



SECONDARY ROADS

JOURNALIST ACTIVISM
TO REACH ANOTHER
REALITY

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PRESENTATION

YOLANDA POLO TEJEDOR (COMMUNICATION MANAGER IN COORDINADORA DE ONG PARA EL DESARROLLO-ESPAÑA)

The rescue of citizenship is essential for the defence of human, social and civil rights. We must help create organisations that are capable of harmonising globalisation with local communities active membership, and this is possible, and is, possibly, the future towards which our Non-profit organisations (NPOs) should head; and build a global civil society upon both local and transnational organisations at the same time.

ARANTXA CEJUDO¹

And so, one morning we get up and shout out that the absence of the important world news in some daily newspapers is a crime, that societies are being deceived and numbed by this non-journalism, that people who are not well informed can be easily manipulated, and that quality information, as a public service, is the basis of free and democratic societies.

OLGA RODRÍGUEZ²

As Albert Camus once said, there are times when indifference is criminal. Ours is undoubtedly one of them. We are witnessing a change of paradigm, a transition to a new era in which the world we knew will never be the same. Citizens rebel against a global predatory, mean and unfair system, while those who pull the strings cling to power through economic, political and media tricks. The old formulas used by social organisations to counteract these powers are obsolete; the so-called fourth power is no longer so powerful; and citizens build their own alternatives outside mainstream institutions and ways.

The major mass media are currently in crisis, partly because of economic problems, but mainly because they have become large business conglomerates whose sole objective is to make a profit. In this race for profits, they have lost their essence: telling what happens in the world and to the people who inhabit it with rigour, honesty, ethics and a good dose of empathy. The employment situation in which many communication professionals find themselves is indeed precarious: freelance journalists who pay for their own travel

1 NT: Translated from the original . CEJUDO, Arancha. "¿Qué cambios ha experimentado la solidaridad en la cultura digital?" en #ParadigmaTIC@s: <http://desycom.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/culturaldigital.pdf>

2 NT: Translated from the original . RODRÍGUEZ, Olga. "Otro periodismo es posible (II)" en <http://minotauro.periodismohumano.com/2011/01/17/otro-periodismo-es-posible-ii/b>

expenses and insurance, and who do not even make enough money to be self-employed. Foreign bureaus are closing, leaving very broad world areas without anyone to provide first-hand information about what is happening there. The reality is limited to the visions of the two or three dominant international agencies. The result is a markedly Orwellian interpretation of global reality. In this context, independent journalism has a very difficult task ahead.

At the same time, the new forms of communication represent an unprecedented information revolution that goes beyond mere communication and that is deeply rooted in the essence of politics: civic participation and engagement in public affairs, and the collective construction of proposals that are essentially political. For those of us who are devoted to communication these are fascinating times, indeed. Social networks offer powerful opportunities to create alternative narratives to those offered by the mainstream media and the status quo. We no longer need the mass media, governments or institutions to organise ourselves; we can do it without help-and we do.

Today's turbulent context is also affecting NGOs; we are part of organised civil society and, therefore, we are going through a complex transitional phase too. Beyond cuts, we are seeing a change of paradigm that has taken us off guard and that we do not know how to handle. New development actors with narrow economic interests are steadily taking over traditional ones. For years, we were at the forefront of the protests for a better world, made proposals and opened new pathways in the social sphere. Precisely owing to the communicative revolution that we are witnessing today and to the new forms of citizen participation, we have lost our leadership to horizontal society, the new leader of social alternatives.

Communication is going through a transitional phase that squarely affects us too. For years we have been striving to promote communication for social change, namely one committed to reporting causes instead of just focusing on consequences; tackling the ordinary instead of the exceptional; transcending trademarks to promote causes; bringing about social and political changes; building global alliances, and placing people at the centre of a process that will never be unidirectional again (as with the sender-message-receiver model), but rather multidirectional, diverse, participatory...A process that weaves and unweaves, constructs and makes proposals, rebelling against rigid traditional schemes. This attempt has been more of a wish than a reality, for promoting this approach is a rather

complex and long-term task. The coexistence of past and present paradigms often brings us to the verge of schizophrenia, as our companion Xosé Ramil³ points out.

Fortunately, we share that imbalance with other actors and in different areas. It is precisely in one of them that the idea of this publication arose. One evening in May, after a session of what we like to call #comunicambio (#communicchange) -that is, communication for social change in the language of social networks-, some restless minds like mine began to imagine ways of building strategies and alliances to ensure that we are rigorously informed about world events and whatever may concern us as global citizens. From our particular perspective as NGO workers, we began to ask ourselves how to formulate common strategies with journalists and social movements who, like us, thought that communication is above all a political tool, and that using it as such is not always easy. We started thinking of ways to weave new narratives that go far beyond fundraising or the simple description of poverty to report the underlying causes, bring about change and unmask a shameful global system that impoverishes individuals and companies worldwide.

With one foot in journalism, and the other in cooperation, we are very much aware of the precarious labour market position of journalists. We also know how difficult it has become for social movements to give their demands and proposals visibility in the media – and therefore, to be taken into account by the political powers. Indeed, we as NGOs have great difficulties explaining our proposals for change. That is why we wanted to elaborate some joint recommendations, to create partnerships that may improve the information that reaches the public through the international, local and alternative media. This modest contribution ultimately seeks to prevent, as Olga Rodríguez says ‘the poor, the dispossessed, the anonymous, the street people, from learning through the media that political, economic and financial powers are given there a regular voice which they themselves lack’⁴. To this end, we selected three recent international events that would have been unthinkable in the near past. On one hand, Egypt’s revolution and Mexico’s #YoSoy132 movement were selected for showing how powerful the new forms of citizen politics are. On the other, we chose a situation we naively believed a thing of the past: the first famine of the twenty-first century, which hit the Horn of Africa and put more than eighteen million people at risk of starvation.

3 NT: Translated from the original. RAMIL, Xosé, “¿Cuál es el nuevo paradigma de la comunicación en el que nos movemos las ONG de Desarrollo?” en #ParadigmáTIC@s : <http://desycom.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/culturadigital.pdf>

4 NT: Translated from the original .Op. Cit.

To carry out this initiative, some excellent journalists and representatives of social movements and NGOs will analyse the facts from where they occurred. Indeed, for as Master Kacuściński rightly said, 'one needs first-hand knowledge, namely physical, emotional, olfactory, free of filters and shields, in order to explain what we are talking about. (...) It is a mistake to write about someone with whom you have not shared at least a little bit of your life.'⁵

In brief, this work mainly aims to raise more questions than it answers. Indeed, for it is only through a constant search for and collective construction of knowledge that we can counteract a system that makes the proposals of thousands of people invisible, creates stereotyped images of them and conditions political decisions. Our focus must be on what Bru Rovira calls "secondary roads", i.e. those human spaces and stories that are never reached by communication business conglomerates.

As development NGOs, we will start with some self-criticism along with the help of Jean-Paul Marthoz and Montse Santolino. We hope they will serve as inspiration.

NGOs have a responsibility in the field of information. As a matter of principle, they should commit themselves not to exacerbate the contamination of information supply or the failures of journalism. They should respect the fundamental principles of journalism by disseminating rigorous information without exaggeration or manipulation. They should contribute to improving journalism, making up for what it leaves out or fails to notice, highlighting unreported crises and providing details from their own surveys which, too often, are overlooked by the fleeting glance of the media.

J-P. MARTHOZ⁶

So far, the sector had not clearly realised that communication policies can hamper the achievement of fair and sustainable global development. Today, however, it is clear that they do so as much or more than other policies, hindering a full understanding of the implications of our model of development and blocking the proposal of other possible alternatives. In this sense, the democratisation of communication is an essential prerequisite for achieving the efficiency we are looking for.

M.SANTOLINO⁷

⁵ NT: Translated from the original

⁶ NT: Translated from the original. MARTHOZ, J-P. "Las ONG en la conquista del terreno periodístico" en BERNABÉ, J. y WÖRMER, N. Comunicación y Desarrollo, Nº 25 de Revista Española de Desarrollo y Cooperación, invierno 2010.

⁷ NT: Translated from the original. SANTOLINO, M. "Recuperando la esencia: las ONGD como agentes de comunicación para el cambio social" en BURGUI, T. y ERRO, J. Comunicando para la Solidaridad y la Cooperación. Edit. Foro Comunicación, Educación y Ciudadanía, 2010.

INTRODUCTION VISIONS OF THE WORLD: STORIES OF COMMITMENT

MANUELA MESA (DIRECTOR OF CEIPAZ)

Over the last few years, conventional mass media have dramatically changed, as the relevance of international information has declined in favour of show and entertainment information. International news coverage has significantly diminished for lack of resources, and investigative journalism has become marginal. This explains why the media have increasingly reduced the number of foreign correspondents to cover what was happening there. It seems as though what happened beyond national borders did not affect populations within. Similarly, the time allocated to international news in both public and private television has been reduced in favour of a populist journalism that turns irrelevant, sensationalist events into news. The press is increasingly convinced that the public wants emotions and drama, and morbidity takes the place of or relegates to the margins what happens internationally.

And this all comes at a time of an accelerated globalisation process that is making the world increasingly interdependent, and remote locations increasingly close and interconnected. The time has come in which journalism and its role need to be redefined, contradictory tendencies coexisting in a mass media universe where new players are emerging. The media have had, and still have, so much power and capacity to influence as, for example, to make a party win or lose an election, prompt military intervention after showing images of innocent victims, or topple presidents, putting an end to a dictatorship and giving way to a revolution, among others.

Sometimes, the media have become a great ally of human rights organisations by exposing violations in war contexts or under authoritarian governments that have outraged public opinion and forced the international community to take measures. For example, the images of torture at Abu Ghraib prison were decisive to spark criticism of military practices in Iraq. The disclosure of a video in 2010 showing how a U.S. helicopter attack in Baghdad in 2007 had caused several civilian casualties, among whom several employees of Reuters (British news agency), also resulted in public outrage and criticism of military practices and the lack of humanitarian guarantees in Iraq.

The world of the media is increasingly heterogeneous, in which contradictory trends sometimes coexist. Alongside quality journalism that seeks to report national and international news both rigorously and independently, there is also a sensationalist and populist yellow press that is guided by audience measurement. Then, there are other media that are used as tools for political propaganda and manipulation of governments, or serve the interests of the private companies that own them. All this adds to the emergence of social networks that are capable of conveying endless information and have opened a space for new players, who play an increasingly important role in the field of information.

This book focuses on three important events that took place in different parts of the world: the Arab Spring, the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico and the Sahel famine. The analyses have been carried out by Spanish correspondents in the field, local journalists and representatives from social movements who were involved in the events. Each one offers his/her own view on what journalism and the job of telling the world from the complexity of its reality and the rigour that is required.

THE ARAB SPRING

The Arab Spring provided social movements with a framework that highlighted the capacity of Arab civil society to challenge authoritarian regimes and take a step towards building a democratic system that reflects the wishes and aspirations of the people. This helped give social movements visibility and worldwide publicity to their struggle and ideals. This was after years of dictatorships, supported by Western governments out of the conviction that they were the best way to curb the rise of fundamentalist religious groups. The idea had been supported by the media in general, which helped perpetuate the fiction that Arab citizens were not ready for democracy and that the Islamic religion prevented the establishment of democracy. The Arab Spring dismantled these stereotypes, which had taken root over the years. It revealed a dynamic civil society in the search for a democracy that reflected the true aspirations of society: access to education, health, and a decent life.

Social networks were not only used as a social mobilisation tool; they also served to push conventional media to address uncomfortable issues that did not fit the fiction they had been working on until then. They showed an organised civil society that had no fear of repression and demanded democracy.

The active role played by new actors in the media environment was essential to explain the Arab Spring. In particular, the presence of so-called 'citizen journalists,' that is, individuals or organisations that have burst onto the media scene in recent years and compete with traditional journalism, giving first-hand information. With the help of their own mobile phones and cameras, citizens record events and transfer images to traditional media, email lists or social networks. This is what happened in Tahrir Square in Egypt. As explained by Amira Salah in this book, the best sources of information in Egypt were ordinary citizens and demonstrators, who stood at the frontline with their cameras, a place where no local journalist would dare set foot.

At each demonstration, thousands of participants record what is going on about them, and the abuses committed by the security forces when they intervene, which the authorities try to deny afterwards, blaming the demonstrators.

Then, some bloggers have, in a more systematic and professional way, entered the scene and been recognised as journalists for the role they played during the Arab Spring. Such is the case, for example, of the very important Facebook page created in June 2010 by Wael Ghonim, a human rights activist who disseminated some pictures taken with a mobile phone that showed a young Egyptian businessman, Khaled Said, as he was arrested by the police and tortured to death. This page called 'We are all Khaled Said,' once hit 470,000 users in February 2011 and catalysed the protest movement.

Moreover, social networks in Egypt gained the support of the international community, and the solidarity of individuals and groups that tried to counter the measures taken by Tunisian and Egyptian authoritarian governments, for example by unleashing a DDoS attack (Distributed Denial of Service) against governmental groups. And offered advice to bloggers to mislead the censors and ensure their protection against the network police.

As stated in this book, citizen journalism must find its own place and recognition, an essential contribution to the independence of information. Moreover, an increased participation of local journalists is essential in order to provide a more comprehensive and rich vision of what is happening.

This is the only way to avoid the stereotyped view of the Arab world that the conventional media is set on showing and which constitutes the basis of Western governments' unconditional support to authoritarian leaders. The latest is that which Avaaz⁸ network has de-

8 www.avaaz.org

nounced following the controversy over the images of Muhammad published in a French journal. Avaaz has denounced the biased way of presenting the news, with headlines such as the one in Newsweek, which said: 'the Muslim world is burning with anti-Western wrath because of an islamophobic video, and there are hordes of protesters in the streets threatening everyone'.⁹ This network questioned this approach, offering alternative images that showed that most demonstrations against the video had been peaceful, and that out of 1,500 million Muslims in the world, only a very small part, has taken action if compared, for example, with the Arab Spring. It also unveiled citizen initiatives, new media and networks such as Gawker's blog that are countering this way of presenting the Muslim world as an unrealistic homogeneous whole. Salafist radicals do not represent the Muslim world, although they reinforce the 'clash of civilizations' narrative that has supported and justified military action, terrorism and serious human rights violations.

Social networks have also been instrumental in explaining the Mexican initiative #YoSoy132, as they managed to break the media siege imposed by the Televisa- TV Azteca duopoly to call for the democratisation of the media. As Raúl Romero explains in his contribution to this book, this initiative gave renewed impetus to social mobilisation in Mexico and managed to influence and transform media reporting on the electoral process, showing the malaise of social and political organisations that do not identify with or feel represented by political parties and view Peña Nieto's election victory as an imposition. #YoSoy132 falls within the context of the social movements of 2011, such as the 'Indignados' movement in Spain, or the 'Occupy' movement in the US, which call for a participatory democracy focused on the needs of people.

Besides social networks and their increasingly important role in the media world, NGOs also play an increasingly important role in the field of information. As Marthoz suggests (2011)¹⁰, some NGOs act as true media outlets. They have people on the ground that enable them to have first-hand information; they conduct research about what is happening; and have their own communication policies aimed at reaching the largest possible audience. They offer an interpretive, legal or political assessment framework of events. This has been crucial in regards to the food crisis in the Horn of Africa, which is also addressed in this book.

9 See: ¿Quién le teme a la Ira Musulmana? Publicado el 22 de septiembre de 2012. Equipo Avaaz. www.avaaz.org

10 Marthoz, JP (2011), "Informar en tiempos de Wikileaks" en Mesa, M (coord.). El mundo a la deriva: crisis y pugnas de poder. Anuario CEIPAZ 2011-2012. Madrid: CEIPAZ-Fundación Cultura de Paz.

The main challenge here is finding a way to tackle complexity from a journalistic point of view. Indeed, for this requires an in-depth knowledge of the complex reality that needs to be explained, showing it from different angles and seeking a balance between the various positions. It also requires new perspectives, linking data and information with actual developments. Why does the focus fall so often on the undernourished, agonizing people in refugee camps when reporting on famine? Why is it that the face of food speculators, who negotiate prices in the international stock markets and obtain huge profits from these operations, is not unveiled? Why is it that in food-producing-countries people do not have access to food? Why is it that local producers are not protected? Who is to be held responsible? Such situations are not inevitable but are the result of an absence of a policy response to prevent them. In the end, conventional media show extreme situations, the responses to which will always be insufficient to alleviate the suffering of thousands of people. What makes a famine more newsworthy than other situations?

As Miguel Calatayud suggests in his article for this book, it is difficult to beat the sensationalism and limits of conventional media. Fatalistic and simplistic stories address issues such as famines as if they were narratives with a beginning, a middle and an end. Yet this approach fails to address such a complex issue. 'Newsworthy' events are like peaks of icebergs that suddenly pop up but have been building up for several years. They have very deep roots that can only be explained by the influence of multicausal factors and all the players that are involved.

These problematic issues are not given much space in mainstream media, and when they are, it is almost impossible to keep the media's attention for more than a week. Nevertheless, there are some reports that have gone round the world for their quality and their critical and innovative approach, news that have shaped the course of events. Despite journalists' lack of time and resources to do quality journalism, there is still room for action.

In turn, NGOs and social movements have been a driving force for major social changes; they are leading today a global movement for a culture of peace and justice, real democracy and environmental sustainability. Social networks have become a powerful instrument to connect organisations and to give visibility to a movement which was described in the past as marginal, radical or violent. The need to occupy a more prominent place in the mass media has diminished, as they are increasingly less effective in conveying this information, or do so in a very limited way. Increasingly citizens draw from many different sources, therefore the monopoly of information that was so jealously guarded in the past has been broken.

This situation has also forced mainstream media to reinvent and give more importance to the digital editions, as well as to develop new strategies to maintain their influence. The demand for investigative journalism is on the table. The complementarity between the various sources of information, together with the communication strategies that are promoted by NGOs, yield a more complex media landscape, but also more diverse and plural. Citizens have now more options to obtain and disseminate information from many different sources. This will help us broaden our minds and commit ourselves to reality.



REVOLUTION IN EGIPT



ON JANUARY 25, 2011, THE EGYPTIAN Revolution broke out. To understand what happened that day, known as “The day of wrath” - you have to look back to the many citizen movements which for many years have defended human rights and social justice.

IN PREVIOUS YEARS, MORE THAN 2000 social protests spread across the country. The revolution in Tunisia helped confluence on the Friday of Wrath. That day, thousands of protesters took to protest in the streets of Cairo and other major cities, using social media tools to call for action.

FOLLOWING THE SUCCESSFUL CONVENING OF THE protests, internet access and mobile communication were banned by the government, which decreed a curfew and deployed the army. Despite the brutal repression (some sources say up to 100 people were killed), the riots continue and extend to other parts of the country. On February 1, Tahrir Square hosts more than a million people demanding the fall of the Mubarak regime.

ON FEBRUARY 11, 2011, 18 DAYS after the initiation of the protests, Hosni Mubarak resigns.

EGYPT STOOD THOSE DAYS IN THE international media spotlight. Egyptian media was divided: state-run media told “the truth”, side of the story, while independent journalists and other media linked to the opposition -even if they weren’t official media sources- arose to the occasion and played a relevant role under cover of social networking and citizen journalism.

EGYPT MEDIA NEEDS A REVOLUTION

AMIRA SALAH AHMED

Press freedom in Egypt has always been an elusive issue, affecting objective media coverage of vital events. There are times when the façade and false sense of press freedom is utilized by the local media to push boundaries and tip-toe around some red lines, and other times when the restrictions on media freedoms are more obvious and inhibiting, when oppressive media laws are pulled out of the drawer to justify punitive measures against critics of the incumbent rulers.

The local media, in this context, plays its role according to which category it falls under: state-run, independent or opposition, with the recent rise of social media creating a fourth -powerful yet unstructured-dimension.

Interestingly, the January 25 uprising did little to alter this dynamic, despite one of its main factors of success being independent media challenging the status quo in the years leading up to 2011. The brief window during which media unshackled itself from years of suppression lasted mere weeks after Hosni Mubarak's ouster on February 11. The most drastic change was obvious in the state-run media, which quickly turned on its head to scorn the leader it had spent decades idolizing, and to glorify a revolution it had spent weeks demonizing.

The sudden shift from government mouthpiece to revolution cheerleader gave reason for optimism, but that was quickly and expectedly dashed when it became apparent that state-run media survives to support the people in power. It gave no support to the power of the people when millions marched against dictatorship around the country during the Jan. 25 uprising; and only touted protesters as revolutionaries -as opposed to spies and foreign agents hell bent on destabilizing the country- after their victory seemed inevitable.

For a brief time, there was no clear power class to support and state-run media was bereft of a leader to be loyal to; only the revolution had any real legitimacy, thus garnering support. Once that changed and the ruling military council began asserting the power it took

over from Mubarak, a new idol appeared on the pages of government media, which swiftly shifted back to its longstanding position out of touch with Egypt's realities.

For a year and a half this lasted, until the country's first civilian president Mohamed Morsi rose from the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood, into its Freedom and Justice Party, and eventually into the highest of offices. Ironically, the once banned group that suffered years of injustice and was incriminated by the media, is beginning to show signs of utilizing the same media muzzle purported by the Mubarak regime.



By contrast, throughout this transition, independent media has continued to push boundaries and challenge the regime's version of reality propagated by state-run media. To say that Egypt's uprising began on January 25, 2011 would be to overlook years of activism and defiance by young bloggers, activists, human rights defenders, independent media, and marginalized workers. From 2005 onwards, blogging and citizen journalism gained a real voice along with independent journalism, the former challenging the latter to broach once taboo content. It was a turning point for the media scene long monopolized by the state's newspapers, television channels and radio stations, which, unfortunately, still operate to this day.

Still, much of the efforts of independent journalists are spent correcting the misconceptions and distortions peddled by the government. Without proper laws to guarantee access to information and with transparency being the antithesis of governance in Egypt, the time and energy of independent media is spent mostly on the very preliminary steps of the journalistic process: getting the facts straight and portraying them objectively.

COVERING THE UPRISING

When it came to covering events on the ground during the uprising, independent journalists rose to the occasion, filling the void of truth and objectivity at a time when the government's last ditch resort to quell protests was mainly to reject the momentous events by portraying them as a foreign plot. Independent media flourished despite facing mounting risks, violence, arbitrary detainments and random crackdowns on offices and field journalists. Moreover, the widening gulf between the "truth" reported by state-run media on the one hand, and the one reported by both local and foreign independent outlets on the other, raised the credibility of the latter in the eyes of masses who've historically relied on the former.

The recent rise of social media, over the past years, pushed independent media forward and over the red lines more and more. In the attempt to compete with citizen journalists, independent media has had to step up its game both with the nature and speed of the content produced.

Opposition media, however, while in times of protest mostly rallying behind the street movement, is usually mainly concerned with, as the name suggests, opposing whatever is spewed by the government. Its hardline position on issues often suffers from the same lack of objectivity common in state-run media, thus hindering its credibility. While not to be ignored, it has done little to positively change or shape the local media landscape.

During the uprising, with communication channels hindered, social media was vital in reporting events as they occurred to the outside world.

As plans for the Friday of Anger, were underway, and as young activists secretly planned locations for protests and marches with new routes to outmaneuver police, the state was busy with its plans to quell the protests. When the first hour of January 28 came around, the internet was cut off, so were mobile telephone lines and SMS services. The complete telecom blackout actually worked against the regime; with people at home cut off from their loved ones who went to the protests, they themselves were moved to take to the streets.

Throughout, social media was utilized to spread the news, and was heavily relied upon by local and global media outlets who had limited access to field journalists. With events happening at lightening speed, social media became a constantly updated news ticker, as activists turned into citizen journalists and gained credibility along the way.

The dissemination of information and news through social media continued during the internet blackout as activists found ways to send their tweets abroad to be broadcast either by friends with access to their account, or through services set up such as Alive In Egypt, which launched to display translated voice messages from @Speak2Tweet.

As local journalists, we began using landlines to communicate, and for the first days of the uprising, much of our job was to report events to international media outlets with no correspondents in Egypt. The night of January 28 and 29 for myself and a group of journalists on a local paper, for example, was mostly spent taking turns answering calls from international media.

What the utilization of social media accomplished was garnering the support of the global community, not so much mobilizing or organizing the actual street movement that led to the uprising.

The solidarity Egypt received from citizens around the world who followed the events second by second via social media, was vital to keeping up the morale and spirit of the movement, which during the 18 days suffered several setbacks but was able to recover. The attention and reaction of solidarity movements around the world meant that governments that had allied themselves with Mubarak's regime could no longer ignore the resounding calls for change, and were forced by their own citizens, to support the people's movement in Egypt instead of the corrupt regime, a longtime regional ally.

Social media also served to connect activists and members of social and political movements with local and foreign media, giving voice to a once voiceless segment of society constantly fighting for change when no one else bothered to listen. Bloggers, citizen journalists, and activists made use of different social media platforms to document events, report abuses, cover where traditional media failed; and gained a voice by starting to appear as credible sources cited in print and broadcast journalism, and television stations all around the world.

Despite all eyes being on Egypt for a full 18 days and for weeks after Mubarak stepped down, media in general suffered several shortcomings. For one, foreign news outlets at first resorted to reporting from afar, until they could send parachute journalists into the field. With media around the world suffering from diminishing revenues, many international outlets rely heavily on local journalists hired as freelancers or stringers, if they cover the country at all. Their senior correspondents are flown in only once a major story, like

the uprising, breaks and is already happening. Very few outlets succeeded in covering the years and months leading up to the revolution.



What this results in is shallow journalism despite the best intentions to accurately contextualize breaking news, due to the journalist being thrown into unfamiliar territory with a limited network of sources. This also leads to most media relying on the same sources, offering little variety in the reporting. What we saw quickly developing were celebrity activists/protesters who were easily accessible to foreign media.

On the other hand, the local media faced different setbacks. Local journalists are not usually trained on how to cover events such as a revolution or mass uprising, or sudden outbreak of war: from not knowing how to manage hostile situations to not being fully equipped with the tools to break news as fast as it happens. For local journalists covering the uprising, there was a lot of learning on your feet, maneuvering out of tricky and risky situations, and constantly finding ways to overcome obstacles to reporting breaking news in a timely manner.

Lacking the protection of a proper syndicate, journalists in independent media outlets have to contend with the possibility of injury or arrest without the assurance of a proper body to support them in case of either.

One of the best sources of news, in turn, were the average citizens and protesters; though untrained, their innovative live reporting techniques turned them into accidental journalists. Equipping themselves with smart phones and cameras and safety gear, they were often covering events from the frontlines where local journalists may have feared to tread.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSTACLES

The factors to developing the media landscape are multi-pronged. On the one hand, state-run media needs to be overhauled and restructured, which requires political will on part of the powers that be. However, the dominant and currently all-powerful Muslim Brotherhood -with a president in office, a majority in the nation's Upper House of Parliament (or Shoura Council, which appoints chief editors of government newspapers), and a large bloc in the assembly drafting Egypt's new constitution- may not be keen on paving the way for true media reform.

Recent lawsuits against two media outlets for insulting the president are causing concern. In a joint statement, 18 human rights groups said, "We note that these attacks have come at the same time as statements from the president's office and from leaders of the Freedom and Justice Party [the political arm of the Brotherhood] which have warned against criticizing the president. These statements implicitly give a green light to attacks against media freedom using legal and security methods."

At the same time however, probably in a bid to curb wariness, President Morsi issued a law that bans the imprisonment of journalists accused of media-related offenses. Moreover, newly-appointed Information Minister Salah Abdel-Maqoud, a Brotherhood member, was quoted as saying that "media should be professional and give a platform to diverse opinions," adding that a committee comprised of prominent figures will be formed to draft new guidelines.

However, the ensuing reshuffle by the Shoura Council was seen as mostly placing Muslim Brotherhood members or people with similar ideologies as the chief editors of state-run papers.

Still, officials have promised to ease restrictions on press freedom and to create an independent body to monitor media practices, a step billed as one towards media self-regulation.

On the policy level, access to information and transparency also remain major obstacles to a truly independent media, and the longstanding censorship board has always been a drawback to true freedom of expression. Both issues are vital and unsolved.

On a more practical front, local journalists need training to face and cover the new political landscape and the now awakened street movement in Egypt. At times of breaking news, foreign media outlets would do better to link up with trusted and established local media outlets and partner on coverage, instead of relying on visiting correspondents.

On a broader scale, the powerful citizen journalism that has repeatedly reasserted itself in the most volatile times needs to be regulated, equipped and trained to optimize objectivity and credibility in coverage, as well as finding ways to offer a sustainable source of income for these citizens who often put their lives on the line.

Same goes for journalists from independent media outlets that are not supported by a recognized body. Online platforms -less costly than print or broadcast and easier to manage- need to be developed and funded by NGOs to support independent media and citizen journalism.

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SPEAK OUT, TAHIRIR, SPEAK OUT

FRANCISCO CARRIÓN

"Take pictures, please." Those were the only words that Boutros, the Coptic priest, addressed to me on the morning of October 10, 2011. Some twenty Christian protesters had been killed by the Army the day before in the vicinity of the public television broadcasting corporation's central building, and their bodies had been stored in that precarious Cairo morgue, where the priest led the convoy of volunteers. I remember that room of white and withered tiles which, in the absence of cooling, fought against the ravages of decomposition with the help of the weak blades of a fan. Then, the responsibility to tell it all -in spite of all the ethical questions that are sparked off by others' pain-, made journalism an essential exercise again. I usually put that heartbreaking scene of suffering together with the images I keep of the 18 days during which Tahrir Square in Cairo was the centre of the world. Both are pervaded by what the American journalist Truman Capote called "the demoralising abyss of reality." The Egyptians, tired of decades of corruption, impunity and autocracy, started on January 25, 2011 a journey with no end in sight yet. They peacefully took to the streets and turned the end of their fears into a historic event of international relevance.

From the very beginning, we as journalists tried to describe the tremendous social change that, after the triumph of the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, reached the most populous country in the Arab world. But what was the role of the international media in the uprisings? To answer this question I will mention some of the certainties I had the opportunity to further corroborate at the time. The most essential has to do with the way we work: no matter how much technological advances have connected the world, the reporter must be physically where transformation is forged. It is the only way to guarantee a certain quality. Obviously the final product is the result of many factors. Some depend on the person who communicates: his/her training, knowledge of the country concerned, clarity of vision, degree of honesty and commitment, capacity for sacrifice and ability to apprehend as many pieces of reality as possible, avoiding taking sides or too extensive "out-of-fields". All this could easily fail if the reporter had not the slightest idea of how to mend words and articulate the message.



Other limitations, however, are shaped by circumstances that can always get worse. In the timeline of the Egyptian uprisings, for example, there is a particularly dramatic date for journalists: January 28. That day, in a failed attempt to prevent mass demonstrations, the authorities interrupted telephony and Internet services. The main purpose of such measure was to cut the umbilical cord that had served to call the protests, but it actually affected those like me who had an obligation to denounce to the world one of the most brutal days, in which dozens of people died. The night the police retreated in disarray and the Army broke into the streets as lawlessness spread throughout the country, my story and that of other colleagues reached their destination just by chance. Most of us were freelancers equipped with a camera and a laptop but with no satellite telephone. Eventually, a TV crew granted me some minutes to dictate that note on police charges, tear gas, flames and stones hitting heads and bodies.

Even before it is transferred, the information is also the result of the publisher's approval, the space constraints and/or the indulgence of sections and media themselves under an identity crisis further aggravated by a profit and loss account in the red. That combination of personal, professional and business circumstances influenced, for example, the Spanish press coverage of the riots, one which helped set the alarm bells ringing in the international community. Somehow, we as reporters served as transmission belts for Western diplomacy, helping it to understand that change had become inevitable.

In retrospect, some have criticised a media coverage which, in their view, popularised terms such as the Arab Spring and ended up comparing Egypt's popular uprising with the democratic waves that swept Southern, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America in past decades. Moreover, those who think that way often reproach the pens that, like mine, told Egyptian citizens' victory in Tahrir square, for failing to anticipate the electoral triumph of the political arm of Islam. In my view, that was not the purpose of the humble daily work we were supposed to do during the uprising. The features, reports and interviews were meant to capture a very heterogeneous movement with no leadership and united around the circumstantial dream of overthrowing the autocrat. There was absolutely no question of creating historical texts or opinion platforms. The German poet and philosopher H. M. Enzensberger skilfully unravels a handful of requirements applicable to press reports: "Depth, patience, narrative skills and, above all, empathy, a capacity to delve into the issue that is being dealt with. It is a job that cannot be done if one comes with preconceived ideas. I have to approach things feigning almost ignorance, trying to capture the life experiences of those involved in the story".

The essayist recommends a "cold neutral approach" that does not lead inexorably to the well-trodden path of "demonstrating certain opinions." Then, after carrying out field research, the "dialectic of feeling" will have to be deployed. Perhaps it is rather unorthodox, but I have to admit that I cried when, on my way back from Tahrir, I tried to reconstruct the events through the testimony of the real protagonists. From what I was told by other colleagues, I was not the only one to feel that way. It is impossible to do good journalism in such dire circumstances as those that marked the days of the revolution without being overwhelmed by pain. In early February, what is known as the "Battle of the Camel", -the storming of the square by the dictator's forces on horseback and camels- made any attempt to maintain an emotional distance impossible. Thus, the danger to be avoided by any writer was that of mistaking one's commitment and sensitivity with taking on the leading role.

Beyond the world of emotions, did mainstream and alternative media coverage differ from each other? From my personal experience I would rather say no. Despite its geostrategic importance, Egypt is so many thousands of miles away from Spanish newsrooms as from the pockets that foot the bill for them. Without the historical and/or economic interferences that do come into play in Morocco, we journalists enjoyed considerable freedom of action even regarding the thorniest and most controversial issues, such as the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in the twilight of the tyrant. As far as I'm concerned, I had total autonomy to suggest approaches and make news reports. This is why, instead

of focusing on the differences between large and small media, or between mainstream and alternative press, I consider the two categories proposed by British journalist David Randall in *El Periodista Universal* most appropriate, namely: good and bad journalism. Curiosity, the search for truth and/or an endless dissatisfaction mark the difference between the two. At the time when the Egyptians were living dangerously, there were as many exquisite chronicles on the planned organisation of Cairo square or the causes of the public outcry as empty news feeds with free spectacular doses of blood, tanks or fire.

It would be absurd to deny that we all made mistakes, the most common being -partly influenced by our Anglo-Saxon fellows- that of putting faces to the protests. An obsession that, for no good reason, created spokespersons and gave media fame to what a U.S. magazine called the "Tahrir generation". Most of its members shared the same profile: upper-middle class, well educated and westernised youth. That reckless exercise in metonymy died a month after the triumph of the riots, when, contrary to the views of an elite that was connected to Twitter or Facebook yet away from public opinion, an overwhelming majority ratified by referendum the roadmap of the military and the Islamists. After this setback, we learned that one of the driving goals of citizen journalism is to give voice to the silenced, those who cannot achieve notoriety through 140-character tweets, nor do they know the miracle of Skype conversations.

The best way to get it right is to cooperate with local journalists. They are often the best resource for identifying sources, contrasting information or shedding light on grey areas. A source as valuable as social movements, already somewhat powerful when the protests broke out. Mubarak's Egypt differed from neighbouring Libya precisely in that it contained loopholes which allowed to nurture a nascent civil society. Since 2004, the Kefaya (Enough) Movement, which counted among its most prominent members some opposition journalists, had led the recovery of public spaces. In the two years before the uprising, 2,200 workers' and civil servants' protests were organised. A turning point was reached in April 6, 2008, the stage being a textile strike in the industrial town of Mahalla al Kobra. It is there, in the Nile Delta, that the April 6 youth movement was born, which would be one of the 2011 protest convenors. Both organisations were extremely useful for foreign journalists in the early stages of the riots and became a source of information on the mobilisations. It was also imperative to resort to those local entities which already existed under the dictatorship, as for example the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre for human rights, transformed into the logistics headquarters of the revolutionaries and the target of the secret services; the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and its powerful network of lawyers, who denounced army arrests and acts of torture; the Nadim Centre for the

Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture; and the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information. Several months before the riots, the April 6 movement and the Egyptian Democratic Academy gave birth to a movement that was based on the U.S. professor Gene Sharp's theory of "nonviolent resistance," aimed at undermining institutions through civil disobedience actions. The smashed skull and disfigured face of Khaled Said, a young man beaten to death by two policemen in June 2010, was the spark that ignited the ire of those behind the shout of "Bread, freedom and social justice," or simply "dignity".

Fortunately, the associative network expanded during the transition and focused its efforts on denouncing the violations by the military junta. This led to the emergence of platforms such as "No to Military Trials for Civilians," that gave voice to the more than 12,000 civilians tried by military courts, or "Kazibun" (Liars), an itinerant project that went into the poorest neighbourhoods in the country to tell people about the military and police repression freed from the fetters of state-owned media. Social movements humanise journalism, and contact with their leaders allows for the tracing of those stories that should be made known to our readers. I sought their help, for example, to trace the tragedy of Samira Ibrahim, a young woman aged 25 who back in March 2011 was one of the Egyptian subjected to virginity tests by the armed forces.

To bridge the ideological divide and correct errors, journalism needs the first-person testimony of those who suffer. In this ongoing battle, achieving a deeper understanding of the social fabric, cultivating relationships with journalists and local activists, questioning everything and being accurate, and going for permanent stays instead of occasional visits mark the beats of that authentic journalism which reconciles us with a battered profession. One whose darts make those in power feel uncomfortable when speaking through Samira Ibrahim: "My father taught me to break down the walls of fear. Everyone else remained silent. I did not."

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///YO SOY 132

MOVEMENT:

MEXICO



ON MARCH 11, 2012, KNOWN AS “Black Friday”, PRI’s presidential candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, was expelled by shouting students at the Universidad Iberoamericana, protesting against his repressive policies against social protests during his time as governor of the State of Mexico.

THAT NIGHT, THE MOST POWERFUL TELEVISION channel in the country, Televisa, an ally of PRI, accused the students to be supporters of the leftist candidate, Andrés M. Lopez Obrador.

IMMEDIATELY, THE 131 STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED the event recorded themselves on video showing their student ID cards to demonstrate that they were real students. These videos reached a viral effect and the next day, thousands of videos were posted on the internet in solidarity under #YoSoy132.

FROM THE BEGINNING, THE #YOSOY132 MOVEMENT demanded the democratization of the media. The power of social networks allowed them to break into the presidential campaign and then jump to traditional Mexican media.

IN A COUNTRY WHERE 2 MAJOR enterprises hold 95% of television concessions, and where press freedom is often paid with the lives of journalists, the #YoSoy132 movement managed to get the attention of the media to a different reality. The vindications of the students were covered by the main traditional media.

THE COUNTER-HEGEMONIC POWER OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

RAÚL ROMERO

THE CONTEXT

Mexico is a country where few have much, and many have nothing. Of the more than 112 million people living in the country, 40 million are poor and 12 million more live in extreme poverty. Nevertheless, there are 10 Mexicans on the Forbes list of the “Richest People in the World 2011”, among which is Carlos Slim (the richest man on the planet), Joaquín Guzmán (one of the world’s major drug traffickers), Ricardo Salinas (the primary stockholder for TV Azteca) and Emilio Azcárraga (president of Grupo Televisa).

Mexico is currently suffering one of the worst crises in its history: as a result of the “war against drugs” unleashed by Felipe Calderón in 2006, over 70,000 people have been killed, over 20,000 are missing, and more than 250,000 have been displaced. The conflict is of such magnitude that the French newspaper *Le Monde* called it “the world’s deadliest in recent years”¹¹.

In this context, on 1 July 2012, 128 senators, 500 congressmen, and the President of the Republic were elected. The electoral process was not without surprises. In fact, it was marked by an intense social mobilization against Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN), a candidate for the *Compromiso por México* (Commitment for Mexico) coalition -composed of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) and the Mexican Green Party (Partido Verde Ecologista de México, PVEM)- who was identified by a sector of society as the media’s candidate and the symbol of a corrupt authoritarian past¹².

11 *Le Monde*. Mexico, la spirale de la barbarie, 23 August 2012..

12 One must keep in mind that the PRI ruled for 70 years in Mexico.

"BLACK FRIDAY"

On Friday, 11 May, Peña Nieto visited the Ibero-American University (Universidad Iberoamericana) to present his campaign proposals to the student community at the institution. During the question and answer session, the attendees questioned Peña Nieto about his poor performance as governor of the State of Mexico. A recurring theme was the repression of members and supporters of the Community Front in Defense of Land in San Salvador Atenco; events during which the National Human Rights Commission¹³ noted 207 people were arrested, 26 women were sexually assaulted, and 5 foreigners were illegally expelled from the country. At the insistence of his critics, EPN took the microphone and in a challenging tone said it had been a “personally determined action” and that he had ordered the operation “to restore order and peace using the legitimate right of the Mexican State to use public force”.

The response provoked anger amongst the attendees, who soon increased the tone of the protest and chased the candidate out to the university’s exit shouting: “The [Ibero-American University] doesn’t love you; the [Ibero-American University] doesn’t love you!”.

When interviewed about the events at the Ibero-American University, Arturo Escobar (PVEM), Emilio Gamboa and Joaquín Codwell (PRI) stated they had information that the protesters were not students at the institution but “porro thug elements” or “infiltrators” at the behest of the left-wing candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Many television and radio outlets -primarily those run by the Televisa corporation- repeatedly broadcast this same version.

In the evening, the social networks were swamped with criticisms and information about what had happened, most of which questioned the biased coverage by the television duopoly and its manifest display of favouritism towards EPN. Videos recorded with cell phones, laptops, and tablets were circulating everywhere. Cyber activists named that day Black Friday.

13 National Human Rights Commission. Informe preliminar de las acciones realizadas en el caso de los hechos de violencia suscitados en los municipios de Texcoco y San Salvador Atenco (Preliminary report regarding the actions taken in the case of the violent events that took place in the municipalities of Texcoco and San Salvador Atenco). Mexico, 22 May 2006.

#YOSOY132 AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF MEDIA

Three days after the events at the Ibero-American University, a group of students that had participated in the protests uploaded a video to YouTube that started off by saying: "Dear Joaquín Codwell, Arturo Escobar, Emilio Gamboa and media outlets of questionable neutrality. We use our right of reply to disprove you. We are students of the Ibero-American University, not thug elements, not porros... and nobody trained us for anything." The video then shows the faces of 131 youth who, with identification cards in hand, show themselves to be students of that institution. The video went viral. On Twitter, the hashtag #YoSoy132 -created as a means of showing solidarity with the criticism of the students in the video-, became a worldwide trending topic.

While the main news outlets of Televisa attempted to play off the impact of the protests, people in universities and on social networks began to organise. Students of the Ibero-American University created the group #másde131 and fostered the creation of the Inter-collegiate Coordinator, which brought together students from various public and private secondary and higher educational institutions. The primary task of the Coordinator was to organise a network of networks for the thousands of groups that were adding up.

The media blockade imposed by the duopoly of Televisa-TV Azteca broke quickly thanks to the activism of youth on social networks and media coverage by independent media and small and medium-sized communication enterprises that sought to be part of the business. Reality could no longer be hidden: a social movement had been born and its primary cause was the democratisation of the media. The First Communiqué by the Coordinator of the #YoSoy132 Movement stated: "In essence, our movement seeks the democratisation of the media in order to guarantee information that is transparent, pluralistic and based on minimum standards of objectivity so as to promote critical conscience and thinking." It is important to remember that in Mexico, there are 468 television stations, of which 256 belong to Televisa and 180 belong to TV Azteca. In other words, 93% of television channels are controlled by these corporations¹⁴.

14 Proceso Magazine 1838, 22 January 2012.

CONSOLIDATION

#YoSoy132 grew rapidly. The spontaneity and playful and festive character of the demonstrations arose much sympathy across Mexican society. A new and broader organisational structure soon became necessary: the Intercollegiate Coordinator was overwhelmed by the very success of the movement. Moreover, all its members wanted to voice their opinions and be part of the decision-making process. An air of distrust of politics could be felt among the crowds and progress could only be achieved by listening to as many voices as possible.

That is how May 30 came about, the date upon which over 6,000 youth attended the first meeting of #YoSoy132 at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México). At first there was a bit of a chaos: some students focused all their proposals on the elections, others argued for a need to transcend the electoral process, and there were those who spoke movingly about overthrowing the State and its bourgeois democracy.

Little by little order came out of chaos. 15 working groups were established to address issues such as Memory and historical consciousness, Political positioning, Organisational structure, etc. From that meeting, the principles emerged that were later ratified: #YoSoy132 was defined as a social, political and permanent, non-partisan, secular, plural, peaceful, student-based, humanist, autonomous, and anti-neoliberal movement. There was also another aspect that began to materialize there and that would be ratified later: the anti-Peña Nieto character of the movement. No binding decision emerged from that meeting, which is why the first assembly was called right there. Only two representatives (spokesman and delegate) per institution would attend. It was also established as a principle of the movement that the representation would rotate.

In the first assembly of the movement, the Intercollegiate Coordinator evolved into a logistical group and the assembly moved to become the premier body of discussion and decision. Representatives of over 100 schools, faculties, and universities attended. Civil mobilization had definitely become a movement, as its organisational structure evidenced. One month later, it was announced that the movement had over 52 representatives abroad, all tied in via Facebook, Skype, or independent platforms.

THE DEBATE AND SIEGE OF TELEVISA

At its second assembly, #YoSoy132 decided to convene a debate for the candidates running for President of Mexico. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Gustavo Quadri, and Josefina Vázquez Mota accepted, though Enrique Peña Nieto did not, arguing that there was no guarantee of impartiality and respect due to the anti-Peña Nieto character of the movement. The debate took place on 19 June and was broadcast primarily on the Internet. Added to the value of the debate itself, which was organised by and relied on the participation of various students, the youth sent a more important underlying message to the television networks, one which would be later summarised in a single phrase: “The fifth power has been born, they are the social networks, and they are ours. #YoSoy132.”

Another event that caught the attention of the national and international press was the symbolic siege of the offices of Televisa in Chapultepec, Mexico City, which occurred on 27 July, the same day the London Olympics began. The event lasted 24 hours and was highlighted once again by recreational and artistic activities. The police responsible for building security were surprised to see that the youth did not confront them; on the contrary, they read poetry to them and even invited them to dance. The news travelled across borders: media outlets like The Guardian, Reuters, BBC and El País covered the event.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

#YoSoy132 revitalized the social movement in Mexico and thus managed to link itself to other social and political organisations that do not identify with or feel represented by the political parties. Similarly, it managed to influence and transform the story behind the electoral process: while television networks and dominant groups in the country profiled Enrique Peña Nieto as the clear winner of the elections, the movement helped highlight and disseminate a different story: that of imposition.

The youth movement has transcended the electoral situation, largely because the demand for the democratisation of the media and its anti-neoliberal nature allow it to continue fighting for a national project different from the present one. However, the imposition of EPN as president of Mexico having been achieved, the movement is called upon to rethink itself and flesh out its demands, responding to three questions: how to democratise the media, how to reverse the negative effects of neoliberalism, and what are the real alternatives to the current economic system. The movement’s future depends heavily on the answers to these questions.

#YoSoy132 understood perfectly that to reach more people, it must have a good communication strategy, which it has achieved to some extent: not only has it taken maximum advantage of social networks, it has also created its own media ([#YoSoy132media.org](#)), formed strategic alliances with free and independent media outlets (encouraging the creation of the assembly [#YoSoy132-Free Media](#)) and, through the communication commission, built fraternal relations with journalists from traditional media.



The movement's strategy involved making virtual social networks its primary means of dissemination and organisation of the struggle. Unfortunately, the use of computers and the Internet remains available to only one quarter of Mexican society. That is why, if the movement wishes to grow and remain a key player in national political life, it must stop regarding virtual social networks as sacred and strengthen flesh and bone social networks, that is, counting on grassroots organisation and opting for a viral policy that generates a network of networks that goes beyond just Internet users.

The emergence of #YoSoy132 on the public stage also meant a fight over information in the virtual arena. In this way, the movement confronted and witnessed the interests of Televisa, which also helped prove that Mexico continues being a country of formal powers and actual powers, and that critical decisions are taken in accordance with the political and economic interests of the latter.

Like other social movements around the world, #YoSoy132 is characterised by its ideological pluralism and by the flat hierarchy of its organisational structure. Consistent with its demands, which fundamentally reveal the need for a participative democracy in all spheres of life, the members of the movement call for a new policy where all ideologies coexist and where there is no supreme leader who dictates the direction of the movement, but rather that every action and agreement be developed in assembly. It is not just lip service that every document issued by the movement is signed with: For an authentic democracy: #YoSoy132.

Finally, the cyber and informatics revolution that began in the early 1980s led to changes in people's daily lives, and those youth who grew up in that period have understood it. They now use new technology to communicate and build a counter-hegemonic power to produce a world that is more just. Mexico will definitely never be the same.

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AN ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF **#YO SOY 132** MOVEMENT

MAJO SISCAR BANYULS

The history of contemporary social movements cannot be written without taking into account how the media represents them. Their discourse determines, for the most part, the impact of the movements on public opinion and the institutional agenda. Students who joined #YoSoy132 were sure of that when they began their allegations of informative bias and the capacity of the media to build a president. That is why they prioritised their presence in the media agenda. First, they found an alliance in the network that allowed them to break into the campaign. But they soon jumped into the public forum. In a country where two media enterprises own 95% of television outlets and freedom of the press is a right that is sold to the highest bidder, or is even defended to the death by journalists, they managed to shift the spotlight onto them. They also carved out a place for themselves outside of Mexico.

THE **#YO SOY 132** MOVEMENT AND ITS EMERGENCE IN INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

To understand the international media coverage of the movement, one has to bear in mind that foreign media cannot allocate the same amount of space to it as the national media. Unlike what is requested of the local reporter, which is more episodic, i.e. it adheres to the specific events chosen as a function of the media interests; the correspondent tends to address the most sensational events, those that can compete with the amount of unique information obtained worldwide. And they tend to do it more thematically, using an analysis of the facts and their implications, without the pressure of directly attacking or defending the interests of their form of media, as it is not their country.

#YoSoy132 did not generate that sensationalism until a few days after its constitution. As international journalists, we saw the protest at the Ibero-American University, which sowed the seed of the movement, and the first demonstrations as local actions by some

students who rejected a candidate. Sensationalism arrived with the anti-Enrique Peña Nieto march on Saturday, 19 May. A demonstration with anonymous organisers, not against a government, but against a presidential candidate, mobilised tens of thousands of people. The desire for change, the rejection of the return to the old regime as expressed by the youth was a sentiment shared by a large part of Mexican society and came into play during the elections. In journalistic parlance, it was news. Between 20 and 25 May, the #YoSoy132 movement started appearing in the pages of international newspapers.

ANALYSIS OF THE NARRATIVES OF #YOSOY132 IN THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

To perform a more detailed analysis of the image of the movement projected internationally, I have reviewed ten written publications, six mainstream ones and four alternative ones. I chose print media only in order to be able to use the same elements of study, taken from a critical analysis of the discourse. The specific selections intend to reflect the diversity of Western media regarding overall readership and strategic importance and influence relating to Mexico. My sample therefore covers information published between 12 May and 31 August from the following mainstream publications: El País and El Mundo (Spain), The Guardian (Great Britain), The New York Times and Los Angeles Times (USA), Página 12 (Argentina). As far as alternative media, I chose: Periódico Diagonal and Periodismo Humano (Spain), Waging on Violence and Narconews (USA). With these, I cover the broad ideological spectrum and a wide latitude of Western thought.



Having said that, due to the nature of this article I will not carry out a detailed analysis of each bit of information, but rather I will touch on some specific details I find relevant to recreating the narrative presented on the movement, looking at those perspectives and the alternatives proposed.

ANALYSIS OF COMMERCIAL MEDIA

El País is the first publication, among those reviewed, to speak of the movement. The first time it is mentioned is on 20 May following the march against Peña Nieto. The demonstration was not called upon by the movement, so it still did not appear as the protagonist of the news story. It just makes reference to the acts of repudiation towards the candidate that took place at the Ibero-American University nine days earlier and mentions that a group under the banner #YoSoy132 has been organized against the candidate and against “his alleged privileged relationship with the media” and that the group seeks “greater neutrality in coverage of the electoral process.” However, it does not use the activists as a source, though it uses a direct quote from them directed at Peña Nieto to respond to the protest. This coverage of the country’s events is significant insofar as it is the best-selling foreign newspaper in Mexico and Latin America. The following morning, on 21 May, Televisa (which is a shareholder in the PRISA group) broke the silence regarding the movement and interviewed three students in the Ibero-American University on its highest-rating morning programming, *Primero Noticias*, known for setting the Mexican media agenda. That appearance apparently managed to convince the rest of the international media that the #YoSoy132 movement had become another player in the electoral campaign. Indeed, that week it reached the Spanish media, as well as American newspapers like the *Washington Post* (from the same editorial group as the *New York Times*) and the *Los Angeles Times*, the British media outlets *The Guardian* and the *BBC*, Venezuelan international television *Telesur*, and Arabic-language *Al Jazeera*. These highlighted the protests of thousands of students against media favouritism towards the PRI candidate in the presidential elections. The *BBC World* site, the international subsidiary of the prestigious British broadcast network, published an extensive commentary titled “Who are the #132 of Mexico?”, where it detailed the emergence of the movement and speculated on whether this was a “Mexican Spring.” The name spread like wildfire and the news was also broadcast in Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Switzerland.

In the Spanish edition of *El País* itself, on the day after the activists appeared on Televisa, the correspondent published a chronicle entitled “The angry Mexicans are born.” It em-

phasized that this was a university student movement and how this sector had emerged on the campaign scene. Yet it does not use the movement as a source. It is the correspondent who defines them. This is rather frequent in the various notes of other correspondents such as those from *El Mundo*, or the *New York Times*. In the electronic edition, there are indeed links to YouTube for the movement's events and videos where they speak, but the text refers only to experts in Mexican politics. In the *El País* article, one of them accuses the youth of being the "political arm" of the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). This association would appear with relative frequency in various publications, including *El País*, *El Mundo* or *The New York Times*, fitting in with the PRI discourse, who labelled them as *mamporreros*¹⁵.

Furthermore, it is notable that the correspondent used the adjective *enojados*¹⁶ to present them, as it is a confrontational term, which represents them as an antagonistic movement of negative, and not constructive, opposition. This narrative would go changing progressively in the Spanish newspaper's coverage as the weeks passed. In fact, in the third article in which they appear, they are again protagonists of the news: "The Mexican student movement defines itself against the candidate Peña Nieto" (31 May), and they are given their own voice. The report explains how the university assembly is organised, describes the environment, extends its position, and compares it to the 15M movement to make it more relevant to Spanish readers. To end, it poses the question of whether youth movements can change the course of the elections.

The movement increased its impact thanks to an article in the 7 June publication of *The Guardian*, "Computer files link TV dirty tricks to favourite for Mexico presidency: Network [Televisa] alleged to have sold favourable election coverage to top politicians." The investigation justified the claims of #YoSoy132 regarding electoral bias as well as some cables leaked from Wikileaks in subsequent days where the US ambassador confirmed it. Various media touched on it or mentioned it and in particular, *The Guardian* began focusing on the movement thereafter.

As elections approached, all of the press came together to present it as even more oxygen to fuel the campaign. In this sense, it is very interesting to note the presence of opinion articles on the movement. *El País* published seven, while one appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and another two in *The Guardian*. It should be noted that in general, the opinion pieces do not necessarily respond to the newspaper's editorial stance, but rather many

15 Translator's Note: a very derogatory term in Spanish original, used in the sense of "pawns".

16 Translator's Note: angry, annoyed

of them have differing ideologies to give the media outlet the appearance of plurality. Nonetheless, it still gave importance to the movement, as it is also noteworthy that all of the opinion articles, pure and edited as such, are written by Mexicans writing in support of #YoSoy132. In the various articles, they are presented as a political player that has burst onto the scene, with youthful participation and leadership that is valued, and the movement is recognised as a contribution to democracy.

There are some differences in opinion as to whether this was really a Mexican spring or not, or regarding its social impact and the changes it may bring about once Peña Nieto comes into power. But generally, their achievements are emphasised, like the fact that they had managed to ensure that the second debate was broadcast by the main television stations, that they had organised their own presidential campaign or, most of all, that they had removed from lethargy a society that seemed numb to these elections. On the other hand, The New York Times published a hybrid opinion article-report by Damian Cave, the chief correspondent for the Mexico office of the newspaper, which I would like to pause and reflect on. It is the first focus piece they published on the movement, on 11 June, after the second anti-Peña march and one month after the events at the Ibero-American University. Despite the delay in the focus piece, it is very extensive and questions whether or not this was truly a “Mexican spring”, evaluating what influence on institutional policy the movement would have, in comparison to the Arab spring. It highlighted that the Mexican media portrayed the youth as heroes and gave them much importance, and he intends to critically analyse it. To do so, he provides four arguments. Let us analyse these.

The first is a mockery of the movement’s assembly-style practices, stating that the participation in the assembly “was a scene ripe for satire” because representatives from 74 universities took turns grabbing the microphone for their two minutes of participation, and each ended their pledge with the motto of “we’re all 132” and “Until victory, forever!”. To conclude this argument, he states that after twelve hours of assembly, the students left without clear leaders and with over 250 varied declarations and proposals.

The second argument is that many people are excited about belonging to something, but the question is what exactly is that something. He answers that while the Arab spring movements had clearer objectives; #YoSoy132 is like Occupy Wall Street, with little structure and horizontal management. “If one of the 74 spokesmen is interviewed by the media, others will get jealous; if another focuses on a pet proposal while failing to mention the other 249 declarations, anger rises,” he alleges. For Cave, the horizontal structure is a weakness for the movement. This journalist’s position also appears in other media,

though in a more subtle form. For example, *El País* also discussed the first internal divisions (“Social networks spice up the elections in Mexico”, 22 June), and “doubt” their “multi-form structure.”



Going back to *The New York Times*, the third argument denies that it is a Mexican spring because it only “seeks to influence elections.” It also removes uniqueness from the movement by incorporating statements from a Mexico specialist who alleges that in Mexico, before each presidential election “protests increase by 30%,” and he assures that “students have a prominent place in Mexico’s dissidence hall of fame.”

The fourth reason counters that they are not changing the final results much because EPN keeps winning, but omits that the distance between him and the second place candidate was narrowing. He emphasises that it is a movement that is primarily student-based and centred in the capital, but that Mexican youth in general are more frustrated than mad, and that they are therefore apathetic. Thus, he points out that they can only aspire to be a “Mexican summer”, that is, a force to be reckoned with for the next government.

I stopped to reflect on this article because, though it is the one that most openly deals with the issue and at once groups together the criticisms progressively appearing in other media.

In general, these media issued notes where the main protagonist is the movement, framed by the context in which it emerged and its media impact in Mexico and on the electoral campaign. In some cases, they are used as a source of information, and what they say is

accepted without discussion, though in *El Mundo*, *El País* and *The New York Times*, the bases of the movement are explained: the opposition to Peña and the democratisation of the media, without explaining that the two go hand in hand. Furthermore, the opinion of the youth is often countered by PRI rectification that, as the protests grew, decided to turn its discourse and speak of the movement as a contribution to democracy that it also supports. They also include press notices.

After the elections, coverage of the movement began to drop off, to the point where much of it disappeared. For example, *El Mundo* published a press notice on 2 July about #YoSoy132 complaint about the manipulation of the elections, and the correspondent published an article on 8 July about the second large mobilization against fraud. Then there were no notices until 31 August, when they appear as secondary actors in an article about the Electoral Tribunal's ratification of Peña Nieto's victory. *The Guardian*, on its part, still dedicated a good portion of text to the siege of Televisa at the end of July. It chronicles the camp out, discussing the youthful and festive aspects of the movement positively, but reduces the demonstrations to prevent media manipulation and stops at "expressions of frustration, anger, and impatience that have appeared since the election results." These feelings of defeat were highlighted in other international media. In contrast, *The Guardian* tries to look to the future, and seeing through the opinions of the youth and experts on social movements, highlights that is a germinating seed. *El País* also moved in that direction, and continued its pre-election trend of being the international media outlet that gave the movement the greatest media coverage. Thus, on 3 August, the Spanish newspaper published in its print edition an indirect interview with one of the movement's spokespersons titled "132 is a reference right now", concluding that the student movement in Mexico will be another political actor.

On the other side of the Latin American continent, in Argentina, the three main newspapers echoed the movement with favourable treatment. *Página 12* gave it the greatest coverage, for reasons of political affiliation. Nonetheless, it hit the front pages in the print editions of *Clarín* and *La Nación*. It is also worth noting that #YoSoy132 had a certain following across the entire subcontinent.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

The four media outlets I decided to review, despite their different points of view and objectives, for which I chose them, are a sample of alternative media, a crack in the media system. Among the tasks that inspire them is providing a critical view of reality, though it may stay on the sidelines, while in prioritising their focus on ordinary people, they avoid government management or partisan politics, as conventional media tend to report on those. Thus, none of these four media outlets were interested in addressing the partisan evolution of the elections and focused on the #YoSoy132 movement, with which they aligned themselves openly.

First of all, we must note that financing is always an obstacle for independent media. Thus, coverage is more spaced out in time. However, it is owing to that spacing out of coverage that we find lengthier and more detailed reporting in *Diagonal*, *Periodismo Humano* and *Waging on Violence* than in mainstream forms of press. There is a clear stance in favour of the movement, and criticisms are either absent or very light. Members of the movement are presented from the start as political actors who can change the course of things, highlighting the importance of the emergence of a movement that wishes to advance democracy in a system in crisis like Mexico, pausing particularly on the means by which they are organised. They praise the movement's horizontal practices, which they highlight as a virtue, unlike the commercial media, and give a consistent voice to the youth themselves. On the other hand, it is more directly accusatory of the PRI, to which it gives no voice, and especially against Enrique Peña Nieto, explaining, for example, the brutality of repression which he ordered at a protest in Atenco in 2006 when he was governor of the State of Mexico, in the zone surrounding the capital. The outcome of that mobilisation: two youth killed, dozens arrested, and 27 women sexually assaulted, is omitted in mainstream media. The few economic interests of these media outlets allow them to more freely criticise the subject who was emerging and establishing himself as a winning candidate. Similarly, they take a broader view at the irregular practices during the presidential campaign -buying votes, computing errors, media manipulation, etc.- that underlie allegations of electoral tampering. In short, they incorporate more information about the roots of the conflict, the reasons for the emergence of a movement wishing to democratise media to advance democracy. They even discuss what paths could be furthered -unlike the mainstream media- in concrete proposals of #YoSoy132 aimed at building up a new media and democratic system.



Narconews also does this in detail, and although its coverage of the movement only started on 1 June, it is the outlet that gave it the greatest coverage. This can be partly explained by the fact that they have an office in Mexico with one fixed correspondent and various collaborators. Thus, they have over a dozen notices focusing on or mentioning the movement, as well as reporting on allegations of electoral tampering by Peña Nieto. Narconews not only performs an exhaustive analysis of the movement, but also issues notices about details with symbolic anecdotes, like how a policeman left the security perimeter and joined the movement, something left out of all other media examined. This media outlet takes communicative militancy to the extreme, by linking itself to the movement, as seen in the title of the first notice on 1 June: "In Mexico, Finally a Revolt against the Media." This dynamic is repeated in several notices, in the titles and the text, which in most cases are more opinion articles than reporting. It thus appears as a means of expression of the movement, by publishing training sessions on non-violent resistance organized by #YoSoy132.

So, the informational weaknesses of these media with regards to the movement lie in the balance of information. There is an almost total identification with the movement and its demands, to the point where they posit that it can really produce changes in the electoral result. Though this vision could present a source of empowerment for #YoSoy132, it misses the constructive criticism that is normally the hallmark of independent media. In this sense, Narconews maintains critical judgment only from the perspective of wanting to set the tone of the movement and come to demand more radical positions.

PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERACTION BETWEEN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE MEDIA

As we have seen, the international media recognized #YoSoy132 as a major player in these presidential elections and painted them in a positive light. There are hardly any traces of criminalizing the movement, due its stance on non-violence and aim to achieve consensus on social democratisation. However, I think we can identify several problems and provide some responses regarding the coverage:

- **There are certain differences between commercial and independent media**, especially because the former do not wish to close their doors to the president-elect, as they will need to obtain information from him over the next six years. As such, even when Peña was elected, his kind words towards the movement are highlighted, despite it being a double-edged sword that seems more like a party strategy to clean up its image. Even after his ratification as president on 30 August, some coverage was provided to #YoSoy132 to describe its position critical of Peña. Alternative media instead aligned themselves directly with the movement and continue to observe it even as it had less of a presence on the streets while it restructured. That brings us to our second point.
- **It is difficult to maintain a presence in the international media once the protest cycle wanes.** Journalism oriented towards coexistence and democratisation would continue to report on it after the protest had deflated, but traditional journalism re-directs itself immediately to the next conflict. It calls for immediate headlines, drama, and emotion in storytelling. But democratisation is a process, not everyday news. To cover it, one would have to explore the complexity of the situation and of the players, see how they are reconfiguring themselves and what progress or setbacks there are.
- **The principle of proxemics or the proximity criterion.** Citizens are more interested in a protest on their street corner than a hundred on the other side of the world. In the case of #YoSoy132, there is a complicity with the youth movements that arose in 2011 like the “Indignant” movement in Spain or “Occupy” in the US, which favours giving it coverage. But there are some distances that are insurmountable, and obviously it will not have as much of a presence in the international media as in the national media. Nonetheless, there are certain factors that help. For example, in the Los Angeles Times, coverage was wider than in The New York Times -twelve articles compared to three- due to the large quantity of potential readers of Mexican origin in

California. Similarly, due to its interests in Mexico, Spanish media give it more attention than other European media outlets. To facilitate these connections, #YoSoy132 should build communications channels with international movements. For example, they could have organised joint press conferences and called selected international media in advance when representatives of 15M and of Chilean and American students came to visit them.

- **The work dynamics of international media.** The correspondent is more of an interpreter of Mexican reality than a street reporter. He has to cover a variety of topics that range from politics to culture, violence or economic topics. As such, he or she is not a journalist specialised in a concrete area -in this case social movements- and more often than not, they end up being the primary source for news agencies or local media, which rehashes external observer analysis and a few interviews. Large media correspondents do not systematically attend marches or assemblies, except in specific cases where it is foreseen that they will be newsworthy. For them, the movements would need a defined agenda and clear communication strategy, with an easily identifiable and locatable spokesperson. It should be noted that due to its innovative and dynamic spontaneous generation, #YoSoy132 was defining itself progressively. Though this could be a virtue, it led to the majority of its criticisms.
- **The horizontal and multi-form structure of the movement made it vulnerable to being discounted by politicians and certain media.** Correspondents, covering both the institutional policy and the campaign, were put off by an organisation that was not vertical and had no single spokesperson or unidirectional communication system. In the first few weeks, not even the students had a clear idea of where the movement was going and its voice was being channelled through improvised interviews at marches or very young spokespersons. After the first general assembly, mechanisms were established for external communication, which facilitated the presence of media at most of the assemblies -except for some closed-door discussions- and determined public spokespersons, press conferences, and an information portal. There were certainly some isolated episodes where local reporters were told off. But in general, and especially in the face of international media, the movement proved to be very interested in making itself known. Its criticism of communication media was coupled with an awareness of its power and a clear intention of counting on the media as a pillar of an informed citizenry. In this sense, various correspondents interviewed indicated the willingness of the students to provide them with informa-

tion, though they also recognized that the long assemblies and multitude of cells were the first hurdle. Notwithstanding, once the communications commission was appointed, one needed only attend one of the events, find the youth in charge of the commission, and they would provide the phone numbers or contacts to get the right people in touch for interviews about each topic. And prior to that, they were easily found via Twitter.

- **Criticism of an unclear agenda.** As the movement grew, so did its aims. That made its definition more difficult in the media, used to tight, summarised messages. Thus, the majority of the media focused on its demand for pluralism and the rejection of Peña Nieto, without paying attention to constructive proposals in concrete policies. There needed to be a concrete stance on each topic, as the movement did with its proposal for media democratisation at the end of August.
- **Over identification of independent or alternative media with the movement.** Objectivity is a myth in all journalism, but journalistic ethics require plural and balanced reporting. In the very configuration of alternative media is the premise that those in power -parties, politicians, corporations,...- already have the loudest voice in mainstream media, which is why they prioritise other voices. But sometimes they fall into the trap of reverse information bias. And this generates a perception of partiality that may delegitimize these media themselves, which certainly have an essential role in the media system.

In short, we must be aware of the media as another political player. We must know that they tend to prioritise coverage of the conflict, but also that their discourse is full of cracks and holes that journalists and social movements can widen. #YoSoy132 has managed to carve out some space by adhering to consensus regarding the struggle for democracy. On the other hand, the Internet emerges as an uncontrollable counterweight that works as they do, horizontally, without a leader or guiding sector. Its ability to disseminate information makes clear that the few complaints from the mainstream media about the non-traditional means of the #YoSoy132 movement are stereotypes. However, it is a task that requires working together to facilitate complex media coverage, respecting journalistic ethics and in the search to expand democracy, even in the media.

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#YOSOY132: THE YOUTH OF THE NATION STIR UP COLLECTIVE DIALOGUE

DANIELA E. REA GÓMEZ

TURN OFF THE TV

The first time I went to a #YoSoy132 student protest, it was to march with them. It was the afternoon of 23 May at the foot of the “Pillar of Light” monument, inaugurated by President Calderón to celebrate the Bicentennial of Independence, renamed by citizens as the “monument to corruption” due to the irregularities surrounding its construction.

Three weeks had passed since the so-called “Black Friday”, 11 May, when the PRI’s presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto was expelled from the Ibero-American University by shouting students who condemned his repressive policy against social protest when he was the governor of the State of Mexico¹⁷. Six years ago, the then governor authorised police repression against florists, ending with the death of two adolescents, the sexual assault of nearly 30 women by the police, and the arrest of over 200 social activists.

Things could have ended there, with that image of the candidate fleeing through the university’s halls surrounded by bodyguards. Instead, the national leader of the party accused the youth of that private university of being “porro thug elements” and “infiltrators”, in an attempt to discredit the authenticity of the claims, and the students’ ability to be and think for themselves. That night, primetime news on Televisa, the largest Spanish-speaking television network and a clear ally of Peña Nieto, aired the truth according to the politicians: the youth who had shouted at the PRI candidate were supporters of leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

17 All the videos referred to in this article were online as of 18/09/2012. Video: “¡ASESINO, FUERA! Reclaman Atenco A Peña Nieto En La Ibero” (“ASSASSIN, OUT! Peña Nieto confronted about Atenco at the Ibero-American University”): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSEmgX296Qo>. Video: “Abuchean y Avientan Zapato A Peña Nieto En La Ibero” (“Peña Nieto Booed and Given the Boot at the Ibero-American University”) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h147nDmVPHM>



Then, a second trench was dug. The next day, Rodrigo Serrano and Ana Rolón summoned their friends at the Ibero-American University through Facebook and called them to show their faces and university student IDs on tape so as to prove they are neither “porro thug elements” nor “infiltrators”; they totalled 131 students¹⁸. The response, aimed at politicians and television networks -and other official media- had a viral effect that mobilized students of other public and private universities, who showed their solidarity with them through the hashtag #YoSoy132 and marched on the television network offices to demand truthful reporting.

One of those marches took place on May 23; the streets were crowded. Male and female students painting banners on the ground, hanging cardboard televisions on their heads, shouting slogans such as “turn off the TV, turn on the truth,” “TV makes you stupid”, “I read, I don’t watch Televisa”, “we are not one, we are not a hundred, sell-out press, count us correctly” took over the streets. There was no path; we walked where the momentum took us, 500, 3,000, 6,000 demonstrators.

We are children of the massacres and student repressions, of the dirty war, of the economic crises, of the senseless violence, of the profound corruption, of the rampant impunity, of the abandoned education, of a predominantly sexist society, of gender violence, of ideological and material domination over our way of thinking and way of life, of the abandoned countryside and humiliating work... We are the children of a new Mexico that cries ‘never again!’.

(DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, 11 JUNE 2012)

¹⁸ Video: “131 alumnos de la ibero responden (no son acarreados ni porros)” (“131 students of the Ibero-American University respond (we are neither infiltrators nor were we smuggled in)”) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOt44rFV-Rs&feature=related>

In a country drowned in blood, where terrible atrocities were being committed -beheaded and butchered bodies, people hung from bridges-, where both the slaughterers and the slaughtered were mostly young, why did young people take to the streets shouting for the democratisation of the media?

It would be worthwhile to take a step back in history. Since the second half of the last century, Grupo Televisa -a corporation that includes television, radio, written press, theatre, and internet outlets- has greatly influenced the education of Mexican families. In 1968, it evinced that proximity to power which #YoSoy132 questions: on primetime news, it was said that there were only 20 deaths in the 2 October student massacre. That imposition of their truth has been continuously present -in the cases of the massacre of peasants in Aguas Blancas, the PRI presidential victories in 1998 and 1994, the massacre of indigenous peoples in Acteal, and the repression at Atenco under the orders of Peña Nieto, then governor of the State of Mexico- until today, with the creation of a presidential candidate rooted in television, Peña Nieto.

The students were able to amass their reflections and launched their slogan: democratisation of the media. They are, as suggested by the journalist Roberto Zamarripa in the newspaper *Reforma*, the first Mexican generation that has not had their cultural norms and education come from television, who since childhood witnessed the growth of the internet and from there joined the adult world, with access to information that the traditional media hides, omits, or despises.

- "We are putting ourselves out there because they do not represent us. We no longer believe in representative democracy; we seek participatory democracy," Rodrigo Serrano, of the Ibero-American University, told me a few days after the event.

In this framework, the war on drugs launched by the government has primarily had the youth as its victims: criminalised, killed, harassed, they lost their right to discover, learn, and err. Yet it could be that the cause that made them take the streets was not the end to the war, since the Movement had its epicenter in Mexico City, which until now has been removed from the scenes of terror present in other states of the country, and because its origin was a private school, whose students have most of their needs guaranteed.

That afternoon, during the march, the people on the streets, from the balconies or from their cars, greeted the demonstration with their fists raised, applauding, and we responded equally excited with "the conscious populace unites with the contingent." That after-

noon, which soon became night, we owned the city; we walked it at our leisure, along main avenues, and took the Zócalo, the country's main plaza. That night, for the first time in a long time, we felt powerful.

MEETING WITH THE OTHER

In the midst of hollow, predestined elections, where opinion poles stated that Peña Nieto would win the Presidency, as he had a comfortable lead of nearly 20 points, #YoSoy132 sent shock waves through the political arena. While Televisa initially suggested they were linked to the left and only gave voice to PRI political leaders, the youth, with their protests, forced them to cover the demonstrations. On 18 May, on primetime news, eight minutes were devoted to the demonstration. A hitherto unheard of fact, when you consider that they once erased coverage (tarnishing its image) of the President of the Senate for his support to electoral reform, which affected the corporation's interests.

In the following days, the students held intercollegiate assemblies, meetings that convened representatives from over a hundred universities from across the country, to debate the principles and plans of action leading up to the first of July presidential elections. All had more or less the same plan: they summoned the press, but closed the doors for fear that internal conflict might be used to discredit the Movement. They demanded transparency of the media, but forbade giving interviews to learn about their organizational process. At the beginning, a group of youth known as "the coordinator" spontaneously served as interlocutor with the press, but little by little, in order to prevent leadership from emerging, the Intercollegiate Assembly asked them to stop making statements. Then emerged the "spokespersons" who, on a rotating basis, would read terse statements to inform the press of their resolutions. The stubbornness even caused the media to protest outside the assemblies a couple of times.

The start of the coverage was marked by distrust. The dialogue between the media and students took time to start up and flow. Perhaps it was due to prejudice on both sides, the youth of #YoSoy132, many of whom were new to social mobilisation, continued to view all the media as "sell-outs", while the media, with certain arrogance, underestimated their capacity for action, especially because the Movement, breaking the tradition in the country, had started in a private school.

In the Mexican context, where the work of the press is limited, and almost constrained to the dissemination of official content, of facts without any explanations, the #YoSoy132

Movement posed a challenge: that of covering not only their actions and internal processes, but also delving into the substance of their speech, what they say and how they do it. How could the Movement be covered in the country's media context, marked by a simplistic tendency to tell the facts without explaining them?

The Mexican press is embroiled in a vicious cycle: the focus is on immediacy and does not seek to carry out political journalism made understandable to the public.

At the same time, coverage was hampered by the horizontality of the Movement, the lack of leadership and the wild swaying of its path-every step, every action seemed to border upon the edge due to the expectation of a summons or the effect it would cause. Every night, fracture was looming, and every day they would surprise the country with a new action: the marches swelled to 100,000 protesters, the citizens' presidential debate¹⁹-which Peña Nieto did not attend- was transmitted over YouTube as an exercise of that democratisation of the media they were demanding, the video projection of "the truth" on the walls of Televisa²⁰, the proposal to create a new constitution²¹, the counter-report²² in response to the last report by President Felipe Calderón.

Suddenly, we as reporters found ourselves stumbling from a traditional coverage of their actions and protest marches to attempting one that attempted to go deeper, focused on the political weight of their proposals, trying to rescue them from the electoral hustle and bustle and push them towards the medium- and long-term.

Their actions revealed a political stand, and we as reporters tried to overcome immediacy and the brevity of space allowed to reflect it. For example, toll picketing was not just a simple conflict over transit, but an act of civil disobedience. We did not always achieve it. And when we failed, when the debate over their proposals was not in the news, the youth challenged the media from the social networks, places, parks, in a "collective juvenile conversation," without precedent in the history of the country, as the youth sociologist Rossana Reguillo, professor at the Western Institute of Technology and Higher Education (ITESO) called it. With their innate ability to manage social networks, #YoSoy132 led the way for press coverage.

19 Video "#Debate132" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txWoCr1EXyE&feature=plcp>

20 Video "#LUZ132" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOLGmEf3H2A>

21 Video "Mas de 131" <http://www.youtube.com/user/MasDe131>

22 Counter-report #YoSoy132: <http://www.rnv.gob.ve/noticias/index.php?s=3a540eaf04698b51f285f4b9367b6368&act=Attach&type=post&id=post-3-13465372872.ibf>

THE VIEW OF THE PRESS

Nearly a month after the Movement started, with the press hounding them and the newspapers, radios, and television shows providing daily coverage of their actions, the students made a shift to try and build alliances. They published a video called “Support for journalists”²³, dedicated to the work of the editorial staff, reporters, editors, and news managers, where they warned them that they would stop working with those media personnel who did not disseminate the truth:

- “We know it is very likely that for some time, you have had to toe the line in some way, publish a certain side, model your notes, and hide realities in order to keep your job (...) Is that your vocation as a communicator?
- “If you are affected, stop collaborating with those who ask you to betray the truth and renounce your convictions in exchange for scraps and threats (...) Mexico needs you as a spokesperson for the truth, which is not owned by anyone, but is the evidence of the reality of everyone”.

One afternoon, I went to have coffee with Tevye de Lara, a student at the ITAM private school. We spoke about the internal divisions, the challenges, and the future of the Movement. I asked him about the video expressing support to journalists and about the media coverage of #YoSoy132. Seemingly uninterested in the subject, he answered that it was a coverage that swung from one extreme to another. They were either presented as youth serving the left, or as new child heroes, an allusion to that group of cadets of the Military Academy who, according to the official story, defended the country against the US intervention in 1847.

- “It is not the press’ job to be our public relations manager. It is their job to report things as they are and give the opportunity for expression. We will defend ourselves,” he told me.

#YoSoy132 has a clear objective: the democratisation of the media, which means public access to transparent, plural, and unbiased information. In the presidential debate they organised, in a march on the Federal Election Commission, and in the counter-report to Felipe Calderón, they tried to get to the bottom of the discussion regarding the concentration of media outlets -the TV duopoly of Televisa and TV Azteca account for 96 percent of

²³ Video “Apoyo a los periodistas” (“Support for journalists”) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eufYYjxr1XI>

broadcast stations, 58 percent of official spending on publicity, and 51 percent of digital channels- and the lack of access to media for social organisations and communities. Televisa was a constant target of the Movement's actions -for example, it was the victim of symbolic "sieges"-, as they considered it responsible for the imposition of Peña Nieto as a candidate.

In the coverage, however, the media corporation was overcome by the rejection of the PRI imposition. I think this is due to a mix of three factors: the electoral context and the social polarisation from which the Movement emerged provoked a simplification of the coverage, looking at the reality as either pro-Peña or anti-Peña -a shortcoming of the media-, the lack of agreements amongst the youth themselves to put forth a common agenda -they managed to discuss the end of neoliberalism, the concession of mining corporations, the impeachment of Calderón over the drug war-, and the lack of media interest.

Some, like Reforma, CNN, or MVS-Radio kept the issue in circulation, but as part of their editorial agenda prior to #YoSoy132. The space dedicated to the Movement focused on its achievements and celebrated its courage, its irreverence and its constant questioning.



The official press -Televisa, TV Azteca, Milenio, the El Sol de Mexico editorial group- bound by the public outcries of the Movement against their lack of journalistic balance, gave it superficial coverage, but did not change their editorial discourse. As the days passed and the PRI's victory was confirmed, they focused on discussing and exaggerating fractures, and linking them to radical social groups. For example, when a group of youth disavowed #YoSoy132, accusing it of being an instrument of the left²⁴, Televisa broadcast that position and not the links the dissidents had with the PRI.

The international press, from its vantage point without ties to the national press, set its sights on #YoSoy132 and did not hesitate to establish similarities with other youth movements around the world, such as Occupy Wall Street in New York, the Indignant movement in Spain, or the Arab Spring in North Africa. The coverage, most of the time, highlighted the breakdown of the electoral process caused by thousands of students.

Alternative media, like Narconews, provided detailed reporting on the demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience of #YoSoy132, investigating the organisational processes and ties that were forming little by little with other organizations. But like the rest of the press, it took a superficial look, failing to analyse what "media democratisation" really means.

Four months after the emergence of the Movement, there has not been a deep discussion of the figure of a media ombudsman, sanction systems, the de-concentration of concessions in public spaces, competition, and access for communities and civil organisations. Perhaps it was the electoral maelstrom that swallowed the other concerns of the students. For now, they are not giving up and maintain the backing of media law reform, created by the Mexican Association for the Right to Information (Asociación Mexicana de Derecho a la Información, AMEDI)²⁵.

POLITICAL ACTORS: PARTIES AND ORGANISATIONS

When the students drafted their "Declaration of principles"²⁶ they also built a sort of defence mechanism to protect themselves against future attacks: a Movement that is non-partisan, peaceful, student-based, secular, plural, of social and political nature, humanist, autonomous, and democratic. Its self-definition was a limit on any attempt from political

24 Video "#YoSoy132 se divide; nace Generación México" ("#YoSoy132 splits: Generation MX is born")
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p37cttmeaWg>

25 Video: "Nueva Ley de Medios, ('New Media Law') #YoSoy132 Jalisco"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-m7bfl22Kwg>

26 <http://www.yosoy132media.org/yosoy132oficial/principios-generales-del-movimiento/>

parties to co-opt or link the Movement to them. The political parties had played a secondary role in the development of the Movement and its coverage. Publicly, the PRI, PRD, and PAN celebrated the “awakening” of the youth and expressed respect for the demonstrations. But there were, as always, ulterior motives.

The right-wing candidate Josefina Vázquez Mota tried to appropriate the call to march against Peña Nieto on 19 May, as a day before she called “to take to the streets to avoid exposure to the risk of that candidate, of that group regaining power.” Actually, the march had been called a week earlier, authentically on the social networks. Students responded with a video²⁷ and denounced the attempt of politicians to appropriate citizens’ movements. The reprimand also aimed at Grupo Milenio, who on the day following the march attempted to manipulate the information on its front pages by bringing together on its front pages both the statements of PAN’s candidate and the photos of the civil demonstrations.

The other parties also resisted the temptation to take political advantage of the student movement. Groups aligned with Andrés Manuel López Obrador supported #YoSoy132 with advice and technical equipment through one of their members, Saúl Alvidrez, whose voice was recorded on a telephone call released publicly, in an attempt to dethrone the Movement. The students reacted quickly, and without entangling themselves, they pointed out that those who violate the Declaration of Principles (non-partisanship and autonomy) are not part of #YoSoy132.

The PRI attempt seemed to go even further. A group of students who participated in the first demonstrations renounced the movement and created Generation MX, launching a video²⁸ where they accused #YoSoy132 of being co-opted by the left and of a loss of authenticity in the group. The social networks responded faster than the press and identified the close ties between some of the actors in the video with the PRI. Once again, the youth came out ahead of attempts to discredit them. They celebrated other student efforts for democracy, but lamented that they be carried out by attacking #YoSoy132.

In an attempt to maintain their autonomy and avoid the risk of political infiltration, the students were reluctant to tie themselves to civil society organisations and kept themselves as a 100 percent student-based movement, as stated in the Declaration of Princi-

27 Video: “Así responde Grupo Milenio a alumnos de la Ibero” (“Thus responds Grupo Milenio to Ibero-American University students”) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ci7iXyAyBC>

28 Video: “Generación MX” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16bDjeb262c>

ples, especially at the start. In conversations with some members like Antonio Atolini, of the ITAM and Javier Saldaña, of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, they told me that they also feared losing sight of the goal of their fight, by linking themselves to groups with more political clout and defined interests.

At the intercollegiate assemblies, they agreed to give voice, but not a vote, to civil organisations. Trinidad Ramírez, one of the leaders of the Community Front in Defence of Land (Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra), a brave and persistent woman, approved of the alliance. Finally she, as a figure of the movement repressed by Peña Nieto in Atenco during the events to which the youth made reference on that Black Friday when they expelled him from the Ibero-American University, had the authority to call upon them to join other organisations. In an assembly, she took the floor and said to them:



- “We all seek the same goal, and that goal is that it is to us to change the course of the nation to one that best suits the people; one which will benefit our Mexican people. Colleagues, you bring the strength, we at some point will depart, we are not eternal, but you will live on, then your children, your grandchildren, and our future generations. There is no other way to move forward if we are not organised (...) We may have experience, but we lack another thing: your strength. Let us march together,” said the woman, with her fist raised.

That trust was maintained with some groups like the Community Front in Defense of Land -more of a social Movement than an organisation-, the Cerezo Committee, who supported them in the documentation of threats and harassment, and who offered them security advice, and the Mexican Association for the Right to Information (Asociación Mexicana de Derecho a la Información), with whom they worked on the proposal for media law reform. For some time, they maintained links with organisations created expressly for election day monitoring, with whom they trained in election monitoring. But the students of #YoSoy132 primarily relied on professors and teachers to undertake actions of greater transcendence, such as the presidential debate.

That was until the day of the elections, when Enrique Peña Nieto won at the polls. Since then, the nod given by Trinidad Ramírez was consolidated and the #YoSoy132 Movement became part of the National Convention against Imposition, with the Community Front, the Mexican Electricians' Union, and the National Coordinator for Education Workers, movements with which it had previously maintained its distance due to the radicalism of their actions. At that Convention, actions were decided upon to demand the annulment of the electoral process.

AS AN EPILOGUE

The last day of August, Enrique Peña Nieto was named president-elect of Mexico. Almost four months had elapsed of student struggle against the imposition of the PRI, of protests to demand the cancellation of a race they considered unfair. They did not succeed. In their last statement, the youth of #YoSoy132 turned their gaze towards the future and outlined their next fight: political reform that will provide real tools for citizen participation and the regulation of power.

How can alliances be forged between social actors, organisations, the press, and movements that allow the dissemination of ideas, debate, linkage, and public understanding? As for the press, what I learned by covering #YoSoy132 is that journalists should not ignore the process of growth and organisation of student groups. Their narrative in the press will allow us to draw the various social actors that are being mobilised, those that may be joined in, and how they can do it. In a way, it is like hunting for clues of a broader social call to action. We should also not overlook the present debates regarding the proposals of emerging groups, though it requires more training, reading, and knowledge of the context in which they arose. Ties to the foreign or alternative press can help the traditional

press refine their view, connect with other forms of mobilisation, and explain the scope and reach of local mobilisations.

Witnessing the relationship between the mobilised students and organised society allowed me to understand that it is the impetus of the former to learn, build alliances and networks that enable them to channel their energy, that makes them open to new relationships. At the same time, though, the fear of losing sight of their main goal, of being consumed by groups with more experience and defined interests, could narrow their vision. Therefore, I think that if civil society organisations want to get involved, and strengthen themselves with emerging movements, they should not impose their own agenda and immediately hop onboard zealously, but rather, they should listen to them, walk alongside them, and analyse the opportunities to collaborate and learn from their experience.

When mobilised, organisations and journalists can bet on finding a common agenda that will perhaps lead to public agreement, understanding, and the transformation of our reality.

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FAMINE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA



IN LATE 2010 SOME NGOS IN the Horn of Africa began to warn of the serious food crisis millions of people were facing. If there wasn't a timely response, they warned, the consequences could be catastrophic.

THE ENTIRE REGION FACED A SITUATION of extreme vulnerability as a result of human and natural factors: the worst drought in decades, long-term and complex conflicts and high levels of underdevelopment had plunged parts of Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia in an extreme situation which demanded an immediate international response.

ON JULY 20, 2011, UNITED NATIONS declared a famine in two regions of Somalia, the first of the famine of the XXI century, affecting nearly 4 million people. This declaration gave the final push for the international media to finally set their focus in the area.

THE HORN OF AFRICA FOOD CRISIS

JOSE MIGUEL CALATAYUD

INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE OF THE HORN OF AFRICA FOOD CRISIS

On 20 July 2011, the United Nations declared famine in two regions of Somalia²⁹. It had been almost 30 years since a famine had been officially declared in Africa, the last time being in Ethiopia between 1984 and 1985, and it was the world's first famine in the twenty-first century.

During the weeks prior to the UN announcement, articles had begun to appear in the international media on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa, mainly focused on the situation in the refugee camps of Dadaab in the east of Kenya. The official United Nations declaration gave a definitive push to coverage of the crisis, turning it into a front-page story in a matter of weeks and making radio and television news programmes in countries throughout the world.

However, journalists on the ground had been aware of the critical nature of the situation in Somalia and parts of Kenya and Ethiopia for some time. As early as October 2010, FEWS NET had warned that the most likely scenario for Somalia in 2011 would be "emergency," the food insecurity phase that comes immediately before "catastrophe/famine"³⁰. Humanitarian workers and journalists in Nairobi and other parts of the region had been discussing these issues in private, however at the time it was still hard to sell articles on the issue to the media. Furthermore, to travel to Mogadishu, other parts of Somalia, and the affected parts of Kenya and Ethiopia was difficult and, above all, expensive. It is possible that media outlets viewed reporting the crisis as a risky investment in journalistic terms, and freelance journalists were unable to travel to the area at their own expense.

29 FEWS NET, FSNAU. Expanding famine across southern Somalia. Nairobi, 20 July 2011. PDF available at: http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/FSNAU_FEWSNET_200711press%20release_final.pdf (Accessed on 3 September 2012).

30 FEWS NET. Somalia Food Security Outlook, October 2010 to March 2011. 31 October 2010. PDF available at: http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/Somalia_OL_10_2010.pdf (Accessed on 3 September 2012).

Furthermore, since the end of June 2011, many journalists based in the region had travelled to South Sudan to cover its declaration of independence, planned for 9 July. However, during these days warnings reached us from organisations on the ground about the deterioration of the situation in Dadaab, where hundreds of Somali refugees were arriving by the day.

In the case of Dadaab it was easily reachable, relatively cheap and offered the potential for dramatic images. When I returned to Kenya from South Sudan, I began preparing a trip to Dadaab on my own initiative. I proposed the Dadaab story to the Spanish media but my proposals were met with limited interest. Many other journalists were also keen to travel there and the organisations on the ground were beginning to find themselves inundated by our requests for transport, accommodation and information.

Throughout July, a growing number of articles on the crisis appeared in the international media, until the images captured by France Press and the BBC in Dadaab made the crisis visible to mass audiences throughout the world for the first time. This was followed by the UN declaration of famine, at which point -according to my own personal experience- the Spanish media also began to take an interest in the story and my visit to Dadaab.

Humanitarian workers in Dadaab and the refugees themselves were bombarded by officials from international organisations and journalists for a number of days as Dadaab became a “humanitarian, diplomatic and media circus”³¹. Journalists, our editors, and perhaps part of the public, expected dramatic stories and images of poor Somalis trying to escape from an inferno. All of us set to task: officials, workers on the ground, and even some of the refugees themselves, who quickly learned the sorts of histories we wanted to hear. The facts, information and figures came from the UN or the NGOs and there was neither the means nor time to check them.

After these initial days, coverage of the crisis varied from one media outlet to another. In general, the highly dramatic nature of the first stories set the tone for the ensuing coverage. Furthermore, this served to complicate matters when it came to keeping abreast of the situation because many journalists and editors -and perhaps part of the public- expected increasingly dramatic stories to avoid boring repetition.

31 Malone, Barry. La caravana de ayuda al Cuerno de África llega tarde...de nuevo. Reuters. El Adow, Kenya, 26 July 2011. Available at <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/07/26/us-africa-famine-idINTRE76P1A220110726> (Accessed on 3 September 2012).

On top of the fact that the situation in Dadaab had already been covered, this meant many international media outlets only continued reporting from the ground when able to do so from one of the other affected locations and with dramatic stories. The problem lay in the fact that it was complicated and, above all, extremely expensive to travel to Mogadishu, and travelling to other places in southern and central Somalia was practically impossible since these were controlled by the radical Islamist militia, al-Shabaab, which opposed the presence of Westerners. Travelling to other famine-hit areas in Kenya or Ethiopia was also considerably expensive, and they were less accessible than Dabaab -due to a smaller presence of international organisations on the ground- and, in some senses, less interesting to the media since, technically speaking, they were not suffering from famine or a conflict situation.

In my case, I had the opportunity to travel to Mogadishu at the request of *El País* to continue reporting the famine from on the ground in addition to the conflict between al-Shabaab and the Somali government and its allies. In general, only the largest media outlets and those with most resources reported from on the ground in locations such as Turkana, in the north-east of Kenya, or the south of Ethiopia. In the Spanish press, Eduardo S. Molano, who travelled to Turkana for ABC³², and Xavier Aldekoa, who was at least able to pass through Ethiopia for *La Vanguardia*³³, were the exceptions.

As the days and weeks passed, the coverage gradually became diluted until only the large news agencies continued to provide sporadic reports on the Horn of Africa food crisis.

THE CRISIS AS NEWS

The declaration of famine offered an angle for reporting the story that helped many of us to sell it. With the crisis already present in much of the international media, generally speaking coverage was framed within a narrative of crisis as an emergency, as news, as a specific event that had had a beginning, was experiencing a middle and would have an end. It cannot be stated enough that the crisis had a trigger: "the worst drought in the region in 60 years"³⁴.

32 Molano, Eduardo S. La sed de 2 millones de niños. ABC. Turkana, 17 July 2011. Available at: <http://www.abc.es/20110717/internacional/abcp-millones-ninos-20110717.html> (Accessed 3 Sept. 2012).

33 Aldekoa, Xavier. Desmemorias de África. *La Vanguardia*. Ethiopia, 28 August 2012. Available at: <http://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20110828/54206808685/desmemorias-de-africa.html> (Accessed 3 September 2012).

34 Calatayud, José Miguel. La guerra eterna de Somalia. *El País*. Mogadishu, 14 August 2011. Available at: http://elpais.com/diario/2011/08/14/internacional/1313272801_850215.html (Accessed on 3 Sept. 2012).

We were describing its development and we cited experts from the UN and NGOs who were working to put an end to the crisis.

In my opinion, generally speaking, coverage was framed in this narrative for two main reasons. First of all, it fitted well as an article or report, or television or radio snippet in the media. The vast majority of journalists and media outlets lacked the time, space, knowledge and incentives to dedicate more time to the story and deal with it in all its complexity, and this was also the case with the majority of those who consumed the information. Furthermore, both journalists and the public are accustomed to this type of narrative. Secondly, generally speaking, this was also the narrative used by the organisations on the ground when it came to communicating the story, both in their press releases and in conversations with journalists.



The problem is that this narrative of the crisis as an emergency tended to be fatalistic and simplistic, failing to account for the complexity of the situation. This dated back to a series of interrelated historical factors whose effects are still being felt, including drought, the armed conflict in Somalia (which had already lasted 20 years and stood against a political backdrop and the struggle for control of resources), the absence of formal Government institutions throughout the majority of the country, the lack of legal security and the absence of public and private investment in agriculture and infrastructure, the lack of formal education, and the continuous and challenging food and health situation faced by a large part of the population.

This problem raises an open question: How can the mainstream media cover complex, long-term stories without lapsing into narratives that are simplistic, fatalistic and overly dependent on newsworthiness?

Ideally, all parties -journalists, the media and the public- would be able to strike a balance between this method of communication, which tends towards over-simplification and a beginning-middle-end structure, and the complexity of many situations that do not fit such a narrative.

THE COVERAGE OF THE CRISIS IN THE TERMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The organisations that formed part of the response are better placed to deal with this issue and I can only provide brief observations.

In my opinion, the fact that, in general, our coverage and the communication of organisations on the ground framed the situation as a crisis as an emergency, contributed to the fact that the international response (and national, in the cases of Kenya and Ethiopia) was limited and aimed at alleviating the emergency. What was newsworthy was the famine, the situation of emergency, which supposedly had a beginning, a middle, and would come to an end.

The media attention, the activity of international organisations and financial donations were limited to the emergency, and not to many of the underlying factors that for many years had contributed to making the famine possible. On the one hand, the problem is that it is difficult to discuss a permanent crisis in the media and it is hard to sell such a situation as an article. On the other hand, it is also extremely difficult for international organisations and those on the ground to deal with this situation of permanent crisis. How is it possible to help a country such as Somalia achieve self-sufficiency in terms of its food supply? It is possible to separate the problem of food security from other factors such as political and economic circumstances, the armed conflict, the different interests of various clans, the corruption and inefficiency of the Government, the interests and interventions of neighbouring countries and other international actors, the absence of formal governmental institutions, the general underdevelopment of the country, and the absence of public and private investment.

This returns us to the previous question: how can the media provide an account of such a complex, long-term situation?

Perhaps the images shown in the media -and in general the dramatic nature of our pieces- might have contributed to this limitation on the story and its definition as a mere emergency, as a specific and concrete event. Photographs and television footage often showed gaunt women and children, travelling and living in miserable conditions, surrounded by an arid landscape affected by the drought. These images may have transmitted the impression of asking the reader or viewer to help these people, intimating that at that point in time they were suffering, but that with the correct aid they would be able to emerge from the crisis situation. Once again, this brushes aside all the underlying factors that have led to the crisis.

In fact, for both the media and the general public, the crisis in the Horn of Africa was already long forgotten when, on 3 February 2012, the UN finally declared that Somalia was no longer suffering from famine³⁵. Regardless, the present reality is that in this country alone there are 2.12 million people facing an “acute food security crisis”³⁶, also according to the United Nations.

Furthermore, despite the apparent improvements in the political situation and the relaxation of the armed conflict, there are still sufficient political, social and economic factors at play that could cause a new emergency in Somalia. Another drought or an excess of rain, the reactivation of the conflict or a new one resulting from the hypothetical defeat of al-Shabaab, or the eruption of other political, economic or social problems, may push the Somali population once again into a humanitarian emergency. However, it is extremely hard to deal with these issues in the mainstream media, it is complicated to sell this situation as a beginning-middle-end type event and it is hardly discussed in the media, except perhaps for a brief closing paragraph to provide context on the occasions when we are able to report from Somalia.

35 FEWS NET. Famine ends, yet 31% of the population remain in crisis. Nairobi/Washington, 3 February 2012. PDF available at: <http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/FSNAU%20FEWS%20NET%20Technical%20Release%20Feb%203%20Final.pdf> (Accessed on 3 September 2012).

36 FSNAU and FEWS NET. Somalia Crisis Easing, but 2.12 Million People Remain Food Insecure. Nairobi, 29 August 2012. PDF available at: <http://www.fsnau.org/downloads/FSNAU-Technical-Release-August-29-2012.pdf> (Accessed on 3 September 2012).

THE WORKING CONDITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISTS IN THE AREA

The working conditions of international journalists in the area can vary considerably from one case to another, however in my experience they conform to various general conditions:

- Television channels, above all large international organisations, such as CNN or the BBC, have many more resources available than radio and the press.
- In terms of media outlets with correspondents present in the region, generally speaking, the Spanish media often has fewer resources and offers their African correspondents less space than in other countries.
- It is often the case that in-house correspondents are given much more resources and space in their media outlets than freelance journalists, even if they do regular work for a specific media outlet.

The category to which a journalist belongs largely determines the material and financial resources available to them, the space they are given and, in general, their ability to work. Furthermore, depending on the category to which they belong, a journalist will have specific incentives and will dedicate more or less effort and resources to different types of stories.

Generally speaking, living costs in a city like Nairobi are expensive and moving around the region is also very expensive; moreover there are places to which it is extremely complicated or even dangerous to travel. Under these circumstances, an in-house journalist will depend on the willingness of the media outlet for which they work to send them to cover a specific event in the region, and the organisation will consider such travel carefully before investing its resources. A freelance journalist, who needs to pay for the expenses incurred by their work out of their own pocket, will also give careful consideration to travel; they will accept limited financial risks and have incentives to focus purely on stories that can guarantee them a certain level of income.

This means coverage is not purely -and in many cases predominantly- determined by journalistic criteria, but that financial criteria are as, if not more, important when it comes to deciding what, how and when to report.

Consequently, the specific coverage of each media outlet will depend on the working conditions of any journalists it may have on the ground. An organisation without a correspondent in the Horn of Africa will obviously respond to the crisis much later and its coverage, limited to material provided by the large news agencies, will be more sporadic and narrower, unless they are willing to invest a significant sum of money in sending someone to specifically cover the crisis.

When it comes to places or situations that are particularly complicated, or where access is difficult or expensive, freelance journalists, and occasionally in-house staff, may end up being wholly dependent on the organisations on the ground to travel there and provide coverage from the location. This means these organisations have significant potential when it comes to selling their own stories or selling a particular situation, depending on the angle that interests them or which they deem to be most important or relevant. Under these circumstances, the organisations will be guided by their own interests or will follow humanitarian criteria, which may or may not correspond to the reporting criteria that would have been applied by media outlets and journalists if they had had sufficient financial resources and materials to cover the situation independently.

In terms of the coverage of the Horn of Africa food crisis, the fact that Nairobi is arguably the city with the greatest number of international journalists and humanitarian workers in the continent helped the media respond relatively quickly to the declaration of a state of emergency and contributed to ensuring international coverage of the crisis was broad and generalised. We can assume that if a similar food crisis had occurred in a country such as Gabon, in which there are hardly any international journalists and less humanitarian workers, the media response would have been slower and the coverage shorter, more irregular and limited to the large media outlets and news agencies.

HOW TO RAISE AWARENESS OF NON-CURRENT ISSUES LIKE A PERMANENT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

In addition to their working conditions, journalists on the ground are also strongly conditioned by the newsworthiness of a situation when it comes to being able to sell stories to media outlets.

The resources available to the media and journalists themselves -more so if they are freelance- are often scarce, and this is increasingly the case. They may even be insufficient to provide coverage of all the newsworthy events in the area they are assigned to cover, as

in the extreme case of one freelance reporter being required to cover the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. This leaves them with practically no time or other resources to dedicate to non-current situations, such as a permanent crisis.

Moreover, such situations do not fit well with the narrative used by the media. Journalists, the media and the public tend towards simplification and framing situations as events with a beginning, middle and end. For a journalist, reporting a highly complex situation that has been going on for a considerable period of time and for which no end is in sight, requires a considerable amount of time and can even end up costing them their own money. The media will find it difficult to publish such a story, except perhaps in large, in-depth and labour-intensive pieces, or in a series of shorter pieces. It is also difficult for the public to digest such stories, which require more time and attention and can become boring or tiresome.

From the journalist's perspective, and thinking of a situation such as the famine in Somalia, perhaps it is possible to find a powerful personal story or an innovative or newsworthy angle with which to try and sell the topic. It is also occasionally the case that organisations on the ground seek to offer such angles in their press releases or their own communications. Regardless, it is always difficult and media outlets are not disposed to report such situations. If one does find a sufficiently eye-catching story and the media publishes it, this automatically makes it harder to publish another on the same issue immediately after, since the media outlet will need an even more eye-catching or dramatic story, making it likely the organisation will not publish anything else on the issue for some time.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISTS AND LOCAL JOURNALISTS ON THE GROUND

In my experience, in this region, the relationship between international journalists and local journalists is good, being one of camaraderie and respect amongst colleagues; except for specific or isolated cases, there have not been problems in terms of sharing information, contacts and other resources.

What does happen, however, is that local and international journalists often form their own communities. It is common for international journalists to have more and closer relationships between each other than with local journalists. International journalists often come from a similar environment: they have lived in and travelled to the same places in Europe, America and Africa, and their socio-economic level, customs and cultural preferences are often very similar, differing from those of local journalists.

Furthermore, international journalists address an international audience, which determines the issues they work with and how they treat them, whereas local journalists often deal with national issues for a national audience. Journalistic requirements and the resources available to international journalists often differ from those of local journalists. They can even influence language, since, while all local Kenyan journalists speak English, few international journalists speak Swahili and, dare I say, none speaks Somali.

By means of example, and sticking with the case of Somalia, both the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Kenyan Army have organised travel for the international and Kenyan press separately.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISTS AND LOCAL ORGANISATIONS AND POPULATIONS

In general, the relationship between international journalists and local organisations is one of journalist and source. It is often less fluid than the relationship between journalists and international organisations, whose staff often belong to the same social circles as international journalists, whereas this is not as common when it comes to local organisations. It is common for public relations and communications staff at international organisations to be former international journalists, facilitating the relationship between them. In fact, staff at these organisations may filter information through to international journalists, hoping their coverage will be able to generate attention and hence increase the visibility of the activities and presence of their organisation. Additionally, international organisations and journalists often address the same audience and speak the same media language. Finally, international organisations often have considerably more material and financial resources than their local counterparts, allowing them to have a greater presence on the ground in different parts of the region and be more proactive, both in terms of their own activities and in communication work.

Once again, and generally speaking, the relationship between international journalists and the local population is often one of journalist and source. However, in this respect, and by means of a personal observation, in Nairobi and throughout the region in general, the relationship between foreign journalists and the local population is corrupted a priori, a phenomenon that is hardly ever symmetric due to the considerable socioeconomic differences between the two. On the one hand, this can benefit the journalist by facilitating access to the local population, be it in terms of politicians, academics, professionals or people on the street. On the other, establishing an informal relationship of equals with part of the lo-

cal population, who have certain deeply-embedded expectations of foreign professionals, whom many see as a source of income, information or access to places and social circles to which they would otherwise not have access, can be extremely complicated.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN DIFFERENT ACTORS

In my opinion, instead of partnerships, NGOs and other humanitarian organisations should restrict themselves to their role and field and avoid attempting to practice journalism. Similarly, reporters should also limit themselves to their role and field and should not be activists or have a humanitarian agenda. The criteria and interests of both humanitarian organisations and journalists and the media are legitimate, but there is no reason for them to coincide, meaning that each actor should follow their own criteria and interests.

In general, and on a professional level, I believe the relationship between journalists and those who work for international organisations should be one of journalist and interested source, in the best sense of the word. A humanitarian professional has a strongly defined agenda and their interests and goals, while being legitimate have no reason to correspond to those of the journalist, who must be motivated by reporting and journalistic criteria. In this respect, the activist may filter or inform the journalist of the activities of their

organisation or other information, but must always do so with transparency and integrity, respecting the activities, interests and objectives of their organisation.

If, for example, a journalist is to travel with an NGO or the organisation is to provide assistance in terms of logistics, accommodation or access to information, the journalist should carefully consider and be clear if such a relationship will compromise their impartiality when it comes to dealing with the issue in question. Furthermore, in their articles they should also clearly state their relationship with the NGO to ensure their audience is aware of possible conflicts of interests and other possible limitations of their coverage.

In practice, it is common for journalists to have to accept compromises they would not have to accept in an ideal world. Under such circumstances, the journalist must make a responsible decision as to whether or not to accept these compromises. In the event that they decide to accept them, they must bear in mind that their activities respond to journalistic and reporting criteria that may differ from the interests of the organisation providing them with help.

As a rule of thumb, I believe both international organisations and journalists and the media should aspire to be as transparent as possible, both with each other and our audiences. In my opinion, NGOs and other agencies should ensure their communication campaigns are fully transparent, making it clear how they are financed, the resources that are available to them, where they are based, where they have workers on the ground, their interests and intentions, the projects in which they are involved, exactly what they are asking for from the public, and exactly what they are going to do with those resources.

This should be exactly the same for the media and journalists. The media should make clear its sources of financing, its conflicts of interest, whether its journalist on the ground (if it has one) is a correspondent or contributor, whether they have been sent specially by the media outlet or have travelled with an NGO or another organisation. The journalist must make it clear how they have obtained the information, whether they have been on the ground and from where they are being informed, how they have communicated with their sources (i.e. in person, over the phone, in writing), whether they have needed a translator, if an NGO's staff have been present when they have spoken to beneficiaries of one of their programmes, and whether military personnel have been present during an interview with civilians in an area of conflict.

In my opinion, journalists and the media occasionally lapse into a range of bad reporting practices by failing to maintain this transparency. It is all too common for the media to label their correspondents as having been specially dispatched, even though their travel has been paid for and organised by an Army or NGO, something that is not mentioned and may compromise the impartiality of the coverage. Similarly, on many occasions, the journalist forgets their relationship with or dependency on a certain organisation when it comes to being able to obtain access to information or visit a certain location; a factor which, at the very least, influences the information that can be obtained and how it can be obtained. There are also occasions on which the journalist fails to state how much time they spend in a specific place or under what conditions they spoke to their sources; once again, this factor has a significant influence on their production of information. The public has the right to know under what conditions the journalist obtained the information, and the media and journalist have a duty to provide transparency in terms of these conditions.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY: THE COVERAGE OF A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS WITH RESPECT TO OTHER INFORMATION

From the journalist's perspective, in covering humanitarian crises, journalists should apply the same criteria they use for any other coverage. They should remain impartial, be transparent with their sources and audience and, in general, follow time-honoured and traditional journalistic standards, which are still relevant to this day.

Regardless of whether they are reporting a humanitarian crisis on the ground or any other type of situation, they should try to clarify the facts as best they can. They should then report on what they have been able to find out with respect to these facts, clearly stating what they know to be true and how they have found this out. The journalist must attribute any information they have obtained to the individual sources. They should base and back their piece using the information and sources that are relevant or affected by the events. In the case of informative texts, the journalist should bear in mind that the focus is on the events and the people affected by them, and not the author. The journalist should always clearly separate information and opinion, ensuring the integrity, responsibility and transparency of the reporting process, all the way from how they have obtained the information through to how it has been processed and published.

Reporting a humanitarian crisis from on the ground, where conditions may be hard and the journalist may be required to report dramatic situations should not be an excuse for falling below these standards.

Similarly, nor does the fact that the media outlet -or freelance journalist- does not have or does not wish to dedicate sufficient material and economic resources to coverage constitute an excuse for failing to report the information that can be obtained under these specific circumstances with transparency, responsibility and integrity.

In practice, there will be many occasions on which journalists are unable to be fully impartial or access information on the ground by means of their own resources. There will be others on which they will depend on NGOs and other organisations to be able to travel to the location and obtain certain information. Under these circumstances, the journalist should decide if the compromises they will be required to make will allow them to provide professional coverage, predominantly guided by journalistic criteria. At all times, the reader has the right to be aware of potential compromises the media outlet and journalist have had to make in order to be able to report the situation on the ground.

Humanitarian organisations, workers on the ground, media outlets and journalists on the ground may have different interests and criteria, which are equally professional and legitimate. Journalists should not be involved in humanitarian work and those involved in humanitarian work should not act as journalists. A direct and transparent professional relationship will allow both parties to maintain their independence and benefit from the interested collaboration of the other. Here the word interested is used in the positive sense of the word, simply acknowledging that both parties may have different interests.

The objective of the journalist is not to end poverty or solve a humanitarian emergency. Their objective is to provide responsible reporting on a specific situation for their audience. A single article cannot make a difference, however professional coverage with transparency and integrity contributes, alongside that of other journalists who are doing their job properly, to the development and progress of society.

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THE HORN OF AFRICA: PRERECORDED BROADCAST

IRINA FUHRMANN

When Aite Eknoba sat down in front of a group of journalists who had travelled to her community in the North of Kenya to report on the effects of the food crisis, there was a big silence. With the help of the technician of our local counterpart, Aite answered one by one all the visitors' questions in a soft voice, without taking her eyes off the ground, explaining how for weeks she and her children had been eating only roots and animal skins. Sat beside her, the children struggled to keep their eyes opened with what little energy remained from the effects of starvation.

Two hours later and some 50 kilometres away, a smiling Benson Koré received the same group of journalists in his home in Kaleng, a community of 400 inhabitants. He wanted to show them his garden, where he grew corn and watermelons, creating an orchard in the midst of the arid land. This bounty, with which Benson is able to feed his entire family, has been made possible thanks to the water distribution systems managed by the community and supported by Oxfam. Although distribution is rationed over alternate days, the water has allowed them to survive during this tragic year of drought.

The same region, the same time, and yet two different stories based on the same reality. It is not hard to imagine which of these made the international news the next day: Aite and her children were another face of the famine that ravished the Horn of Africa in summer 2011, while Benson's splendid ears of corn and the initiative of the Kaleng community were consigned to anonymity.

This real case illustrates one of the many challenges faced by NGOs during the crisis, one of the most severe and, unfortunately, not the last, to affect the African continent on a recurring basis. How to divert the focus of attention from the faces and bodies that reflect the drama towards possible solutions that can illustrate the actions of those affected? How to translate the complexity of the economic, social and political causes of a crisis into news articles that would appeal to the action of donors? How to reduce to a single

newspaper column years of neglect that have pushed thousands of sufferers to the verge of starvation?

However, for professionals who worked on the ground during the Horn of Africa crisis, perhaps the most serious challenge is summarised by the following question: how to attract the attention of the international community before it becomes too late? On a radio programme I was recently asked about the virtues of plumpy nut, a medicinal paste given to children suffering from severe malnutrition. My answer was clear: it is the lack of attention and ability to react in time that gives the paste its miraculous properties. If we were able to prevent the milk of lactating mothers running dry, families from exhausting their food reserves and food price speculation, a medicinal paste would not be needed.

When it comes to communication, we distinguish between two types of crisis: sudden disasters, on a dramatic scale, occurring from one day to another and attracting full-blown media coverage in less than 24 hours (recent examples include the Indian Ocean tsunami and the earthquake in Haiti); and chronic crises, which develop away from the glare of the media over months or even years until reaching tragic proportions that turn them into front-page news. The events in the Horn of Africa are an example of the latter, and in this case, as in many others, it was too late.

For years, a combination of human and natural factors had been fuelling the food crisis that affected Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia: the first drought in recent years, decades of marginalisation, underdevelopment and neglect in one of the planet's most vulnerable regions, and a military conflict that had decimated the fragile Somali state. Towards the end of 2010, some NGOs present in the region warned that without urgent intervention the situation ran the risk of turning into a catastrophe for millions of people over the coming months. The refugee camp in Daadab continued to see thousands of refugees from Somalia arrive on a daily basis as they fled famine and the conflict, and regions on the borders of Kenya and Ethiopia had seen sharp rises in the rates of malnutrition. Stories of Somali pirates had made the television news on numerous occasions, but few media outlets were reporting on the deeply rooted causes of this social breakdown.

Our warning, issued at the end of the year, failed in its attempt to awaken the attention of the media and, by extension, the international community. We had to wait until July 2011, when the United Nations' declaration of famine in Somalia succeeded in activating the machinery. Only then did hundreds of journalists turn their gazes towards the bellies of the children and the cracked feet of their mothers. This was also the point at which,

as NGOs, we launched our fundraising campaigns, making the crisis one of the largest humanitarian interventions this century. However, as the report *A Dangerous Delay*, published by Oxfam and Save the Children in January 2012, explains, it would have been possible to save more than 50,000 lives by responding to the first warnings. As noted by the former United Nations Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Ege-land, it costs just \$1 a day to prevent a child from suffering from malnutrition, whereas it costs \$80 a day to deliver emergency life-saving treatment.



We had not only failed to arrive on time in terms of communication, but we also had to deal with numerous challenges, some of which were specific to this emergency, while others were related to the nature of NGOs and the media. In the case of Oxfam, at Intermón Oxfam in Spain, we needed funds to distribute food, provide water and implement sanitary measures for 3.5 million of those affected, and this meant we had to appeal to the support of donors, both private and public. However, we also had to be able to communicate the fact that the chronic vulnerability suffered by the region will not disappear without political willingness to tackle the most deeply-rooted causes of the crisis. And beyond this, we needed to be able to continue financing the work of local organisations to ensure long-term projects would continue to promote the development of the region.

Many objectives converging at a decisive moment, with humanitarian teams racing against the clock to provide urgent aid and save lives, and communications and political impact teams receiving hundreds of requests from journalists.

POLITICAL IMPACT VERSUS FUNDRAISING

In the case of Intermón Oxfam, where communication pursues both fundraising and advocacy objectives, striking the balance between the two is not always an easy task. To give a specific example: Aite's story is able to raise funds through immediate support, and we need these contributions to be able to act and help those who are affected; however Benson's orchard shows the existence of possible long-term solutions that require the political will of governments and the initiative of citizens to put them into practice.

After a few initial weeks of intense media attention, some journalists tried to keep the story "alive" by trying new angles for their coverage, but restrictions in terms of space, time and budgets faced by the media outlets, together with the complexity of the issue made the task difficult. On the other hand, as NGOs, we also had to face the challenge of communicating in a highly sensitive political context, which could jeopardise the work of our teams and our presence in the countries.

Fortunately, the media context of which we are currently a part is made up of the still highly influential traditional media (television, radio and written press) and new communications platforms that offer an infinite number of possibilities. At the outset of the media campaign, we were clear that if we wished to communicate messages of urgency capable of raising funds and reporting live on what was going on, as well as messages that analysed causes of and possible solutions to the crisis, we would need to use all possible communication tools. Hence, our continuous relationship with the media (including national media, correspondence on the ground and newspaper offices), journeys by Oxfam ambassadors and other opinion leaders, and the collection of material to be used for blogs, photo-logs, tweets and other entries on social networking sites, were priorities from the start. We are increasingly aware that a humanitarian news story is defined by the human being at the centre.

One of the most important aspects of our media response was the attention paid to correspondents or special reporters on the ground, which made it essential to develop complex logistic support to facilitate these visits. There is nothing new here. Many journalists request help from NGOs to be able to reach those who are affected, especially when the crisis affects a large area (such as the three affected countries in the Horn of Africa), with isolated populations and regions rendered out of bounds by the military conflict, or refugee camps. In the case of the Horn of Africa, Oxfam supported more than one hundred visits by journalists, who provided important coverage of the most powerful stories of

the crisis. However, these visits also allowed many professionals to understand from up-close the reality faced by those living in the area and the chain of events that have led to this situation.

SOCIAL MOBILISATION CAMPAIGN

The Horn of Africa crisis showed once again that teamwork within organisations is essential. In the case of Oxfam, the communications teams fed off the messages from the campaign teams, who established partnerships with both local organisations working in the country and other international groups. Similarly, marketing and fundraising teams were able to use much of the material that was collected to generate a media “wave” that had a considerable impact. All of this took place together with the direct participation of our teams on the ground, who provided us with logistical support, facilitated first-hand information and acted as spokespersons when it came to interviews.

One of the highlights of the social movement to help those affected by the crisis was the A4A (Africans for Africa) campaign, which focused its messages on the responsibility of the Governments of the countries affected by the drought and the role of support among the population. This gave a clear example of the capacity for political impact and fundraising of the affected continent. Kenya received considerable attention, where private funds were raised for the crisis and various groups exerted pressure to persuade governments to make a greater financial contribution to the UN appeal.

LESSONS IN A CHANGING WORLD

In spite of successful initiatives and the intense communication campaign that succeeded in raising more than six million euros of private funding in Spain alone, there is still much to be done.

We know we arrived late, and we wish to avoid this happening again in the event of other chronic crises currently threatening millions of people throughout the world. This year, faced with the Sahel crisis affecting 18 million people in Africa, we have tried to coordinate a response from the early months. Thanks to considerable effort made by our communication teams, we have succeeded in ensuring the media’s attention has focused on empty grain stores before turning to the bellies of the malnourished. We have invested resources sooner, gathering material to cover the situation from the outset, looking for stories that reflect the population’s struggle to move forward in the face of a looming crisis. We have

tried to ensure that the media and its audiences understand the difference between prevention and responding late. This has not been easy, and to do so we have had to work together with communication professionals. This year, in Sahel, some journalists decided not to travel to the area in the knowledge that they would not find simple images of swollen bellies, but there have been many others who have made the effort to report on the urgency of action, before plumpy nut becomes the only solution.

For their part, NGOs must know how to manage this relationship, forming links to facilitate the continuous flow of information between the realities of the countries in which we work and the journalists with an interest in reporting on them. We also need to be able to form strategic partnerships with other organisations and forge common messages whose communication will reach larger audiences. And we need to continue trying to strike the balance in our messages, ensuring they can obtain the support of donors while also challenging governments and the international community to assume their responsibilities towards the affected populations. These are considerable challenges that define our efforts to provide more and better help to those in need.

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CHALLENGE OF COVERING HUNGER IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

SAMUEL SIRINGI

Starvation, as journalists in Kenya this year learned, could take away your happiness. It can waste away a whole generation, besides causing deaths and starvation whose gory images can send journalists from work straight into counseling sessions.

Such was the situation last year as the Horn of Africa became a theatre stage on which starvation played. Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti were the main suppliers of the more than 10 million starving people.

But our close attention was in Kenya, where the UN announced that about four million people were in dire need of food. Some of them were Kenyans in the northern frontier and the northeastern regions. Incidentally, the northeast was also a host to refugees fleeing Somalia. It had been for the past 20 years, only that this time, it would take in more.

Dadaab Refugee Camp, located in Garissa county in Kenya's former North Eastern Province, was to swell with more refugees and hungry populations. By July 2011, it comprised three different smaller camps; Dagahaley, Hagadera and Ifo I. Later, another encampment, Ifo II, was created to accommodate more refugees. Since 1991, when the 50 square-kilometre camp was created to cater for refugees fleeing the Somali Civil War, it has consistently hosted the less fortunate becoming the world's most populous camp.

The camps were initially supposed to host only 90,000 people, but that number has since risen fivefold. Although 95 per cent of the 380,000 that live there are Somalis, figures from the UN show that refugees from Ethiopia and South Sudan are also hosted here.

Although 1,500 and 3,000 people were fleeing into Kenya each day, initially looking for a secure place, recurrent famine has forced more to come in-looking for food and water.



Early this year, UNHCR told of an imminent situation of getting overwhelmed and called on the Kenyan government to open up a new encampment to accommodate the influx.

Both international and local media picked up the story, but it was the former that were first on the ground to air the graphic detail of the situation. The BBC, Al-Jazeera, CNN and the New York Times first sent in their reporters. Local media organisations, as often the case with accessing remote sources, relied on the news agencies for reports, photos and videos.

But it could soon be inevitable. The images became irritatingly repetitive: feeble limbs, pale deep-set eyes, pole-like frames, wrinkled skin, distended tummies and scattered brownning hair. It was survival of the fittest. Local press organisations started sending reporters to Dadaab, but the most of the Kenyan newspapers were still relying on the support of the police, the UN and relief agencies for faster transport, secure internet and security.

On the morning of Sunday of July 10, non profit Medicines San Frontieres (MSF), or doctors without borders, invited reporters from Nairobi for a trip to Dadaab. The agency, one of the many that give aid to refugees in Dadaab, had offered to take the journalists to help expose the crisis to the world.

In the case of Dadaab, Kenyan journalists wouldn't know of the goings on until the relief organisations tipped them. The only problem, which the journalists didn't experience when they arrived there, would be the lack of a free hand for journalists to plan their work.

It is not every day that Kenyan journalists go to Dadaab to cover stories on refugees, so the arrangement with the MSF was important. The logistics to arriving at the camp were circuitous and dangerous. And the refugee centre itself is far-flung. The journalists boarded an MSF Toyota four-wheel drive double-cabin vehicle in Nairobi and left for Dadaab.

The camp is about five hundred kilometres north east of Nairobi. A tarmacked road leads one from the Kenyan capital to Garissa town, about four hundred kilometres away. Before one could enter Garissa town, there are stringent security checks.

The vehicle was allowed in after a ten-minute search. But the journalists could not continue with the journey. Dadaab lies only 100 kilometres from Garissa, but the jungle is unforgiving and painfully thorny. With old gully tracks serving as uncertain routes, there is no guarantee of security against uncertain bandit attacks or from the roaming wild animals. Mohammed, our driver advised us to stay and we agreed. We chose to spend a night at the Nomad Hotel in Garissa.

In the morning, at around 8am, the scorching sun met us as we rode on a zigzagging sandy track. On an ordinary smooth road, Dadaab would be just an hour's drive away. But the remoteness of this place meant that the gusts of warm wind sweeping through the hostile landscape and the mushroom-shaped clouds of dust the journalists left behind would be company for some time.

Occasionally, there would be a group of women and children by the roadside with containers waiting for water. As we learnt later, the place is so dry the women have to wait for army trucks to deliver the water from Tana River. And since there is poor communication on when the next truck would actually arrive, the women must camp by the roadside lest they are elbowed out by another group, twice!

Dadaab camp and such scenes would be our home for the next ten days. We would be traversing the camp, mingling with refugees and looking for the facts to package our stories.

But first, there were rules. At the MSF for example, workers and their guests are supposed to get back to their hostels not later than 5pm, with strict exceptions. "We cannot guarantee your safety, but we would like you to abide by our rules because they have often helped us to stay away from trouble," said Serene Assir, MSF Coordinator in Dadaab.

We signed a safety agreement, a deal to show that we would not leave the compound after 5pm and that we would be responsible and guard our personal belongings jealously. "You must remember that this is a jungle and we live like rats. Just be responsible," she added.

That seemed like an orientation to a world of hunger, misery and insecurity. MSF runs a hospital in Dadaab. During the peak of the hunger crisis, the hospital, a 300-bed facility was overwhelmed.

Inside a camp hospital in Dagahaley (the northern-most encampment), doctors and nurses were making frantic efforts to treat malnourished children under improvised shelters.

At the severe malnutrition unit, mothers were cuddling or laying their babies in beds. Often a mother could try to coax milk down her child's throat, only for it to spew back. Malnourished children were fed on milk and soya. At the time, a UNHCR report showed that of the 380,000 estimated refugees in the camp, 130,000 were toddlers. A third of these were in urgent nutritional support, the hospital's fact sheet showed.

Add that to the drought and these figures could probably have been a mere conservative estimate. UNHCR had reported the number of those running away from the drought in Somalia was increasing by the day and it could no longer be possible to give daily estimates.

- "The number we are receiving is too big and we don't have where to take them; now they are settling anywhere," said Mr Fafa Attidzah, the head of UNHCR Dadaab sub-office.

That testimony would be buoyed by long queues at the refugee reception centre in Dagahaley, where new comers were issued with an identification number before joining the growing number of people the world is doing too little too late to recognise.

There were children too, who, after walking hundreds of kilometres, through the harshest of terrain, arrived in Dadaab only to join a long line of exiles, seated or half asleep under the scorching sun because they were too weak to stand, waiting to be admitted as refugees in a fenced enclosure.

After registration, they would be given cloths, most of which were donated by well-wishers from around the world. Then the children would walk around the meshed compound as if to inspect their new home. Their parents would be jostling for food rations from the World Food Programme (WFP). Occasionally, a refugee would come out smiling, dragging a sack of maize meal to his new home in the already congested camps.

The WFP supplied bi-monthly food rations to refugees, fed school children and provided supplementary food for lactating women. However, most of those meals, as we learnt, were more for interim survival than for providing adequate nutrients for the needs of children, the most affected. Nurses tried to fill this gap by feeding the young on 'therapeutic' milk.

- "The food here does not meet the kid's nutritional requirements because malnourished children need some special diet which aid food does not give," explained Ms Caroline Abu-Shada, a nutritional researcher with MSF.

When these images of spindly children and struggling parents were splashed on the pages of newspapers and TV screens, help started to come in. The UN announced that it had received over \$11.9 million within a month of the crisis. And several other countries like China channeled their food and clothing donations through Kenyan airports.

But the situation in Dadaab was helped mostly by reports aired abroad. Kenyan journalists were torn between concentrating on writing on the hunger situation biting their own folk and Dadaab. Pictures from Turkana and other northern regions were the same as that of Dadaab.

Corporate bodies, perhaps influenced by continual pictures on local newspapers and TVs, came together to pool for funds. The fundraiser dubbed, 'Kenyans4Kenya' pooled more than \$7 million.

The money was targeting Kenyans affected by hunger, not the refugees in Dadaab.

A WFP official, Rose Ogolla, said some of the food rations were also supplied to locals because they were facing the same hardships. But far from the hospitality the Kenyans had been offering, the recent drought had started to cause friction. This never-ending influx, it appeared, had pushed the locals to the limit. Those who couldn't access the camps were cutting down vegetation to put up houses; their influx could become an environmental hazard, they charged.

- "They have settled as far away as Kumahumato Division (outside the camp area). Now we don't know where our goats will browse," lamented Ali Mohammed, a resident at Dagahaley.
- "The host community here is not aggressive. However, it is not happy with the way shelters are being put up outside designated places," Mr Attidzah further explained in an interview.

That suspicion though went further than just the environment. Abdullah Hassan, a Kenyan taxi driver there claimed that Hagadera, the oldest southernmost encampment, was generally home to 'tycoons', stooges from former Somali president Siade Barre's government .

- "Luxurious cars drive in and out of the camp at will, and some of those who stay there fly in and out frequently. I believe most of those who live there have everything a person needs to live in comfort."

This was one of the reasons some local residents wanted the inflow of refugees tamed. In fact, Nur, a refugee and leader of a band of 400 families of refugees, agreed that some of the people housed in the camp were bandits, even though he could not confirm the claims.

Residents also alleged that some refugees were stealing their livestock, although Daga-haley Location Chief Hussein Khalif told us it would be difficult to ascertain whether some refugees cross the border while armed.

Despite the claims and defences, aid agencies were still reluctant to operate from Somalia, meaning last year's crisis and any future crises would still be hosted by Kenya. A long-term solution would be sufficient to end the refugee crisis in Dadaab.

But it would be the journalists and the media in general to expose this need. Only problem is, as we learnt, maybe media houses need to get enough facilities so they can keep sending journalists to keep a constant surveillance on the situation, not just when the situation worsens.

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CONCLUSION

Crossing through secondary roads is no easy task. Those who have contributed to the publication of this book all agree that there are serious difficulties when it comes to attracting attention to the spaces, approaches and protagonists in the shadows of the mass media.

The rocks on the path appear in various contexts and for different reasons. On the one hand, there is the operation of the media itself, increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few business groups for which the objective of communication is subordinated to the logic of increasing profits. In this context, the disappearance of correspondents has become a general trend, leaving large areas of the planet without correspondents to report events from where they take place on the ground. This has resulted in a significant information deficit.

On the other, those who chose to go freelance and work in these regions must do so under extremely precarious conditions that make their work incredibly difficult. To begin with, they must be extremely versatile, covering a wide variety of topics and vast regions. Their work is significantly limited by financial constraints: in many cases they cannot afford to travel to the places where events are taking place, and in others they lack technological coverage, such as satellite telephones that are essential in complex situations.

If we take time to analyse who determines what is news, journalists will agree that the decision very often lies with the major media companies, which all the other media follow. This was the case in the Horn of Africa, where, in spite of the warnings of NGOs and journalists in the region, there was no news until France Press and the BBC released the first pictures. In the initial days following the declaration of famine, the demand for information from the media was extremely high, and NGOs and the United Nations were then their only sources. Subsequently, sources became more diverse.

Another factor that must be taken into account is the discourse of journalism itself and how it conditions the explanation of events. Immediacy takes priority over reflection, and events over analysis; complex processes are presented as stories with a beginning, middle and end. The simplistic nature of narrative is a widespread phenomenon (as with much of the discourse of NGOs, which focus more on the emergency than its causes) and reporting the events that lie beyond the initial outbreak is extremely complicated.

If the analyses of the three events covered in this publication have one thing in common, it is the importance of communication in bringing about change, be it the reaction to an event (as was the case with the famine in the Horn of Africa), or a change in the dominant narratives and the political direction (as was the case with #YoSoy132 and the Egyptian revolution).

The relationship between international journalists and national ones varies from one location to another. In the Horn of Africa, for example, the relationship is not very close because the focus of one group is not necessarily the same as that of the other. In Egypt, however, collaboration with independent local media was extremely important, so much so that they became an essential source of information for reporting what was going on beyond the official version of events.

NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND NETWORKS

Current structures for social action break with the rigidity of the past: they are horizontal, they lack leadership, they come and go, they become tangled, they contract, they join different movements, they network... This mode of operation breaks with traditional, one-way communication patterns to which the media -and society itself- were accustomed.

Both in Mexico and Egypt, the public has acted, and continues to act, in this way. In some cases, this has made it difficult to communicate with the media, as there lacks a single spokesperson or a single discourse. #YoSoy132, for example, is based on participatory democracy, leading to an unprecedented collective discussion.

This way of functioning would not have been possible without the help of information technology. In Egypt, it made it possible to reach remote areas where the media could not reach. People captured images as they stood in the street, which were immediately transmitted over the networks and picked up by traditional media. The public disseminated alternative information to the official version, which became decisive in understanding what was going on there. The networks became sources of information for the international media, and even managed to shape conventional media coverage.

The potential of networks is so great that they could easily become an important countervailing power. They are often the main channel of communication that guarantees information that is different to the official version. Networked narratives have great potential to transgress their own channels to reach traditional media and even the political sphere.

This was the case with #YoSoy132, which managed to promote a public debate between the Mexican presidential candidates and alter the discourses on the electoral process.

The social movements discussed in this book challenge the media system, #YoSoy132 in a more specific way than the Egyptian revolution, albeit both of them demand free and plural information, and the right to information. This democratic demand is essentially a demand for the system as a whole. In this respect, alliances between social networks, movements, independent media and critical journalists are extremely important to bring about the desired democratic changes.

NGOS AND COMMUNICATION

NGOs come up against significant problems when it comes to communicating the work they are carrying out, for theirs is a long-term work multiple and complex causes. This way of functioning comes into conflict with the narrative of the media, which is more used to moments of “explosion” than long-term processes. If we focus on humanitarian crises (excluding other types of work carried out by development NGOs), it is possible to distinguish two types of crisis: sudden disasters with dramatic dimensions, and chronic crises. The former attract the focus of media attention, whereas this is seldom the case with the latter. And this in spite of the fact that one is a consequence of the other.

NGOs’ narratives are not always able to go beyond the immediate tragedy to offer a broad and comprehensive analysis of complex situations. Nor is it easy for these organisations to divert attention towards other stories. Combining social mobilisation and advocacy in the messages they disseminate is something that needs to be worked on by the various NGO teams in a coordinated manner, to guarantee that all aspects are taken into account and that the South and the main protagonists are given a voice.

In emergency situations, NGOs can provide significant support to journalists. On many occasions they help them to access difficult-to-reach locations; on others they provide them with specialised sources of information or local contacts that can give them first-hand information. Travel organised by NGOs for journalists is just one way, although not the only one, to deliver more comprehensive coverage of events. Journalists are also effective partners for NGOs. This mutual bond is decisive in widening the scope of information, disseminating it, shaping public opinion and ultimately influence political decisions and social changes.

Without losing sight of the fact that NGOs and the media have different criteria, goals and working methods, both parties agree that mutual collaboration helps them provide different approaches.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WAY AHEAD

When it comes to promoting narratives capable of bringing about profound social and political changes, when it comes to reporting reality from a perspective different from that of commercial mass media, social movements, NGOs and journalists can develop certain strategies that help travel this path.

Let us summarise some of these, which have been examined throughout this book:

1. There are gaps in the media that journalists, social movements and NGOs can widen. #YoSoy132, for example, used the consensus on the need for democracy to promote its proposals.
2. The partnership between social networks and independent media is essential as a lever to break mainstream narratives and reach the general public, society as a whole.
3. The criterion of “proximity by affinity” should be promoted by social movements and NGOs; there are currently highly similar movements in various locations throughout the world that could easily build alliances to develop joint, supranational discourses and approaches.
4. NGOs should back communication that goes beyond events and delves deeper into the causes with a view to preventing rather than alleviating extreme situations, generating socio-political changes and eliminating the need for assistance. In their discourses, they must be able to combine humanity and reporting.
5. Social movements and NGOs must build partnerships with related media organisations to be able to reach out beyond their traditional audiences.
6. When journalists are invited by NGOs to cover specific situations, they should never lose sight of the fact that any commitments they make to the inviting organisation cannot under any circumstances limit their journalistic work.

7. International partnerships between social movements and alternative media outlets are essential in a world as interconnected as ours. In fact, they are deemed important in motivating people beyond their immediate environment.
8. Given the enormous potential currently offered by social networks, social movements and NGOs should create their own media outlets.
9. Citizen-journalism, citizen journalists, or however we wish to refer to it, is significantly contributing to further independence of information, which must be taken into account when it comes to building these other narratives.

Kapuściński said that “For us journalists -and we believe for NGOs as well- who work with people, who try to understand their stories, who need to explore and investigate, personal experience is essential. The main source of our journalistic knowledge is other people. These other people are those who guide us, who give their opinions, who interpret the world we are trying to understand and describe it for us. Journalism is not possible on the margins of the relationship with other human beings. The relationship with human beings is the most essential part of our work”.

Today communication is more than ever a construction with others, a continuous to-ing and fro-ing that weaves and unweaves, creating complex tapestries of information, tapestries which, without a shadow of doubt, allow us to better understand what is really happening. The key lies in forming partnerships, since, despite wearing different boots and overalls, we are heading in the same direction, against the prevailing currents, slipping through the gaps.

THIS WORK mainly aims to raise more questions than it answers. Indeed, for it is only through a constant search for and collective construction of knowledge that we can counteract a system that makes the proposals of thousands of people invisible, creates stereotyped images of them and conditions political decisions. Our focus must be on what Bru Rovira calls "secondary roads", i.e. those human spaces and stories that are never reached by communication business conglomerates.

To this end, we selected three recent international events that would have been unthinkable in the near past. On one hand, Egypt's revolution and Mexico's #YoSoy132 movement were selected for showing how powerful the new forms of citizen politics are. On the other, we chose a situation we naively believed a thing of the past: the first famine of the twenty-first century, which hit the Horn of Africa and put more than eighteen million people at risk of starvation.

To carry out this initiative, some excellent journalists and representatives of social movements and NGOs will analyse the facts from where they occurred. Indeed, for as Master Kapuscinski rightly said, 'one needs first-hand knowledge, namely physical, emotional, olfactory, free of filters and shields, in order to explain what we are talking about. (...) It is a mistake to write about someone with whom you have not shared at least a little bit of your life.'