

For Whom Media Speaks: The Paucity of Today's ICT Explosion

"Never have so many been held incommunicado by so few."

These words of Eduardo Galeano, the Uruguayan writer considered to be one of Latin America's fiercest voices of social conscience, best describe the impact of globalised and corporatised media and information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The April 2002 Netcraft Web Server Survey <<http://www.netcraft.com>> identified 37,585,233 websites on the Internet. On television, there are hundreds of cable channels beaming both news and entertainment. This exponential increase in the number of information sources, however, has not led to any real plurality of views and diversity of images seen, heard or read in the media.* This can be attributed to the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few (mostly U.S.-owned) media conglomerates. According to a media analyst, only around 10 firms dominate the U.S. media.

This narrowing of views is best illustrated in the impact of the U.S. government's media propaganda around the September 11 attack in 2001, and the subsequent war against Iraq that commenced the year after. After September 11, only three percent of the American public believed that Iraq was responsible for the attack on the World Trade Centre. However, after massive government propaganda supported by global corporate media such as the CNN, by 2003, about 50 percent of the population already believed Iraq was responsible for the September 11 attack (Frontline India's VK Ramachandran, interview of Noam Chomsky, 2 April 2003).

What does globalisation have to do with the constriction of views and suppression of the freedom of expression? Corporate media (including advertising and entertainment media) and ICTs have become globalised industries on their own. Like toothpaste out of the tube, expect further concentration of corporate media ownership, not the reverse. Government and corporate media will continue to work together and devote their resources to power and propaganda. The result will be more news and entertainment that push for the interests of the elite and the ruling class.

In addition, media and the new ICTs play a central role in the globalisation process because they serve as the carriers of capital, labour, goods and services. The global telecommunication networks established on the foundation of new ICTs enable transnational businesses to further organise their operations.

In this issue of *Women in Action*, we examine the impact of globalisation and corporatisation of the media on its role in informing, educating, motivating, persuading and entertaining the public. It is a role that is crucial, because it shapes public opinion and attitude on so many issues, including class and social relations, religion, race, caste and sexual orientation. Spe-

cifically, *Women in Action* interrogates how militarism and fundamentalism are fuelled by globalisation and the corporatisation of the media.

As in previous issues, we invited women from different parts of the world that have been working on these issues. María Suárez Toro and Margaret Thompson of the Feminist International Radio Endeavour speak of the ironies of rising militarism and fundamentalism in Costa Rica, a country with no army. They also note the dangers of losing an efficiently run national telecommunication structure to corporate communications. From India, Kalyani Menon Sen of Jagori illustrates how ICTs promote the various aspects of patriarchy and capitalism, citing the experiences in call centres that now proliferate India and employ thousands of young women.

Anita Gurumurthy from IT for Change, also in India, underscores the irony of the current IT revolution vis-à-vis the kind of knowledge society essential to national development policy and practice. Another Indian writer, Anuradha M. Chenoy, discusses how fundamentalist groups in her country turn modern media and ICTs around to return to "tradition." In "Choices We Make For Ourselves," Muthoni Wanyeki from FEMNET Africa examines what she refers to as "deception by omission" committed by American TV in highlighting the Bush administration's decision to attack Iraq while downplaying the anti-war positions of a large section of the American public.

It is easy to consider the increasing globalisation and corporatisation of media as a necessary result of the global capitalist system. However, media itself is not monolithic. Within its systems and structures, there are opposing views and positions. There are those that protect the status quo, on the one hand, and those also seeking to contribute to the attainment of social justice, on the other.

Media has been an active site of activism in recent years. Across the world, media monitoring initiatives abound. Efforts around media literacy education or capacity building to empower people to be critical thinkers and creative producers of non-profit media are likewise increasing. Communities and non-government organisations are producing their own magazines, news and video projects. Some are setting up their own community TV and radio stations. Media reform groups are being established to expose and oppose the commercialisation of the media, protect public service broadcasting, and promote community and independent media initiatives. With this issue of *Women in Action*, we hope to contribute to such efforts and encourage more debate and discussion on the current state of media.



* Media is used here in an encompassing manner—to include the new media such as Internet, electronic discussion lists, and newsgroups, reflecting not only the merging of ownership but also the convergence of technologies.