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International communication in the 1990s: implications for the Third World

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For thirty years now Third World nations have been central parties to the global debate on the vital issue of international communication. Supported by the former Soviet Union, they had called for a New World Information and Communication Order in which the negative effects of Western dominance of the international communication scene would be alleviated.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the reinvigoration of the United Nations, Muhammad Ayish argues that international communication is likely to remain on the agenda of world debates in the 1990s, but it will be far less ideological and more pragmatic.

During the past four decades the question of international communication has become an important component of world politics and academic scholarship.[1] In the period immediately following the Second World War, international communication was generally an East–West issue. By the late 1960s, however, shifts in global power structures, characterized by a growing role for the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa in world affairs, brought the Third World to the forefront of debates on international communication. Frustrated by a decade-long 'experimentation' with Western-prescribed development models, many Third World nations began to see Western dominance of the international economic and communication system as a source of their 'underdevelopment'. Third World spokesmen charged that such dominance posed threats to their political independence, cultural identity and socio-economic development.[2] These charges were based largely on empirical data which indicated that the global flow of information relating to the Third World was imbalanced, distorted and focused on 'negative' rather than 'developmental' news.[3] To bring about more equity and balance to the international

[1] The history of the international communication issue in fact goes back to before the Second World War. However, the saliency of this question reached its peak in the 1960s. See Stuart Bullion, 'The new information order: how new?', *Gazette* (Dordrecht: Klewer), 30, 1982, pp. 155–65.

[2] For details on Third World views, see articles by Rao, Masmoudi, Aggrawalla and Schiller in Jim Richstad and Michael Anderson, eds, *Crisis in international news: policies and prospects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[3] Studies on the international flow of news were first conducted in the early 1950s by the then Geneva-based International Press Institute and were expanded in the 1970s to include the international flow of

communication environment, Third World spokesmen called for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).[4]

For Western media and governments, the issues underlying the NWICO debate are far more complex than was claimed. While recognizing the existence of communication problems in Third World countries, proponents of Western positions maintained that only a free flow of information within and across national frontiers would improve the performance of media systems in those countries. They charged that the Third World call for a NWICO was a euphemism for further curtailment of freedom of speech and the press and a reinforcement of political authoritarianism.[5]

Although political and academic debates over the idea of a NWICO have become rather quiescent in the past few years in light of the rapidly changing world political environment, international communication is likely to remain a highly visible global issue in the 1990s. The scope and substance of discussions of this issue are expected to be shaped by two global trends now in the making: first, the widespread proliferation of new information/communication technologies, and second, the growing democratization of sociopolitical systems around the world in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union, a traditional long-time supporter of Third World calls for a NWICO. One of the implications of this techno-democratic revolution relates to the diminishing significance of the political/ideological underpinnings of debates on the issue and the increasing focus of attention on information as a central component of the emerging global economy.

In this article I will argue that unless shifts in traditional Third World approaches to international communication are brought about, transformations in the global political and technological environment will have adverse consequences for developing nations. In a competitive world of evolving economic and communication giants, transforming the globe into an 'electronic village', conceptions of information solely in terms of news and broadcast programming would seem to be rather archaic. While this type of mass media content continues to constitute a major source of Third World concerns over certain negative sociopolitical and cultural effects on their societies,[6] the potential consequences of diffusing new technological innovations in an increasingly liberalized free-market-oriented international environment are likely to be more serious for the Third World.

television programmes. See International Press Institute, *The flow of news* (Zurich: International Press Institute, 1953), and K. Nordenstreng and T. Varis, 'Television traffic: a one-way street', *Reports and Papers on Mass Communications*, no. 70 (Paris: UNESCO, 1973).

[4] For a definition of the NWICO, see M. Masmoudi, 'The new world information order', in Richstad and Anderson, eds, *Crisis in international news*, pp. 76–95.

[5] See L. Sussman, 'The Western press and the Third World challenge', in Richstad and Anderson, eds, *Crisis in international news*, pp. 345–55.

[6] Examples of recent news flow studies include C. C. Lee and J. M. Chan, 'The Hong Kong press coverage of the Tiananmen protests', *Gazette*, Nov. 1990, 46: 3, pp. 175–95; K. R. Rampal and W. C. Adams, 'Credibility of Asian news broadcasts of the Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation', *Gazette*, Sept. 1990, 46: 2, pp. 93–111; and M. S. Hasin, 'Usage of foreign news in five ASEAN newspapers and perceptions of foreign news in Malaysia', *Media Asia*, 1990, 17: 1, pp. 8–13.

In addition, one of the casualties of the emerging post-Cold War order has been the political weight of developing nations in international affairs, which drew heavily on East–West rivalry. Anti-Western political rhetoric no longer seems to be an effective strategy to achieve Third World goals in the area of international communication. In the new era in international relations, ideological commitment will have to give way to flexible political realism if Third World nations are to keep their perspectives high on the agenda of international communication.

I will suggest that in the 1990s, challenges presented by the new techno-democratic revolution to the Third World in the area of communication will centre on four issues: freedom of information; reconceptualization of information; development of national telecommunications; and integration into the global economy. Before expanding on these issues and their implications for the Third World in the 1990s, I will present a historical background in terms of how the two components of the techno-democratic revolution, democracy and technology, have been tackled in the context of international communication.

Democracy and international communication

In the history of social and political thought, the term 'democracy' has acquired various connotations. Yet, despite its divergent interpretations, democracy has generally been used to refer to any system of government functioning by some form of majority (or, occasionally, plurality) rule, with a broad electorate. In modern times, the basic tenets of a democratic system included a restrained executive body, a freely elected legislature, an independent judiciary, a private economic entrepreneurship and a free press, referred to in some democratic systems as the 'fourth estate'. In international politics, democracy has acquired an ideological taint, becoming associated with capitalism and free-market economies. With the demise of one-party totalitarianism in the former Soviet bloc, democracy seems to have gained worldwide acclaim as the alternative political system for former communist states and Third World nations alike.[7]

The role of mass media in a democracy has been conceived in terms of informing the electorate on public issues, enlarging the base of participation in the political process and watching over government behaviour. For media to play these roles, a system of freedom of expression is a precondition. American media scholar Thomas Emerson suggests that a system of freedom of expression embraces a set of rights which include 'the right to hold beliefs and opinions on any subject, and to communicate in speech, writing, music, art, or in other

[7] Recent less successful democratic experiments in countries such as Algeria, Romania and Pakistan seem to have reinforced beliefs that democracy may not necessarily be the most appropriate option for non-Western societies. Auchincloss noted that the failure of democratic dreams to come true in formerly authoritarian societies may be partly due to misunderstandings of democracy as breeding prosperity, producing stability and meaning majority rule. See Kenneth Auchincloss, 'The limits of democracy', *Newsweek* (international), 7 Jan. 1992, pp. 10–17.

ways'. Emerson also argues that the rights of all in freedom of expression must be reconciled with other individual and social interests.[8] Merrill maintains that freedom of expression is the continuation and practical manifestation of freedom of thought, and is therefore one of the most fundamental rights.[9]

Because debate over international communication in the past had involved nations with democratic and non-democratic systems, disagreements over media issues were bound to occur. To a large extent, the debate centred on freedom of information, a central corollary of democracy. Discussions of freedom of information in international contexts have focused largely on the flow of news and broadcast materials within and across national frontiers. While Western governments and media representatives demanded the enforcement of an unrestrained flow of information, socialist and communist nations called for formulating national and international policies to regulate the flow of news, films and television programmes into their societies. Proponents of the 'free flow' principle argued that the issue boils down to the rights of individuals to freedom of opinion and expression.[10]

For Third World spokesmen, on the other hand, the issue was framed in terms of an *imbalance* in the flow of information which was viewed as adversely affecting indigenous cultures, political integration and socioeconomic development.[11] Lee noted that Third World concerns generally 'stem from fears that foreign media have distorted the shared symbolic meaning of society and culture by creating mass frustrations; strengthening a conspicuous consumption pattern and fostering a false consciousness'.[12] With respect to the notion of freedom of information, Mustapha Masmoudi of Tunisia, a staunch supporter of the idea of a NWICO, commented that: 'Freedom of information is presented as a corollary of freedom of opinion and freedom of expression, but was in fact conceived as "freedom of the informing agent". As a result, it has become an instrument of domination in the hands of those who control the media.'[13]

As a derivative of the traditional American notion of the 'free marketplace of ideas',[14] the 'free flow' principle was placed at the core of American foreign policies in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. Because of growing US influence worldwide in the period following the Second World War, the 'free flow' principle was written into the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other related UNESCO declarations at a time when war-weary peoples around the world yearned both for peace and for

[8] T. Emerson, *The system of freedom of expression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 6.
[9] J. Merrill, ed., *Global Journalism* (New York: Longman, 1983), p. 29.
[10] See Sussman, 'The Western press', and J. Merrill, 'A growing controversy: "the free flow" of news among nations', in Richstad and Anderson, eds, *Crisis in international news*, pp. 151–60.
[11] See K. Nordenstreng and H. Schiller, eds, *National sovereignty and international communication* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1979), and H. Schiller, 'Freedom from free flow', *Journal of Communication*, Winter 1974, 24: 1, pp. 110–17.
[12] See C. C. Lee, *Media imperialism reconsidered* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981), pp. 182–3.
[13] See Masmoudi, 'The new world information order', pp. 76–95.
[14] See L. Etherberge, 'UNESCO's New World Information Order colliding with First Amendment values', *American Bar Association Journal*, June 1981, pp. 3–10.

US economic aid.[15] In 1946, for example, the United Nations issued its Declaration on Freedom of Information, which stated that: 'All nations should proclaim policies under which the free flow of information within countries and across frontiers will be protected. The right to seek and transmit information should be insured to enable the public to ascertain facts and appraise events.'[16]

Increasing competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for global hegemony in the late 1940s began to focus attention on the international flow of information as an East–West issue. Initial agreement on the principle of free flow suffered its first breakdown as early as 1948 at the Geneva Freedom of Information conference: the Soviet Union maintained that true freedom of information could not exist as long as Western media were controlled by 'a small group of capitalists', while the United States called for a totally unrestrained flow of information.[17] That year also saw the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, although not binding, carries great moral and psychological weight.[18] Article 19 of the declaration stated that: 'Everyone has a right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes the right to hold opinions ... and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.'[19] In his article on the genesis of the free flow principle, Schiller noted that the concept of freedom of information was evolving internationally in parallel to growing global American economic expansion and was indeed used to justify that expansion.[20] In recent times, Ungar has argued that the most basic goals of US foreign policy—the promotion of liberty, the securing of free-market capitalism and strategic interests around the globe—cannot be fully achieved without also advancing freedom for the media worldwide.[21]

Although many Third World nations were already independent of Western colonial rule in the late 1950s and early 1960s, they were not major parties to the global controversy over the international flow of information. Two reasons seem to stand behind this lack of involvement. First, disagreements over the international flow of information reflected existing competitive power structures around the world, and at that time most Third World nations, being either under colonial rule or newly independent, had no substantial input into international politics. Second, Third World nations were deeply preoccupied with domestic issues relating to political integration and socioeconomic development. Many of those countries, guided by the tenets of Western-

[15] C. C. Lee, 'The politics of international communication: changing the rules of the game', *Gazette*, 1989, 44, pp. 75–91.
[16] United Nations General Assembly Resolution no. 59, Article I, 1946.
[17] Report by the United States Delegates of the United Nations Conference on Freedom of Information, US Department of State Publication 3150, International Organization and Conference Series 111.5 (Washington DC: GPO, 1948).
[18] See J. Gunther, 'An introduction to the great debate', *Journal of Communication*, Autumn 1978, 28: 4, p. 143.
[19] United Nations General Assembly, 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights', New York, 1948.
[20] H. Schiller, 'The genesis of the free flow of information principle', in Richstad and Anderson, eds, *Crisis in international news*, pp. 161–83.
[21] See Sanford Ungar, 'Pressing for a free press', *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1989–90, no. 77, pp. 132–53.

inspired modernization paradigms, were concentrating on the development of their national mass media, which were viewed as powerful agents of change.[22] For them, the question of the international flow of information was far less urgent than the employment of mass media in the process of nation-building.

By the late 1960s, the growth of the Third World role in international politics, especially through the Non-Aligned Movement and later through OPEC, and the frustrations of many of those countries with Western models of development, prompted the Third World to take an international approach towards dealing with its domestic problems. Third World spokesmen and researchers argued that the failure of their national media to make a revolution of 'rising expectations' come true was partly attributable to Western controls over huge global communication resources. To redress this imbalance, Third World representatives called for the formulation of national communication policies to ensure that the flow of foreign messages into their societies was compatible with the declared objectives of national development. The 1960s brought criticisms of the small quantity of Western-reported news about the Third World circulating in international channels, during meetings in Bangkok, Santiago and Paris. Although the three meetings of UNESCO recommended the establishment of regional news agencies, the quality of reporting about the Third World was not an issue.[23] At its 1970 General Conference, UNESCO turned more attention to 'flow' questions, authorizing its director general to help member states formulate their mass communication policies. In 1972, the Soviet Union introduced a proposal for a binding convention of principles for international satellite broadcasting. By a vote of 102–1, the UN General Assembly called upon its Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) to develop principles for trans-border direct broadcasting satellites.[24]

At the 1976 UNESCO General Conference in Nairobi, a draft resolution including an article stating that 'states were responsible for the activities in the international spheres of all mass media under their jurisdiction' was so heatedly debated that a commission voted (78–15) to shelve it. In its place, the conference accepted a resolution that endorsed the idea of assistance to the developing world to increase its members' communication capabilities as a means of correcting imbalances in news flow.[25] One outgrowth of the 1976 UNESCO General Conference was the creation of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, known as the McBride Commission. In 1978, Third World and Western concerns over a free and balanced flow of information were incorporated into a compromise UNESCO Mass Media Declaration. Article X of the declaration stated: 'It is important that a free and wider and better dissemination of information be encouraged. To this end, it is necessary that states should facilitate the procurement, by the mass media in the Developing Countries, of adequate conditions and resources, enabling them

[22] See Lee, *Media imperialism reconsidered*, p. 173.
[23] See R. Righter, *Whose news? Politics, the press and the Third World* (New York: Times Books, 1978), p. 83. [24] See Gunther, 'Introduction to the great debate', p. 145. [25] Ibid.

to gain strength and expand, and that they should support cooperation by the latter, both among themselves and with the mass media in the developed countries.'[26] Although the declaration prompted a wide variety of reactions, there seemed to be a general agreement that politically, legally and even philosophically, it was the first official UN document broadly to define the tasks, rights and responsibilities of the mass media.[27]

Debate over the deteriorating situation with respect to international communication gained momentum with the submission early in 1980 of the McBride Report on a New World Information and Communication Order. The report, prepared by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, was published under the title *Many Voices; One World: Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow*. Like the 1978 Mass Media Declaration, the report provoked a wide range of reactions. The majority of parties to the debate seemed to concur that the report stood out as one of the most civilized documents yet published under UN auspices.[28] While a Soviet analysis claimed that the report represented a serious contribution to the cause of placing information in the service of peace and prosperity,[29] Western governments saw in it a reaffirmation of the free flow principle.[30] From the extreme left of the ideological spectrum, the report was viewed as reaffirming the existing state of media dependency.[31] Western journalists, on the other hand, saw in the report a blessing of Third World and communist controls on freedom of information.[32] This Western position culminated in May 1981 with the adoption of the Declaration of Talloires by liberally oriented journalists from 21 countries. The declaration affirmed that: 'The people's interests, and therefore, the interests of the nation, are better served by free and open reporting. From robust public debates grows better understanding of the issues facing a nation, and its peoples; and out of understanding greater chances for solutions.'[33]

In 1981 the United States sought to depoliticize the question of international communication by proposing the establishment of an organization within UNESCO to serve as a clearing house for technical assistance to the Third World. However, when the International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) was launched, differences among delegates arose over fund contributions, allocations and prospective recipients.[34] The Third

[26] UNESCO, 'Mass Media Declaration', Article X, para 2, no. 22, 1978.
[27] K. Nordenstreng, 'Behind the semantics: a strategic design', *Journal of Communication*, Autumn 1981, 31: 4, p. 196.
[28] K. Singh, 'McBride: the report and the response', *Journal of Communication*, Autumn 1981, 31: 4, p. 107.
[29] Y. Zassoursky and S. Losev, 'Information in the service of progress', *Journal of Communication*, Autumn 1981, 31: 4, p. 118.
[30] See E. Abel, 'Communication for an interdependent pluralistic world', in Richstad and Anderson, eds, *Crisis in international news*, pp. 97–116.
[31] See C. Hamelink, 'The NIIO: the recognition of many different worlds', *Journal of the World Association for Christian Communication*, Summer 1979, 29: 3, pp. 144–8.
[32] See Sussman, 'The Western press', pp. 345–55.
[33] The Declaration of Talloires, 15–17 March 1981.
[34] See W. Harley, 'The US stake in the IPDC', *Journal of Communication*, Autumn 1981, 31: 4, pp. 150–8.

World–Western confrontation over freedom of information reached its climax in 1984 when the United States decided to withdraw from UNESCO, accusing the UN agency of corruption and politicization. Britain followed suit in 1985, thus depriving UNESCO of over one third of its funding.[35] When new UNESCO director general Frederico Mayor of Spain took over his post in 1987 as successor to Amadou-Mahtar M'bow of Senegal, an air of realism was dominant: the agency's five-year plan did not contain a single reference to the controversial NWICO. This emerging pattern of pragmatism seems to be reinforced by shifts in global power structures, characterized by the growing global dominance of the United States, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union (a traditional supporter of Third World calls for a NWICO) and the reinvigoration of the role of the United Nations in international affairs as affirmed by its new secretary general, Boutros Boutros Ghali.[36]

Technology and international communication

Like the principle of free flow of information, the question of communication technologies was a major component of the debate over a NWICO in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. While Third World nations supported the idea of formulating national and international policies to regulate the allocation of global technical resources and the uses of telecommunications in international and national contexts, the United States spearheaded Western crusades for a free-market approach to the issue. Third World positions have been based on concerns over the potential threats of powerful communication satellites, trans-border data flows, digital communications and interactive computerized data exchanges to their political sovereignties and indigenous cultures. If the traditionally Western-sponsored free flow of information principle enhanced the outreach of news and television programmes into far-flung societies, the introduction of new technologies into the international environment is likely to make that flow faster, more varied, more accessible and less controllable.

To a large extent, Third World nations have come to realise that existing imbalances in global information flows are matched by widening gaps in telecommunications resources between them and the industrialized nations of North America, Western Europe and Japan. In the late 1980s, Winseck and Cutbert noted that half of the existing satellite systems belonged to the United States or the Soviet Union; the other half belonged to some developed Western nations, plus Papua New Guinea and Pakistan.[37] Other data on operational satellite systems in 1990 also indicate that out of 98 satellites orbiting the globe, 85 are operated by industrialized nations, seven by the developing countries and

[35] For details on the controversy surrounding the US decision to withdraw from UNESCO, see the Summer 1984 edition of the *Journal of Communication*, and more recently W. Preston, Jr, E. S. Herman and H. I. Schiller, *Hope and folly: the United States and UNESCO: 1945–1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[36] See 'Challenge for the new boss', *Time* (international), 3 Feb. 1992, pp. 40–41.

[37] Dwayne Winseck and Marlene Cutbert, 'Space WARC: a new regulatory environment for communication satellites', *Gazette*, 1991, 47: 3, pp. 195–204.

six by INTELSAT.[38] In 1985, the Maitland Commission issued its *Missing Link* report on the telecommunications situation around the world in which it revealed a huge gap in telecommunications resources between the industrialized North and the developing nations of the South. The Commission noted that three quarters of the 600 million telephones in the world were located in nine industrialized countries. In response to the Maitland report, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) set up its Center for Telecommunications Development (CTD) in 1985 to offer technical training to personnel from the Third World.[39]

Fora for international debate on communication technology have ranged from the ITU to the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) to INTELSAT. In technical matters, the ITU has been the major agency responsible for the regulation of radio frequencies. Once members of the ITU had agreed upon the uses to which each portion of the radio spectrum would be put, they were expected to register their electronic services with the International Frequency Registration Board (IFRB). The frequency bands for this service were originally fixed in 1948 in Mexico City by the World Administrative Radio Conference (WARC). The basic idea was to establish a frequency allotment plan to which all countries should have access with a guaranteed quality in the intended area. But such efforts failed because of the limited spectrum space available and the excessive requirements submitted by many countries. The 1959 WARC adopted a flexible solution for high-frequency allocations, allowing everyone to use frequencies according to individual needs.

The problem of frequency allocation became acute with disagreements over appropriation of satellite geostationary orbits. Since the industrialized nations had highly developed telecommunications networks, Third World countries did not seriously challenge the system. However, the expanding use of satellite technology, especially for direct television broadcasting (DBS), prompted Third World nations to stake their claims to portions of the geostationary orbit (GSO) and of the radio frequency spectrum devoted to satellite communications.[40] The United States had opposed Third World recommendations for a priori planning of the GSO, claiming that such a policy would involve a waste of resources and retard the development of satellite technology.[41] Third World claims for 'equitable access' to the GSO, recognized at the 1979 WARC, were reiterated in Resolution 3 of the 1982 Nairobi ITU plenipotentiary conference, which glossed the phrase as meaning 'taking account of the special needs of the developing countries' and the geographical situation of particular countries.[42]

[38] See M. Petronchak and W. Morgan, '1990: satellite performance reference chart', *Satellite Communication*, Mar. 1990.

[39] Maitland Commission, *The missing link: report of the Independent Commission for Worldwide Telecommunications Development* (Geneva: International Telecommunications Union, 1984).

[40] W. Menzel, 'The future regulation of high frequency broadcasting', *World Radio and Television Handbook* (Denmark: Keleher, 1985), p. 34.

[41] 'Will there be room for Arc?', *Science*, 9 Mar. 1984.

[42] M. Jussawalla, 'The geostationary orbit: economic issues for the Pacific region', *Intermedia*, 1988, 15: 1.

The 1985 and 1988 space WARCs sought to establish international regulations that would address Third World concerns over access to the orbit and help them realize their telecommunication policies. The outcome was a two-tiered regulatory regime in which the Fixed Satellite Service (FSS) and C and Kv bands (very high frequency bands used for satellite broadcasting) were considered. A new frequency allotment plan was introduced under which each country received 800 Mhz of bandwidth and at least one orbital allocation.[43] Jussawalla noted that the implied costs of prior planning in orbit allocation include a freezing of low-cost satellite technology; the cessation of innovative uses of orbit; long periods of unused slots in space; and competition leading to higher 'parking costs'—those expenses incurred by an occupation of a slot in the geostationary orbit by countries with satellite systems. On the other hand, the costs of posterior planning, demanded by the United States, include more difficult access for latecomers and higher costs to reach less preferred orbital space; inability to protect the surplus generated by innovations now enjoyed by developed countries; and high leasing costs for transponders available on current satellite systems.[44]

Satellite communications also came under discussion within INTELSAT, a consortium of 103 countries and organizations in which the United States has historically enjoyed outstanding voting powers. INTELSAT expanded its telecommunications services to the Third World when it permitted domestic leases of its satellite transponders. Algeria was the first country in the world to make use of this service in 1975.[45] Because the 1973 INTELSAT agreement conferred on the system a monopolistic power in international satellite communications, Third World nations were dissatisfied with the 1985 decision by the Reagan administration in the United States to permit private enterprises to compete with INTELSAT, which contended that the costs of satellite services to the Third World would increase if competition were introduced.[46] Recently, competition from submarine fibre optic systems seems to have put more pressure on INTELSAT to consider expanding the volume, scope and flexibility of its services;[47] and proponents of deregulation policies have argued that the increased supply of both satellite and fibre optic capability would mean a significant decrease in the cost of international voice, data and video transmissions.[48]

In accordance with its position on the international flow of information, the United States supported a liberalized, free-market approach to international telecommunications. A US report submitted to the Nairobi 1982 ITU conference set forth two major principles in telecommunications and information: 'To enhance the free ... flow of information across national

[43] See Winseck and Cutbert, 'Space WARC'.
[44] Jussawalla, 'The geostationary orbit'.
[45] C. Griffith, 'The Arab world: elusive accord', *Intermedia*, July/Sept. 1986, 14: 4–5, p. 37.
[46] M. Snow, 'Arguments for and against competition in international satellite facilities and services: a US perspective', *Journal of Communication*, Summer 1985.
[47] N. Pelton, 'INTELSAT and separate satellite systems issues', in M. Jussawalla *et al.*, eds, *Information technology and global interdependence*, (Westport, CT, London: Greenwood, 1989), pp. 264–71.
[48] See R. Greshon, 'Global cooperation in an era of deregulation', *Telecommunication Policy*, June 1990, 14: 3, pp. 49–59.

borders, with limited exceptions, and promotion of an international environment for the provision of telecommunications and information facilities, services and equipment, in which maximum reliance is placed on free enterprise, open and competitive markets, and free trade and investment with minimum government control or regulation.'[49]

In the area of technology transfers to the Third World, UNESCO's IPDC programme was also a forum for international debates on technical matters; however, political differences between Third World and Western delegates over fund contributions, allocations and qualified recipients seem to have crippled the programme. Lee notes that IPDC was originally established to shift UNESCO attention towards less politicized matters of a technical nature. He points out that the US position in this respect was based on the doctrine of 'market technicalism', which envisions market competition as the engine of development for communication technologies, which should in turn provide the ultimate solution to redressing the inequality of information flow.[50]

American calls for 'wholesale' transfers of communication technologies to the Third World, on the other hand, have been criticized as recipes for further Third World dependency on Western nations. Katz and Wedell noted that: 'The importation of complex technology brings with it many associated constraints and needs: engineering and production staff must be trained in the country from which the equipment is imported. Methods and systems of working are necessarily imported; and then there is the continuing dependence of the importing country on the exporting country for spare parts, continued training and new generations of compatible equipment.'[51] Within the intellectual community, the transfer of communication technologies to the Third World has generated heated debate. While researchers associated with the modernization paradigm saw the new technologies as panaceas for Third World development woes, critical thinkers argued that the introduction of those technologies into national and international environments would benefit the Western 'military–industrial complex' and would perpetuate the existing state of dependency between countries of the First and Third Worlds.[52]

International communication in the 1990s: policy issues and implications

The foregoing review of debates on the two components of the techno-democratic revolution—democracy and technology—indicates that both issues were salient elements of global political and academic discussions on

[49] US Senate, 98th Congress, First Session on Commerce, Science and Transportation, 'Long-range goals in international telecommunications and information: an outline for United States policy' (Washington DC, 1983), p. 12.

[50] Lee, 'The politics of international communication', p. 83.

[51] E. Katz and G. Wedell, *Broadcasting in the Third World: the promise and performance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 67.

[52] For perspectives on the information technology issue see L. Tsui, 'The uses of new communication technologies in Third World countries: a comparison of perspectives', *Gazette*, Sept. 1991, 48: 2, pp. 69–93.

international communication. Traditionally, while Western governments and media spokesmen maintained that the diffusion of new communication technologies in a competitive free-market environment would be conducive to a free flow of information and thus to a wider political participation in democratic processes, Third World nations were less sanguine. Third World leaders and intellectuals have maintained that the sociocultural peculiarities of their societies dictate the formulation of national policies to guard against the negative consequences of the international flow of information and against the uncritical transfer of technologies. In addition, it was charged that Western thinking about the potential virtues of new technologies and of freedom of information was ethnocentric and oblivious to their cultural identities and historical processes of development.

The question that needs to be addressed here relates to the implications of continuing sociopolitical and technological transformations for international communication, and how the Third World is likely to be affected by these processes. It is my contention that although lack of research on the consequences for developing nations of the techno-democratic revolution currently sweeping the world renders it difficult to draw firm conclusions, emerging patterns indicate that a growing number of Third World countries are enthusiastic about being partners to this revolution. The diminution of communism as a global ideology and the accelerating rise of the modern information-based economy seem to have reinforced a belief on the part of many Third World leaders in the imperative nature of that techno-democratic revolution. The following sections review some issues in international communication that are likely to gain further saliency in the 1990s as a result of these techno-democratic developments.

Freedom of information

Freedom of information was an important issue in debates on international communication between Western and Third World nations. Third World formulation of national policies to control incoming and outgoing flows of information was viewed by Western nations as contravening the basic rights of individuals to freedom of opinion and expression. For their part, Third World nations invoked national sovereignty, cultural identity and socioeconomic development as factors underlying their adoption of national policies. Though such conflicts initially arose out of incompatible philosophical conceptions of freedom of information, they have recently crystallized around inherent contradictions between the 'transnationalism' of contemporary world economic and information systems and the traditional notions of an 'independent nation state' trying to maintain full control over its national territory.

In their analyses of the concept of press freedom and its applications around the world, Western scholars have developed their own typologies. In 1956, at the height of the Cold War, Sibert *et al.* introduced their four models of the

press, based on existing systems of social control whereby relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted. These four models were the authoritarian, the Soviet–communist, the liberal and the social responsibility.[53] In 1979, Merrill also produced a typology of four press philosophies: the authoritarian, the social-authoritarian, the liberal, the social-liberal and the social-centrist.[54] These typologies seem to conceive of press freedom in terms of the presence or absence of external controls on media institutions. Media systems in the Third World have generally been viewed in terms of authoritarian and social-authoritarian philosophies. It is no surprise, therefore, to find some Western scholars criticizing Third World models of development journalism as an increasing threat to the existing free press, and in the Third World itself as an obstacle to the development of free political as well as journalistic systems.[55]

Over the past few years, democratic trends have been noted in many countries in the Third World. Countries like Columbia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Yemen, Zambia, Pakistan, the Philippines and recently Saudi Arabia are just a few examples of places where democratic practices with important implications for press freedom have begun to take root. On the regional level, calls for democratic changes have been noted in the recent summit of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa, the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC) summit in Dakar and the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement in Cyprus. Earlier, an African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation was adopted by acclamation at an international conference organized jointly by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the UN Interagency Task Force on UNPAAERD (UN Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development) and African and northern hemisphere NGOs.[56]

Although democratic transformations in the Third World have been widely hailed in the West, their adoption may not necessarily produce a perfect replica of the Western concept of press freedom. Distinctive sociocultural and political values and attitudes in the Third World have a strong bearing on the scope and substance of freedom, and would therefore generate culture-bound conceptions of that freedom. Sibert *et al.* noted over three decades ago that the press always takes on the coloration of the social system within which it operates.[57] In the 1970s, the Western model of 'free journalism' was challenged by Third-World-sponsored 'development journalism' models which accorded the media a prominent role in national development. Third World spokesmen argued that press freedom is a luxury their nations cannot afford. A study of 134 nations in

[53] F. Sibert, T. Peterson and W. Schramm, *Four theories of the press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956).
[54] J. Merrill, *Media, messages and men: new perspectives in communication* (New York: Longman, 1979).
[55] Sussman, 'The Western press'.
[56] See D. Braue, 'Europe at a crossroads', *D+C*, Mar. 1990, p. 4. See also 'A longing for liberty', *Newsweek* (international), 23 July 1990, p. 24.
[57] Sibert *et al.*, *Four theories of the press.*

1985 concluded that given the conditions of scarce resources, a colonial legacy, a poorly educated population, tribal and ethnic rivalries and a subordinate position in the world economic and information systems, a free press can too easily lead to an inability of governments to function and to internal chaos.[58]

In recent times, the breaking tide of democracy in the Third World has stimulated the development of alternative conceptions of press freedom. An example was noted at a joint Asia–Pacific Press Convention and General Assembly of the Confederation of ASEAN Journalists in which an 'Eastern model' of the press was presented as an alternative to the 'Western model'. Proponents of the new model charged that the values on which Western press freedom was based were over-liberal, self-centred, anti-state and unacceptable to developing nations.[59] Winter notes that the alternative 'Eastern model' has emerged in response to the techno-democratic changes around the world.[60] In its basic configuration, it features a media–government partnership focused on the goals of developmentalism. The model is centred on what has been described as 'tandem journalism', in which the newspapers pedal along with government in the direction set by the political leadership.[61] Even in Eastern Europe, disparities in conceptions of press freedom have been quite conspicuous. A group of visiting American journalists in Prague in July 1990 were shocked to hear Czech President Vaclav Havel criticize Western press freedom as excessive, lacking in responsibility and preoccupied with playing a detective role.[62] Both Third World and East European nations undergoing the transition to democracy seem to rule out unrestrained press freedom and to place a higher value on the responsibility of mass media to protect national security and to foster the development process than on other competing interests.

While the spread of democratic institutions may not lead to a single universally accepted definition of freedom of information around the world, it is likely to bring about the demise of totalitarian dictatorships of information, like those long dominant in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Lent comments on press freedoms in South-East Asia by noting that: 'Overt repressive actions still persist, but not as frequently or blatantly as a generation ago, when a South Vietnamese daily could be suspended two out of every three days, when the Chinese press was rigorously ruled by Cultural Revolution strictures, and when entire presses were done away with in one clean swoop, as in Indonesia in 1985, Singapore in 1971, the Philippines in 1972 or Thailand in 1976.'[63] The relaxation of controls over press freedom in the newly emerging democratic structures of the Third World is likely to produce two approaches to the question of international information flow. The first approach, already adopted by many Third World states, is based on the

[58] D. Weaver, J. Buddenbaum and J. Fair, 'Press freedom, media and development, 1959–1979: a study of 134 nations', *Journal of Communication*, Spring 1985.

[59] W. Winter, 'Aggressive reporting clashed with traditional Asian values of respect, cooperation', *ASNE Bulletin*, Mar. 1990, pp. 12–13.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] 'East Europeans have second thought about a free press', *International Herald Tribune*, 17 July 1990, p. 4.

[63] J. Lent, 'Mass communication in Asia and the Pacific: recent trends and developments', *Media Asia*, 1989, 16: 1, p. 19.

selective application of restrictive measures to the international flow of information to suit political, social and religious interests. Because those interests are likely to be perceived in a fairly pluralistic and liberal manner, in flows of international information relevant to them would receive more appreciation on the part of the policy-makers. As a result, audiences in the Third World would be exposed to more varied, though still controlled, foreign news and broadcast materials. This selective approach acknowledges that new communication technologies have made it virtually impossible to control all flows of foreign cultural material into developing societies.

The second approach is more open and less restrictive, and seems to derive from confidence in the domestic society's ability to produce information capable of competing with external cultural materials. The main tenet of this approach is that freedom of expression would tend to stimulate creative productions competitive enough to attract the attention of national audiences. Because many Third World nations may not be able to produce highly competitive materials individually, entering into regional cooperative ventures with culturally, linguistically and politically homogeneous states would be useful. Lee notes that this policy of collective self-reliance is of paramount importance because so many individual nations are too small and too weak to act alone.[64] Examples of this collective self-reliance are noted in the Arab world, Latin America and South-East Asia.

The main implication of the liberalization of Third World policies on the international flow of information is that more developing nations are willing to tone down their rhetorical stands against Western conceptions of press freedom in return for greater Western appreciation of the commitments of their mass media to national development issues. In this case, challenges to the liberal conceptions of press freedom would no longer emanate from authoritarian and communist conceptions, but rather from social responsibility perspectives on the mass media. Hodges defines press responsibility in terms of the social needs to which 'we expect journalists to respond ably'.[65] Merrill states that the social responsibility theory of the press has its roots in the libertarian press system. It goes beyond the libertarian theory, however, in that it places a great many moral restrictions on the press; instead of emphasizing freedom of the press, it stresses responsibility.[66] In this case, the international debate would then centre not on the controlled vs free press dichotomy, but on responsible vs unrestrained perspectives of the press. Press freedom would therefore be defined in terms of views of media held legally and morally responsible for their utterances on the one hand, and conceptions of media free of constraints on the other.

[64] Lee, *Media imperialism reconsidered*, p. 87.
[65] L. Hodges, 'Defining press responsibility: a functional approach', in D. Elliott, ed., *Responsible journalism* (London: Sage, 1984), pp. 13–31.
[66] Merrill, *Global journalism*, p. 26.

The changing nature of information

During the past few decades, as observed above, the majority of Third World concerns about international communication were centred on the transmission of broadcast news and other television programmes into their societies via Western news agencies and broadcast companies. However, the introduction of new technological innovations into the international environment seems to have revolutionized our traditional conceptions of information solely as mass media content. Terms like 'informatics' or 'telematics' have been used to refer to a newly emerging sector in which information is a central element. O'Brien describes aspects of the technological revolution in communication:

> The most important effects of the current technological advances in the information sector are cost reduction through miniaturization based on microprocessors; increased volume and specificity of computer systems; and enhanced speed of global transmission relying on optical fibers and satellites. The latest high growth area in the industry is the convergence of the electronic information processing, data banks and telecommunications networks in a single system known as *telematics*.[67]

Tehranian argues that the impact of informatics has led to four concurrent, contradictory global trends: the transnationalization of economies, the indigenization of politics, the democratization of culture and the totalitarianization of power.[68] Schiller has also echoed perceptions of the changing nature of information when he observed that:

> The modern world system is tied together by more than movies, TV shows and news flows. There are dense economic networks utilizing trans-oceanic cables, satellites, interpersonal connections, and interactive computers that facilitate an historically unprecedented interpersonal corporate economic order. Accordingly, there is no chance that a new international information order can be gained independently and separately from the international economic system now dominating. The players in this engagement are not journalists and poets. They are Exxon, IBM and General Motors, and they are playing for multi-billion dollar stakes.[69]

The shifting emphasis from mass media to telecommunications content underscores the rising importance of the economic aspect of information at the expense of cultural and political aspects. Policy-makers in the Western nations and Japan were quick to perceive this change and have formulated appropriate policies to meet its requirements. In the Third World, however, the emerging vital role of telecommunications in economic growth does not seem to be adequately comprehended and remains largely unappreciated. Commenting on this situation, Bascur laments the absence of a clear understanding of the value of information as a resource for economic development in developing countries. Rather than adjusting technologies, the main problem for the Third

[67] R. O'Brien, 'The political economy of information: a North–South perspective', in G. Gerbner and M. Siefert, eds, *World Communications* (New York: Longman, 1984), p. 39.
[68] M. Tehranian, *Technologies of power: information machines and democratic prospects* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1990).
[69] H. Schiller, 'Foreword', in C. Hamelink, *Cultural autonomy in global communications* (New York: Longman, 1983), pp. ii–ix.

World now is to adjust its own strategies to deal with information.[70] In 1985, the Maitland Commission noted that telecommunications in the Third World have often been neglected in favour of other sectors such as agriculture, water and roads. The report urged that telecommunications be regarded as a complement to other areas of investment and as an essential component in the development process raising productivity and efficiency in other sectors and enhancing the quality of life in the developing world.[71]

The same theme has been voiced by some Third World researchers. Samarajiva called for a shifting of focus away from the exclusive concentration on established approaches based on information as persuasive content and as an organizational facilitator to an approach that focuses on information as a resource for decision-making that is sufficiently established to deal with the many levels of power relations formed in the real world, ranging from simple two-way negotiations to the most complex structural dependency relations.[72]

The main implication of this changing nature of information for the Third World is that the flow of such information would be viewed from an economic rather than a cultural/political perspective, to be treated like any other commercial transborder movements of goods subject to tariffs. Global financial transactions, satellite teleconferencing and databank transmissions originating in or flowing into Third World countries are examples of the economic flows of information. The size and type of information flows from and into the Third World, of course, seem to be a function of the size of transnational business activities in those countries. Accordingly, the volume of information flow would fluctuate in Third World nations depending on their degree of integration into the global information-based economy. In the 1960s and 1970s, the quality and quantity of mass media flows into and from developing countries were viewed as a function of dominant external political/cultural forces.

Development of national telecommunications

It would be quite misleading to expect Third World participation in international communication with underdeveloped telecommunications infrastructures. Despite the potentially alarming implications of technology transfers to the developing countries, many of them have been keen on the acquisition of telecommunications on a large scale. Available data indicate an unprecedented rush by many Third World nations to invest in telecommunications. Jussawalla notes that the pace of technological change has meant that developing countries are forced to adapt to the new technological changes by directing their efforts towards investment in this area. She also points out that some Third World nations, such as Brazil, India and Indonesia, granted a high priority in their development programmes to telecommunications as early as

[70] R. Bascur, 'Information in the Third World: adjusting technologies or strategies?', *Media, Culture and Society*, July 1985, 7: 3, pp. 355–68.

[71] See Maitland report, *The missing link*.

[72] R. Samarajiva, 'Implications of new information/communication technologies for the periphery', *Media Asia*, 1988, 15: 4, pp. 197–8.

the 1960s.[73] Both India and Indonesia launched satellites into outer space in 1976, while Brazil has capitalized on data network development, opening the door to a greater private-sector role in the telecommunications market. Although the Indonesian satellite experience has placed television within reach of 65 per cent of the population, it has been criticized for leapfrogging more basic technologies like terrestrial and undersea cable. It has been noted that in the capital city of Jakarta alone, over 20,000 prospective telephone subscribers are on the waiting list to obtain the service.[74] In 1985, the Arabsat project became operational with the launching of Arabsat into geostationary orbit some 35,000 kilometres above Zaire as a joint Arab venture. A third Arab satellite system was launched in February 1992 for use in telephone, television and telex services. Satellite systems launched for India, Indonesia and the Arab world were manufactured by American and West European companies and were taken into outer space aboard rocket systems built for the United States, Western Europe and the former Soviet Union.[75] Estimates produced by the UK-based Telecommunications Research Center (TRC) suggest that Middle East telecommunications spending will approach $7,500 million by the year 2000.[76]

The question of formulating sound policies to develop communication structures has been a subject of much academic and political deliberation. According to Lee, the foundations of such policies include, first, harnessing media to national development objectives, such as political integration, socioeconomic modernization and cultural expression. Second, a sound communication policy should not only be beneficial to a country's own goals, but also fair to other nations. Third, the media should not be subjected either to a market monopoly by a few conglomerates (such as the US model) or, alternatively, to control by oligarchic bureaucracies (such as the former Soviet model). Fourth, every nation, however small, should be able to design its own communication direction and control its destiny.[77] For Samarajiva, the issue facing Third World attempts to develop telecommunications structures may be dealt with in two parts. The first question is: how can information/communication technologies be utilized to improve the position of Third World countries in the international system and to better the living conditions of the peoples of those countries? The second is: how can Third World countries cope with the instability introduced into many aspects of society by information/communication technologies and their potential for further exacerbating power differentials between Third World and developed countries?[78]

As for the issue of planning, policy-makers in the Third World must realize that new equipment will not overlap with existing equipment, and that new

[73] M. Jussawalla, 'Telecommunications technology, deregulation and economic development', *Media Asia*, 1989, 16: 1, pp. 63–7.
[74] A. Mehra, 'Harnessing new communication technologies for development in Asia', *Media Asia*, 1988, 15: 2, pp. 63–7.
[75] See 'MEED special report: telecommunications', *Middle East Economic Digest*, 10 Nov. 1989, pp. III–XIV. [76] Ibid. [77] Lee, *Media imperialism reconsidered*, pp. 182–3.
[78] Samarajiva, 'Implications of new information/communication technologies', p. 182.

acquisitions should be tied to specific objectives. A seven-country study of technological applications in South-East Asia concluded that the choice of applications has to be decided by end users in accordance with overall development strategies and the concerns of governments.[79] Mehra notes that the information revolution is meaningful only if the adoption of modern information/communication technology extends the scope of work and enhances the effectiveness of all information workers engaged in various economic, social and cultural activities, and thereby contributes to economic growth, social welfare and equity in spite of economic disparities.[80] In technical matters, the equipment should also be compatible with existing standards of operation in the host country.

With respect to funding telecommunications purchases, Third World nations should make sure that this investment would not overburden already beleaguered national budgets. Assistance and loans from international organizations like the Technological Information Pilot System (TIPS), an international South–South technology and trade information network, and the World Bank, which has a special funding programme for telecommunications, would be useful, despite the stringency of some of the Bank's requirements. In 1987, World Bank telecommunications loan commitments rose to over $600 million.[81] Hanna and Schware noted that World Bank involvement in information technology projects covers information services, socioeconomic statistical services, telecommunications infrastructures and manpower development for informatics.[82] Codding observes that proposals to create a new telecommunications assistance fund within the ITU are gaining momentum, despite fears that such a step would weaken the union's overall effectiveness, should the funds be drawn from its general budget.[83]

The social and economic benefits of telecommunications investments should also be taken into account. Unless the equipment promotes existing economic activities and leads to profitable performance, its adoption should be reconsidered. In addition, the transfer of new communication technologies should not be used to widen existing social and political gaps in society. Instead, they should be employed to expand public access, participation and democracy.

Because new technologies require new institutional environments in order to yield efficient operation, structural changes are required to achieve that purpose. In a world of growing liberalization, decentralization and privatization,[84] telecommunications in the Third World continue to fall under the administra-

[79] M. Kaul, N. Patel and K. Shams, 'New information technology applications for local development in Asia and the Pacific countries', *Information Technology for Development*, Mar. 1989, 4: 1, pp. 1–10.
[80] Mehra, 'Harnessing new communication technologies', p. 65.
[81] See 'World Bank: a crossroad for telecommunications', *Intermedia*, July/Sept. 1989.
[82] N. Hanna and R. Schware, 'Information technology in World Bank financed projects', *Information Technology for Development*, Sept. 1990, 5: 3, pp. 53–77.
[83] G. Codding, Jr, 'Financing development assistance in the ITU', *Telecommunications Policy*, Mar. 1989, 13: 1, pp. 13–24.
[84] See the three-part study by G. Philip and S. Tsoi on telecommunications regulations around the world, published in the *Journal of Information Sciences*, 1988, 14: 14, pp. 257–64, 14: 15, pp. 265–73, 14: 16, pp. 329–34.

tion of government-controlled post, telegraph and telephone (PTT) services which have been handicapped by heavy bureaucracy, centralized planning and complicated politics. In his study of the Brazilian satellite system, Correa noted that the greatest obstacles to the utilization of the system have been political and institutional factors.[85] In an analysis of Indian applications of information technologies, Banerjee concluded that the social institutions in the Third World are failing on the emerging technology scene.[86] Jussawalla also noted that the World Bank would like to see the PTTs distanced from the political process of the government and acquiring greater autonomy.[87]

The restructuring of social and economic institutions in the Third World should in no way imply the introduction of free-market economies in the telecommunications sector. As Parapak noted, competition for service improvement may be valid in Western economies where the market is large, the technology is sophisticated and the capital for infrastructure is readily available. In the Third World, the market is relatively small and technology has to be imported. Given the rarity of hard currency, financing is cumbersome. Therefore, telecommunications deregulation, privatization and competition is not the answer. Monopoly is the answer.[88]

Finally, efficient and creative uses of telecommunications in the Third World, especially when those uses involve international transactions, will not be ensured unless local expertise for operation and maintenance is made available. This requires the establishment of national and/or regional training facilities to provide the market with qualified personnel capable of operating and maintaining the equipment.

Interdependence vs independence

One of the main legacies of the Second World War has been the growing relations of interdependence among nations of the world. Although this trend has been criticized by dependency theorists as perpetuating Western hegemony of peripheral societies, accelerating developments in international communications and transnational economics seem to have made this interdependence more and more the rule rather than the exception in international relations. This fact has been highlighted during recent months in the aftermath of the Cold War and with the emergence of a 'New World Order' in which economic competition is seen as replacing ideological rivalry. As a result, the autarkic development model preached in the early 1970s no longer seems practicable or relevant in this increasingly interdependent world. Hudson noted that it is impossible to shield Third World countries from the stormy winds of technological change. In countries that do not adopt isolationist policies,

[85] C. Correa, 'Informatics in Latin America: promises and realities', *Information Technology for Development*, Mar. 1989, 4: 1, pp. 11–30.

[86] U. Banerjee, 'Informatics policy in the Third World', *Information Technology for Development*, Dec. 1988, 3: 4, pp. 263–74.

[87] Jussawalla, 'Telecommunications technology', p. 5.

[88] J. Parapak, 'The problem of balance in international communications', *Media Asia*, 1989, 16: 3, pp. 132–6.

decision-makers are under continuous pressure to react to environmental changes, often with inadequate information about the technological choices before them, and the problems to be addressed. As is usually the case in such circumstances, decisions tend to be arbitrary and irrational.[89]

Although the question of Third World independence from the global economic system ranked high on the agendas of debates on new world information and economic orders in the 1970s, the advent of new communication technologies seems to be forcing developing nations into making critical decisions regarding their degree of interaction with the world economy. Spero noted that the future of the world is greater interdependence among its nations; the information society has provided the technological tools to bring markets and nations, North and South, closer together. Deriving benefit from this trend depends on developing countries making policy choices. One key choice, according to Spero, is whether those countries will cut themselves off from the international financial market, or whether they will seek ways to achieve greater participation which will afford them greater access to sources of capital and more efficient domestic financial services.[90] Because of the impracticality of dissociation in our increasingly interdependent world, Third World nations seem to have no alternative to 'navigating the stormy waters of rapid technological change'. Samarajiva argues that the task is not easy, but neither is it impossible.[91]

The globalization of banking services is just one example of the growing trend towards interdependence. Global banking relies heavily on satellite technology for speedy transfer of funds; stock exchanges as distant as Singapore and Chicago are linked simultaneously. One advertisement for an international bank exemplifies this development. It reads: 'Yesterday, globalization was a word ... Today it is reality ... A swap in London and private placement in New York, yen from Sydney, dollars from Zurich ... We can put the pieces together swiftly and efficiently.'[92] In addition, the globalization effects of satellites have reached television news business. The US Cable News Network (CNN), for example, produces daily world coverage in 91 countries and in more than 200,000 hotel rooms outside the United States.[93] Recently, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has gone international in its television transmissions, thus emerging as a formidable challenger to CNN in South-East Asia.[94]

The prospects of further Third World incorporation into the world economy have begun to generate concerns among its leaders, especially in view of the apparent moves by some Western governments to make economic aid

[89] H. Hudson, *When telephones reach the village: the role of telecommunications in rural development* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984), p. 182.
[90] J. Spero, 'The information revolution and financial services: a new North–South issue', in M. Jussawalla *et al.*, eds, *Information technology and global interdependence*, pp. 109–17.
[91] Samarajiva, 'Implications of new information/communication technologies'.
[92] See *Global Finance*, June 1988, p. 1.
[93] See 'CNN's global village', *Newsweek* (international), 18 June 1990, pp. 46–50.
[94] See 'The BBC's new bay: challenging CNN in all-news TV', *Newsweek* (international), 8 Oct. 1991, p. 51.

to the Third World contingent on the latter's adoption of Western-style democratic institutions and free-market economics. Recently, those concerns have been accentuated by the possible diversion of Western assistance funds to the newly emerging nations of Eastern Europe and of the former Soviet Union. The editor of *South* summarized these concerns, noting that:

> As young Germans chip away at the remnants of the Berlin Wall, political leaders in Asia, Africa and Latin America are expressing concern about their place in the New World Order emerging from the ruins of communism in Eastern Europe. Third World leaders fear that if the pace of Western economic aid and investment to Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia speeds up after democratic elections this year, they may be left out in the cold.[95]

A UNESCO meeting in February 1990 was convened to explore the needs of journalists in Eastern Europe. The World Press Freedom Committee is also planning to initiate journalism training activities in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.[96] This rising interest in developing communication systems in Eastern Europe could be to the detriment of allocations received by Third World nations to improve their communication capabilities, despite assurances from Western countries that the levels of assistance to media in developing countries will not be affected.

Given the undesirable consequences of total integration of Third World countries into the Western-dominated global economy, the formation of regional economic ventures among culturally, economically and politically homogeneous developing nations would be helpful. The emergence of regional bodies in Latin America and South-East Asia would certainly present Third World nations with ample opportunities for competition with economic giants in Japan, Western Europe and North America. The formation of those regional bodies, of course, should in no way imply dissociation from the world system. Interdependence is here to stay. However, this interdependence will be among powerful economic giants rather than among small individual states.

Conclusions

The thesis advanced by this article is that because of its centrality to global politics, international communication will be affected by the technological and democratic developments being experienced in our world. For the Third World, which has been an important party to the global controversy over international communication, the implications of the continuing techno-democratic revolution are large. I have argued that unless Third World nations reconsider their traditional approaches to international communication, the prospects for introducing new communication technologies and of democratizing formerly authoritarian systems around the world look gloomy. I further suggest that the international communication agenda in the 1990s is likely to

[95] See 'The big switch', *South*, Apr. 1990, p. 13.
[96] I. Ghilione, 'What can we offer emerging press in Eastern Europe?', *ASNE Bulletin*, Mar. 1990, p. 2.

feature four major issues that have eventually to be addressed by developing nations. These issues are: freedom of information; comprehension of the changing nature and role of information; development of national telecommunications; and integration into the information-based global economy.

With respect to freedom of information, Third World nations would lean towards the social responsibility model rather than the libertarian model of the press. Although the democratization of the Third World would lead to a widespread abolition or at least relaxation of controls over the press, the stakes in maintaining the sociopolitical balances in societies remain so high that a social responsibility approach seems to be more workable.

As far as the changing conceptions of the role and nature of information are concerned, it is important that information no longer be viewed exclusively in terms of mass media content with political and cultural implications. The introduction of new communication technologies has transformed information into a vital element of the emerging global economy. Rapid gathering, storage and retrieval techniques have made information an indispensable component of economic and political planning, decision-making and implementation. In the light of this revolutionary conception, it is high time that Third World nations begin to view information more as an economic resource than as persuasive content.

The issue of telecommunications development has always been of interest to the Third World. However, the accelerating proliferation of new technologies in the international environment has put further pressures on developing countries to establish their own telecommunications infrastructures as a prerequisite for their participation in international communications. Underdeveloped terrestrial cable networks, microwave links and telephone systems would preclude the speedy reception, transmission and distribution of information necessary for the development process.

The prospect of Third World integration into the global economy has become a source of concern for leaders in the developing countries. It is my contention that, in practice, dissociation from the world system is an illusory goal, despite the great amount of enthusiasm for this notion in the 1970s. I believe, however, that the adverse consequences of Third World incorporation into the world economy may be alleviated through formation of regional cooperative ventures, capable of meeting outside challenges collectively.

Although the above issues may not necessarily arise in the same fora with which they have traditionally been associated, debates on a NWICO are likely to surface in such contexts as international trade negotiations and economic assistance programmes. Attempts by developing countries to keep these issues prominent in international discussion on an emerging New World Order would encounter enormous challenges. With the end of the Cold War and with the newly defined role for the United Nations, it has become more difficult for Third World nations to air their grievances and push for a new world information order. The New World Order seems to present a totally different agenda, one that Third World countries will have to live with. However, as one

writer noted, if there is to be a 'second wave' of support for a NWICO, it is imperative that the degree to which the analysis and actions of the old order have been flawed be assessed.[97]

[97] C. Roach, 'The movement for a New World Information and Communication Order: a second wave?', *Media, Culture and Society*, July 1990, 1: 3, pp. 283–308.