

## **Third World Countries: Imbalance in Trade in Information and Cultural Products**

Since the beginning of the century developing countries have been concerned with the negative use of the electromagnetic spectrum and the harmful social impact of the foreign mass media. While the former colonial powers defended a “first come, first served “ approach throughout the 20th Century, “third world” countries proposed the design of an allotment plan through which radio frequencies could be negotiated between telecommunication administrations and allocated in relation to each country needs.

It would be during the 1970’s that developing countries succeeded in changing the formula: “free flow of information” for “free flow and wider and better balanced dissemination of information.” (Unesco’s Mass Media Declaration of 1978), which would represent the basis of the new world information and communication order (NWICO), but the battle between the imbalance in trade of cultural products and information is still taking place. Along with the problem of the technological imports that got poorer countries into debt, there are also concerns on the prejudiced point of view that is still propagated by the dominant media, reaching receptors at a global scale.

Although US is the most illustrative of all the examples, this essay will attempt to shed light on the current relationships between those who largely own the means of communication and those who are struggling to become competitive and self-governing in a global market. If developed countries are taking the lion’s share of the cultural and entertainment world market, should this be of major concern in terms of ideological and cultural interference? And if that is so, are developing countries also to blame for their passivity, lack of investment and future planning? We know there is local interest in continuing to restrict the cultural incomes from abroad, but does it really favour local production and enhance cultural contra-flow?

### **A global village: re-structuring means of communication**

Should one browse through US mainstream media looking for explanations of international events in which US has been involved, we would rarely find real and rationalized answers to the question of “why” these events happen. Officials, politicians and economic elites, principal players of the media panorama, never debate or deepen about these facts, and neither do the media. “The US media” Herman and Chomsky say, “do not function in the manner of the propaganda system of a

totalitarian state. Rather, they permit –indeed, encourage– spirited debate, criticism, and dissent, as long as these remain faithfully within the system of presumptions and principles that constitute an elite consensus, a system so powerful as to be internalised largely without awareness. No one instructed the media to focus on Cambodia and ignore East Timor. They gravitated naturally to the Khmer Rouge and discussed them freely –just as they naturally suppressed information on Indonesian atrocities in East Timor and US responsibility for the aggression and massacres.” (Herman and Chomsky; 1988).

Though the work of Herman and Chomsky was carried out 15 years ago, Chomsky is still defending his ideas about a reduced group of controlling families that produce a biased social spectrum closely related to personal economic and political interests. As an American citizen recently said about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: “I never knew about this in America, I had to come to Britain to know how monstrously they are being treated.”<sup>1</sup>

Yves Eudes, a French sociologist who investigated the US communicational structures linked to foreign countries, explicitly described how US networks were being used as a platform for the contents that would colonize “the foreign mind”, since “due to the difficulties of military control upon some countries, like those in South America, the control of the communication, information and ideological structures would be much more practicable and efficient” (Eudes; 1982). After the World War II US created the International Press Institute (IPI) whose main duty was to fund foreign newspapers that were against the nationalist trend of their respective governments. It was also founded the centre for Accuracy in Media (AIM), whose function was [and still seems to be]<sup>2</sup> to put pressure on national media to follow the corporate agenda and hard-line, right-wing foreign policy. At the time, US encouraged an intentional and constant exchange of selected personnel<sup>3</sup>, aid and developing plans that primarily included US products allowing the incursion of technical assistance in the future. Along with others, but for the most part, the US offered the installation of affordable satellite networks and programs that could bring in those images and codes from the “civilized world” and produce debt on other countries.

By the end of the 1980’s, though satellite broadcasting had not been a big commercial success, there was a consolidate network for educational and entertainment programs coming

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<sup>1</sup> *Question Time*, BBC 1, Thursday 24/04/03 22:40 pm

<sup>2</sup> “Quite frankly, the news media don't always get their stories right. What's worse, many of them don't even seem to care. By advising them of their responsibility to the public, whom they claim to serve, AIM helps to nudge the members of the news media into greater accountability for their actions.” AIM: <http://www.aim.org/>

<sup>3</sup> So that university students from developing countries and American civil servants would be able to use the same intellectual concepts as well as the same language.

from US to the Samoa islands, Paraguay, the Philippine islands, Mexico, Ethiopia, Nepal, El Salvador and Brazil. Western multinationals profoundly opposed to a localized usage of language –English should be the primal means of correspondence. As Jörg Becker put it: “The Reagan Administration clearly recognized the increasing importance of the peripheral markets for its own satellite and telecommunication industry. Thus, the US Agency for International Development received the sum of US\$25 million to establish a rural satellite program in the Third World; an initiative that was being promoted as advancing the living standards in rural areas of this part of the Third World. In reality it fulfilled experimental and market penetration functions.” (Becker; 1984)

Together with these identified commercial attempts from the former colonial powers, it is important not to forget a not so well-known network, Echelon –based on the USUKA Agreement in March 1946, which brought together the SIGINT<sup>4</sup> organizations of the United States of America, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand–, which set out to complete the ambitious purpose of global interception of any kind of microwave broadcasting. In its origins the USUKA agreement was supposedly cancelled because of its illegitimacy. But Duncan Campbell, a British journalist, denounced in 1999 that an electronic global network was being used to spy on other countries’ secret commercial deals. The original Echelon dates back to 1971, and only seven years later its satellites were able to film a stamp stuck on a highway in the middle of the Texan desert. Apparently, it is currently capable of intercepting as many as 3 billion communications everyday, including phone calls, e-mail messages, Internet downloads, satellite transmissions and so forth. The system collects this information and then distributes it once it has been filtered through artificial intelligence programs. The European Parliament has created a special commission to investigate this spying device under the assumption that it may have benefited Anglo-Saxon companies to the detriment of European ones. However, the exact capabilities of Echelon remain still unclear due to the extensive secrecy of the project –it is thought that Echelon is not being used to watch over civil population, but latest reports confirm otherwise.<sup>5</sup>

The ideological battle of North America leading the planet on “behalf of democracy” has been in the minds (and mouths) of US presidents, politicians and businessmen since the beginning of the century. In more recent times, especially from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush, this kind of

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<sup>4</sup> See more in: Andronov, A., *American Geosynchronous SIGINT Satellites* [[www.fas.org/spp/military/program/sigint/androart.htm](http://www.fas.org/spp/military/program/sigint/androart.htm)]

<sup>5</sup> Bamford, J., *What big Ears you Have*, The Guardian (2002), Big Brother II: The Secret State and the Assault on Privacy, 14th September, p. 6

American discourse has been strengthened and openly regarded as being of firm paternalism and solid self-conviction in doing what is right to do.

The 1980's, with Reagan and Thatcher, were years of abundance in terms of brand-new liberal ideologists that, from Bill Gates –*The Road Ahead*– to Nicholas Negroponte –*Being digital*– or lately Vice President Al Gore –*The Information Superhighways*– were of great assistance to the spread of international communication networks. It is interesting to point out the book *Bound to Lead. The Changing Nature of American Power*, where professor Joseph S. Nye (Harvard University), assistant secretary at the White House during the Clinton era, clearly exposes: “*Soft Power* [in addition to *Hard Power*: economic and military power] implies the capability to achieve the aims in the field of international relations using seduction instead of imposition. It consists in convincing the rest of the countries to follow a direction or leading them into adopting norms and institutions that produce desirable responses.”(Nye; 1990)

Professor Nye was still supporting these ideas in 2000 (“That's why we have 100,000 troops in Europe, 100,000 in Asia, about 20,000 in the Gulf, essentially because it is a stabilizing factor and we benefit from that stability.”<sup>6</sup>) but politically, the critical mindset that arose during the 1960's and 70's had been largely surpassed long ago by radical liberationists –the Realist School–, aimed at creating that international disposition that could fix with a (“the”) new order in the world.

But the reality of this “new order in the world” is that the global market has literally become dominated by few transnational corporations: General Electric, Westinghouse<sup>7</sup>, AT&T/Liberty Media, AOL-Time Warner, Sony, News Corporation, Viacom, Vivendy and Bertelsman. These firms, five of which are American, own the main film industries in America and Europe, the most important global television networks, cable and satellite, 80-85 per cent of the global musical market, and an increasing number of publishing houses, bookshops chains and online/offline distributors. Even second order companies like Globosat in Brazil, Mediaset in Italy, Televisa in Mexico or PRISA in Spain are still big enough as to compete in local markets and buy internationalised products from the large ones. These companies, most of them partially owned by western banks, support the expansion of the global market of the media.

We daily see the number of films released in our respective countries (including China, Indonesia, Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Nigeria, South Africa, Morocco, and a long etc.) and many, if not most of them, come from US. No film awards gala gets as many viewers in the world as the

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<sup>6</sup> Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/Nye/nye-con7.html>

<sup>7</sup> GE and Westinghouse are both huge, diversified multinational companies heavily involved in the controversial areas of weapons production and nuclear power.

Hollywood Oscar's, a ceremony created in the 1930's to live up the spirit of depression and attract consumers to the venues. And no musical event creates greater expectation and more profitable feedback than the GRAMMY's. For instance, if we choose any language and any kind of document and type the words "Jennifer López" into the browser window of Google, it will display up to 1,310,000 web sites, ten times more than the last six literature Nobel prize winners altogether.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, if we type the name "George W. Bush", we will get flooded in less than 0.2 seconds with 2,380,000, seven times the number of web sites found for Kofi Annan (332,000). And if we try "Ariel Sharon", Israeli Prime Minister since February 2001, we will receive 397,000 web sites, 150,000 more than "Yasser Arafat" (240,000), president of the PLO since 1969.<sup>9</sup>

Internet figures speak for themselves. If we look at statistics on the usage of the Internet, it was estimated that the number of worldwide Internet users surpassed 665 million by the beginning of 2003. The US had over 25 per cent, and Asian users, altogether, reached a figure of 23 per cent, but Africans would not even account for 1 per cent.<sup>10</sup> And when it comes to world telephony the International Telegraph Union (ITU) shows that in 2000 only 3 people out of ten had access to either a landline or a mobile phone. In the western countries 80 per cent of population used a telephone line, while in Africa only 5 per cent did so.<sup>11</sup>

International organisations such as UNESCO or WTO are supposed to bring about a peaceful and balanced global market where everyone would be sharing part of it. But the latest reports on the work of these organisations are still very disappointing. Mike Moore, Director-General of the WTO, opened the Doha agenda in 2002 with the following words: "The successful launch of a new Trade Round at Doha brought to an end the uncertainty, loss of momentum and lack of confidence created by the frustrating failure [of the WTO], two years early at Seattle." Will the World Summit on the Information Society coordinated by the ITU in 2003 and 2005 be containing these same apologies in its introductory assembly?

### **The New World International Communication Order**

The opening of a global market would not have been possible without the approval of political institutions and international organisations that have played a major role in the development of cultural and services globalisation. Up to the early 1980's UNESCO was the principal reference to

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<sup>8</sup> Dario Fo: 63,100; Jose Saramago: 16,900; Gunter Grass: 22,400; Gao Xingjian: 17,400; Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul: 5,230; Imre Kertesz: 10,200

<sup>9</sup> [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

<sup>10</sup> Internet user forecast by country, executive summary [[http://www.etforecasts.com/products/ES\\_intusers.htm](http://www.etforecasts.com/products/ES_intusers.htm)]

<sup>11</sup> International Telecommunication Union [<http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>]

debate culture and information issues, but with the withdrawal of the US (followed by United Kingdom one year later) and without the support of major western allies, another organism took over some of its responsibilities, the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), redesigned as WTO (World Trade Organization) in 1995, and whose development programmes in “the South” have openly helped multinationals –termed as “NGDO” (Non Government Organisations)– to exploit other countries’ resources. (Lal Das; 1998) In the beginning, developing countries became the most vocal advocates of the WTO, arguing that its emerging as an international treaty to which the US would have to subscribe would provide them a fundamental protection against unilateralism within the trading system.

Throughout the Uruguay Round negotiations, when the US was threatening to use part of its retaliatory legislations (Special 301 and Super 301) a common refrain was that once the rules were laid down multilaterally, the US would no longer use these instruments. But during the six years of negotiations, the US used its unilateral trade sanctions against those countries that could threaten its economic stability. “In Super 301 cases (before that law expired), the US would target and name countries claimed by it to be engaged in “unfair” trade practices and start negotiations with those countries for ending those practices. It targeted Japan, Brazil and India.”<sup>12</sup>

GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) contained clauses allowing countries to take action against restrictive private business practices, “but these are vague” says Graham Dunkley, examples like the above-mentioned “constitute structural advantages rather than illegal acts. Such structural factors may bring efficiencies to the importing countries but could also deprive them of cumulative advantage, along with the range of adverse social and cultural effects.” (Dunkley; 2000)

The updated New World International Communication Order’s proposal (NWICO) was aimed at creating a balanced flow of cultural products and unbiased information. But NWICO was regarded as an authoritarian plan that undermined western liberties, and it was though to be influenced by governments and therefore unacceptable. The international mass media blamed the “Third World” itself for the problem of this inequality, caused by the scarcity of technical and financial resources. “Unable to win support for an autonomous body independent of UNESCO, the United States was able to restrict emphasis to communications infrastructural development, involving technical assistance, while preserving the ‘free-flow’ principle. US policy towards IPDC (International Programme for the Development of Communication) was designed to weaken the position of the ‘Third World’ countries, which formed the majority of its Intergovernmental Council,

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<sup>12</sup> Sunonline: *Did the Uruguay Round Solve Anything?* [www.sunonline.org/trade/process/towards/02150094.htm]

and to ensure that US corporations had access to communications development and markets in 'Third World' countries." (Reeves; 1984)

The problem with NWICO was that it based its goals on mere schemes of technological development. US and UK withdrawal from UNESCO was justified under the assumption of attempt to politicised free market and free press. "Although the concept of a new order remained central for some years to come," Says Reeves, "nothing was done in regard to its implementation. Whereas the non-aligned summit in Belgrade (September 1989) reiterated its support for the NIICO, the Unesco General Conference strove hard to reach consensus on freedom of expression and free flow of information. According to the Unesco Director General in 1989 plans for a new order no longer existed in Unesco."<sup>13</sup>

Nowadays, although there is an informal accord for multilateral cooperation, this remains largely ineffective since the most powerful players do not complete their promises. This is reinforced by the fact that the most powerful players do not perceive an accord as necessary. They have the technological advantage and stand little to gain from cooperation. "Both GATS and TRIPs (Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights) agreements are extremely controversial additions to the GATT system, both very strongly resisted by "third world" countries and their likely effects are barely understood by many countries at present. The theory behind GATS is that services are subject to the same 'gains from trade' benefits as goods, and the theory behind TRIPs is that the lack of IPRs (Intellectual Property Rights) can distort trade. There are good reasons to doubt both of these rationales."<sup>14</sup>

As a matter of fact, the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 will be still addressing issues on the equitable access in a digital global economy, consumer protection, privacy, security and ethics as well as cultural diversity and the right to communicate.

But despite the fact that advanced industrialised powers own the biggest communicational structures around the world, it would be imprecise to claim that "third world" countries are in a completely state of passiveness, governments and public alike, happily acquiring western messages without any physical/mental barrier and consuming large amounts of information for the benefit of a few. To what extent are "third world" countries' governments acting in favour of their own population's benefit by either acquiring or refusing western culture. What part are the local elites

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<sup>13</sup> Reeves, G., *op. cit.* 202

<sup>14</sup> Dunkley, *op. cit.* 191

and governments playing in their development? And what part do the individuals play as the very end of the consumption chain?

### **Determination of local interests: self awareness within a global market**

It seems understandable why developing countries feel that western policies threaten their national sovereign control, especially over foreign investment and their domestic monetary policies. In fact, the importation of services has increased their foreign debts and since media products are finished products, liberation has not increase labour or technology inputs. Developing countries have repetitively denounced the continuation of exploitative economic relations and WTO's incapability to deal with western protectionism. But the WTO maintains the view that when economic development is in motion "some countries are better at making the adjustments than others. Those without effective policies are missing an opportunity because the boost that [freer] trade gives to the economy creates the resources that help adjustments to be made more easily."<sup>15</sup> The World Bank's web site also warns that: "formidable obstacles to growth remain. Inadequate infrastructure, a weak banking system and an economy overly reliant on the weather-dependent agricultural sector are structural challenges that need to be confronted."<sup>16</sup> This may be true, but why "third world" countries are still struggling to obtain their rights?

There is great unwillingness in the rich countries to provide a solution that would resolve the problems reported more than 70 years ago. But Hamelink points out that "policy makers in the Third World were more interested in acquiring maximum volumes of technological products and little or no attention was given to the infrastructural requirements for a productive assimilation of imported science and technology. Why not import now, but plan in advance so that there will be no more repetitive imports in the future?"(Hamelink; 1994) For example, developing countries tend to use the data processing facilities of the industrialized countries for several reasons: "routine data processing can be done more economically, western countries possess experts in data process not available locally and their data bases contain vital information."<sup>17</sup> Hamelink speaks of the lack of Third World's coordination, and that services like transport or banking and insurance are still inadequate, in some cases due to the government's intervention.

We know that, frequently, the installation of these outer space nets turn out to be the cultural and ideological integration of that country into that of the broadcaster. But many of these

<sup>15</sup> WTO: The 10 misunderstandings [[http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/10mis\\_e/10m02\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/10mis_e/10m02_e.htm)]

<sup>16</sup> World Bank: Data and Statistics [<http://www.worldbank.org/data/wdi2003/worldview.htm>]

<sup>17</sup> Juan F. Rada: *The Microelectronics revolution: Implications for the Third World*, in Becker; 1984.

countries preferred to have a dependant development that no development at all. It is important not to forget that in these regions, just as in those of the advanced capitalist world, governments and corporations constantly interfere with the final news products that go out for public consumption, as well as with activities that could work against their interests. Since 2001 there have been serious allegations in Argentina against foreign western banks, HSBC among others, declaring that during the economic crisis and just a few days before the government froze all cash withdrawals, those banks had tipped off that the freeze was imminent. “This is an important point,” says Naomi Klein, from *The Guardian*, “because for many of Argentina’s richest families and business, the banking fiasco and devaluation have actually made them richer than they were before: they now pay their employees, their expenses and their debts in devalued pesos, but – thanks to the banks– their savings are safely stored outside the country in US dollars. It’s a highly profitable arrangement.”<sup>18</sup>

In China, the Tiananmen Square events in 1989 were restricted on television, and the global community, lead by the US, heavily criticized Chinese government’s reaction. But only one year later, US renewed most-favored-nation trade status for China. “Would the Bush administration have been timid toward Chinese political repression following the Tiananmen Square crackdown in June 1989 if President Bush had not previously been the US representative to China, leaving him with numerous personal relationships with Chinese leaders?” (Keley and Wittkopf; 1996). In 2000 Gao Xingjian, a Chinese writer exiled in Paris, won the literature Nobel prize, but the Chinese authorities did not broadcast the event. Alternatively Chinese public had the chance to see that year the following films: *Charlie's Angels*, *Vertical Limit*, *Perfect Storm*, *The Gladiator*, *Men in Black*, *X-Men* or *Mission: Impossible II*.

Though Mills’ and Chomsky’s points of view seem to be operative nowadays, particularly in terms of cultural interference, there are some other points that should also be considered. For example, that of David Morley and Kevin Robins when they speak about the linkage of “the local culture” with the global structure. “Clearly,” they assert “we should not respond to the deficiencies in the hypodermic model of media effects by romanticising the consumption process and cheerfully celebrating the ‘active’ viewer as a kind of semiotic guerrilla, continually waging war on the structures of textual power. (...) But equally we should not fall into any technologically determinist argument. Some technologies are used as proper tools.” (Morle and Robins; 1995)

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<sup>18</sup> Klein, N., (2003), *Out of the Ordinary*, The Guardian, Saturday supplement, 25<sup>th</sup> January, p. 17

We may regard the global-local nexus as the act of particularising dynamics in the strategy of the global corporation<sup>19</sup>. A good example of this may be Play Station 2, owned by Sony, which is about to launch its project *Zool*, a website that will serve as a video-platform for “young people to express what they care about”; it would be interesting to follow the selection process which the videos will have to go through before being launched.<sup>20</sup> But if the local is still accepting the global message, are we entitled to put on trial what their very receptors are reckoning of it? Graeme Turner, from the film industry, has cautiously defended the idea of an existing gap between what academics interpret and what audiences deduce, since for audiences “film narrative is not found at the deep structural levels explored by Todorov, Propp or Lévy-Strauss. Rather, it occurs at the level of discourse.” (Turner; 1999) Is that one of the main reasons why Hollywood movies have simple discursive plots but mind-blowing special effects: the simpler, the less likely to cause misunderstanding? And if local viewers are now so keen on receiving foreign products, like MTV in India or *Titanic* in China, would they also be so keen on watching a film based on the local economic cycles of Toledo, the largest town in Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. Where is the cutting line between the local and the global then, and why should the local be of global consumption? Is the local production being swallowed by the global-US-Western Europe messages? And if so, why in Ghana the film called *Bent it like Beckham* had to change its title, so that the name of the footballer in it was known enough by its local public? Did Ghana apprehend the message on feminist revolution, cultural integration and independence from traditional values beyond the comic scenes of an Indian girl playing football in Britain? How can we measure with certain accuracy the impact of these cultural-ideological products upon the individual foreign mind?

Eudes recognised that US “educational planning” had to be aimed at the ruling classes of South American countries because there was no acceptance from the middle and lower classes, since their real life was in great contradiction with what they “were told to accept.”

*This self-awareness of particularised viewers and listeners is creating a world where differences count. For any kind of text to reach a global audience there has to be some simplicity stemming from a desire-to-see that is within everybody, a layer of our composition as human beings that may be different from or contradictory to our surrounding environment. This kind of inner conflict has its result upon the production of genuine culture.*

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<sup>19</sup> Sony, Canal +, the 20th Century Fox or even Saab are now involved in the production of local and independent cinema as well as in new forms of artistic expression.

<sup>20</sup> BMW has been funding young web-video-makers since 1995, all the selected products have to have a BMW car in the film.

We find many local products that have begun to emerge in the international markets: from the Spanish flamenco, in the 1970's, to the Brazilian or Indian or Iranian cinema in the beginning of the new century. West Indian and Latin American music have always been noticeably successful<sup>21</sup>. And some Latin American writers, such as Gabriel García Márquez<sup>22</sup>, have become part of the world best-sellers industry. "Contra-flow" from Africa in the international market is more difficult to find, unless one deeps into academic resources, but there are symptoms of local culture growing, especially in big cities such as Lagos, Nigeria, where local film based on ancestral myths are being exported to other parts of the continent, even replicated.

But it has to be said that many of these "contra-flow" products owe their success to the links with big corporations and local elites' interests. However, it is still rare for developing areas' cultural commodities to penetrate advanced capitalist markets. Their economies are not competitive enough and the aid from the industrialised world is of little help compared with the burden of the foreign debt. Africa's foreign debt in 1990 was \$146 billion. In 2000 it has ascended to \$300 billion.<sup>23</sup> Brazil defaulted on its estimated \$255 billion debt in 2003, and Argentina is planning to renegotiate terms of the country's \$132bn debt.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusions

So, is Antonio Banderas or Enrique Iglesias part of the Spanish cultural production? Why is Noam Chomsky of little consideration and popularity in the US? Is *Amores Perros*, a film termed as the "Mexican *Pulp Fiction*" part of the South American "contra-flow"? What is part of the cultural realistic scenario of "third world" countries and what is part of the "local-global-nexus"?

Morle and Robins believe that "Jostein Gripsrud makes the important point that, while these ethnographic findings concerning varieties of reception in different contexts are of considerable interest (as counter-evidence to any simple-minded theory of 'hypodermic' media

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<sup>21</sup> Carlos Santana won nine GRAMMY awards at the 42nd Annual GRAMMY ceremony in February 2000.

<sup>22</sup> It is Márquez, and not Agatha Christy or Stephen King, who has the highest sells of novel narrative in the world nowadays.

<sup>23</sup> African Action [[www.africaaction.org/action/debt.htm](http://www.africaaction.org/action/debt.htm)]

<sup>24</sup> Chriszt, M., *Latin America Economic Overview*, January 2003 [[www.southerncenter.org/2003\\_LA\\_Economics.pdf](http://www.southerncenter.org/2003_LA_Economics.pdf)]

effects), we would be foolish to conclude that the continuing world dominance of the Hollywood film and television production base is therefore of no consequence.”<sup>25</sup>

Some may still regard globalisation as being “driven by the advances of communications, which are creating a world where no one is outside.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, even Chomsky ventured to forecast that “the rise of the cable and satellite communications, while initially captured and dominated by commercial interests, has weakened the power of the network oligopoly and retains a potential for enhanced local-groups access.”<sup>27</sup>

We find Chomsky’s prognosis in practice in the anti-war movement that recently took place around the globe, when millions of people reacted against the attacks on Iraq. The Internet was the key tool for such global agreement. None the less, we all know the response of the US and UK governments to such reaction.<sup>28</sup> Antonio Negri, an Italian philosopher, explained his work on the concept of “multitude” and claimed that capitalism was becoming a passive force, and that there were multiple representations of desiring to be free to communicate with each other differently, to create communities. “Nation states” Negri says “no longer exist, even if they call themselves that. This leads to fundamentalism, to defensiveness that relies on extreme violence, in defence of things that no longer exists, because it’s an illusion to think you are living locally or nationally.” And consequently “since the new world capitalist order is unable to control the desires and creativity of the multitude, it will have to create a state of permanent war in order to re-establish its control over us. Today they call it terrorism but they always invent these enemies simply to justify their hold of power. But it’s a tired power, a stuck power, and a power that hasn’t been able to keep pace with the revolution of our spirits. So I don’t know whether I am optimistic or pessimistic.”<sup>29</sup>

We have yet to know whether new communication networks will increase our communication capabilities between different cultures or will mainly be used as a device favourable to an elite. To date, some are struggling to slowly gain some ground on the communication structure, while others are refusing to lose it. So far we have assisted to a mostly biased representation of “the other”, which is widening the yawning gap between both sides. And governments and big corporations appear to care very little. The expansion of communication structures seems to be destined to bring in recognition and awareness of what is really happening.

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<sup>25</sup> Morle and Robins, *op. cit.* 117

<sup>26</sup> Giddens, A. (2002). *Talking to the planet*, The Guardian, Media supplement, 16<sup>th</sup> December, p. 7

<sup>27</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *op. cit.* 307

<sup>28</sup> Bush and Blair seem to be hiding; their appearance on television has dramatically been reduced.

<sup>29</sup> Negri, A., *The End of Capitalism*, BBC 4, Saturday, 15/03/03 00:25 hrs.

We cannot underestimate the power of capital, but we would be unrealistic too by stating that the power of the “multitude” is and will be of no consequence.

However, though we might eventually overcome some of the major problems and setbacks of the new world information order, there are more concerns waiting ahead, such as the connection between biology and informatics and its links to the analysis on the Human Gene. Today, out of sight and beyond the popular agenda elaborated by the well-known media, quiet meetings of boardrooms from the largest chemical corporations are taking place in order to set up the groundwork for the battle of the so-called “Biology Century”. Where will “third world” countries be positioned and what will it be their role then? Will the advanced communication networks be of any assistance in the struggle for an equitable use of genetic breakthroughs? And if so, is not that putting on trial the current concept of democracy as we know it today? We cannot be oblivious to the fact that more development implies more control, thus we should be cautious on defending global means of communication like the Internet as the panacea of equal world communication, unless, as some believe, everybody will be able to pay the costs of being connected to the Net and get by with less than 20 US dollars a month. How many online subscribers with that purchasing characteristics would The Financial Times have? Or how many living in an unindustrialised country will be able to watch satellite channels like Al-Jazeera and BBC in wartime and report on his web log using a multinational language? There may be some voices out there speaking for a quiet mass, but its input is still of little repercussion. Only time will tell.

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