The transnationalization of communications : implications on culture and development

Constantino, Renato

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By

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THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF COMMUNICATIONS: IMPLICATIONS ON CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

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In the words of Amilcar Cabral, "Culture is the dynamic synthesis, at the level of individual or community consciousness, of the material and spiritual historical reality of a society or a human group, with the relations existing between man and nature as well as among men, and among social classes and sectors."[1]

Human beings must satisfy certain fundamental needs in order to survive. In satisfying these needs, people develop not only a material culture which includes technology and the overall system of producing and distributing goods, but also patterns of behavior and thought, concepts, standards, and values which are handed down from generation to generation and which taken together comprise the bedrock of culture. Each succeeding generation, however, modifies its cultural legacy, in accordance with its concrete historical circumstances. In a narrower sense then, culture may be defined as the organization of shared experience which includes values and standards for perceiving, judging and acting within a specific social milieu at a definite historical stage.[2]

Patterns of behavior and thought, concepts, standards and values encompass the economic, political, social and aesthetic areas of human life and society. The last category - the aesthetic - is what is commonly referred to as culture. In its popular sense, culture is the distillation of human experience through various techniques involving manipulation of the senses to produce art, music, dance, and literature.

Both culture as patterns of behavior and thought, concepts, standards and values, and culture as aesthetics are shaped by material life. In turn, culture by shaping human consciousness and defining the self-view of a people and their view of the world also influences the development of material conditions. Let us subsume the two categories - culture as behavior and thought patterns, etc. and culture as aesthetics - under the term spiritual culture.

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[1] Amilcar Cabral, "The Role of Culture in the Liberation Struggle," in Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub, eds., Communication and Class Struggle, New York, International Gen.eral, France, IMMRC, 173, p. 210.

[2] Maelsheachlainn O. Caollai, "Broadcasting and the Growth of a Culture," in Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub, eds., Communication and Class Struggle, New York, International General, 1979, p. 331.

It is in this sense that culture is discussed in this paper: culture as developed, refined, and transmitted in the realm of consciousness, especially that type of culture disseminated through what is now called the communications Industry. Such a focus, however, will not dissociate spiritual culture from its material moorings, for there are many developments in the material field, e.g. technology, the organization of the labor force, etc. which define, limit and modify cultural forms. In turn, there are also cultural activities which have stimulated the production of material objects that become part of the cultural sphere. This is well illustrated in the development of musical instruments, the construction of theatres, the invention of the phonograph and the movie camera, and the rise of the electronics industry. Today, radio and TV are major material conveyors of cultural products.

Culture and Communications

Culture is not only the product of a distillation of social experience, it is in essence also social communication. Art must be seen, literature read, music heard before any of these aesthetic products can become part of culture. Therefore the means of communication is vital. At the same time, communication is crucial to society's development because it articulates social relations among people.

> How people communicate, where and when they communicate, with whom they communicate and even to a certain degree, what and why they communicate, in short, the way they communicate, i.e. their mode of communication, is a function of the historical process.[3]

Communication is generally regarded as the conveying of information and ideas. It is both a product and a cause of social development and has itself its own development according to the specific historical period of particular societies, because it involves the movement not only of people but also of commodities and of capital.

At an early stage of social development, communication was a bond among equals but as society developed and stratified, the means of communication became privately owned and controlled and were used by its owners as a medium for reproducing the types of society favored by ruling groups. As such, communication has been transformed into a channel of domination. This is particularly so during the contemporary period when nearly all means of communication are in the hands of monopolies tied up with other monopolies engaged in the circulation of commodities and capital on a global basis.

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[3]Seth Siegelaub, "A Communication on Communication," in Mattelart and Siegelaub, op, cit., p. 11.

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Means of Domination

From its initial function of facilitating social interaction in relatively simple ways, communication has developed a massive, complex technological base. Media have become industries and have been transformed into producers of cultural commodities. They are integrated into vast business structures and therefore are part of the economic base of society. At the same time, media are institutions functioning within the sphere of consciousness and reinforcing the existing socio-economic system through a network of ideas, images, and standards. It may therefore be said that the production of concepts and values is not autonomous, but rather, intimately linked with material activity.

Thus, when we talk about communications, information, and mass media, we must necessarily deal with a prevailing ideological apparatus and the set of social relations it seeks to reproduce and preserve. Its overriding objective is to present the prevailing socio-economic system as given and irreplaceable.

Dominant classes in control of mass media as well as the latter's underlying infrastructure can be expected to limit dissemination, with occasional exceptions, only to such ideas, values and viewpoints as will help them maintain their ruling status. However, the dominant ideology is not the only ideology which exists; alongside it, there develops an ideology of the dominated sectors of society which in inchoate or fully developed form exhibits its resistance to the dominant culture and the social forces that sustain it and are sustained by it.

Given this reality, it is necessary to expose not only the concentration of private ownership of the means of production of material goods but even more so, the monopolization of the means of production of informational and popular cultural commodities. This is all the more urgent in Third World countries like the Philippines where the abstract ideal of press freedom has long obscured the partisan nature of information, particularly foreign information fed to our press.

Similarly, cultural products have been generally viewed as politically neutral, and insufficient efforts have been exerted to examine their overall political content and/or effect. Under a system of private ownership, freedom to transmit and to receive information and culture naturally works in favor of the owners of the means of production and is necessarily loaded against those who are dispossessed. Current investigation as well as historical hindsight attest to the foregoing observations.

The Rise of Media

Let us advert briefly to the historical development of Western media. In Western Europe, freedom of the press was a battlecry of the struggling entrepreneurial class against the censorship imposed by the ruling feudal aristocracy. The first periodicals made their appearance at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries. They experienced rapid development in conjunction with the industrial revolution which witnessed major advances in printing technology and made possible the creation of a literate mass audience. The press, then as now, served primarily as an advertising agency and business operations. It soon took on a political coloring and became the voice of the rising class of manufacturers in the latter's struggle to throw off the feudal yoke and install itself in power[4].

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[4]Kaarle Nordenstreng and Tapio Varis,"The Nonhomogeneity of the National State and the International Flow of Communication", in George Gebner, et al., eds., Communications, Technology and Social Policy, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1973, pp. 394-399.

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As society became more and more industrialized, and as a literate work force essential in manning increasingly sophisticated industries became more and more numerous, conditions became ripe for the mass production of newspapers, and magazines to an unprecedented scale. This gave rise to a new kind of work, that of the professional communicator. During this stage of rising capitalism, freedom of the press meant giving readers a selection of the owners of media who generally were also property owners, the necessity of selling to a wide range of customers with varying interests restrained the owners from using their papers openly to propagate their ruling class views. Moreover, it was good business to allow to some extent the airing of contrary opinions as this built confidence among readers in the impartiality of the newspaper. Competition required that each newspaper build up its readership and the best way was to gain a reputation for fairness and truth.

Nonetheless, the general thrust of all newspapers was to induce readers to accept the economic and political frames of reference not only of the owners but also, and perhaps more importantly, of the advertisers on whom newspapers increasingly grew to depend for their profits. This meant overall support for the status quo. It must be emphasized, however, that the essential homogeneity of the ideological framework of most newspapers is not necessarily deliberate nor the result of a conspiracy among media owners. Rather, it is the natural consequence of the system of private ownership itself.

Communications and Technology

Information and communication on a global scale today likewise proceed from the character of the social formation from which they emerged. These ideological "commodities" are inevitably defined by the material infrastructure that produces them. These material means include the printing presses, radio, television, videotape recorders, film equipment, computers, satellites, and a host of other technological marvels. And all these means are built on even more basic, far-reaching and interlocking foundations. In our day and age, there can be no radio and television without the electronics industry; there can be no publishing without electricity and paper manufacturing; there can be no films without the chemical and allied industries. All these are in the hands of monopolies.

A fairly recent revolutionary development in the field of microelectronics gave birth to the mind-bending powers of "compunications" hitherto thought possible only in science fiction movies. Computers of all shapes, sizes, and uses have invaded almost all fields of human endeavor in the industrialized societies. The "information age" has arrived and its sophisticated products have become vital to global business activity in widening the competive advantage of transnational corporations over smaller companies, particularly those in Third World countries. Such computers have likewise given an immense ideological clout to the global communications monopolies. Big irresistibly becomes bigger.

Concentration and Conglomerization

The increasing concentration of capital which characterizes all free-enterprise systems results in the centralization of the production and distribution of informational and cultural commodities. This characteristic has become more and more apparent and decisive in the more advanced states. In the United States, for example, the trend is toward "increasing emphasis on the production, storage, and distribution, while nearly half of the labor force is engaged in these activities. What is called the "primary information sector" is "dominated by a relatively small group of large corprations that are the builders and operators of the basic information and communications infrastructure. Their size and influence are awesome. The industry is dominated by giants - IBM, International Telephone and Telegraph,

RCA, General Electric, CBS, and so on." The foregoing observations are quoted from a publication of the US Information Agency.[5]

The following is an even more telling description:

> Huge enterprises identified with military production and microelectronics have already absorbed cultural industries and are said to own, at world level, 90 per cent of the facts and figures accumulated in 82 per cent of microelectronic components, 75 per cent and perhaps more of TV programs, 65 per cent of news dissemination, 50 per cent of films, 35 per cent of short wave radio broadcasts, 30 per cent of book editing, and more than 800 satellites circling the earth, most of them of a secret nature and purpose.[6]

There are many more examples of this inexplorable process of monopolization, many through conglomeration. In the field of publishing, a multifaceted multinational, Gulf and Western, took over Shuster and Simon in 1975. Note that Gulf and Western also controls Paramount Pictures. Bantam books was taken over in the same year by Fiat, the Italian automotive transnational.

In broadcasting, Westinghouse, RCA and GE graduated from producing and developing TV and radio equipment to establishing and managing TV stations and studios. American Telephone and Telegraph (ATT) not only manufactures telephone equipment but also controls the administration of telephone and telegraph offices. It has cornered 80 percent of telephone services in the US[7].

The film industry is yet another example of international monopoly controlled by the United States. During the period before the second world war, the film industry was already dominated by eight major companies which held a monopoly of patents of film and sound. These companies tied up with distribution channels including ownership of theaters and radio stations. All these interconnected companies had financial backing from major banking and investment groups. For example, Paramount Pictures controlled Columbia Broadcasting and was in turn tied up with the Morgan group Warner Brothers was tied up indirectly with Rockefeller interests. RKO's (Radio-Keith Orpheum) stocks were predominantly owned by Radio City, the Rockefeller real estate enterprise.[8]

Today, the American film companies are members of the Motion Picture Export Association. They constitute one of the biggest multinational conglomerates that are heavily dependent on foreign sales. Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America once made this interesting revelation: "To my knowledge," he said, "the motion picture is the only US enterprise that negotiates on its own with foreign governments." That is why the industry is sometimes called the "little state department."

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[5]Wilson P. Dizard, "The Coming Information Age," Economic Impact, No. 44, 1983-1984.

[6]Enrique Gonzalez Manet, "NIIO: Issues and Trends, 1983," Democratic Journalist, 7/8/83.

[7]Armand Mattelart, "Introduction: For a Class Analysis of Communication," in Mattelart and Siegelaub, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

[8]The Film Council, "A Brief History of the American Film Industry," in Mattelart and Siegelaub, op. cit., pp. 255-257; see also, Claire Johnston, "British Film Culture," in Carl Gardner, op. cit., pp. 81-85.

Advertising Control

The data on advertising are worth emphasizing because the billions of dollars which go into the industry are proof of its strategic importance. The truth of the matter is that media can no longer exist without advertising. In effect, the real role of media is advertising because so large a share of the decision-making powers are in the hands of advertisers. The means of communication, aside from being owned by monopolists, are also dependent on advertising income from other monopolies. Thus, through the control of the communications channels - the press, radio and TV - advertisers shape consciousness and are able to create new lifestyles and new needs that not only sell their products but also affect cultural norms, develop values, and inculcate ideas that support the system.

John Kenneth Galbraith offers a perceptive appraisal of the relationship between advertising and consumption in the following words:

> Advertising and salesmanship - the management of consumer demand - are vital for planning the industrial system. At the same time, the wants so created ensure the services of the worker. Ideally, his wants are kept slightly in excess of his income. Compelling inducements are then provided for him to go into debt. The pressure of the resulting debt adds to his reliability as a worker.[12]

Synthetic Culture

Media is the main agent in the manufacture of synthetic culture. But more than this, media through advertising creates the impression of a universal and permanent system that is not to be challenged in any fundamental way.

With the monopoly control of the television networks, the information systems, the record industry, video recorders, etc., culture in itself has become a commodity. It has also become a means of social control. While a variety of cultural products give the illusion of freedom of choice, practically all of them aim to standardize men and women into acceptable types of citizens and consumers who do not question the system. The standardization of popular culture provides the dominant classes with happy, exploited people whose minds are sedated with entertainment featuring comic strips, mindless music, and soap operas and comedies revolving around situations that distort reality and ignore basic problems of society. At the other end of the spectrum are the stories about sex and violence, the movie and TV mayhem, which brutalizes and desensitizes and hardly provides useful social insights because the emphasis is on individualistic solutions effected by cops, detectives, supermen and wonderwomen who are the equivalents of the cowboys of yesteryears fighting bad guys in defense of the law, women, and private property.

As for today's so-called popular music, one finds that in its various manifestations it reflects even more extremely both the emphasis on technology and the mindlessness that afflict the majority of film and TV productions. Rock music with its ear-splitting volume, its empty repetitive lyrics, generates nothing more than a purely physical excitement. It is incapable of saying anything meaningful about human life. Instead, it simply erects "walls of sound" behind which its consumers exist in an unreal world where the violence done to the senses becomes an opiate for the mind. It is said that "when the generals took over in Chile they blasted rock music through the loudspeakers into the streets of Santiago" - cultural violence reflecting political

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[12] John K. Galbraith, The New Industrial State, Hammondsworth, UK, 1975, pp. 55 et seq.

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and economic violence. Under Allende's government, Chilean musicians had rediscovered indigenous music and developed it to express the people's sentiments and aspirations. Song became a great mobilizing agent.[13]The generals arrested and killed the artists to silence their music.[13] Truly, entertainment is today's substitute for Roman circuses.

It is an irony that with the "mass consumerization" of high technology information and communications facilities, the means of widening outlook and access to culture and education, because they are in private hands, are instead used for imprisoning men's minds and preventing them from understanding the society in which they live. The extension of "mass culture" has become a means of democraticizing domination. "Mass culture" has become anti-cultural.

Standardization of Consumption

The standardization of both consumption and culture begins with the adoption of new products and styles (cultural or material) by the elite in the impeiral economies. These are disseminated to and readily appropriated by the elites of developing countries. But since wider markets are needed for more profits, the product is further promoted either as is or in a less expensive version to be consumed by a wider public. This destroys its value of exclusivity. The elite must then be provided with completely new products or the old ones are restyled. Thus begins a new cycle in the inexorable process of premature obsolescence and frantic modernization.

Cultural domination is facilitated by the fact that Third World audiences have been reduced to passive recipients of inputs from information monopolies. Cultural experience is limited to seeing, hearing, and to a lesser extent reading pre-digested and packaged products of the information industry that also controls entertainment. People now think that being informed is simply knowing the latest news: they are habituated to learning about the newest development or event and forgetting what happened the day before. This is especially true of a growing majority who rely on the TV news coverage rather than on newspapers. TV offers on the screen, words assault the ear and fade away. Who, what and where are its staples; why is hardly its forte.

At least newspapers offer an occasional intelligent analysis but a TV-habituated generation has no time or patience to be intellectually provoked - indeed, does not imply that a non-analytical presentation is non-judgmental. Value judgments are incorporated in how news is presented, in what is considered newsworthy, in what is ignored. Unknowingly, most viewers will absorb these value judgments as part of the factual packages.

Ideological Dependence

The analytical mind is exercised and honed through interaction. Popular culture as dispensed by the boob tube and the Walkman cassette is generally consumed in isolation and has produced a fragmented, escapist, pliable, largely unthinking audience. While the upper and middle classes constitute the more faithful market for Western cultural commodities, the relatively inexpensive transistor is fast becoming an indispensable fixture in the countryside and doles out, though not as graphically and with a more Filipino accent, more or less the same pap as the television set.

This is not to say that television and radio are complete cultural wasteland but certainly, good, serious, solid programs are the exception rather than the rule. As for material that addresses a problem in a people-oriented manner, that is scarcer than a hen's teeth on radio-TV. At least, the much maligned because administration-controlled newspapers, manage once in a while to print research findings and exposes from a progressive, Third World perspective. True, the occasional talk-show sometimes tackles controversial subjects but time constraints and commercial interruptions usually preclude thorough discussion.

We must mention in passing another consequence of the Third World bondage to the global communications network which in turn is the result of a country's integration into the world economic system. Reliance on information transnationals produces ideological dependence, a state that facilitates acceptance of recommendations on types of state structures and economic development programs whether directly by imperial states or through multilateral agencies. Ideological dependence also insures that external forces are viewed as friends while internal counter-forces are considered subversive.

Origin of "Free Flow"

The overwhelming cultural and ideological penetration of the Third World by Western media is justified, especially by the United States, through the invocation of the principle of "free flow of information." It may be useful to look back to the historical origin of this principle in order to uncover the real interests of those who have used it as a political weapon.

It is well known that before the war, Britain and France had major control of the cable services. The US-based Associated Press was trying to compete with them and wanted to make inroads into the territories controlled by the British and French empires. After the war, US business soon realized that the control of information was important to global expansion. The European countries were then economically prostrate; moover, the propaganda against Nazism was effective in weakening their defenses against American demands. Presented with a choice between the US and the USSR during the unfolding of the cold war and dependent on the former for aid, the Europeans aligned themselves with the US. Thus, the free flow principle got the support of the Europeans and the mechanical majority in the United Nations in 1948. With its military-propelled lead in the development of electronics and satellite communication, the US was soon able to dominate the field. Thus, "free flow of information" in practice came to mean the propagation of the American way of life, the dissemination of the US world view, and the defense of US interests, to the consternation of the former holders of the communications monopoly.[14]

The economic motivation for invoking the principle was well articulated by Assistant Secretary of State Benton in 1946. He said:

> The State Department plans do to everything within its power along political and diplomatic lines to help break down the artificial barriers to the expansion of private American news agencies, magazines, motion pictures and other communications media throughout the world. Freedom of the press and freedom of exchange of information is an integral part of our foreign policy.[15]

Thus, "free flow" has been transformed into its opposite. The flow is not practically unidirectional as Third World countries become mere recipients of information from advanced countries, especially the United States. The imbalance is not only quantitative; it is also qualitative.

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[14] Deiter Bielenstein, ed., Toward a New World Information Order: Consequences for Development Policy, Brunswick, FRG, Institute for International Relations, 1980, pp. 21-22.

[15] Herbert I. Schiller, "Genesis of the Free Flow of Information Principles," in Mattelart and Siegelaub, op. cit., p. 345.

The United States has succeeded in bringing about an apparently unchallenged position of leadership for itself in global media and communications, especially in the high-tech areas. The US-based transnational news agencies, UPI and AP, receive, process and deliver 40 million words a day. AP's subscribers alone include 100,000 foreign newspapers and broadcasting services in over 100 countries. As one observer commented, "Over a billion people a day make their value judgments on international developments on the basis of AP news."

Together with Reuters and Agence France Presse, AP and UPI handle about 95 percent of the information gathered in, and received by, Third World nations.[16]

The Philippine Scene

The transnationalization of communications is a well-known fact, especially in the Philippines where a cursory glance at the foreign news pages reveals an almost absolute dependence on the Big Four wire agencies. Less obvious is the transnational hold on the telecommunications system and other advanced information technology which has been "a boon to TNC trade, banking, insurance, manufacturing, transportation, advertising and the mass media industries which enjoy the scale of production necessary to avail of the highly privilege cost of access."[17]

The Japanese conglomerate Marubeni is the principal supplier of Domestic Satellite Philippines, Inc. (DOMSAT), which in turn is the transmitting system for Radio Philippines Network (RPN), in itself a lengthy chain of innumerable TV and radio stations. DOMSAT's other major customer is the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT), which in 1977 initiated an $870 million project with the Siemens Corporations, a West German conglomerate operating in 129 countries, "to install in Manila and major regional centers an all-digital telephone switching and dialing system by 1986." Fraught with grave political implications is the fact that –

> Philcomsat, the Philippine representative to the International Telecommunications Satellite Consortium (Intelsat) has been in operation as a "carrier" since 1967 serving the US military, the international carriers and PLDT. Originally established for US military circuits from Hawaii to the Far East for the conduct of the Vietnam war, the current bulk of Philcomsat traffic goes through PLDT for international telephone service. The US military, however, remains its largest single and user.[18]

The transnational presence is strong not only in satellite communications but also in telecommunications. "Eastern Telecommunications Philippines, Inc. (ETPI), an international carrier, and its domestic interconnect, Oceanic Wireless, Inc. are joint ventures of the British International telecommunication giant Cable and Wireless." The other two principal international carriers which take charge of telegraph, telex and data transmission are "the ITT subsidiary Globe Mackay Cable and Radio (GMCR), and RCA's Philippine Global Communications, Inc. (Philcom)."[19]

The abovementioned facts have long-range implications on national security and sovereignty because foreigners can have unlimited access to the country's data and even secrets. Knowledge of a country's resources and even potentials can be used against it in any negotiation. The close connection between the TNCs and the US military apparatus makes this power doubly ominous.

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[16] Vicente Maliwanag, "The Flow of World News: An Appraisal," Media Asia, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1983, p. 30.

[17] Gerald Sussman, "Telecommunications Technology: Transnationalizing the New Philippine Information Order: Media, Culture and Society, London, Academic Press, Inc. 1982, p. 388.

[18] Ibid., p. 382   [19] Ibid.

It must likewise be mentioned that prominent individuals who are identified with the present regime have been instrumental in linking up with the TNCs in the satellite and telecommunications fields, lending credence to the observation that the exercise of martial law powers has facilitated "the concentration, integration and hegemony of information structures that ultimately serve the ideological, cultural, material and political interests of the transnational corporations."[20] It may be remembered that the ownership of print and broadcast media substantially passed to the hands of interests related to or aligned with the ruling family in late 1972. Media therefore faithfully served these interests which more often than not coincided with transnational concerns.

The Economics of Domination

Given the powerful financial hold of foreign advertisers on local media, the latter have no real choice. One source reports:

> Subjects not banned are those that perpetuate foreign domination of the marketplace. American ad agencies like J. Walters Thompson and McCann Erickson together with local proteges spin out Western-style jingles that turn the transnational corporate product into a barrio household word. Of the ten largest sponsors of Benedicto's national RPN TV network, nine are such TNCs as Pepsi, Colgate and Nestle. And of the 123 members of the Philippine Association of National Advertisers who use all media, 75 per cent are TNCs or their affiliates.[21]

It is not surprising that transnational corporations are known to have cornered as much as three-fourths of the air time for advertising.[22] The foreign, mainly American presence, is not limited to ads. Past studies have shown that most television stations "are dominated by foreign programming." The US supplies prime time TV programs - "game shows, police/adventure thrillers, situation comedies and films."[23] Other sources include Britain and Japan.

Why this state of affairs? Because, "as is true in all developing countries, it is more expensive to produce shows than to buy them from foreign suppliers." In 1981, local production of one single episode cost $800-$2,400 while importing a whole foreign series entailed only $100-$2,600. The later, if highly popular abroad, would also be less risky to screen than an untried Filipino program.[24]

One source claims that US TV programs sold to other developed states at $3,500 are being peddled to developing countries for less than $100. The point for offering such a bargain is clearly cultural penetration and influence, the lucrative export of the American lifestyle and consumption patterns. A more ominous motive springs from the close interconnection between the US government and media: the expansion of US-sponsored TV hookups facilitates global electronic surveillance through communications satellites.[25]

Third World Reactions

The arrogant way the transnationals wield their awesome power over global communication has generated vehement objections from the developing countries collectively victimized by the generally negative image presented of them. Unfortunately, this very domination, the foreign control over many Third World economies, their disperate political structures and the interests of their respective ruling groups have made it difficult for Third World countries to act collectively in establishing a New International Information and Communication Order.

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[20] Ibid., p. 388;   [21] Ibid., p. 387.   [24] Ibid.

[22] "State of TV Reflects Economy," Business Day, Oct. 23, 1984; see also, "The new economics of the air time for advertising," Business Outlook, December, 1976.

[23] Orly S. Mercado and Elizabeth B. Buck, "Media imperialism in Philippine television," Media Asia, 1981, p. 97.

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Like the call for a New International Economic Order sounded by Third World countries represented by their respective ruling groups and therefore inconsistently advanced, the move for a New International Information and Communication Order, for the past eight years, has remained "a hope, a long-term objective." The NIICO is "no more than an aspiration, not a programme with set goals and rigid deadlines." Yet it is the decolonization of mass media by regulating the activities of the information multinationals, by developing communications structures that safeguard national sovereignty and cultural identity, and by assuring access to and participation in the international flow of information under conditions of equality, justice and mutual benefit. To the doctrine of "free flow" of information which "has often been used as an economic and/or ideological tool by the communications rich to the detriment of those not so well endowed," the Third World countries through the UNESCO argue for a "free, reciprocal balanced flow of accurate, complete and objective information, and for the rectification in the imbalance in the quantitative and qualitative flow of information between the developing and the industrialized countries."

Two-Fold Problem

The problem in the Philippines is two-fold. On the one hand, we have internally a vertical flow of information from above with almost no reverse flow from below, and on the other, the very vehicles of national information owned and operated by the dominant groups have become channels of international control because of tie-ups with foreign monopolies.

The NIICO like the NIEO is officially supported by the Philippine government but more in the realm of rhetoric, and only as a reaction to negative publicity on the regime in the Western press. Nevertheless, the fact that it is intermittently mentioned as a desirable end may open up possibilities for popular forces to press their demands, not only for a free press but also for an independent press.

Committed communicators may work within the interstices of the media system. There is no consistent conspiracy which ties all the publishers at any given moment to one tendency or viewpoint. Publishers too, have their own sectoral contradictions which could make it possible for some members of media to expose certain truths against certain sections of the ruling class, and even against imperialsim itself. We need an expanding core analysts who can correct impressions resulting from the barrage of information directed at a passive audience. Journalists and groups speaking for the "inarticulate mass" must demand newspaper space and air time for their viewpoints in the context of the struggle for a freer press. If used in a responsible manner, such a foothold can become permanent.

Alternative Possibilities

Whether or not some little space and time in the establishment media is granted, committed organizations must explore alternative possibilities opened by new technologies. Small radio stations can be operated, presupposing a struggle against monopoly of frequencies. Betamax tapes may be utilized to reach a wider audience. Small, efficient word processors may be employed to put out community papers. In short, efforts must be exerted to pluralize sources and widen exchanges with other Third World countries. Whatever may be the chosen venue, it should be organized and patiently sustained on a continuing basis. Too many projects are either too grandiose to be viable or suffer from the ningas cogon mentality and expire after Vol. I, No. 1. Above all, such efforts should carefully adjust to the level of their target audience.

These are small beginnings to counter the consequences of monopoly in media. Freedom of the press, traditionally the preserve of a narrow elite, should be extended to the masses who theoretically enjoy this basic right. This is the real meaning of the democratization of communications, which is one of the goals of NIICO. In the words of a report on the subject submitted to UNESCO, "The media should contribute to promoting the just cause of peoples struggling for freedom and in-

dependence and their right to live in peace and equality without foreign interference. This is especially important for all oppressed peoples who, while struggling against colonialism, religious and racial discrimination, are deprived of opportunity to make their voices heard within their own countries.

Communication and Development

The struggle against monopoly in communications must start at home. The restoration of freedom of expression is the beginning of the struggle against international monopolies. Communication must be restored to its original two-way nature. This will be an arduous, uphill, fight considering present constrainsts but some modest gains can still be achieved even within the system. The residual consciousness of people which reacts against oppression can become the focal point in the resistance against an unjust communications policy which is the outgrowth of an unjust socio-economic system. We must not separate communications policies from the development programs adopted by this country. They are part and parcel of a general plan conceived by external forces which the communications system is trying to sell to its victims.

In the Philippine context, in the context in fact of all societies wracked by class antagonisms, large masses of people are denied, partially or wholly, of specific rights "such as the right to be informed, the right to inform, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public communication - all elements of a new concept, the right to communicate." They are disadvantaged by many factors: illiteracy, poverty, inaccessbility or inadequacy of the technological means and knowhow, etc. During the moments when their lives are touched by media, they inundated by alien or distorted imagery or information which reinforce their ignorance and apathy. The communications revolution has arrived even in the Philippines, but the magic wrought by computers, telephones, telex machines, video recorders, etc. is monopolized by a narrow urban elite.

The Philippine experience shows very clearly that "the national oligarchy of a developing country has very close interests with those who sell the products of the industrialized countries, whereas the material interests of the poor masses are often almost in opposition to those of the ruling class."

The Options at Hand

In the Philippines, the present power structure encourages integration with the world power structures. Though not openly stated, Philippine communications policy is in support of the developmental programs of TNCs and advanced industrial countries. An alternative program must therefore strive for a delinking, or a selective linkage which will be based on the interests of the people. It must develop a communications policy that will transform the passive receivers into active participants. As a market for technologies and programs, we have the option of not buying, or buying only that which is in our interest. Within the existing constraints, we can strive for a more horizontal access and participation in the communication process. There are crevices within the national structures that can be exploited. There are institutions and organizations that can make information flow from the bottom up. An alternative communications order must study structures of ownership and distribution in order to mitigate the vertical lines of communications flow.

Given their tie-ups and orientation, the local powers that-be who also control the media have no choice but to bow to the pressures emanating from transnational advertisers and technology suppliers, even if they do complain sometimes and pay lip service to the NIICO. In the main, there is a confluence of interests as quasi-martial-law powers are exercised to contain dissent through media regulation or manipulation for the benefit not only of the present power holders but also of the foregin corporations lording it over the economy. These interests, however, are not all the time identical, especially at this stage when the US is trying all means, including the adroit and sometimes clandestine use of both global media and some segments of the local press, to pressure the Marcos regime and pave the way for a more acceptable political order.

On the other hand, we must not fall into the error of thinking that reforms within media will solve the problems of freedom of expression. We must view communications as part and parcel of international and national structures. We cannot entertain the illusion that we can have a free media simply by a change of leadership without changing structures that cause oppression and encourage a popular consciousness that perpetuate an unjust system. Even if we change the ownership of present media, new interests intertwined with international monopolies would still constitute a restraining factor against democratic forces.

Some Guidelines

The situation, therefore is really complex. While it si correct to demand removal of the obstacles created by the present regime to the exercise of the people's right to communicate, the main enemy must also remain visible and dealth with accordingly. To this end, some general guidelines derived from the Macbride Report, the output of the 16-member International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems submitted to the UNESCO in 1980, may be suggested:

1. Formulation and development of comprehensive national communication policies, which should "evolve from broad c consultations with all sectors concerned and adequate mechanisms for wide participation of organized social groups in their definition and implementation."

2. Removal of obstacles and restrictions "which derive from the concentration of media ownership, public or private, from commercial influences on the press and broadcasting, or from private or government advertising."

3. "Effective legal measures x x x designed to:
a. limit the process of concetration and monopolization;
b. circumscribe the action of transnationals by requiring them to comply with specific criteria and conditions defined by national legislation and development policies;
c. reverse trends to reduce the number of decision-makers at a time when the media's public is growing larger and the impact of communication is increasing;
d. reduce the influence of advertising upon editorial policy and broadcast programming;
e. seek and improve models which would ensure greater independence and autonomy of the media concerning their management and editorial policy, whether those media are under private, public or government ownership."

4. Strengthening cultural identify and creativity through the establishment of national cultural policies which "ensure that creative artists and various grassroots groups can make their voice heard through the media;" introduction of guidelines with respect to advertising content and the values and attitudes it fosters, in accordance with national standards and practices;" putting more emphasis on "non-commercial forms of mass communications" integrated with the traditions and cultural goals of the country;

5. Development of essential elements of communications systems: "print media, broadcasting and telecommunications along with the related training and production facilities." These should include "strong national news agencies vital for improving each country's national and international reporting;" comprehensive radio networks reaching the remotest areas; basic postal and telecommunications services through "small rural electronic exchanges;" a community press in small towns and the countryside; "utilization of local radio, low-cost small format television and video system and other appropriate technologies (to) facilitate production of programmes relevant to community development efforts, stimulate participation and provide opportunity for diversified cultural expression."

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6. Access to technical information and advanced communications technology with the end in view of developing national capabilities in this area to answer national needs; establishment of national and international measures, "among them reform of existing patent laws and conventions, appropriate legislation and international agreements," to counteract concentration and monopolization by a few industrialized states and transnational corporations; strengthening collective self-reliance and cooperation among developing countries in this crucial field;

7. Democratizing media management "by associating the following categories: (a) journalists and professional communicators; (b) creative artists; (c) technicians; (d) media owners and managers; (e) representatives of the public. Such democratization of the media needs the full support and understanding of all those working in them, and this process should lead to their having a more active role in editorial policy and management."

Communications and Liberation

The substance and spirit of the above suggestions are obviously antithetical to prevailing norms described by one media expert as "highly centralized", "government-oriented, (and) often associated with the domination of a technocratic elite that focuses on 'social" efficiency and "public" rationality at the cost of democratic participation." End users are not consulted; technology preceds policy as when "broadcast stations are developed." Worst of all, dependence of communication technology on multinationals who supply technology as well as replacement parts and maintenance has threatened the growth of self-reliance."

Yet democratic and anti-imperialist forces must operate within the given constraints and seek to transcend them through consistent and sustained struggle. There must be a determined effort to widen whatever breathing space is left, using the very means the enemy itself wields.

As the Macbride Report succinctly puts it, "communication can be an instrument of power, a revolutionary weapon, a commercial product, or a means of education; it can serve the ends of either liberation or of oppression, of either the growth of the individual personality or of drilling human beings into uniformity." The choice is for us to make.