

CHAPTER 10

MEDIA SPACES: INNOVATION AND ACTIVISM

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and Nick Couldry

Introduction

This Chapter provides an eclectic snapshot of media spaces created by diverse global civil society actors to communicate issues of concern to them and to further their aims. It also catalyses questions about the extent of global civil society's embrace and the characteristics of its members. From the myriad civil society innovations of media spaces and communications technologies around the world, we have selected a kaleidoscope of case studies: advocates of gun control and firearms freedom, Nigerian video-films, Indymedia, and *Jihad* videos, as well as text boxes on film festivals in Africa and political jamming.

The Chapter eschews an exclusive focus on, for example, alternative media in Nick Couldry and James Curran's sense of media production that challenges concentrations of media power (2003). Victor Pickard's analysis of Indymedia does just that. But the Chapter as a whole adopts a broader approach - of media spaces - to explore the extent and variety of global civil society's communicative practices, not all of which have deliberate political intentions, and some of which pursue distinctly undemocratic ends.

Ultimately, the aim is to spotlight the influence of these media spaces on public debate and policy making, or on ideas about identity (whether national, diaspora or religious). To that end, key aspects of these communicative practices are examined: how they are constructed and how they function; the philosophies and values that inform them; the relationships with target audiences, mainstream media and other actors in civil society; and the extent to which they have reclaimed, created anew, or expanded the space for deliberation and debate.

In so doing, two important characteristics of global civil society are highlighted. First, is the creativity of actors, from their adaptation of new technologies and tactical use of mainstream media and political processes, to their art practice, performance and humour. Second is the 'bewildering diversity' of global civil society that, as Nick Couldry points out in the conclusion to this Chapter, encompasses actors from

all parts of the political spectrum, whose philosophies, aims and strategies may differ markedly. The diverse array of case studies presented here defies distillation into a single model. Couldry emphasises the importance of linking such communicative practices to processes of decision making if global civil society actors are to have impact and to be sustainable.

Perhaps the most memorable image emanating from this kaleidoscope is that of the public sphere as Play-Doh. But instead of children creating fanciful shapes and strange creatures from this fake dough, it is civil society actors who are constantly kneading, stretching and manipulating it into new communicative forms and expanded media spaces.

Conservative forces, communications and global civil society: towards conflictive democracy

Clifford Bob

In summer 2006, the United Nations faced a major transnational lobbying campaign. In less than a month, it received over 100,000 letters and email messages on a pressing global concern. This rhetorical barrage was not urging action on global warming or the Darfur killings. Rather, the angry writers, mostly members of America's National Rifle Association (NRA), demanded that the UN stop its 'global war' on 'our firearms freedoms' (Stop UN Gun Ban URL). The immediate target was the UN Small Arms Review Conference (RevCon), set up to assess the 2001 Programme of Action on Small Arms, which had established a set of non-binding principles to control illicit arms transfers. But the NRA's involvement in global civil society has been far broader. It has targeted UN activities on small arms and light weapons (SALW) for over a decade, formed linkages with pro-gun organisations in other countries, and actively lobbied the US Congress not only on domestic weapons issues but on overseas arms policy. In so doing, the NRA uses many of the same communication methods as the 'progressive' human rights, environmental, and women's NGOs so closely

identified with global civil society. Indeed, while its messages are diametrically opposed to those of the international gun control network, the NRA's communication strategies are quite similar.

Concern over small arms as a global issue first emerged in the early 1990s, as conventional disarmament organisations, domestic gun control groups, UN officials, foundations, and scholars held conferences, began research, and published books on the role of small arms in conflicts and crime worldwide. The NRA and other national gun groups quickly took notice. In 1997, they established a transnational network, the World Forum on the Future of Sport Shooting Activities (WFSA) – two years before pro-control forces formally created the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA). WFSA now comprises 38 NGOs from around the world, primarily domestic sporting associations, firearms organisations, and gun manufacturers' groups (WFSA URL). (IANSA claims over 700 member organisations in more than 100 countries, including domestic gun control groups and international development and human rights NGOs [URL]). Just like IANSA, WFSA's most important function is facilitating communication and exchanging ideas through conferences, publications, and a website. As its website declares, WFSA has a 'noble purpose: to further the study, preservation, promotion and protection of sport shooting activities on every continent.' Its 'Project on Myths' refutes 'statistical myths and pseudo-scientific facts' about firearms. Pro-gun groups then use this information to combat control measures. Meanwhile, WFSA's image committee promotes 'a true and accurate portrayal of the time-honored traditions and heritage of sport shooting.' As one part of this, it presents an annual 'Ambassador Award' for a public figure interested in sport shooting who has made the greatest 'social contribution.' The 2006 winner: Italian gun-maker Ugo Gussalli Beretta (WFSA URL).

Most of WFSA's member organisations, like IANSA's, also have vibrant domestic communications networks. The NRA uses books, magazines, radio spots, television programs, and websites to galvanise the four million dues-paying members it claims (LaPierre 2006a: iv). Much of the content now concerns international issues, whether because these are seen as real threats to American gun ownership or as a powerful tool for electrifying the NRA base. NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre's 2006 book,



The Global War on Your Guns: Inside the UN Plan to Destroy the Bill of Rights, released months before the RevCon, included lengthy chapters attacking the world's 'anti-gunners' and arguing that tragedies like the Rwandan genocide would not have happened if Tutsis had owned guns. One of the NRA's membership magazines, *America's 1st Freedom*, which consistently highlights international issues, recently featured the failures of Australia's strict firearms laws, and an interview with a Brazilian who helped defeat a national referendum banning handgun sales to the country's citizens (see Chapter 6: 120 of this volume). In addition to these mainstream communications technologies, the NRA has a sophisticated website (much of it available in Spanish and English), making its views accessible in print, webcast, and blog not only to members but to gun owners worldwide. While building this foreign following, the NRA also raises international awareness among its domestic constituency, which the American media often stereotypes as 'Red state' and 'redneck'. In short, the NRA is transforming red-blooded American gun owners into a special brand of armed, global citizens. As LaPierre has written, 'let the roar of our voices be heard by all nations, United or not: If you cannot respect our Bill of Rights, you'd best keep your hands off it' (2006a: 226).

In addition to informing and inflaming the pro-gun base, these 'autonomous communication spaces' help WFSA and the NRA influence domestic and global gun policy, which they see as intertwined. WFSA has roster consultative status with the Economic and Social



Memorial to victims of a mass shooting - just one element in the armoury of the integrated global struggle over guns

mounted their own 'Million Faces' campaign, which submitted a photographic petition - said to include over one million participants from more than 160 countries - urging the UN to adopt global arms export standards (Control Arms URL). Ultimately, the RevCon ended in failure, with no action to extend the 2001 Programme of Action's purely voluntary 'goals', themselves the result of US government 'redlines' supported by the NRA.

But the UN is only one arena for this transnational gun activism. Like IANSA, the NRA scours the world for gun-related issues to use in its fundraising and policymaking efforts. In this integrated global struggle, everything from a school shooting in Pennsylvania, and a paramilitary massacre in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, to the Holocaust is likely to turn up in the contending networks' campaigns. Reciprocally, local groups facing gun control threats at home regularly seek NRA and WFSA aid, just as those suffering gun violence often turn to IANSA. The Brazilian referendum was only a recent example of a pattern visible also in places as far-flung as South Africa, Japan, and Great Britain.

Much of the conflict between pro-gun and pro-control forces is vicious. The groups critique one another's policy positions and allege deception and misrepresentation. Personal attacks are common. So are efforts to exclude the other side from participation or to de-legitimate institutions in which it appears to be making gains. Yet despite contradictory content, the framing of the contending sides' messages, like their media strategies, is quite similar. Both networks portray themselves as moral actors representing the global public interest. Both mix scientific studies and rational arguments with emotional, even histrionic, appeals to their own constituents. Both portray their opponents as so misguided, self-interested, deceitful, even evil, that persuasion, debate, and compromise is impossible. Both identify powerful, shadowy and suspect sources as their foes' bankrollers: for IANSA, the global gun industry is the dark force behind WFSA; for the NRA, George Soros is IANSA's 'sugar daddy,' along with a 'broad collection of left-wing foundations' and European governments (La Pierre 2006a: 8, 11). Both sides seek to strip each other's networks of more moderate members. And both sides highlight the other sides' missteps. For instance, in early 2007 a leaked draft of an NRA fundraising pamphlet, 'Freedom in Peril' drew media accusations of xenophobia, extremism, and racism. In a milder passage, it

described the UN and IANSA as 'part of a marching axis of adversaries far darker and more dangerous than gun owners have ever known' (NRA 2007: 1). IANSA quickly responded by placing a link to the online version of this 'scathing attack on gun control advocates, NGOs, the United Nations, feminists and the media' on its website (IANSA 2007). For its part, the NRA has festooned its attacks on IANSA with unflattering outtakes of Rebecca Peters, taken from the 'Great Gun Debate' (LaPierre 2006b; see Box 10.1).

All of this raises questions about how communication technologies affect global democracy - and the nature of global civil society itself. In some ways, the entry of groups such as the NRA and WFSA into the global arena makes for greater democracy. New voices add to the marketplace of ideas. Theorists of global civil society need to open their eyes to this diversity and its implications for democratic practice. For too long, progressive NGOs have identified themselves as 'global civil society,' and sympathetic academics have fueled this perception (Wapner 1996). On this narrow empirical base, elaborate theories of transnational politics have then been erected. This creates the impression that global civil society is thick with like-minded groups harmoniously cooperating to fight corporate greed and state power: they may disagree over strategy, but all fundamentally agree about the world's problems.

The reality is more complex. In many cases, one NGO's solution may be another's problem. Their autonomous and largely closed communication networks make it easy for the rhetorical temperature to rise. Once unleashed, the blogs of war quickly create distrust among contending networks. As a result, direct confrontations, in print or in person, resemble a slanging match more than the rational deliberation and respectful dialogue so dear to many theorists of national and international democracy (Risse 2000; Habermas 2001; Dworkin 2006). Often these controversies serve important purposes for the protagonists: stoking attention to their issues, mobilising their base of support, demonstrating their fighting skills, and securing their organisational leadership. Because activists seek to influence policymakers, rather than making authoritative policy decisions themselves, most have few incentives to restrain their demands or compromise with their foes. At best, political realities may sometimes compel moderation. But with promulgation of new policies and

evolving power relations, the opposing sides continue their dueling indefinitely.

For those who view deliberation and dialogue as central to democracy, this strife is troubling. Yet it need not spell the futility of democratic practice at the global level. Indeed, this contentious international reality closely resembles the raucousness of democratic politics within nations. The diversity of values in contemporary societies, and their proponents' passion for them, mean that staid debate signals either an issue's triviality - or the subtle workings of hegemonic power. Instead, what cases like the global small arms and light weapons contest suggest are problems with deliberative democracy theory, both empirically and normatively. Clashes are endemic not just to gun control, but to any number of other global issues, from climate change to family planning. Democratic practice, difficult enough at the global level, must accommodate these profound divergences and the brawling tactics they spur. In turn, democratic theorists must use new tools to understand these realities and strengthen global politics in the face of profound disagreement. While some may cover their ears and wring their hands at the din, it is and always has been a hallmark of political debate. Indeed, as Chantal Mouffe (2005) argues, such conflict is the essence of the political both in domestic and in global arenas.

Notably, however, civil society's conflictive nature does not in itself make it democratic. Neither does the use of communication technologies by all sides in contentious debates. Global civil society remains primarily an arena of elite, not mass, politics. While new communication networks bring a small segment of the public in closer touch with international institutions and issues, the vast majority remain outside the charmed circle (Bob 2005). And even for those inside, the unelected leadership of WFSA, IANSA, and their component organisations, does not represent the 'popular will' or the 'global interest,' notwithstanding declarations to the contrary. Of course, in some ways this too is not fundamentally different from politics in large modern democracies. Professional interest groups dominate and occasional elections provide only the briefest windows for popular preferences to be expressed. But while this may diminish democracies (Skocpol 2003), it does not kill them. The result, democracy with deficits of various degrees, may be the most we can expect at global and national levels.

Box 10.1: The 'Great Gun Debate'

On 12 October 2004 IANSA Director Rebecca Peters and NRA Executive Vice-President Wayne LaPierre went head to head in the 'Great Gun Debate', held at London's King's College and broadcast on pay-per-view television in the US. In the wake of the debate, both sides have used it for their own purposes. An edited transcript is available on the IANSA website, and DVDs of the debate are available from both organisations. Here, extracts provide a flavour of the debate.

Moderator: Do you believe, as you said in the past, that semiautomatic rifles and shotguns have no legitimate role in civilian hands?

Peters: Yes, I do. Semiautomatic weapons are designed to kill large numbers of people. They were designed for military use. Many people have bought them for other purposes, for example, for hunting because they've been available. But there's no justification for semiautomatic weapons to be owned by civilian by members of the civilian population. . . . And not only that, handguns have no legitimate role in civilian hands....

LaPierre: The fact is Ms Peters and IANSA and her UN crowd believe every firearm has no legitimate use. Not just semi-autos but pump actions, shotguns, and any rifle that can shoot over 100 yards. Hunters know that's every hunting rifle out there. Handguns. She doesn't believe handguns have any legitimate use. The truth is there's no such thing as a legitimate role for a firearm. Isn't that your real opinion?

Peters: No. We recognise that hunting, for example, plays an important role in many cultures. You do not need a semiautomatic firearm; you do not need a handgun to kill a deer, to go hunting. We recognise that target shooting is also a sport in many countries. . . . You can be a sporting nation without semiautomatic rifles or handguns.

Moderator: How has the NRA been involved in the UN small arms process? In terms of negotiating with the UN how successful have you been?

LaPierre: I think our participation in every way should be defined as the fact we oppose IANSA and the UN's attempt to weaken our Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. We're going to get in your way. We're going to fight you folks at every turn. At IANSA, the way we see it, the average people we represent, it's a club of unselected elitists accountable to no one. Our involvement shouldn't be defined as a participant. Our involvement is in opposition. I mean we intend to defeat your intrusion. You want to take foreign money. I know you got George Soros funding IANSA. You've got a bunch of tax-exempt foundations, and you have money from the United Kingdom, by the way, and Norway and Belgium, and a lot of it flowing into IANSA to try to change policy in the United States.

Moderator: Is there a way that the UN would welcome the NRA in . . . this negotiation?

Peters: Well, the NRA has been very involved. As I've said they've had a great deal of influence there. And they do bring some technical knowledge to the process. But that answer of Mr LaPierre sort of demonstrates for me one part of the problem is the preoccupation that Americans have that the world is America. The purpose of IANSA and of activists around the world, in relation to the UN's small arms process, relates to the UN, it relates to the world. . . . And for most people on Earth the rights of Americans are important, but others peoples rights count too. . . . We recently pointed out that governments have an obligation to protect the human rights of their citizens by restricting the proliferation of small arms. They're killing hundreds of thousands of people a year. These are real weapons of mass destruction.

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Should the United Nations have the right to search your home for guns?
Will you ever be asked to give up your gun?
Should the United Nations have the right to search your home for guns?

WAYNE LAPIERRE VS REBECCA PETERS

Mr. Lapierre is a member of the National Rifle Association of America (NRA). Ms. Peters is a member of the United Nations.

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NRA

Audience questions: Why do you place such unquestioning trust in governments and the United Nations when you clearly do not trust individuals for the best way to protect themselves and their families?

Peters B: It's called civilisation. Individuals come together. They form societies. They form governments. That's part of the contract that we make. It's a long time gone now since Thomas Hobbes described society as being characterised by a continual fear and danger of violent death and the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. I have confidence that people coming together into countries are going to operate better than a whole lot of individuals making up their own rules, taking the law into their own hands.

Q: I would like to ask why do you want to export American gun culture to the rest of the world?

LaPierre: . . . What we really are is we're a freedom culture. That's what we're about. We're about the fact that if Ms Peters goes and visits her friend . . . where there are three babies, and there's a knock on the door. You hear somebody. Not a knock, but a pounding on the door. And you hear breaking glass. And someone is coming in that house, either in Australia or here in the U.K. What's she going to do? What does she propose? Is she an expert in martial arts? What gives her that chance to live? That equaliser is the right to have a firearm to protect yourself. And

she's got no answer for that. It's global government, some social fantasy. They're going to protect everybody. She's not going to be there at the scene of the crime. She'll be in London or New York or somewhere else. That victim will be there, and that's who I'm concerned about. And that victim ought to always have the choice, whether in the UK or the United States. Rwanda, by the way, how many millions died by machetes? She talked about Rwanda when the UN tuck-tailed and ran. Millions died by machetes. You bet a lot of those individual people in Rwanda would've liked to have a firearm there. It's a freedom we're talking about.

Source: <http://www.iansa.org/>

Nigerian videos, at home and abroad

Jonathan Haynes

The Nigerian video film industry is now widely recognised as the third largest in the world (for general descriptions, see Haynes 2000 and Barrot 2005). It has done what no film industry in sub-Saharan Africa has ever come close to doing, which is to dominate audio-visual entertainment in its own national market. It has also acquired a remarkable international dimension. Nigerian films are on sale as video cassettes and video compact discs across Africa, and in many places they are regularly broadcast on television. They have followed Nigerians into the African diaspora in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, and have expanded their audience well beyond the African communities there. Nigerian films are the staple of African Magic, a South African-owned satellite channel with more than a million subscribers in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Nigerian films can be bought from dozens of websites in the US, Canada, and Europe and can be streamed from the Internet. The influence of Nigerian films has gone beyond their consumption: they have seeded production of similar films in the Nigerian diaspora in Europe and North America (Haynes 2003a) and in many places in Africa, where they serve as a model and an inspiration for local filmmakers. In several African countries, Nigerians have been involved in co-productions with local artists who are eager to profit from their experience and from their star power (Haynes 2005).

The basis on which all this has grown up is, in comparison with other film industries, peculiar. Nigerian video film production began with artists from the Yoruba traveling theatre tradition, which Biodun Jeyifo (1984) and Karin Barber (1987; 2000) have described as a central instance of the 'African popular arts.' These arts, which include such other forms as popular music and painted decorations on trucks, are produced by and for the heterogeneous masses of African cities. Like other informal sector businesses, they require little capital or technical education, and so are open to all comers, resulting in a crowded and extremely competitive field. Formal sector institutions - the government, banks, and so forth - are largely irrelevant. Socially and culturally, artists of this kind feel themselves to be mediators between the rural/local/'traditional' and the urban/Western/'modern.' In order to survive, they must be in very close touch with popular tastes and desires.

In contrast to the apparatus of cinema, which is capital-intensive and requires considerable technical expertise, and therefore, in the African context, normally requires governmental or foreign support, video technology is cheap, easy to operate, and fits perfectly into the generative structure of the popular arts. This remains the essential structure of Nigerian video production (Haynes and Okome 1998), even though the national marketing of Nigerian films in Igbo and English that took off in the early 1990s was the result of an infusion of personnel from the soap operas made for national television - a more 'formal' environment. The film industry now provides steady work for thousands of people, some of them trained professionals and some who have learned on the job, and it remains open to anyone who can get his or her hands on a video camera. The lack of professional standards is frequently bemoaned by those inside and outside the industry, though the films' grassroots character has also been a source of vitality. The rate of production is now over 1,500 films a year; President Olusegun Obasanjo mentioned the video industry as an important part of the national economy in his 2004 Budget Speech; banks, foreign embassies, and American media conglomerates are now hovering in the wings, trying to figure out how to get involved; but the industry is still based entirely on tiny capital formations. The average budget for a video film is about US \$20,000, and almost none run to more than \$100,000.

What holds the industry at this level is the extremely leaky distribution system, beset by piracy. Brian Larkin points out that the Nigerian video film industry was actually built on an infrastructure of reproduction and marketing that was created to pirate American, Indian, and Chinese films. Claiming a space for legitimate, regulated commerce is uphill work and the government has been of limited help. As Larkin argues, Nigerian videos are not a case of 'tactical media' in opposition to a mainstream one, but a system that parallels, overlaps, and competes with legitimate media (Larkin 2004). The videos are now the mainstream, having achieved parity with the broadcast media and the press in their hold on the nation's attention. The clear aspiration on the part of everyone in the video film industry is for it to be a mass entertainment business. The extent to which this is a commercial phenomenon and nothing else can hardly be exaggerated. For better and for worse, the videos have no non-commercial dimension, which might allow for more art for art's sake and for a more concerted

political orientation (as with African celluloid filmmaking, with its crucial international support), but which might also constrain their nature.

The videos have been an unparalleled success at two classic nationalist projects: import substitution and the projection of a national image in answer to Western media domination and stereotyping. The nationalist mantle has been passed to them perforce, but only with great reluctance and after years of abuse by those in positions of cultural and official power, who saw the video films as technically and artistically sub-standard and as a national embarrassment in their strong tendencies both to imitate Hollywood films and, conversely, to dwell obsessively on dark magical practices, crime, polygamy, and other blemishes on the national image.

As Pierre Barrot points out, the Nigerian film industry is not escapist, as are most other mass entertainment industries. The videos are preoccupied with social problems and motivated by social anxieties. Barrot also suggests that the privacy of the 'home videos' (as they are often called in Nigeria) permits their freedom of expression, even under military rule: because they are primarily viewed in domestic space, they do not provoke the same type of public debates or questions of social responsibility that television programmes or articles in the press would do. 'The only regulatory authority that counts is the consumer himself, who is free to buy or not' (Barrot 2005: 52-53, my translation).

The videos have inherited the 'progressive conservatism' of the Nigerian popular arts (Barber 1987). They are seldom militant in the manner of much of African celluloid cinema, as they do not spring from an activist intellectual class and Nigeria does not have an ideologically coherent political opposition (though see Haynes 2003b). But they have mounted a broad political critique of the ruling elite and of the state of the nation through the forms of popular culture, including, for instance, discourses about the occult,¹ and have treated political matters with increasing directness since the end of military rule in 1999 (Haynes 2006).

Video film production reproduces the major cultural, religious and political division in Nigeria between the Muslim-dominated north and the mainly Christian

¹ *On occult discourses and modern forms of power, see especially Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 1999; Geschiere 1997*



On the 'set' in Lagos

© Jacob Silberberg/Panos Pictures

south. Northern Nigeria has its own film industry, mostly based in Kano, which makes films in Hausa (Larkin 1997 2000; Y Adamu 2002; A Adamu et al. 2004). To a remarkable degree, it is a separate phenomenon in terms of production and distribution networks and of aesthetics: the foreign influence that matters most is Bollywood rather than Hollywood, for example. Hausa films have always been surrounded by debates about what was allowable in Hausa culture and in Islam; the introduction of *Shari'a* law in the northern states has hardened the differences with the frequently scandalous English-language films, leading Kano State to institute its own censorship code that forbids any touching between the sexes. To a considerable extent Hausa films are a conscious reaction against English-language Nigerian films and the culture they represent; in southern Nigeria, on the other hand, English-language filmmakers think of their industry as 'Nigerian,' that is to say, national, but there is hardly any consciousness of Hausa films at all. That Nigeria's film culture is so deeply riven is strong evidence of the fragility of the nation.

Northern Nigeria also provides the most dramatic example of the gendered effects of video technology. Respectable women in Hausa society do not go out to cinemas and so they were almost entirely shut out of film culture until the advent of the VCR allowed for viewing in the privacy of home. Hausa video films are sometimes known as 'women's films' because women are the heart of their viewership (Larkin 1997; 2000). All over Nigeria women are considered to be the principle consumers of video films and the ones who most often make decisions about what films to watch. The films have an affinity with domestic space: family melodrama is the predominant form, and the small screens for which they are made favour interior scenes and close-ups.



'Nollywood' films for sale in Lagos

In southern Nigeria, artists from the venerable Yoruba traveling theatre tradition maintain a sturdy market share with their videos. To some extent their personnel, themes, and audience overlap with those of the dominant English-language industry, which is largely controlled by Igbo marketers but staffed by people from all the southern ethnicities. Igbo-language production waxes and wanes, and there have been a scattering of films made in Nupe, Efik, Urhobo, Itsekeri, Edo, and other languages, often with financial support from local communities eager to express their ethnic pride in this medium. But 'Nollywood', as the English-language industry has become known, submerges and eclipses such micro-nationalist productions. Business calculations encourage filmmakers to aim at the English-language market, which is the largest. This has led to the creation, through thousands of films, of a shared national image: a set of stereotyped characters, standard images of city and village, common symbols, and typical narratives.

Films in languages other than English have their own export networks, but it is Nollywood films that have had the massive international impact. We need dozens of fieldwork studies of their reception to establish what they mean in the varied contexts in which they are viewed. On television in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in modest video parlours serving the poor in Kenya, interpreters provide translations into local languages and explanations based in local meanings - what are they saying? What influence has the Nigerian example had on the new spate of Wolof-language videos in Senegal? Why the mania for Nigerian films in Guyana and Surinam?

For Nigerians in North America and Europe, the films provide images of home and a means of maintaining their cultural identity within their domestic space, passing that identity on to the next generation, and sharing it with friends. For other Africans abroad, the films provide images of a generalised African modernity and (through the genre of the 'cultural epic') of an African usable past, and express values more like their own than any other available entertainment. Nigerian videos are bolder, more horrifying, and more titillating than any other African culture probably could or would produce, but this extremity helps to sell films. Nollywood is doubtless a homogenising force in the African diaspora.

In the Brooklyn neighborhood where I teach, vendors of Nigerian films report that their biggest customers are African-Americans and Caribbean immigrants. The Caribbean immigrants may feel at home with Nollywood's Third World ethos and production values, but it is remarkable that African-Americans would choose these films, given all their other choices in the saturated American media environment, where movies commonly have \$25 million advertising budgets - enough money to finance a thousand Nigerian productions. Nigerian films are never advertised, apart from the trailers included with the films themselves and the occasional film poster in the shops where they are sold, normally shops whose original and main business is selling shoes, electronics, or something else. Often a video monitor sits on the counter, showing a new film, and the salesperson behind the counter offers guidance as each week's wave of new releases washes through the rack behind him. Word of mouth is obviously crucial in moving particular films and in creating interest in the films in general, but the conversations are all private: there are no public spaces associated with Nigerian films.

Barrot claims that the fundamental fact about the Nigerian video industry is the desire of its audience for its own proper form of entertainment, which conjured the whole business into existence with the slenderest of means (Barrot 2005). He means the Nigerian audience, but the point is equally valid, if in a more mysterious way, in Brooklyn and everywhere else. I have written about how badly Nigerian videos fit with the desires of the established North American audience for celluloid African films, including its African-American component, which typically wants images of Africa that convey dignity, cultural richness and purity, and a humane and politically sophisticated response to the

continent's misery (Haynes 2000). Classic forms of Afrocentricity might draw African-Americans to Nollywood but probably would not keep them there. A rougher, thoroughly urbanised, actually existing Pan-Africanism sends gangsta rap one way across the 'Black Atlantic' (Gilroy 1993) and Nollywood back the other.

The films' appeal beyond racial boundaries to a wider audience, primarily of immigrants from the Third World, requires an explanation beyond identity politics. The films are rooted in anxiety, the anxiety of a population living in or perched precariously over an abyss of poverty, in a turbulent, aleatory world without a safety net, constantly threatened by violent crime, written off by the authorities, shut out of meaningful political participation by a thoroughly corrupt system, caught in a strong tension between the moral standards of an ancestral village or newer ones based in Pentecostal Christianity and a merciless, amoral urban environment where intimate relationships are stressed and broken by betrayals, witchcraft, temptations of the flesh, and tricks of fate. At the same time fabulous wealth is always visible on the horizon, images of consumer goods rain down on everyone, and a lucky or ruthless few, perhaps able to channel strange hidden powers, are plucked suddenly by fortune into the elite. This is Nigeria, but it is Brooklyn too, and any world city; Nigerian films turn this situation into addictive melodramas, enlivened with laughter and dreams of love, in which much of the world can see itself.

The Indymedia model: strengths and weaknesses of a radical democratic experiment

Victor Pickard

The past decade has witnessed an emergence of global civil society groups defined by their reliance on participatory practices (Polletta 2002), Internet strategies (Pickard, forthcoming), and network social structures (Castells 1996). Indymedia exemplifies all of these trends. What sets Indymedia apart, however, is its commitment to radical democratic practices at both the local organisational and global network levels. The following case study addresses Indymedia's origins, innovations, strengths and weaknesses, and recent developments.

The rise of Indymedia

The November 1999 World Trade Organization protests, a series of events known as 'The Battle of Seattle', left an enduring institutional legacy in the form of the Independent Media Center (IMC, popularly referred to as 'Indymedia'). Emerging from within the global justice movement, Indymedia's roots trace back at least as far as the 1990s media democracy movement, inspired by alternative media groups like Paper Tiger, Free Speech TV, and Accion Zapatista. According to veteran media activist and scholar Dee Dee Halleck, with Indymedia, 'Many different streams came together: the video activist community, microradio pirates, the computer hacker/code writers, the 'zine makers, and the punk music world' (2002: 417-418). Jeff Perlstein, one of the Indymedia co-founders, saw the original idea as using media, especially the Internet, as an activist tool for community self-expression, particularly in under-represented communities. Wanting to challenge the corporate news monopoly on telling their stories, Perlstein says Indymedia's aim was to create 'alternative networks' and a 'community-based people's newsroom' (2001). The original project, then, was to 'be the media' based on radical democratic principles and practices. In its expansion across six continents, the Indymedia movement has since merged with a broad array of local and global struggles and developed new variants, though many of its original objectives remain relatively constant across the evolving network.

The Indymedia model

The IMC model is distinguished by an interactive news website, a global network, and a radical democratic organisation replicated in over 150 sites across six continents (Pickard 2006b). Past scholarship established Indymedia as an anarchic or radical democratic model based on openness, inclusiveness, lateral decision making, non-hierarchy, global justice, and transparency (Downing 2001; Dorothy Kidd 2002; Pickard 2006a). Though one should not over-generalise the distributed and diverse IMC global network, there is remarkable uniformity reflected in common website architecture, a commitment to organisational processes such as consensus-based decision making, and other radical democratic practices codified in a shared manifesto or charter called the 'principles of unity'.

Indymedia first distinguished itself as a radical democratic experiment by its 'open-publishing'

Box 10.2: The African film festival – local entertainment/transnational engagement

For the last seven years, activist Spanish filmmakers have organised the Sahara International Film Festival (SIFF) in Ausserd refugee camp on the border of Algeria and the Western Sahara to raise awareness of the plight of the Saharawi people. In 1976, just after Spain ceded its colony to Moroccan administration, Western Sahara's Polisario Front created a government in exile – the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) – in refugee camps south of the Algerian border town of Tindouf (Wikipedia URL). The Saharawi people wait in these camps with the hope that they will one day be able to return home to the Western Sahara.

At first glance of the sleek SIFF website, the grim reality of life in a border camp is hard to discern. However, SIFF shares a socialist ideology with the films and techniques of filmmakers influenced by 'revolutionary struggles against Neocolonialism that inspired Third Cinema' (Guneratne 2003). Wayne explains the nature and significance of Third Cinema:

Above all [Third Cinema] designates a body of theory and filmmaking practice committed to social and cultural emancipation. This body of filmmaking is small, indeed tiny, in terms of world cinema output. Yet Third Cinema films are amongst the most exciting and challenging films ever to be made, their political and cultural significance amplified by their proximity and intervention into the major historical processes of the epoch. Third Cinema can work with different forms of documentary and across the range of fictional genres. It challenges both the way cinema is conventionally made (for example, it has pioneered collective and democratic production methods) and the way it is consumed. (Wayne 2001: 5)

In 1970 the Federation of Pan-African Filmmakers (FEPACI) was formed by a small group of intellectuals, the pioneers of African cinema, during the Carthage Film Days in Tunisia, the longest-running film festival on the continent (URL). In 1975 in Algiers, the Charter of African Filmmakers was drafted at the Second FEPACI Congress in an effort to consolidate the role of film in the political, economic, and cultural development of post-colonial African countries (URL). While theoretically under conceptualised, Third Cinema does imply a role for civil society in that 'a cinema of social and cultural emancipation cannot be achieved merely in the political realm of the state' (Wayne 2001).

Today there are between 30 and 40 film festivals in African countries, some annual, others occasional. Often they are hybridised by a variety of users – filmmakers, audience members, and activists in the case of SIFF – whose participation imbues each festival with a different intention, character and outcome. In *Event Places*, Sabate states that festivals 'are rooted in their place and in turn are place transforming' (2004). For Africa, film festivals have the potential to counter-balance the piracy¹ and informal screenings that constitute the dominant film-viewing experience across the continent. At the same time local filmmakers have an opportunity to meet other film professionals who come from around the world, and thereby expose their work to regional and international entertainment markets. With their convivial nature, festivals often serve as a point of negotiation around sparse distribution networks and contradictory conditions for intellectual property rights, which make it difficult for African filmmakers to profit from screenings in other African countries.

Despite this market orientation, African film festivals often reflect a historical thread connecting ideas of Pan-Africanism and the political project of the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union) with Third Cinema, a theory of film defined by its socialist politics more than its geography (Gabriel 1982).

Stephen Crofts states that the 'export of a given text may shift its variety, as in the common recycling of films from Third and totalitarian cinemas as art cinema' (quoted in Hill & Church 2000). In this way, the staging of SIFF exhibits the versatility of the film festival as a popular Western media format that can 'shift its variety' to become a tool of activism, which in this case moves in the opposite direction from Crofts' idea. This hints at new – and multi-directional – possibilities for the flow of ideas in an era that is termed both post-colonial and neo-colonial. Other examples of film festivals and festival sites with such versatility include:

¹ Western audiences may understand this from popular reporting on Nigeria (and Nollywood), and it is endemic in many African countries.

Rwanda Film Festival – a site of healing

At the 2005 inaugural Rwanda Film Festival (URL) a university theatre in the city of Butare held the first local screening of 'Shake Hands with the Devil', a documentary in which Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, former Force Commander of the UN Mission to Rwanda, publicly apologises for the genocide that had taken place on the same university campus some years earlier. Many of the university students were too young to have witnessed Dallaire's original statement.

Imagine Institute – a site of heritage

Alongside the French-supported Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO URL), Burkinabe director Gaston Kaboré has established the Imagine Institute (URL) for film students in Ouagadougou. 'I believe that a society that is confronted with images and values from abroad on a daily basis will eventually lose its identity and the ability to choose its own destination. Imagine [Institute] is an attempt to wake us up and to keep our inner ears and eyes wide open' (quoted in Vlam n.d).

Zanzibar International Film Festival – a site of collaboration

On the coast of East Africa, the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF URL) hosts regular meetings of the East African Filmmakers Forum in order to discuss regional cooperation and co-production opportunities, and to embed a regional network of professional organisations and individuals. There are many advantages to a unified approach in East Africa, where there is popular demand for film and television programs in the language Kiswahili.

Many African film festivals are sponsored, at least in part, by philanthropic foundations, multinational corporations, and former colonial governments, which requires the reconciliation of a range of political and economic agendas. ZIFF embodies the dualism of many African festivals, as Anthony explains:

This support was advertised by banners that flew visibly from the heights of the House of Wonders. In this financial sense, therefore, the African Film Festival can be seen as at least partially an extension of globalism in so far as the political economy of film continues to be dominated by Western capital.
(Anthony 2005: 19)

Julia Galindo, of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, says the festival format 'represents a moment of activity that reflects the social situation at its most exalted point' (quoted in Haskell 2006). With human rights themes such as forced migration, sexual identity, the environment, technological advances, and a generational shift to student festivals and those devoted to short films, the landscape for screening films in Africa holds a pan-continental significance, fiercely dependent and crucial to human development. Wayne echoes this significance and levies is equally between filmmakers and audience:

Social and cultural emancipation needs a much more fundamental and pervasive transformation, and if cinema is to make its own, relatively modest contribution, it too must feel the heat of such transformations, not only as films, but in its modes of production and reception (Wayne 2001:1).

Todd Lester, freeDimensional.net

software, allowing anyone with Internet access to post his or her own news stories for immediate upload onto an IMC website's newswire. Its user-driven news production, collective editing, and open source technology, placed Indymedia in the twenty-first century vanguard for experimenting with Internet-amplified democratic processes. Though the rise of the blogosphere and other facets of the Web 2.0 now eclipse some of its early innovations, Indymedia's radical participatory democracy and global reach continue to make it one of the more significant models to emerge from the Internet. Open source technology and collective editing via wikis further evidence Indymedia's radical democratic model. But Indymedia's most remarkable contribution is arguably its commitment to radical democratic practice, exemplified by consensus based decision-making at the local and global network levels.

The original Seattle IMC followed a spokes council model implemented during the 1999 WTO protests by the Direct Action Network (DAN), a loose coalition of activist groups. With roots in anarchic traditions, the spokes council model empowers small groups to coordinate via temporary representatives. Mediating between autonomous affinity groups, or nodes within a network, this model operates both at the local IMC collective and the global network levels. Based on the notion that sustainability for large networks like Indymedia requires a less bureaucratic and more collectivist system, many IMCs rely on a non-hierarchical collective of smaller volunteer collectives, such as editorial, finance, and tech working groups. New ad-hoc groups may spring up spontaneously to face a particular challenge, though a reliance on volunteer labour makes all IMC collectives prone to activist fatigue. While some IMCs maintain physical spaces where members regularly meet, many issues discussed during face-to-face meetings are negotiated as much - if not more - online. Online discussions take place at the local level on any number of working group or general membership listservs. Network-wide discussions usually unfold over several listservs dedicated to global level discussions, such as 'Communications', 'Finance', 'New IMC' and 'Process'.

All IMCs are mandated by the principles of unity to utilise some form of consensus decision making. The success of this non-hierarchical form of deliberation is based on patient, process-laden discussion, and strong interpersonal relationships founded on trust. At the

Seattle IMC, the consensus process was outlined in a website-linked document entitled 'Detailed Description of Consensus Decision Making', from the online publication, *On Conflict and Consensus* (Butler & Rothstein 1987). Generally, consensus is understood to mean that everyone feels his or her input was considered in the decision-making process. The Seattle IMC's meetings allowed for several levels of consensus and ways to register dissent without derailing the process, including 'reservations' (have concerns), 'non-support' or a state of 'non-disagreement' (the person sees no need for the decision), or 'stand aside' (it may be a mistake, but a person can accept it). Making a 'block' indicates that the person feels the decision goes against fundamental IMC principles. Reaching consensus is sometimes challenging, particularly around contentious issues like membership criteria, financial transactions, and editorial practices.

Indymedia strengths & weaknesses

While the strengths of Indymedia's Internet-enabled radical democratic practices are considerable, they are also fraught with inherent tensions. Indymedia's sustainability issues are discussed in greater depth elsewhere (Pickard 2006b), but a number of other pressure points are well documented. For example, some democratic theorists are quick to note persistent hierarchies in consensus-based decision making (Mansbridge 1983; Young 1996). Gastil (1993) observes that typical drawbacks in small group democracy include long meetings, unequal involvement and commitment, cliques, differences in skills and styles, and personality conflicts. Similarly, Michel's (1915) 'iron law of oligarchy' argues that radical organisations - especially larger groups - tend to become more bureaucratic and conservative over time. In another important critique, Bookchin (1994) argues that beyond intimate small groups, consensus dissuades the creative process of 'dissensus' by pressuring dissenters into silence and thereby gravitating towards the least controversial, mediocrity, and de facto authoritarianism. Similarly, Freeman's (1972) classic critique 'the tyranny of structurelessness' suggests such purported non-hierarchy masks power, allows 'informal elites' to arise, and renders unstructured groups politically impotent.

All of the tensions described above are found in Indymedia practice to some degree. However, increasingly activists are adapting sophisticated tactics

to offset oligarchic tendencies. Polletta suggests that contemporary activists are more reflexive than their forbears, constantly re-examining internal structures and processes. Such reflexivity renders implicit power relationships more explicit, and helps illuminate structural power inequities associated with persistent class, race, and gender arrangements. Another corrective measure is the intense focus on process-related issues during and after meetings - what Polletta characterises as 'fetishizing process', which has its own set of drawbacks, such as long meetings. Some activists have decried being 'processed to death'. For example, a 'process v. progress' theme animated debate during Seattle IMC meetings and across the general email list, with some activists arguing for less focus on procedure and more energy devoted to actions like media-making.

Although endless meetings and debates can bog down operations, network organisations arguably make decisions far more quickly and creatively in fast-changing political situations than any organisation with a bureaucratic chain of command. Paul De Armond (2001) illustrated how the Direct Action Network (DAN) was able to prevail during the WTO protests because of their network-based communicative structure comprised of Internet connections and cell phones, while police stymied the traditionally hierarchical labour march. Similarly, Polletta argues that radical democratic practices encourage innovation, solidarity, and dispersion of leadership skills. She explains, 'In a decentralized organization, people can respond better to local conditions and can act quickly on decisions' (2002: 211), thus affording Indymedia adaptability and resistance to state repression.

Polletta also notes, however, that the participatory model becomes strained once membership expands beyond the small group level. Allowing codified processes to become rigid and unyielding to special situations is a potential peril with the Indymedia model. A failure to reach consensus on accepting a Ford Foundation Grant in the fall of 2002 was a spectacular example of network paralysis, though the process arguably prevailed in the end. Consensus on accepting funding for an international IMC conference was blocked due to what some Indymedia activists, particularly members of the Argentina IMC, perceived as repressive historic legacies associated with the Ford Foundation. Additionally, many Indymedia activists were alarmed at North American IMCs seemingly dominating the

network decision process (Pickard 2006b).

Radical openness causes similar tensions in the editorial processes governing the open published newswire and featured articles. Editorial policy is not specifically prescribed in the principles of unity and is one of the most important decisions largely left up to individual IMCs. For most IMC websites, the featured articles section takes up the centre, whereas the open publishing newswire is allotted a much smaller space. Unlike the newswire where anyone with Internet access can post news stories, featured articles go through an editorial selection process based on a hierarchical value system and subjective criteria. Indymedia is thus torn between becoming a credible news institution able to challenge corporate mainstream representations, and not wanting to repel journalists resisting mainstream news norms. Dealing with inappropriate posts, such as duplicates, advertisements, and hate speech, is also contentious. Indymedia's openness has allowed hate groups like neo-Nazis to abuse the newswire, causing conflict between those advocating for a truly open, unmanaged newswire, and others who advocate for a more pragmatic approach (Beckerman 2003). Some IMCs deal with this by 'hiding' posts somewhere on the site with an explanation for why they were removed.

In a widely circulated intervention, Whitney (2006), a long-term activist with Indymedia experience in a number of countries, argued that this laissez-faire approach to the newswire combined with shoddy newsgathering was exactly what was ailing Indymedia. On the other hand, NYC IMC's *The Independent*, which just celebrated its one hundredth issue, continues to produce reliably good journalism that, if not directly impacting mainstream news media discourse, breaks important local issues eventually picked up by outlets like the *New York Times* (Thompson & Anderson 2007).

Recent Developments

Indymedia's post-Seattle development is something of a mixed legacy, and its direction remains debatable. The continuing dominance of North American white males within the network continues to be a problem. Of the approximately 150 IMCS, about one fourth comes from the Global South. Furthermore, recent research suggests that the global network may be far less active and cohesive than online appearances would suggest (Coopman 2006). Nevertheless, Indymedia's more positive attributes persist. Even Whitney points to IMC

journalists in Latin America, Africa, and Asia covering important life and death social issues that no one else approaches. The latter was tragically demonstrated in the Autumn of 2006 when inveterate Indymedia journalist Brad Will was gunned down while covering state oppression of a grassroots uprising in Oaxaca. Other hotspots in recent years where Indymedia often provided the only direct media coverage include the 2003 Bolivian uprising, and the 2005 tumult in Nepal when the King declared martial law and a media blackout (Waltz 2005).

North American Indymedia have undergone important changes as well. One shining example is the large Urbana-Champaign IMC, which conducted a year-long membership fund-drive to purchase the downtown Urbana Post Office building to provide space for a wide array of progressive community projects. Though it continues to court controversy for its non-profit incorporation, paid staffers, and its fiscal sponsorship of the global IMC network, the UC-IMC consistently produces vibrant community journalism via its website, a community radio station, and a monthly newspaper. A stark counter-example is the flagship Seattle IMC, which lost its prime downtown space and much of its membership. As IMCs rise and fall, the earlier rapid expansion of the network seems to have leveled out for the present.

While many tensions plaguing Indymedia have been present in radical politics since time immemorial, today's activists are actualising democratic practices in unprecedented ways. Ranging from open-published news stories to coordinating a vast global network, IMC activists struggle to redefine power relationships while producing news media, instead of replicating the social asymmetries, structural biases, and systemic failures that they passionately resist.

Jihad Video

Thomas Keenan

In a magazine diary of the 2004 American elections, 'The Revolution Will Not Be Blogged', journalist George Packer worries that reporters aren't getting out enough anymore. As in the 1970 Gil-Scott Heron song, the title of which he borrows, Packer expresses a preference for what he calls 'reality,' for getting out there, away from the screen and into the actual world, rather than waiting around for things to be televised, videotaped, emailed, or blogged. 'To see beyond their own little world and get

a sense of what's really going on', he writes, 'journalists and readers need to get out of their pajamas' (Packer 2004). He could have just said, get out.

Get out to where things are happening, turning, revolving. At work here is a powerful if implicit understanding of the temporality of the media and especially of the image. Television and blogs are fundamentally about delay and expectation, about waiting, waiting for something to happen somewhere else. The pathos and the critical force of the trope comes from the sense that the camera always follows the event, arrives afterwards, a little late...that reality comes first; at best the camera records, archives or transmits it, but it's fated to be after-the-fact, secondary, derived.

The suggestion is that one day something will happen, there will be a revolution, and it will happen somewhere, outside, in some street or public square, and that only then, afterwards, the cameras will come along to take pictures of it. Even if cameras do come along with it, they will only be there as witnesses, distributors. We had better not wait.

What if that's the distinction that we can't take for granted anymore, the one between the street and the camera, between 'our own little world' of the screen and the big one out there, where what's really going on, is going on, really? What if the time lag is increasingly being reduced to little or nothing? What about things that happen on screen, that happen only in order to be on screen, that wouldn't happen without a camera and a screen? Today it is indisputable that such events do occur, that revolutions - or at least insurrections, uprisings, violent acts of resistance - are being televised, blogged, videotaped.

In 2007, the most interesting frontline for investigating this phenomenon is what has been called the 'global *jihad*', with its dogged commitment to integrating highly professional media production, particularly on the Internet, into its core activities. The interest is both epistemological and political. *Jihad* media presents a basic challenge to the will-not-be-televised paradigm, and in doing so encourages reflection on what advocates of global civil society had hoped for, or expected, from a more accessible and pluralised media, whether television or the Internet.

Jihad on the web

One night in October 2005, I stayed up late to watch a Zargawi premiere on the Internet. 'The Expedition of

Omar Hadid'' was an hour-long Arabic-language production. It had been announced in the *Jihad* online forums a few days previously, and expectations had been building. When word came of its arrival, our attention was directed to www.omar-hadid.net, where a stylish animated gif, featuring the late Omar Hadid', presided over a page composed entirely of download links.

Actually, I did not watch the video that night, I watched its distribution. It was available for downloading in an immense variety of sizes and formats, across maybe 15 links, from a 527 MB DAT file suitable for burning VCDs and DVDs to a micro-version in 3GP format, designed for dial-up access and playback on mobile phones.

The introductory page was designed, it said in Arabic, by 'the Media Department of the Al-Qaeda Organisation in the Land of the Two Rivers [Mesopotamia]', and was dated 'Ramadan 1426'. In other words, the video tape came from Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the *Jihad* insurgent group then led by Jordanian-born Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. It chronicled and honoured a campaign of suicide attacks (or 'martyrdom operations') in Baghdad during April 2005, which had left dozens of Iraqi civilians and a few American soldiers dead. Zarqawi named this campaign, 'The Expedition of Omar Hadid', in honour of his lieutenant, who had been killed in Fallujah the previous November.

The video tape is a relentless catalogue of violence, interrupted only by images of the technical and discursive preparations for that violence, which is announced, claimed, and advertised by its perpetrators. As I watched the site for a few hours that night, I noticed that a feature I'd never seen on a *Jihad* download page before and rarely since: a hit counter at the bottom of the screen, which clicked ever higher as new viewers retrieved their copies. Just before I went to bed, after four hours of distracted attention, I saved a copy of the page, as well as the film, which was trickling in from megaupload.com, sendspace.com, or one of the Japanese open servers popular at the time. The counter read 10,738 downloads.

The basic analytic units of the *Jihad* on the web are the forum and the video file. The agents are dispersed across the Islamic world from Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Palestine, to Chechnya, Somalia, Algeria and

¹ An edited version, with disturbing scenes removed, can be found at: <http://switch3.castup.net/cunet/gm.asp?ClipMediaID=379550&ak=null>



beyond to their comrades in the US, Asia and Europe. They also differ greatly in ideology, theology, and outlook, including Iraqi insurgent armies (mostly Sunni but including some Shiite militias loosely related to Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army); those with their own media production units; and the Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters and leaders in Pakistan and Afghanistan (including Al-Qaeda's most important media production unit, As-Sahab).

They appear online in some relatively stable sites, such as theislamsun.com, which hosts the Al-Rashdeen Army in Iraq, and press-release.blogspot.com, which until recently offered multiple daily communiqués from the 'Islamic State of Iraq', the successor organisation to Zarqawi's group. But the real action is in the forums, the web-based discussion sites filled with pages of threaded postings and comments, some of which are accessible, others that restrict access, in which news, communiqués and still images are posted and exchanged, and where links to PDF documents, audio and video tapes, mostly hosted by commercial fileservers in the West, are distributed.

The power of contemporary imaging

This is not the advocacy television we grew up with. More than twenty years ago, in Ethiopia and on the concert stages of Live Aid, the world discovered the remarkable power of television and its images to motivate humanitarian concern and action. Bernard Kouchner, one of the French doctors who created the humanitarian organisation, Doctors without Borders, noted that 'where there is no camera, there is no humanitarian intervention' (Kouchner 1991: 210).

These images were so powerful that aid agencies felt obliged to consider their use carefully and even to develop ethical codes to help protect against the risk of exploiting those whom they sought to help. Critics worried about 'disaster pornography'. When television went global and live, as a matter of norm rather than

Box 10.3: Political jamming

Political jamming is a form of culture jamming that targets not only big corporations but the political in the broad sense (Mouffe 2005) as its object for mockery and activism. The term 'culture jamming' entered popular discourse in 1985 when the 'audio-DaDa' band Negativland released *JamCon '84*, in which they referred to billboard activists who altered advertising hoardings to produce subversive meanings as the archetypal culture jammer. As Berry so eloquently said, culture jammers 'create with mirrors' (1995).

Jamming is not an entirely new phenomenon. Besides its obvious reference to radio-jamming, it is rooted in surrealism, DaDa-ism, and especially Situationism. This art movement of the 1950s-60s 'situated' art in the context of ordinary life, thereby opposing the elitist perspective of art that is detached from or transcends society and the experiences of 'ordinary' people in everyday contexts. Debord and Wolman (1956 – emphasis added), key actors in the Situationist International, coined the notion of *Détournement*, defining it as 'a *parodic-serious* stage where *the accumulation of detoured elements*, far from aiming to arouse indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity.'

Culture jammers have appropriated *Détournement* as a form of resistance. A good example is AdBusters, which maintains a website and publishes a magazine of 'subvertissements' or 'demarketing' (Lasn 2000). Peretti (2001) pulled off a now infamous jam by asking Nike to inscribe 'sweatshop' on his custom-made shoes. Nike's refusal and the email discussion swept rapidly around the world via email forwarding and the Internet. Many jams circulate through email forwarding but most culture jams aim to hack into the mainstream media as well. Besides a comprehensive website, AdBusters buys time on mainstream television to air their 'anti-spots'. Billboard activists, such as the Billboard Liberation Front (BLF), who jammed the Apple campaign 'Think Different' into Think Doomed and Think Dissillusioned, use the street as their primary medium of communication, which is then amplified via their website (BLF URL).

The typical culture jam is constructed as a David and Goliath battle of the inventive, funny activists versus the mighty evil corporate world; in essence, as progressive voices struggling for social and cultural justice. While culture jamming is inherently political, political jamming is broader in its scope, going beyond the corporate world and neo-liberalism to target government policies, political adversaries and enemies. Jamming the political is a way of dealing with the messiness of reality, subverting meanings by combining mockery, satire and parody. The use of *Détournement* in political communication is often progressive, but can also ventilate feelings of intolerance, public hatred towards a demonized enemy, and racism towards ethnic minorities.

The following brief case studies illustrate the phenomenon of political jamming:

- Billboard activist Ron English is a master of what he calls the art of subversion. His website contains several examples of political jams: Picasso's famous painting *Guernica* is headlined with the banner, 'The New World Order'; and billboards carry the slogans 'Jihad is Over (If You Want It)' or 'One God, One Party - Republicans for a dissent free theocracy' (Popganda URL). This type of activism shows that the street remains a space for alternative political discourses to be 'advertised' via buying advertising space, which Adbusters does, or by 'hijacking' existing advertisements with subversive messages. In many countries radical activists use stickers or graffiti to voice dissent, subvert mainstream discourse and reclaim public spaces through counter-messages. The Wooster Collective (Wooster Collective URL), the Iranian Graffiti Art Movement (Iran Graffiti URL), and the artist Banksy (Banksy URL) represent such activism.



Source: <http://www.popaganda.com>

- Prior to the 2003 European and Regional elections in Belgium, an Antwerp-based multicultural radio station, Radio Multipop, supported by a broad coalition of local civil society organisations, launched a campaign to counter that of the North-Belgian extreme right party 'Vlaams Blok'.¹ The counter campaign, 'Hate is no Solution', used the same layout but transformed Vlaams Blok's slogans of 'Less Immigration, More Flanders' and 'Less Crime, More Flanders', into 'More Heart, Less Hate' and 'More Dialogue, Less Hate'. To encourage citizens to display these political jams throughout the city, Radio Multipop printed 40,000 as posters and made them available for download from the Internet, thus demonstrating combined use of the virtual and physical worlds for mobilisation.
- For some, the act of demonstrating becomes a performance in the sense that the Situationists perceived it. Performance is central to activists such as the Yes Men, who pioneered what they call 'identity correction' in which 'Honest people impersonate big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them. Targets are leaders and big corporations who put profits ahead of everything else' (Yes Men URL). The Yes Men have famously impersonated a WTO spokesperson promoting 'private stewardry of labour' to an African business conference. And in the guise of Dow Chemical Corporation they pledged on the BBC World Service to compensate victims of the 1984 chemical disaster in Bhopal, India. Another activist group, 'Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)', mounted a successful campaign against corporate control of US politics, which appealed deliberately to the mainstream media and thus the public at large. As one of the activists stated: 'If the media wanted the humour (and they did), they had to take the content too. The materials were catchy and accessible and the action model was easy to DIY. Thus the meme 'spread, replicated, and mutated' (Boyd 2002: 373).
- Photo doctored is often used to fake images and convey messages opposite to those intended. September 11 2001, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have provided fertile ground for such illicit political jams (Frank 2004). While some are very critical of Western policies, others voice essentialist and racist discourses, or reinforce the Western hegemonic agenda. Examples of jams that attack Western (often US) policies include George Bush morphed into Osama bin Laden (see below) and a Star Wars film poster re-engineered as 'Gulf Wars, episode II - clone of the attack'. However, more vituperative examples have emerged, such as a plane heading towards the Kaäba in Mecca, entitled 'An Eye for an Eye'; and the détournement of the French sports newspaper *l'Équipe*, which represented the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack as a goal scored in a deadly football match between religions.



Source: 'Mullah Bush' by Mister Hepburn (bushspeaks.com)

- The essentialist examples above, which advocate discourses of hate, show that political jamming can easily turn into ridiculing, humiliating or victimising a common enemy or the personification of evil at a given moment in time. At the same time, jamming techniques are increasingly being appropriated as part of 'hip' political communication strategies by political parties, publicity agencies and PR companies, thereby reducing this alternative form of communication to a marketing technique – 'un-jamming' the jam, so to speak.

In our post-modern society, a world of green-wash, spin and other newspeak, *Détournement* does not always challenge the status quo or strive to extend the rights of citizens. The political jam exposes the impossibility of fixed meanings, whether they are hegemonic or counter-hegemonic; as Debord said, 'In a world which really is topsy-turvy, the true is a moment of the false' (1983 [1967]: 9).

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¹ Due to a conviction for disseminating persistent racist discourses 'Vlaams Blok' recently changed its name to 'Vlaams Belang'.



John Shattuck: 'The media got us into Somalia and then they got us out'

exception, the effects multiplied. And so, a decade ago it seemed impossible to discuss the international events of the day - Rodney King and the LA riots, the Gulf War, famine in Somalia, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, genocide in Rwanda - without reflecting on the seemingly overwhelming role that televised images of violence and suffering played in shaping the way crises unfolded. But opinions were split on just what that role was.

At times it even seemed as if the images were more important than the events. In the foreign policy world, there was excitement, positive and negative, about 'the CNN effect'. 'Surely it exists', said then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Shalikashvili, 'and surely we went to Somalia and Rwanda partly because of its magnetic pull' (1995: 115). In Somalia, in 1991, pictures of suffering and starvation proved irresistible for humanitarians, politicians, and generals alike. The United States led an international invasion force that sought to feed and heal the victims of famine by force of arms...and to manufacture a new image for a military that had recently lost its primary reason for being. And the power of images was ratified, however tragically, when the American rescue force was ejected from Somalia two years later by the camcorder pictures of dead American soldiers in the street and a Blackhawk helicopter pilot in captivity.

It seemed that images could make governments undo what previous images had apparently galvanised them to do. 'The media got us into Somalia and then got us out', wrote John Shattuck, former US assistant secretary for human rights and democracy in the Clinton era (1996: 174). The story was obviously more complicated than that (and the counter-example of over-exposed and under-defended Sarajevo can serve as shorthand here) but the message is conventional wisdom today. No major human rights or humanitarian organisation would undertake a major advocacy

campaign, and certainly not one aimed at influencing Northern policy makers, without a comprehensive media strategy.

What the daily torrent of movies from Iraq and the other frontlines have in common, not to mention the homemade videos that American soldiers now routinely upload to YouTube and Live Leak, is the fact that they are conceived, scripted, shot, edited, and distributed by those who feature in them. No third parties, reporters, executive producers, advertisers or network affiliates need be involved. Although, of course, they can be: the Internet reaches into the production and executive suites at Al-Arabiya and BBC World just as easily as it lands on the desktops and cyber cafes of the global *Jihad*. But there exists now, in real life, whatever its blind spots and missed coverage, and all manner of digital divides, a functional, always-on, multilingual and multinational global production and distribution audio-video network.

Its production teams are turning out video tapes at the rate of dozens each week, many of sophistication and high production values. This raises a difficult question. The DIY factor, this user-generated content from the battlefield, differs fundamentally from the paradigm we impute to journalistic coverage of news stories. It is partisan. It advocates, propagandises, seeks to act and encourages action. But does it differ only empirically, or somehow essentially, from the regime of the photo opportunity or the media event? Where would news and politics be without the photo opportunity? The motivation to appear before cameras, and to produce people and events that look good when captured by them, governs not only the behaviour of politicians and celebrities but also humanitarian action and human rights campaigns, as well as military interventions in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, and embedded reporters in Iraq. How different is the daily videotaped combat in Iraq and the last testament of the suicide bomber in Algiers?

Two dimensions of contemporary imaging - the photo opportunity and the act of bearing witness - have effectively created a new politics over the last three decades.

Michel Foucault, speaking in 1981, heralded the emergence of an 'international citizenry' (quoted in Keenan 1987: 22), exemplified by Amnesty International and others, which had created a new right, that of private individuals to intervene in the order of international politics and strategies, to uproot the

monopoly over reality previously held by governments.

Stuart Hall, writing a couple of years later, saw in the Live Aid and Band Aid concert phenomena nothing less than a new kind of politics, catalysed by global networks of rock music and television. In an important essay, 'The Ethics of Television', Michael Ignatieff (1997) argued that television had not only become the primary connector between people in the rich and poor worlds, but that it was creating a new political space and new political agents - non-governmental organisations - which threatened or promised to take over the traditional monopoly on representation possessed by states, and open up new territories of political action to non-state actors, civil society, a global citizenry.

How? On the screen. Television, Ignatieff wrote, 'is the instrument of a new kind of politics', one in which NGOs seek to circumvent bilateral governmental relations and institute direct political contacts between far-flung people. This notion, exemplified in the paradigms of 'mobilising shame' and 'global witness,' today dominates the 'third sector,' from relief agencies to human rights organisations and community movements. For us, that new politics has been generalised and radicalised. Global civil society is unthinkable without media, without a virtual public space and access to its means of production and distribution. Indeed, under the banners of opening-democratic-spaces and overcoming-the-digital-divide, creating and defending those media zones has become one of the chief preoccupations of the new political movements of our time. The current concern with information and communications technology for development is just one indicator of this phenomenon. But civil society - and the new people politics - is not what it used to be.

'It's a war of perceptions', Army Brigadier General John Custer, Head of Intelligence at Central Command, told CBS News' *60 Minutes*. 'They [the insurgents] understand the power of the Internet. They don't have to win in the tactical battlefield. They never will. No platoon has ever been defeated in Afghanistan or Iraq. But it doesn't matter. It's irrelevant' (Pelley 2007).

The 'new politics' of television are increasingly a new new politics of the Internet, and the actors in cyberspace are not just humanitarians and earnest human rights advocates, but protagonists of the restoration of the Caliphate and armed insurgents - maybe even revolutionaries - of the multiform *Jihad*.

All that effort to promote open access and free

media, all that connectivity, bandwidth and cyber-infrastructure, all those attempts to overcome the digital divide...and the new new politics has proven remarkably successful.

Conclusion

Nick Couldry

This Chapter has attempted to address the full range of global civil society; the result is a huge, and at first bewildering, diversity. I want to look back over the Chapter, and argue that no less a diversity must be encompassed if the empirical complexity and normative promise of the term 'global civil society' is to be fulfilled. I will end with some suggestions for how our engagement with this diversity can be developed further.

When introducing 'global civil society', the editors of the first Yearbook pointed to an 'underlying social reality' that the term's rising popularity glossed:

the emergence of a supranational sphere of social and political participation in which citizen groups, social movements, and individuals engage in dialogue, debate, confrontation, and negotiation with each other and with various governmental actors - international, national, and local - as well as the business world. (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor 2001: 4)

From the beginning then, the Yearbook series has recognised a complexity of scale and a heterogeneity of actors, which guarantees that the term 'global civil society' covers multiple dimensions and directions of action. 'Global civil society' as a term may be highly contested and fuzzy (2001: 7-12), but this matters little because of the 'normative aspiration' built into it, particularly in the choice of the word 'global', instead of the more cautious 'transnational' (2001: 17). Since then, the term has been criticised, for example because its reference points are already contaminated by the pre-existing power dynamics of state and markets (Chandhoke 2002), or too detached from 'the daily spaces' in which people act (Sassen 2006: 318). Starting to address those criticisms only increases the complexities that the term embodies.

Four areas of irreducible uncertainty are involved here: first, over what is meant by civil society; second, over what counts as politics; third, over what is meant by 'global' in this context; and fourth, lurking behind

these and less explicit, an uncertainty about what it is for media to enable or sustain global civil society. Each of these uncertainties emerges at various points in this chapter, and each is intrinsic, not accidental, to the concept of global civil society.

So, taking civil society first, and even if we leave aside old debates about whether civil society actors must operate outside *both* market and state, there is a question about what those actors must do to qualify as 'civil society'. Marc Williams defines 'civil society' as 'that voluntary sphere in which individuals come together from outside the state and the market *in order to promote common interests*' (2005: 347, added emphasis). If so, we need to ask, how 'common' do those interests have to be, since the wider ambition of the 'global civil society' debate is to identify processes that help broaden *democratic* politics. Just as some fear that Habermas' public sphere ideal may fragment into countless unconnected 'public spherules' (Gitlin 1998; Sunstein 1999), so too, when looking at possible examples of 'global civil society', we need to ask whether they are connected or at least connectable: if not, as Clifford Bob notes, it may not be a broader civil society or democratic politics that is being built. Uncertainty over the 'civil' inevitably overlaps with long-term debates about the boundaries of the political, as Bart Cammaerts notes in his discussion of 'culture jamming', which is far from traditional electoral politics. Turning to the 'global', the global potential of political debates in the digital media age is a given, but there are many modalities of the global: globality of interactions or networking, globality of the issues or reference-points under discussion, and globality of ultimate political goals (Williams 2005: 350-351). Once again, this chapter illustrates that variety. And finally, if behind the prominence of the term 'global civil society' lie shifts not only in global economics and politics, but also major advances in communications technology (Williams 2005: 353), then there is an uncertainty about how exactly new media – which new media, and in which combinations? – are sustaining global civil society. For, as this Chapter makes clear, we cannot grasp media's contribution simply by looking at 'civil society media', useful though that term might be in some contexts (Hintz 2006).

Thus, in its full ambit, the term 'global civil society' encompasses movements that are not particularly 'civil' (the *jihad* videos discussed by Thomas Keenan), that emerge initially out of national politics (the NRA

discussed by Clifford Bob), that involve an implicit cultural politics rather than an explicit formal politics (Nigerian video-films discussed by Jonathan Haynes) and that challenge existing *media* power as much as political power,¹ sometimes through online networks (Indymedia discussed by Victor Pickard) or through novel combinations of traditional media (Nigerian video films circulating among wider global diasporas).

These complexities are inherent in the term 'global civil society' and the multiple social realities to which it refers. I will describe later how we might take our analysis of this complexity a stage further. First, let us review each case study in a little more detail.

On the face of it, Indymedia is a clear recent example of global civil society: a global network that links various new sites of news, opinion and debate on political issues within a global frame, and in a way, as Pickard illustrates, that was in principle impossible without the Internet. Indeed, the Indymedia network deepens global civil society in two ways, as Pickard shows: first, by offering a new type of media practice, a new type of 'newsroom' much more open to the contributions of non-media professionals; second, by a highly de-centered process of policy making and decision making, which encourages local initiative and adaptability. But this initial success generates major questions for the long-term:² how far will Indymedia's implicit challenge to traditional news production values be taken? Under what conditions is Indymedia's distinctive media and political practice sustainable and for whom in particular? These questions become even more acute when, as Pickard notes, we recall that only one fourth of the 150 IMCs worldwide are based in the South, just as 'global civil society' has from the outset been dominated by the North (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor 2001: 7).

In social and cultural terms, NRA and Indymedia activists would be unlikely to recognise each other as having much in common if they met on the streets of an American city. But the breadth of 'global civil society' as a concept encourages us to look for similar dynamics that may underlie activism from very different points in the political spectrum.³ As Clifford Bob shows, there

¹ Compare Couldry and Curran (2003) on the contestation of media's symbolic power as a separate dimension of contemporary conflicts.

² Compare Couldry (2003: 50-51) on these points.

³ Chris Atton (2004) makes a parallel point in favour of the inclusiveness of the term 'alternative media'.

are important overlaps of method and technique between NRA as an online communicator and the opponents of gun sports and firearm proliferation. These go beyond the obvious value of the web for campaign mobilisation, and include the use of a global issue frame for generating news favourable to their respective viewpoints. But these similarities between online global civil society opponents raise a deeper question, which echoes the uncertainties noted earlier: do we see in the globally framed, digitally enabled gun debate 'global civil society' in action, with positive long-term consequences for democratic expansion, or as Bob suggests, simply a better-resourced *space of conflict* without progress towards greater dialogue or mutual understanding? A recent study of online discussion on immigration and cultural politics in the Netherlands also fails to find signs of genuine 'engagement' online, that is, 'a reflection upon one's own discourse in the light of the other's discourse' (Witschge 2007: 121). It seems clear the presence of mutually exclusive political constituencies on the web is insufficient for genuine 'global civil society'. Thomas Keenan's study of the role of *Jihad* videos in raising the profile of militant groups in many zones of conflict only intensifies this question. As with Indymedia, the Internet's infrastructure is essential to these groups, even if in this case there is no larger network and groups remain highly particularistic. What matters here is not that *Jihad* video represents a form of global civil society – clearly it does not, because this is media where showing and declaration is more important than witness and argument. Rather, the significance of this case study is that it highlights the *normative* force of the global civil society concept: the need for new fora of debate and exchange to *emerge* somehow in the future in an intensely mediatised field of conflict.

Jonathan Haynes' study of Nigerian videos and 'Nollywood' stretches the concept of global civil society in another way, recalling older debates about the political potential of commercial popular culture. On the face of it, Nigerian video culture lies outside 'civil society' because the production and distribution of these films are certainly market operations. The point, as Haynes shows, is how these videos are used by *audiences* in private, often highly gendered contexts, to articulate social issues that find little expression in national or global politics – and for audiences not only in Nigeria but within diaspora populations as far afield as New York. These are videos produced by an industry

with low entry costs, and distribution as much by word of mouth as by expensive marketing, and far removed from formal political processes. Yet to dismiss their significance for the longer-term growth of global civil society would be a mistake, because at stake here is the underlying flow of images that are a basic precondition of a working democracy. As the Burkinabe film-director Gaston Kaboré, quoted by Todd Lester, puts it:

a society that is confronted with images and values from abroad on a daily basis [without others of its own] will eventually lose its identity and the ability to choose its own destination.

Where does this leave us in terms of the concept of global civil society and the questions with which this Chapter started about the emergence and sustainability of new and viable spaces of democratic debate? On the face of it, the heterogeneity of the case studies poses a problem. The media spaces discussed differ in their degrees of 'civility' and politicisation, in their degrees and modes of globality, and in the ways in which media sustain them as spaces. Therefore there is no single model for ensuring either their sustainability or democratic potential.

Following recent work on 'practice' in social theory,⁴ we can think of global civil society as a large and complex 'dispersed practice' (Schatzki 1996: 89) held together at most by a shared or analogous set of understandings, rather than by any explicit rules. Dispersed practices may vary considerably in their component parts, but they require certain linkages or articulations if they are to form part of the same practice. To form part of the large and complex dispersed practice we call 'global civil society', the various case studies of this Chapter must show some articulation between their detailed activities of production and engagement, and a wider context where opinions are exchanged and issues recognised as needing common resolution are deliberated upon. How that articulation gets made will vary greatly in particular cases, but it must be there in some form at least. It is this requirement that makes global civil society a critical and normative concept.

⁴ See Schatzki (1996) and Reckwitz (2002); for an application to research on political engagement, see Couldry Livingstone and Markham (2007: chapter 4).

As we have seen, those articulations may be difficult to find in reality. A question raised by the NRA case study is whether any space yet exists where the NRA and its opponents can address *each other*, and in a way that links to a legitimate decision-making process. The *Jihad* video case study suggests few spaces exist currently online or offline where the declarations and iconography of specific groups can be translated into terms for possible debate and exchange. The cases of Indymedia, the Nigerian video-film industry, and culture jamming seem less problematic, since in each case there is a broader constituency for whom these cultural productions are relevant and resonant, but the issue of articulation arguably arises in a different form: how, if at all, are these processes linked in a regular way to more formal processes of decision-making?⁵ If no such links prove sustainable, then the relevance of these practices to global civil society must surely fade too.

For now, we cannot be sure how things will evolve in any of these examples. The NRA is extremely likely to remain a player on the global and national stage; what is less certain is whether it will engage with a wider process of debate and deliberation. Such a shift is unlikely perhaps for *Jihad* groups unless a larger transnational framework for the political resolution of the conflicts they represent emerges. The Nigerian video scene's implicit cultural politics may or may not be sustained by connections to other forms of political and social action, but the trade is likely to continue because of its commercial dynamics. Indymedia's long-term robustness must surely depend, as Natalie Fenton argues for contemporary forms of online activism more generally, on the development of a wider 'social imaginary' that links together the struggles of Indymedia and other actors on the left in a broader narrative of political change (Fenton 2006: 258).

Such uncertainties, however, are not problems with the concept of global civil society. They are simply an index of the scale and multidimensional complexity of the ongoing political, social and media transformations to which this term directs our attention.

⁵ Compare with Fraser (2005: 85 note 16).

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