A Constructive View of the MacBride Report

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The unenthusiastic view of some analysts with respect to the MacBride Report's argument that proposed the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) and Theory of Economic and Communicational Dependency does not do justice to what they meant or still mean today. As a doctrinal body of work, we are still, in these times of globalisation and identities, able to find some promising lines of work in culture and communication policies.

The proposals of the MacBride Report had a great educational value: their aim of eliminating the inequalities of information; the call for the right of different groups to participate in communication flows and the restriction of the effects of monopolies on information; the simultaneous defence of a free but balanced flow of information and programmes and a plurality of sources; the support for general freedoms and journalistic freedom to report in a free press; the need to develop communication infrastructures and local cultural-industry infrastructures in developing countries; respect for the cultural identity of each country and its right to inform from its own parameters, etc. This was the meaning of the 11 proposals of the MacBride Commission and which was ratified at the Unesco General Conference in Belgrade in 1980.

Today the issues have changed, partly because the world and reflections on it have changed (see the attached two tables on similarities and differences in the context and in the alternative discourses). Where 25 years ago they were seen from the viewpoint of geopolitics and states, today they are seen in terms of identities, communities, languages and religions. Then, people were more outwards-looking (the

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focus was on the relationships between structures in the flow of information and programmes with regard to the paradigm of equality among countries), while today we are more inwards-looking and see not only different countries but also different cultures at risk, or different class interests about communication and culture, with the paradigms used becoming the protection of diversity and the right to culture. In other words, the object of concern has expanded from Communication to Culture, understood in a very broad sense.

Seen from the viewpoint of anthropology or the cultural management of groups, what could be missing in the NWICO are more subtle analyses about the internal social and cultural contradictions (crossbreeding, hybrids, reception analysis, popular reappropriations of federal media, new identities and real or virtual communities, etc.) but those were times of clear fractures and contradictions which were tackled from the point of view of 'big stories'.

In any case, the fact that the 'big stories' were plunged into a state of crisis in the late 1980s does not mean that the fragmented and kaleidoscopic postmodern view or the development of the idea of technology above communication is better, or that new global and multi-faceted visions should not be rebuilt. Also, the mainstays of cultural or communicational policy, both national and regional, are usually guided by assessable and explicit macro-criteria in which the macro/micro or global/local dialectic is present, and which legitimate interest in the micro can never displace.

Certainly, those proposals were established from a vertical focus (North-South), more in the area of principles than the field of the internal contradictions within countries. In fact, the analysis of the specific and differentiated cultural differences between the classes and strata of each country was present but not a major concern. However, very rarely

had an intellectual class worked with more valour to apply those criteria in their respective countries with a transforming vocation, whether directly in communication policy (in cases such as Peru and Venezuela) or in the *anti-imperialistic* ideological struggle (in the other countries). The vocation of intervention was specific to an intelligentsia that was aware that if knowledge was not applied in society, power and the market would inevitably hold sway.

Certainly ideas do not move the world, but even still it was magnificent that the consequences of the Theory of Dependency were put on the agenda even in international institutions like Unesco. In any case, if anybody had thought about an ideological revolution starting from the elite in the developed countries (the Marcusian dream) or from the media or from an institutional technocracy in the dependent countries, they would have been very mistaken.

Labelling something erroneous, simplistic or naïve is easy[1], but what happened to the NWICO doctrine was the same as what happened to the Frankfurt School. Despite a number of exaggerations, they still have a central tenant for analytical rigour and critical capacity, which is also useful for transformer action. The NWICO did not define a fictitious world (some postmodern doctrines that get caught up with details and forget central issues could be called more fictitious) nor should it be lumbered with a responsibility relating to the defeats suffered by the working classes in the societies that supported its struggle to make a different type of world.

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of change in which the organised agents were aware of their transformer ability. Reducing everything to a simple collision between blocks is as false as today sustaining the idea that we are fundamentally living out a struggle of civilisations. Diverse structural and political conflicts were produced at the same time as the collision: between the forces of progress and empires or oligarchies on the periphery (revolutions and counterrevolutions); between models of society and politics within the heart of the central capitalist countries (May '68, the changes in the Welfare State, the Franco and Salazar dictatorships) and, in the case of the 'actually existing socialism' countries, the contradiction between one type of production for others and freedoms repressed by usurper bureaucracies.

On the other hand, it is an irony of history that some

prescriptions were not realised by the agents called to it. For example, we know that the dictatorships that various Latin American countries ended up in at the time were hostile to establishing national communication policies, but after democratisation in subsequent years or lustrums, some countries found (some in the identification of their self-respect and others in the need to supply themselves with images) the development of a certain national cultural industry, even with an exporter vocation that in some cases was able to break onto the Hispanic television market in the US. At the same time, contrary to the accusations of the US and UK governments against the neutralist theses of *Many Voices, One World* which supposedly benefited the Eastern Block, it was the very bureaucrats of the communist parties of the Eastern countries – subsequently converted into the elite of the new power – who opened up the process of implosions from within their countries.

Looking back after the fact, it is important to state the structural wisdom of at least three theses of the old NWICO: firstly, the importance given to information and its distribution in modern societies, and which today is even included in the name of the times in which we live (i.e., the information age), although from another perception. Secondly, the unequal flow of television, audiovisual and news programmes has expanded at the international scale and, when the internationalisation of cultures should be a four-way phenomenon between North, South, East and West, the limitations in the ability to access strategic information and all of its supports generates a 'digital divide'. Finally, the current ideas surrounding 'cultural exception'[2] and diversity are also anchored in that doctrine and are a natural derivation applied to particular societal areas.

The 2001 Unesco General Conference saw the unanimous approval of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, establishing that "all persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue" and that it was important to "fully respect their cultural identity" and for people to "have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." People were aware that the market cannot guarantee the preservation and promotion of the diversity needed for sustainable human

development. Cultural goods and services are carriers of identity and value, and should not be treated as just another good, as the World Trade Organization (WTO) is currently trying to do.

Now it is the turn (it is still in the draft stage) of Unesco's Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions[3], due to be discussed in October 2005 at the 13th General Conference and which is based on the abovementioned Universal Declaration.

In open debate with the liberal theses of the WTO, the International Network of Cultural Policies argues in favour of the draft convention considering that "cultural diversity contributes towards social cohesion, the vitality of democracy and the identity of nations, all essential components of social and economic development[4]", by which states would not only have the right to take steps to preserve and promote culture but would be obliged to use cultural policies to promote the availability of a variety of cultural contents and particularly ones "transmitted by cultural industries" (articles 8 to 11 of the 2001 Declaration).

Certainly, the agent *par excellence* of the current 34 articles of the draft convention are the 'State Parties' who set out their rights and obligations. However, it can also be deduced that, within each state, both the authorities and civil society of the different territories of the state have their own rights and obligations based on the principles of cultural diversity and subordination in management, and that the breach of their obligations by the state within the diverse cultures would legitimise unilateral actions by the threatened cultures or those that suffer situations of diglossia.

The new convention would trial providing a framework for policies that aim to achieve a balance between the right to promote the production and availability of national or local cultural content and the duty to remain open to the cultural content of other countries. All up, the debate – with the US, UK, Holland and other countries – will focus on how to interpret the contact area between the rights and obligations of the Convention and the rights and obligations of the 'State Parties' in virtue of other international treaties (article 19), e.g., those based on the WTO or bilateral trade agreements on goods and services. In the end, in these difficult times where the sectors of progress have suffered regressions, it is a second chance for a NWICO, but the condition is the connection with the Social Forum movement of Port Alegre and alternative globalisation.

Fortunately, the debate no longer involves the subterfuge of years past. Apparently, the clash was between freedom (free flow) and intervention (communication policies) when in reality what clashed more forcefully, both then and now, were ideas about culture/a-good-like-any-other and culture/right/identity. The old conflict is back again.

Notes

1 Thus the acidic theses of J. MARQUES DE MELO in "Comunicación y poder en América Latina". *Telos*, no. 33, May 1993.

2 For an economic explanation of the 'cultural exception', see COHEN E. "Globalización y diversidad cultural". In: *Informe Mundial de la cultura 2000-2001. Diversidad cultural, conflicto y pluralismo*. Madrid: Unesco / Mundi-Prensa, 2001.

3 CLT/CPD/2004/CONF.201/2.

4 http://206.191.7.19/meetings/2004/faq_france_s.shtml

Contexts

	1960s and 1970s	From the 1990s to Today
Geopolitical	Cold War (2 blocks) Non-Aligned Movement Revolutionary Processes	End of the Cold War and international terrorism New World Order with preventive US unilateralism Regression in the Third World
Economic Model	International capitalism and neo-colonialism Great concentration of capitals Industry and material production	Global capitalism and exclusion Ídem and global financial capital Idem and immaterial production and production of R&D:
Social Model	Class conflicts	Ídem and internal cultural conflicts in more hybrid societies and communities (culture, society and immigration)
Political Model	States	States + supra-states + conflicts in geopolitical zones + with emerging communities and nations
Communication and Culture	Towards mass and homogenous culture: market Unequal flows	Ídem + fragmented + horizontal communications Idem + network communication + digital divide

Alternative Discourses in Communication

	1960s and 1970s	Today
Global Formulations	Cultural imperialism and theory of dependency: anti-imperialism Rebalance of flows and free flow of communications	Alterglobalism and looking towards contradictions in each community Plurality, diversity, proposal of the 'cultural exception' against the market as the main regulator
Referents	Bipolar North/South	Multidimensionality North/South and intra (social groups, genders, diverse identities, etc.)
Intervention Frameworks	Nation states	Ídem + regional + local + popular: the identities
Paradigms	Free and balanced flows Protectionism and national communication plans	Horizontality + right to culture and difference Own production and regional or sectorial cultural strategies