the population.

On the other hand the billboards and posters were readily accessible. In a land where the literacy rate is over 90%, their impact could well have been considerable though such high rates are simply not true of many other developing countries.

The outcome of the election was the victory of Alan Garcia who in a previous term of office over a decade had wrecked the economy. Did the people nonetheless think he had the experience and capacity to lead? Subsequently his government was embroiled in a corruption scandal over the allocation of oil-drilling licenses and there have more recently been demonstrations by the native peoples of the areas where the drilling has commenced. It does raise the question that he and his political compatriots may have passed the test for integrity on paper but not in practice.

## Global applications

While democratic processes may have seen a resurgence in many developing countries and emergent economies, elections often remain

a context for political manipulation. On the face of it, there could to be much mileage in adapting this voter education campaign elsewhere to overcome the alienation of the economically disenfranchised. It demonstrates how

marketing communications tools can be used for political education about democratic rights, rather than mere voter persuasion about particular leaders or party platforms.

A key question however is whether the universality of human rights and social justice issues renders the adaptation requirements of this political education campaign relatively minimal for its use in other developing countries and even developed countries with marginalised groups.

Furthermore, given the fact that rates of literacy in Peru are simply not true of many other developing countries, a similar campaign might have negligible impact where elections are dominated by image and rhetoric. Even so, public policy-makers, election officials and social activists in those countries could learn from this case-study a fresh approach to communicating with citizens on how they might evaluate their political choices, exercise their democratic rights, even shape the national agenda.

Political education needs to go beyond the quite hackneyed “go-vote” didacticism which has had no demonstrable impact apart from assuaging the consciences of politicians and officials, to a whole spectrum of messages from “how-to-vote” to “why-bother-to-vote”. If the democratic ethos is to be upheld, if not promoted, then political education needs to be entirely non-partisan without any semblance of advocating voting-in again the incumbent government if it is to be credible. There is sufficient motivation and funding for political marketing by opposition parties without them dabbling in voter education with ulterior motives.

Yet there is scope enough within their campaigns to focus on political platforms and agendas to inform voter choice, rather than reliance on personality or rhetoric. Likewise there is a continuum of political advertising ranging from focus on leadership styles to party platforms to candidate integrity.

Presumably an effective voter education campaign such as the one in Peru, run by credible non-partisan organisations, could nudge

political parties to communicate and debate their alternative proposals for the future and their leaders’ integrity to the benefit of the country and its citizenry. ■

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# Cuando la religión se pone del lado de la gente

## Entrevista con Rolando Pérez

*Rolando Pérez, profesor del Departamento Académico de Comunicaciones de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, forma parte de uno de los equipos ganadores del concurso organizado por el Vicerrectorado de Investigación (VRI). También es el coordinador del estudio: “Nuevos roles de la religión en el Perú: Representaciones públicas y prácticas ciudadanas de Organizaciones Basadas en la Fe (OBF)”, que aborda la participación de las comunidades religiosas en el marco de los conflictos sociales, prestando especial interés a las formas de interacción, incidencia y legitimación en el espacio público.*

**L**a investigación cobra especial relevancia en estos días debido a la emergencia pública de sectores religiosos que buscan incidir en las políticas públicas, como es el caso del proyecto de ley de Unión Civil -presentado por el congresista Carlos Bruce- que ha generado acaloradas reacciones en contra, guiadas principalmente por colectividades religiosas. La situación nos lleva a plantearnos nuevamente una pregunta presente hace décadas en el debate político: ¿Debe la religión incidir (o intentar hacerlo) en las políticas públicas?

### **¿En qué consiste la investigación que viene coordinando y que ganó el concurso del VRI?**

Este proyecto se inscribe en el marco del grupo interdisciplinario de investigación sobre estudios de la religión, del que soy miembro. Nuestro estudio se enfocará dos casos: las iniciativas ciudadanas en las regiones de Cajamarca y Junín. Investigare-

mos el rol que han jugado los actores vinculados a las iglesias –especialmente las católicas y evangélicas– en los conflictos socio-ambientales.

Lo que intenta la investigación es analizar los roles que estos actores han construido, sus formas de participación en la sociedad civil, la manera en que han ido re-significando sus concepciones y prácticas religiosas en su interacción con la sociedad civil en el ámbito público. Yo introduzco una lectura en relación al rol que juegan los medios de comunicación en ese proceso, porque lo que observamos es que la actuación pública de los actores religiosos en este escenario está notablemente marcada por un intenso proceso de mediatización.

### **Estos representantes religiosos no ostentan ningún cargo oficial ¿Cómo se introducen en el conflicto?**

La mayoría de ellos son grupos vinculados a iglesias, pero participan en el espacio público sin adquirir necesariamente una representación oficial. Se inspiran en una manera de entender la fe que –según ellos– los lleva a asumir un rol ético en la sociedad. Estos actores asumen que desde su espiritualidad pueden participar en la creación o la promoción de valores significativos, como la justicia, los derechos humanos o la cultura de paz.

Es interesante porque es un modelo de participación pública o ciudadana nacido desde una frontera de las iglesias. En el caso de los conflictos socio ambientales, por ejemplo, en muchas regiones del país las parroquias locales tienen un rol importante en este sentido, y construyen una expresión eclesial cercana a las necesidades y demandas sociales de la gente. Pero, además de ellos hay otras expresiones laicas que no se han desvinculado de las iglesias y que están participando activamente en diversas redes de la sociedad civil.

¿Cuán espontáneos son? ¿Qué vínculos tienen con la iglesia oficial? ¿Cómo replantean su pertenencia a la institucionalidad eclesial? ¿A partir de qué comprensión teológica o pastoral replantean su inserción en la sociedad civil y su participación en espacio público? ¿Qué tipo de estrategias comuni-



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cacionales han desarrollado? Eso es lo que queremos investigar.

**Hay una idea de que lo que promueve la iglesia es más bien la pasividad política ¿Podemos reconocer alguna orientación política en estos grupos?**

Estos grupos o líderes religiosos toman distancia de la participación política partidaria. Tienen, más bien, una perspectiva de participación en el quehacer político desde los espacios de la sociedad civil, es decir desde una perspectiva más ciudadana. No son movimientos que se adscriban a partidos o movimientos políticos.

Además, asumen su quehacer pastoral desde el acompañamiento a la gente, especialmente a aquellos que están en situación de exclusión o sufren por el atropello de sus derechos. En ese sentido, se distancian de las opciones religiosas fundamentalistas, que precisamente han ganado legitimidad pública en los últimos años y que buscan incidir en las políticas públicas desde determinadas agendas

religiosas conservadoras.

En contraste, el sector religioso que nosotros estamos investigando hace parte de un movimiento mayor de actores eclesiásticos que vienen participando desde hace muchos años en espacios del Estado y la sociedad civil, como las Mesas de concertación para la lucha contra la pobreza, las iniciativas que se generaron para la creación de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, las campañas diversas de incidencia pública en defensa de los derechos humanos, entre otros.

**¿Qué revelan hasta el momento sus investigaciones? ¿Esta participación es espontánea o responde a planes orquestados desde una cúpula?**

En realidad hasta el momento hemos encontrado iniciativas de diverso tipo que trascienden las voces oficiales del catolicismo y las iglesias evangélicas. Muchos de ellos surgen de movimientos laicos, de grupos para-eclesiásticos que no se desvinculan necesariamente de sus congregaciones o



parroquias, pero que reclaman espacios internos para el diálogo y para el debate público, así como otra manera de concebir la participación de los creyentes al interior de sus comunidades y más allá de ella.

En realidad muchos de ellos entran a la arena pública a partir de caminar con la gente y tener cercanía con sus necesidades y demandas. En ese sentido, observamos que para las organizaciones que estudiamos, los agentes de fe deberían estar siempre del lado de la gente, en especial de quienes son excluidos y atropellados en sus derechos.

### **¿Cuál es la percepción que estos actores tienen sobre los líderes religiosos que sí buscan un cargo público?**

Las personas vinculadas a estos movimientos religiosos y ciudadanos creen que su función es afirmar valores y contribuir con una cultura de respeto a los derechos de la gente, a su dignidad humana, a la defensa de la vida, a condenar atropellos. Desde esta mirada, consideran que muchos políticos que aluden a la fe lo hacen solo pensando en intereses de poder políticos personales.

Para las organizaciones que estudiamos, los agentes de fe deberían estar siempre del lado de la gente, en especial de quienes son excluidos. El fundamentalismo no es parte de sus bases ni mucho menos la legitimación de un poder político. Lo que buscan es contribuir a crear espacios para una sociedad más inclusiva.

### **A pesar de eso, es cierto también que hay grupos religiosos que promueven un activismo basado en el fundamentalismo ¿Esta participación no representa un peligro para nuestros derechos?**

Lo que hay que tomar en cuenta es que las iglesias no son homogéneas. Observamos hoy un intenso proceso de pluralismo y pluralización del campo religioso. Tanto en la iglesia católica como en las evangélicas hay posiciones variadas frente a muchos temas. Podemos encontrar sectores fundamentalistas, que buscan incidir en las políticas públicas desde su agenda religiosa, pero también

sectores religiosos que trabajan para construir una sociedad más plural, donde se respeten las diferencias y los derechos de la gente.

El debate sobre la unión civil para parejas del mismo sexo da cuenta precisamente de eso. Aquí observamos grupos que la apoyan y quienes rechazan la propuesta. Creo que los fundamentalismos de cualquier tipo pueden representar una amenaza para construir una sociedad civilizada y democrática.

### **Frente a estos activismos fundamentalistas ¿Cuál debería ser la reacción del estado? ¿Debe darles carta libre o ponerles ciertos límites?**

Creo que el Estado debería promover un debate más amplio sobre todos los temas que conciernen al bien público, donde se puedan apreciar las distintas voces y posturas de la sociedad, entre las que deberían estar presentes las diversas expresiones de las iglesias. Restringir las libertades siempre puede ser contraproducente e implicar un riesgo para la democracia. Lo que le toca al Estado es propiciar una cultura democrática y asegurar las condiciones de pluralismo ético y religioso en la sociedad, sobre la base de la afirmación y protección de los derechos.

En lo que toca a la sociedad civil, creyentes y no creyentes deberíamos promover una cultura de diálogo. Ahora mismo estamos frente al enorme riesgo de un resurgimiento de los fundamentalismos religiosos. Eso es muy peligroso. La religión debe contribuir a la democracia, nunca amenazarla.

*Fuente: Boleín [CONEXION](#) del Departamento de comunicaciones de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.*

# Poder político, tecnología y medios de comunicación

Carlos A. Valle

*La actual crisis mundial que está afectando a millones de personas, muestra una fuerte erosión del sistema político, social y económico imperante, que como el ave Fénix está procurando renacer de sus propias cenizas. Una de las claves para entender el gigantesco avance del capitalismo global es comprender el papel que han jugado y siguen jugando las nuevas tecnologías como herramientas esenciales para su desarrollo. La revolución tecnológica se originó y difundió en un período histórico de reestructuración global del capitalismo. El incesante y creciente desarrollo de las nuevas tecnologías se ha ido introduciendo en nuestra infraestructura social de la mano de grandes corporaciones internacionales.*

Basta recordar que la internacionalización del comercio, la concentración de empresas y capitales que se ha acelerado a partir de la década de 1980, ha contado con el indispensable aporte del desarrollo de los sistemas de transporte y de las tecnologías de comunicación. La concentración de los mercados tiene su fuerte correlato en la concentración de la propiedad de los medios en el ámbito global.

En la actualidad se pueden mencionar no más de diez enormes conglomerados propietarios de los medios, producto de la fusión de varias empresas por cifras multimillonarias. De manera que el mercado internacional de películas, programas de televisión, música, libros, videos, DVD, etc., está dominado en un 90 por ciento por estas compañías.

Se ha argumentado si los objetos técnicos tienen cualidades políticas. Porque pareciera ser que lo importante no es tanto la tecnología en sí misma como el sistema económico y social en el cual la tecnología está inmersa. Los objetos tecnológicos no carecen de importancia porque la tecnología llega a ser una forma de construir orden. Es así que, por medio de sus estructuras tecnológicas, las sociedades determinan, en gran parte, cómo han de trabajar las personas que integran cada sociedad, cómo se han comunicar y viajar, etcétera.

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

Pero lo cierto es que la economía misma no es una ciencia natural y los grandes cambios tecnológicos no tienen su origen y desarrollo en una esfera neutral, porque los basamentos de la sociedad provienen de decisiones políticas. Por eso Landgon Winner concluye que:

“Es característico de sociedades basadas en grandes sistemas tecnológicos complejos que las razones morales que no sean de necesidad práctica son consideradas mayormente obsoletas, “idealistas” e irrelevantes. Cualquier reclamo que uno quisiera hacer en nombre de la libertad, la justicia, o la igualdad puede ser inmediatamente neutralizada si se lo confronta con argumentos como: ‘Bien, pero esa no es la manera para hacer funcionar un ferrocarril’ (o una laminadora de acero, o una aerolínea, o un sistema de comunicación, y así por el estilo)...”



¿Hasta dónde la dignidad del ser humano está en juego en este diabólico juego en el que las reglas están establecidas de antemano y se han tornado inamovibles? ¿Hasta qué punto nuestras sociedades han sucumbido al deslumbramiento de la tecnología, se han dejado llevar por un determinismo científico y han permitido que sus vidas sean decididas en nombre de la cambiante tecnología? Y, al mismo tiempo ¿hasta qué punto la tecnología ha sido una valiosa excusa para consumir el dominio y ejercer el poder sobre la gran mayoría?

Por un lado, la tecnología se democratiza, posibilita el acceso a la comunicación a millones, provee la creación de un sinnúmero de redes solidarias, permite compartir la información a grupos de base de las más remotas partes del mundo permitiendo que la voz de muchos pueda ser oída. Pero, por otro lado, el acceso a la tecnología está inserto en la creciente brecha entre ricos y pobres.

La expansión de este sistema económico tiene efectos directos en el desarrollo de la democracia y en la naturaleza de la comunicación que en ella se ejerce. En consecuencia, el respeto por la dignidad de las personas se ve crecientemente afectado.

Es cada vez mayor el número de decisiones que unos pocos toman en nombre de todos, bajo la aparente participación de la gente. Las elecciones, por ejemplo, se están convirtiendo cada vez más en un proceso mediático. Los candidatos venden su imagen y hay “especialistas” que organizan la promoción y la venta de esa imagen en cualquier parte del mundo. El mundo asiste a la proliferación de puestas en escena colmadas de mentiras

con las que los candidatos buscan conquistar a su audiencia. Nada está ausente, ni el peinado, ni la ropa, ni la sonrisa medida o la promesa esperada.

Los medios comerciales de comunicación están provocando, al menos, tres efectos principales. En primer lugar, tienden a reforzar la despolitización de la gente. Como alguna vez lo indicó G. Gerbner, los conglomerados de medios “no tienen nada para decir, pero mucho para vender”. En segundo lugar, tienden a desmoralizar a la población convenciéndola de que es vana toda esperanza de cambio y que sólo resta aceptar la realidad tal cual es. El tercer efecto es la producción de realidades paradójicas. Por un lado, se verifica un mayor y creciente acceso a la recepción de medios y, al mismo tiempo, los medios están cada vez en menos manos.

El papel que juegan las corporaciones globales aumenta en todas las esferas de la vida, mientras que el papel de los estados nacionales es cada vez más irrelevante. Se exalta la importancia de la libertad de expresión en la vida de la sociedad – aunque con variadas interpretaciones sobre su significado– simultáneamente, se acentúan el control y la censura.

Aquí debemos señalar que el papel del Estado ya sea deteniendo, propulsando o dirigiendo la innovación tecnológica es un factor decisivo en todo esto. Por eso, en buena medida, la tecnología expresa la capacidad de una sociedad para propulsar hasta el dominio tecnológico mediante las instituciones de la sociedad, incluido el Estado. Es importante entender que la revolución tecnológica



fue una herramienta esencial en el capitalismo global. Es importante recordar que la revolución tecnológica fue una herramienta esencial para la reestructuración global del capitalismo.

El mundo tecnológico está inmerso en las profundas aguas de un complejo mar de fuerzas económicas, políticas y sociales que determinan muchas de las corrientes que arrastran su evolución y que afectan las posibilidades del desarrollo de la vida humana y su dignidad. Por ese motivo, es imposible aislar el significado de la tecnología del contexto en que se desarrolla. Por el contrario, hay una cierta retroalimentación entre los procesos económicos, políticos y sociales y el desarrollo de ciertas áreas de la tecnología.

Dada la complejidad del mundo tecnológico, es conveniente comenzar por establecer un encuadre que permitirá poner en evidencia los paradójicos desafíos que se ciernen sobre el futuro de la humanidad y la preservación de la dignidad de las personas. Recordaba A. Piscitelli que:

“La historia del impacto social de la tecnología muestra la conexión existente entre un tipo determinado de tecnología y una forma específica de sociedad. Ni toda tecnología sirve a cualquier sociedad, ni toda sociedad puede absorber cualquier tipo de tecnología. En tanto el factor tecnológico es la variable instrumental, y dado que las máquinas son incapaces, aún, de dictar los ideales sociales, cabe exclusivamente al cuerpo social determinar los modelos de convivencia que se desean alcanzar.” ■

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## Listening to the voices of those living in poverty and marginalization

*The Participate initiative provides high quality evidence on the reality of poverty at ground level, bringing the perspectives of the poorest into the post-2015 debate.*

*Participate aims to:*

- \* Bring perspectives of those in poverty into decision-making processes
- \* Embed participatory research in global policy-making
- \* Use research with the poorest as the basis for advocacy with decision-makers
- \* Ensure that marginalised people have a central role in holding decision-makers to account in the post-2015 process
- \* Generate knowledge, understanding and relationships for the global public good.

Participate is co-convened by the Institute of Development Studies (<http://www.ids.ac.uk/>) and Beyond 2015 (<http://www.beyond2015.org/>), but the initiative is only possible because of the energy, expertise and vision of numerous organisations committed to participatory research. Participate is funded by the UK Government.

Participate connects the unfiltered voices of those most affected by poverty and marginalization with decision-making at national and global levels, thereby providing high-quality evidence on the reality of poverty at ground level, bringing the perspectives of the poorest into the post-2015 debate.

Participatory research carried out by a global Participatory Research Group has been drawn to-



gether to explore people's experiences of living in poverty and marginalization, and mechanisms and processes for positive change. The report looks at how this knowledge contributes to a set of principles for development and a new vision for the future. The full Participate report, details on the methodology, and multimedia research outputs can be downloaded from <http://www.participate2015.org/resources/>

The following 10 interconnected and mutually reinforcing principles provide a strong framework for a vision of post-2015 development that is transformative.

(1) Prioritize those living in extreme poverty and marginalization through a rights-based approach. To make dignity a reality for all people, the rights to food, work, education and civil and political freedoms must be seen as foundational and interconnected.

(2) Tackle inequality by addressing discriminatory norms. For excluded groups to enjoy equal access to resources, services and justice, the intersecting social constraints and institutional power relationships that oppress them need to shift.

(3) Dignity and recognition are central. Interventions that aim to transform the lives of the poorest and most marginalized need to promote their dignity, recognition and empowerment.

(4) Strengthen families and communities – not just individuals. Development initiatives need to prioritize interventions and capacity development which strengthen the positive elements of people's closest support networks and challenge the negative ones.

(5) Make sure development interventions are holistic. Poverty and marginalization are dynamic and interlocking social processes. This requires coordinated, integrated responses, based on the realities of people on the ground, and locally led programmes.

(6) Invest in community organization and capacity development. Community organization and capacity can be a powerful way to increase people's sense of agency, challenge negative norms, build links between the individual and the community, and promote collaboration for positive social change.

(7) Promote a participatory approach to governance. This is an approach that engages with local knowledge, strengthens people's voices, ensures



the influence of citizens in decision-making and enables people to hold decision makers to account.

(8) Accountable, inclusive institutions and access to justice. Institutions should see people at the centre of why decisions are made; they must move away from nepotism and greed, and towards an inclusive and people-centred approach to policy and development.

(9) Quality of services over quantity. Service provision must move away from quantity as a measure of success, and focus on quality.

(10) Working over the long term. Interventions need to be based on longer-term relationships and investments in communities, not on short visits which set up short-term, disconnected projects. ■

# Bonding & Bridging

## Henk Hagoort

*The following speech was given at the 18th European Television Festival for Religious Programmes, co-organised by independent members of the Dutch Public Broadcaster NPO. Henk Hagoort is NPO chairman.*

I will explain the unique character of the Dutch Public Broadcaster later, but for a country born in the 17th century from the struggle between Protestants and Roman Catholics it is very striking, to say the least, that festival participants are being greeted by the Protestant IKON, the Roman Catholic RKK and the Evangelical EO. And tomorrow evening, the NCRV-KRO is hosting a reception. NCRV-KRO was recently created by the merger of two Protestant and Roman Catholic broadcasters which brings the 400-year-long Dutch religious dissent to an end once and for all!

You have chosen the theme: “How can religious broadcasters help to build bridges of understanding in our pluralist society?” It is an extremely topical question which I would like to discuss in brief.

In 2000, Robert David Putnam, the well-known political scientist of Harvard University, published his renowned book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. The book opens by concluding that classic clubs (such as the American bowling club), that traditionally created social cohesion, are disappearing. People no longer join clubs in order to bowl – they play individually. *Bowling Alone*.

In his book, Putnam distinguishes between two types of social capital. Bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding capital occurs when you set out to meet people with the same background or similar interests: the same age, same hobby (the bowling club), similar religion, etc. The value of such clubs or communities lies in their ability to give people something to belong to; a sense of connection. Churches and religious communities are excellent examples of “bonding capital”. They provide identity and nurture people’s self-confi-

dence and their confidence in society.

Putnam is concerned by the dwindling of bonding capital in America. Others point out that the bowling club has been replaced by groups of friends on Facebook, and argue that new types of bonding capital are emerging. However, the fact remains that, in our society, there is a growing number of people who do not feel connected, and refer to themselves as lonely. They lack “bonding”.

Since 2000 (the date Putnam’s book was published), the number of Amsterdam residents who describe themselves as extremely lonely has almost tripled. 11% of all adults feel isolated. This equates to 65,000 people living in Amsterdam. Once again it underlines the importance of bonding capital and communities in a society.

On the other hand, building a peaceful society requires more than bonding. It calls for bridging capital, too. Bridging capital arises when people from different backgrounds and groups meet. Bridging allows different groups to share and exchange information. Bridging gives people a chance to gain new insights and learn from each other. And it builds consensus among all kind of groups and communities representing different interests or backgrounds.

Churches and religious communities are traditionally better at bonding than bridging. Bridging capital has become a rare commodity in our western, individualised society. Confidence in the traditional institutions (political parties, trade unions, etc.) is decreasing. Involvement in the European Union – this century’s most ambitious bridging project for a peaceful Europe – is waning. Apart from music or sports (such as the World Cup over the next few weeks) there is little that connects different groups in our society.

A public broadcaster is an exception to the rule – which is precisely why we have to cherish our public broadcasters in Europe.

### Seeing diversity in the media

A strong public broadcaster (the Dutch public broadcaster reaches 85% of Dutch citizens every week) is vital bridging capital in our society. The people you don’t meet at work, at church, or in your neighbourhood, you see and hear in the



media. Groups learn about, and from, each other through radio and television.

By making society's diversity transparent, public media give people an opportunity to get to know each other and help to eradicate prejudices. But this is only possible on condition that the public broadcaster represents, and reaches, all groups of the population.

A public broadcaster that only makes programmes for the happy few and restricts its content to culture and news cannot build bridges in society. A marginalised public broadcaster becomes the property of the highly-educated cultural elite and by doing so loses its value for society as a whole. It loses its bridging capital.

The Dutch Public Broadcaster – or NPO – is unique in the way that it unites the power of bonding and bridging. The NPO is not one organisation but a collection of independent broadcasters. The NPO umbrella organisation is responsible for programming and distributing the channels, but the production of the programmes is outsourced to independent broadcasters.

These independent broadcasters are associations of members affiliated on the basis of shared convictions, shared religion or shared interests. They are a prime example of bonding capital. The NPO brings together programmes made from these different perspectives on its general channels, providing the bridging capital. A perfect illustration of bonding and bridging.

### **Building bridges**

Back to the question: how can religious broadcasting help building bridges of understanding in a pluralist society? Or, to put it differently: how can religious programmes act as bridging capital?

The first question is: which bridges need to be built in the 21st century? What are the dividing lines in our society? Which dividing lines are responsible for fostering lack of understanding, prejudices, exclusion and a lack of social cohesion? We all realise that the traditional dividing lines between religions or world views are no longer the biggest factor.

The Netherlands may have arisen in the 17th century, springing from the struggle between

Protestants and Roman Catholics, but in our secularised society other dividing lines now play a bigger role. A current and much-debated topic is the dividing line between immigrants and long-standing citizens. I also see this reflected in the programming of this festival.

The focus on Islam as a religion is often closely linked with the theme of immigration and integration. And rightly so: the programme made by the Norwegian public broadcaster about the pilgrimage to Mecca of two Muslims from Oslo can deepen the knowledge and understanding of people you may not come into contact with in your own street or workplace. This is how bridges of understanding are built, and prejudices prevented. The theme of world poverty is another issue I see in many programmes of the festival, which is understandable from the perspective of a religious broadcaster.

However, are these really the themes that threaten to divide our western society in the 21st century, or do they reflect the concerns of the 20th century? Tonight, I will challenge you to focus on another dividing line that worries me, the widening gap between higher and lower educated people in our western society.

A study that appeared last week clearly indicated that inequality is on the rise in the Netherlands, due to two main factors. Firstly, globalisation and digitalisation. Those who are highly educated derive greater benefit from technological advances and globalisation than the lesser educated. In short: the highly educated use computers while those with a lower education are replaced by computers.

The second cause is the lack of social mobility. The upward mobility of 20th century emancipation has taken shape. Highly educated women marry highly educated men, have highly educated children who grow up to find highly educated friends and partners. The consequence is growing differences in earning power and more inequality. On the one hand, I am extremely concerned that our western society will be split between large groups that pay the price for all our progress and lose faith in society, feeling meaningless, and the groups that enjoy the fruits of all that progress on

the other hand.

This scenario carries the risk that these two groups rarely meet each other in their daily life and society is disrupted. Visible signs of this can be found in the rise of populist parties in Western Europe and mounting intolerance between the groups.

My question to you, as religious programme makers, is: What kind of bridging capital can you create and deliver to build bridges between the higher and lower educated, between groups in our western society that benefit from developments and live a meaningful life and those that fall behind feeling meaningless? What can your religious perspective bring to this issue?

Building bridges of understanding between different religious groups in a pluralist society is wonderful. But building bridges between different groups that are really dividing society in the 21st century, is more important.

According to the early Latin church father Lactantius, the word “religio” derives from the Latin *re-ligare*, which means: to bind that which has been separated. Apart from the question whether this is the correct etymology of religion (probably not), Lactantius did manage to capture the mission of religious programming: to join that which is disjoined. Your mission must be to unite the divisive forces in our society.

Finally, if religious programmes help to build bridges between groups in society, those programmes naturally belong on public broadcasting channels.

As I said, the mission of every public broadcaster is to be a platform with programmes that people relate to (bonding) and through which they get to know others (bridging). This is why the Dutch public broadcaster is proud of and preserves its religious programmes. Now and in the future. ■

*The European Television Festival of Religious Programmes took place in Hilversum, The Netherlands, 11-14 June 2014 on the theme “Behind the front door or in plain sight: religion in a pluralist society.”*

Henk Hagoort is Chair of the Board of NPO, the umbrella organisation of Dutch Public Broadcasting.

## Ecumenical Jury Prize at Cannes Film Festival 2014

**Kristine Greenaway**

*A film about the imposition of a totalitarian form of Islam on a village in Mali won the prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the Cannes Film Festival 2014. **Timbuktu**, directed by Abderrahmane Sissako, a film maker from Mauritania, tells the story of how local people resist the arrival of extremists who want to restrict women's liberty and to outlaw music and football.*

The Ecumenical Jury Prize, awarded annually at the Cannes Film Festival by a jury of Catholic and Protestant film specialists, honours a film of high artistic achievement that reflects spiritual, social and ethical values. Winning directors are presented with a medal and a statement by the jury about the motivation for their choice.

In selecting *Timbuktu* (see photo on following page) for its top award, the jury expressed appreciation for the hope inherent in the actions of local people and their Imam as they resist the outsiders and seek to continue to practice a moderate form of Islam.

The jury's citation reads: “This film is a strong yet nuanced denunciation of an extremist interpretation of religion.” Accepting the award, the film's director Sissako, said: “We are not all of the same religion but all religions are about love. This film is about when religion is taken hostage, when love is taken hostage.”

The film tells the story of what happens to an agricultural family when strangers seeking to impose a severe interpretation of Islamic law take over the community. When the father of the family accidentally kills a neighbour in a dispute over a cow, he is subjected to an arbitrary trial and





condemned to death.

The jury also awarded special mentions to two films shown in a separate competitive section for feature films, *A Certain Regard*. Wim Wenders' *The Salt of the Earth*, a documentary about photographer Sebastião Salgado, was cited for its testimony to the human rights and environmental challenges confronting peoples worldwide. *Hermosa Juventud* by Spain's Jaime Rosales highlights the challenges facing a young couple trying to survive the current economic crisis.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Ecumenical Jury at Cannes, considered the world's premier film festival. With financial support from WACC, the six-member ecumenical jury is appointed by INTERFILM, an international network of Protestant film specialists and theologians, and by SIGNIS, a worldwide association of Catholic communicators. Jury members choose the winning film from those in competition for the festival's top prize, the Palme d'Or. This year 18 films from 12 countries vied for honours.

Ecumenical Jury members evaluate films according to their aesthetic merits and the questions they raise about Christian responsibility in con-

temporary society. Directors of past winners of the Ecumenical Jury Prize at Cannes include Wim Wenders, Denys Arcand, Mike Leigh and Zhang Yimou.

At this year's festival the Belgian film makers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne (below) received



the 40th Anniversary Prize of the Ecumenical Jury in honour of their body of work. The brothers have received many awards including two Palmes d'Or and two mentions by Ecumenical juries at Cannes: *The Son* (2002) and *Rosetta* (1999). ■

The members of the jury at Cannes 2014 were Guido Convents (Belgium); Maria José Martínez Ordoñez (Ecuador); and Hervé Giraud (France) representing Signis and Julia Helmke (Germany), Kristine Greenaway (Canada), and Jacques Champeaux (France) representing Interfilm.

# On the Screen...

## Nyon (Switzerland) 2014

Since 2005 SIGNIS (World Association for Catholic Communication) and INTERFILM (International Inter-Church Film Organisation) have been present at the Festival Visions du Réel in Nyon, Switzerland, with an interreligious jury. The jury includes a representative of a member of INTERFILM and SIGNIS and a member of both the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

The jury awards a prize to a feature-length film in the international competition and possibly a commendation that sheds light on existential, social; or spiritual questions as well as human values.

The prize of CHF 5'000 is donated by both the Swiss Catholic and the Swiss Protestant Churches (Conference of the Churches in the French speaking part of Switzerland/CER).

At the most recent Festival (25 April to 2 May 2014) the jury gave its Prize to *Domino Effect* directed by Elwira Niewira and Piotr Rosolowski (Germany/Poland, 2014). This film challenges how to live together, focussing on a Russian artist and the Abkhazian Minister for Sport. Their relationship mirrors local social and political tensions. Involved in reconstructing Abkhazia and their love, Natasha and Rafael open paths towards intercultural dialogue.

In addition, the jury awarded a Commendation to *Café* (Cantos de humo) directed by Hatuey Viveros Lavielle, Mexico, 2014. The film is immersed in the daily life of a Nahua family, rich in human values and desires for justice.

The members of the interreligious jury 2014, appointed by the Swiss delegates of SIGNIS and INTERFILM, were Jean-Jacques Cunnac (Mauguio, France); Amira Hafner-Al Jabaji (Grenchen, Switzerland); Serge Molla (Prilly, Switzerland), president; Brigitta Rotach (Zürich, Switzerland).

## Oberhausen (Germany) 2014

At the 60th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen 1-6 May 2014 the Ecumenical Jury, appointed by INTERFILM and SIGNIS, awarded its Prize to the film *Neeuklidine Geometrija* (Non-Euclidean Geometry) directed by Skirmanta Jakaitė and Solveiga Masteikaitė (Lithuania 2013).

Motivation: Love – Does it endure all things? Will it never fail? In sometimes irritating pictures the film at various levels tells a story of partnership, separation and love. In this way, it challenges us to deal with the question of the (in)finiteness of love, and to seek our own answers.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to *Two Films About Loneliness* directed by Christopher Eales and Will Bishop-Stephens (Great Britain, 2014).

Motivation: The film tells the parallel stories of two characters who seek contact each in their own way by means of the Internet and surprisingly find one another. Per split screen and in stop-motion the two filmmakers succeed in an easily and humorously told story about the importance of relationships in a media-dominated society.

The members of the 2014 Jury were: Matthias Kuhl (Switzerland), Jury Secretary; Théo Péporté (Luxembourg); Sabine Schröder (Germany); and Eberhard Streier (Germany), President.

## Cannes (France) 2014

At the 67th Cannes Film Festival (May 14-25, 2014) the Ecumenical Jury of INTERFILM and SIGNIS awarded its Prize to *Timbuktu* directed by Abderrahmane Sissako (France/Mauretania, 2014).

“This film tells the story of the life and dignified resistance of men and women in Timbuktu who





Still from *Hermosa juventud*, directed by Jaime Rosales and commended by the Ecumenical Jury. at Cannes.

seek to live according to their culture and traditions while at the same time integrating modern communication media. The film is a strong yet nuanced denunciation of an extremist interpretation of religion.”

The Ecumenical Jury Prize honoured the film’s high artistic achievement and its humour and restraint. While offering a critique of intolerance, the film draws attention to the humanity inherent in each person.

In addition, the Jury awarded two Commendations to films in the festival section *Un Certain Regard*, namely to *The Salt of the Earth* (*Le sel de la terre*) directed by Wim Wenders and Juliano Ribeiro Salgado (France, 2014). “This documentary masterpiece about photographer Sebastião Salgado is a compelling testimony of our time and a reflection of the human condition worldwide that shows the possibility of hope for humankind.”

And to *Hermosa juventud* (*Beautiful Youth*) directed by Jaime Rosales (Spain/France, 2014). “A young Spanish couple with a baby seeks to sur-

vive the current crisis. This documentary-style fiction shows us men and women seeking to make choices when confronted with situations that undermine their personal dignity.”

The 2014 Jury consisted of Guido Convents, Belgium, President; Kristine Greenaway, Canada; Jacques Champeaux, France; Julia Helmke, Germany; Hervé Giraud, France; and María José Martínez Ordóñez, Ecuador.

## Karlovy Vary (Czech Republic) 2014

At the 49th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (4-12 July) the Ecumenical Jury awarded its Prize to *Corn Island / Simindis kundzuli* directed by George Ovashvili, Georgia / Germany / France / Czech Republic / Kazakhstan (2014).

Motivation: *Corn Island* (photo on following page) is a story of an old man who passes the wisdom of life to his granddaughter. We are invited





## Yerevan (Armenia) 2014

to reflect on the importance of harmony between man and nature and about the respect and care for others. The film raises attention towards human creativity and the never ending cycle of life.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to: *Rocks in My Pockets* directed by Signe Baumann, USA/Latvia (2014). Motivation: “Rocks in My Pockets” is an animated film telling a personal story of a woman, director and illustrator Signe Baumann, who courageously fights with her psychological illness. She tries to understand her uneasy personal situation, and through her artistic work she shows the always fragile but possible balance of her everyday life.

Synopsis: This writer-director animated film by a Latvian director living in New York City serves up a highly personal statement of a woman struggling with an inherited illness. With humour and courage, the director sets out on a challenging journey to discover her family’s best-kept secret. Baumann is not only director, illustrator, and screenwriter, she also narrates the movie.

Members of the Jury: Brigitte Affolter (Switzerland); Lukas Jirsa (President, Czech Republic); Joel Ruml (Czech Republic); Blandine Salles (France).

At the Golden Apricot 11th Yerevan International Film Festival 13-20 July) the Ecumenical Jury awarded its Prize to *The Abode* directed by Lusine Sargsyan, Armenia (2014). In five episodes the film uses different genres to portray social life in a block of flats in Yerevan during the war period 1990 to 1994. It describes the social consequences of war but without losing hope. The jury considered the film to be an appeal for peace in Armenia and all over the world.

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to: *Blind Dates* directed by Levan Koguashvili, Georgia (2013). Sandro is a 40-year-old Tbilisi teacher. His family and friends want him to get married in order finally to “grow up”. By living his own life and his own love story, Sandro changes the world around him.

Members of the Jury: Bishop Gevorg Saroyan (Armenia); Mikael Mogren (Sweden); Théo Péporté (Luxembourg). ■