



The Global Network Society and the Global Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT *Ingrid Volkmer outlines the new 'flow' of political information that enables us to become informed about issues of global, regional as well as local relevance. The new media infrastructure allows an eyewitness view of events taking place in worldwide locations. These global processes, in which information and knowledge, political values, ethics, aesthetics and lifestyles are exchanged, are becoming increasingly autonomous from nation-state contexts and are beginning to shape a politically relevant 'global' public sphere. The author discusses parameters of this new political space.*

KEYWORDS *global village; communication; journalism; news infrastructure*

Internationalization and extension of national public spheres

Opponents of today's globalization approaches argue that notions of the world as a 'common place' have been elements of philosophical concepts since ancient times.

Indeed, philosophical concepts of 'the world' have existed since Aristotle defined the 'world state', and since Francis Bacon distinguished between different world concepts – the *globus intellectualis*, identifying the world of science, and the *globus terrestris*, referring to new material worlds – and the view of an ever-changing world horizon. Kant considered 'cosmopolitanism' as a new category of reasoning and Hegel defined, in a more abstract phenomenological sense, an overall *Weltgeist* or world spirit.

Not only philosophical concepts but also the transborder information flow is not a phenomenon of the 21st century. A review of the history of international political communication reveals that a continuous 'transborder' communication and distribution of political news had already been established in mediaeval

Europe. During this time, professional couriers and messengers distributed correspondence, for instance newsletters and political messages, on clearly defined routes to mercantile, courtly and monastic elites in Europe and indeed created, in modern terminology, a 'transnational' news community. As Stephens remarks:

Through the news they shared, the wheat traders of Venice, the silver traders of Antwerp, the merchants of Nuremberg, the financiers of Augsburg, and their trading partners around the world, were being drawn together into a society based on this new sensibility; on common interests – the fate of some ships sailing from India to Lisbon; on common values a belief in the rights of capital. (Stephens, 1988: 77)

By the end of the 19th century, newspapers and other print media had already been fully commercialized, mainly due to two processes: first, the freedom of the press had become an acknowledged civil right in various European states as well as in the US and, second, the advances of technology enabled the printing of the first 'mass' media. Both developments triggered the commercialization process of the news media and made wider circulation of newspapers possible. This emerging news market was paralleled by an increasing demand for daily 'foreign' news. Stephens notes: 'Some American editors, with their omnipresent hunger for news from Europe, began by walking down to the docks to obtain news off the most recently arrived ships' (Stephens, 1988: 230).

In conjunction with these processes, news wholesale agencies were founded in order to establish a constant flow of so called 'foreign' news, and served the information needs of an emerging 'public' of 19th century Europe, who lived otherwise in the relatively closed political spheres of new national identities. These wholesale news agencies began to professionalize foreign journalism by covering very specific world regions, which almost identically reproduced the already existing colonial 'world' structure. For instance, Reuters, based in London, covered the entire British Empire, the French agency Havas operated in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Romania and Serbia as well as francophone Africa and so on (Höhne, 1977: 42).

cable systems, again, established a different idea of transborder, 'foreign' news as well as of internationalization of political information. To improve military communication and communication with governments of colonized countries was the main purpose of the world wire and cable systems. In 1866, the Anglo-American Telegraph Company laid a cable between England and the United States, and the Ostdeutsche Telegraphen-Gesellschaft, established a cable line from Constance to Constantinople to Asia. Another one crossed the Pacific Ocean, and by 1912 Great Britain dominated the world cable system.

Transnational media organizations such as Intelsat, Eurovision, and the invention of satellite technology, founded in the middle of the 20th century, were the starting point for a now new concept of 'foreign' political news in the context of a new idea of 'global' communication.

From the global village to a diversified global public sphere

Given the history of international communication in previous centuries, it can be argued that this term referred to international communication in the sense of communication between nations and societal elites, who have a common interest in politics and economic affairs in an international but in many cases clearly defined regional context. In the time of nation-building, which could be viewed as a second phase of internationalization, 'foreign' news journalism presenting international news from a national perspective was a substantial element in the process. The third phase, however, began not only with satellite technology but also with a new dimension of 'internationalization' of news, where news is not merely distributed 'transborder' but, additionally, transmitted simultaneously in various parts of the world.

One of the first visionaries, who sensed the tremendous advancement and paradigm shift of previous concepts of international communication, was Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan's approach was the first attempt to analyse the profound impact, not so much of internationalization, but of the simultaneous worldwide distribution of cultural techniques on various dispersed societies,

exposed to the same signals and messages from a cultural, societal and political viewpoint. For this reason, McLuhan's studies on the 'Gutenberg galaxy' as well as his attempt to outline cultural coordinates of a 'global village' are still today, almost 40 years after they were first published, a profound and always intriguing starting point to our understanding of 'globalization'.

Whereas Marshall McLuhan's vision of the 'global village', inspired by the strong influence of the dawning satellite age in the mid-1960s, was based on a homogeneous 'extension of man' (McLuhan, 1964), the process of 'global' communication today is by far more complex – theoretically as well as practically.

In McLuhan's days, the first satellites, launched by inter-governmental agencies such as Intelsat, distributed for the first time 'live' video footage to news pools across oceans and vast land masses and bridged gaps between cultures and societies, based on the same visual image. In McLuhan's 'the medium is the message' formula (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967), this link inspired the vision of a thus far unknown inclusion of entire cultures and societies into a 'global village', just by being exposed to the same sights and sounds, which, as a consequence, transformed, i.e. homogenized, cultural habits. It also created a new political space in which politically relevant events, although interpreted differently in various countries, created a 'sameness' and 'uniformity' of visual images and a somewhat common political context: the moon landing, President Kennedy's assassination, student protests, Vietnam, Woodstock, etc.

In the era of international political Cold War turbulences, this notion of 'sameness' and 'conformity', despite religious, cultural and ideological differences, has inspired a new transnational political *Weltanschauung* of the baby-boom generation, a political worldview based on the fact that the world was all of a sudden perceived as a 'common' place. Processes which have, indeed, created transnational political alliances – the peace movement of the early 1970s, the concern for equality of the North–South information flow as well as the concern for developing nations – are, one could argue, based on this media-transmitted new enlarged worldview. Ironically, today

McLuhan's metaphor of 'sameness' and a homogeneous 'global village' provokes wide criticism of 'imperialism', 'dominance', and economical elitism. The paradigm of 'globalization' has changed.

Over the last decades, new technological developments have, again, contributed to a complexity and diversity of globalization, which has not 'only' an impact on 'global culture', a dimension which, interestingly enough, remains the centre field of the sociological globalization debate (see, for instance, Tomlinson, 1999), but also on political communication and notions of a global 'public' sphere.

The diversification of satellite technologies (in particular the diversification of C- and K-band satellites, i.e. long- and short-range satellite downlinks) enables not only a unique new parallelism of transcontinental and transregional flow of political information, but also the launch of fragmented globally operating channels, entirely dedicated to political information in point-to-point (via network technologies) as well as point-to-multipoint (via television) distribution modes. Today, around 400 of the 900 satellites in orbit provide worldwide distribution of entertainment but also, to an increasing degree, political content via telecommunication as well as broadband services. These developments have established a new 'transnational' political news sphere, which deeply transforms conventional notions of the (national) public sphere within a new transnational space – a 'global' news sphere, which is not characterized by 'sameness' but by globalized diversity.

It is a new political dimension, which impacts national public spheres in the following ways. First, it refines the conventional parallelism of 'foreign' and 'domestic' news contexts within national public spheres. This conventional parallelism is challenged by the fact that transnational channels and their particular political angle reach the same audience as national channels. Just to give one example: in Germany, TRT International, the internationally distributed channel by TRT, the Turkish state-run broadcaster, can be accessed via cable and satellite by audiences within Germany parallel to German channels. The former parallelism of 'foreign' and 'domestic' news journalism is transformed for

German broadcasters as well as for TRT international, simply by the fact that the audience is located beyond 'foreign' and 'domestic' news angles, in a new worldwide 'translocal' political space.

Second, it seems that this 'translocal' information space impacts developed, transitional and developing nations alike and establishes its own world news order, a 'self-referential' political space beyond conventional agenda-setting hierarchies. Transnational news media (television, radio) as well as the push-pull medium of the Internet shape a worldwide news spectrum in which political events in Zimbabwe are also elements of this translocal 'space', as is President Bush's Iraq policy as well as right wing tendencies in small towns in southern France and Italy. These are processes which impact national public spheres by shaping the national political discourse. This political effect has been famously superficially coined as the 'CNN effect' (Robinson, 2002) in relation to US foreign policy. For instance, Livingston and Eachus (1995) argue that the US news media have caused the US government to intervene in Somalia. Whereas this process seems to be US specific, it could be argued that the extended transborder political space influences, in reverse, national political strategies and that the imaginary presence of a global public sphere, for instance symbolized by CNN camera teams, has become a new force in national politics.

Third, this new transnational infrastructure of the news media also establishes new journalistic alliances, transnational cooperation, and increasingly includes new 'players'. Whereas in the tradition of 'modern' nation-states international channels have been established in order to extend the national public for a worldwide audience and deliver political news as well as information (such as BBC, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America), today new transnational political media outlets have entered the global news sphere.

One of the worldwide dominant political 'hubs' is CNN International (CNNI), established in 1985. CNNI has not only inaugurated 'breaking news' on a global level (almost a revival of McLuhan's 'global village' metaphor in terms of political journalism), which allows a dispersed worldwide audience to share the 'breaking' of a news story, but also new

programme formats, such as 'world report', which operates as a global 'carrier' programme, providing airtime for unedited reports of international broadcasters. Through this unique format and CNNI's worldwide distribution, new political perspectives and new 'players' entered the global sphere, for instance broadcasters from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, who are able to participate in this new transnational political sphere and present authentic political perspectives for a global audience which they would not reach otherwise. CNNI as the first international news channel has also established unconventional cooperation agreements with broadcasters worldwide. CNNI's cooperation agreements also include those channels based in countries which oppose US politics and viewpoints, such as Al Jazeera. CNNI's goal is less political than commercial, i.e. to gain a competitive edge on the US news market as well as being able to sell 'breaking' news to news outlets worldwide. For this purpose, CNNI has provided the satellite uplink for Al Jazeera in a unique war coverage agreement in Afghanistan, where Al Jazeera had access to the war zone and CNNI to the worldwide audience (Rutenberg and Carter, 2001). This cooperation has been increasingly criticized in the US.

The media infrastructure of the 'global public sphere' has been tremendously differentiated in recent years. Whereas in the mid-1980s CNN was the self-proclaimed 'world news leader', carrying news 'in 30 minutes' around the world, successfully competing with the BBC World Service, today a variety of transnational channels target diverse political communities worldwide. One of the newly discovered news audiences is expatriates. In addition to CNNI, Al Jazeera, MBC, the Middle East Broadcasting Center, a conservative transnational Arab channel, Zee-TV targets 30 million Indians worldwide. Another audience type consists of communities increasingly polarized around political ideologies and topical contexts (e.g. business news).

Not only the Internet as a technology but the 'network' as a new globalization paradigm, following Manuel Castells' argument, further increases the dynamics and complexity of the political globalization process and creates a new global 'network society' (Castells, 1996) – not in McLuhan's sense of 'sameness' but rather in the

sense of a new globalized 'networked individualism' (Castells, 2001) in which 'identity' is defined along the lines of new cultural and political parameters. The Internet, thus viewed as a metaphor for a new global communication infrastructure 'decentralizes' the advanced globalization process and creates, again following Castells' argumentation, a new social, cultural and political infrastructure, which cannot be taken seriously enough. Castells' approach of a 'network' society can be considered a new paradigm of the globalization process and of global communication.

It seems that the current global news infrastructure is 're-organized' around a new 'network of nodes' (Castells, 1996), connections and disconnections, 'longitudes' and 'latitudes', which affects the political identity of individuals within a new set of supra- and sub-national co-ordinates, passes national censorship and establishes a new transnational news flow. One example of such a 'network of nodes' is an increasing side effect of the global public sphere, which I define as 'reciprocal' political communication. Reciprocal political communication describes the news flow in which critical political content which is censored in one country can be located on dispersed worldwide servers in order to bypass censorship. Formats of reciprocal communication already began to unfold in the transnational television era, for instance through CNNI 'World Report' programme, where regionally controversial issues, such as the Cyprus crisis, were produced for a global audience by 'authentic' broadcasting organizations, such as TRT and CyBC Cyprus, and aired worldwide through CNNI's 'World Report' (see Volkmer, 1999). However, this process has further developed due to the Internet.

An example of this 'reciprocal' political communication flow in the network paradigm is the following: the Chinese government carefully monitors websites in Chinese, but less so English language sites. This political strategy is already reflected in the topography of Chinese websites: of around 11,000 websites dealing with China, the majority of around 7000 represent 'provinces and regions' and 1000 cover the topical section 'business and economy'. Only 80 are related to 'news and media'. Critical political issues, however, are

covered by international organizations (particularly non-governmental organizations) such as <www.actionworks.org>. In such a restricted context, where access to communication infrastructure is extremely limited and closely monitored, websites that allow true interactivity and information exchange have been set up outside the region, for instance in the US and Hong Kong, where the Information Center for Democracy and Human Rights is located. One of these sites, the Digital Freedom Network, publishes the writings of Chinese political prisoners and monitors human rights abuse not only in China but also in Burma and Bangladesh. Protective 'firewalls' are erected around web users in mainland China to block access to certain information. This includes material related to Falun Gong, the banned religious sect, Tibetan independence and the pro-democracy movements (McGregor, 2002)

Reciprocal communication flow also includes the new options for extreme political organizations to distribute their messages worldwide, for instance right-wing political extremists, who are banned from German servers, locate their sites on servers in the US and elsewhere, which shows that conventional regulation of the push-medium cannot be applied to the global network arena; nationally blocked sites can be accessed through internationally operating ISPs, such as America On-line, though for a higher dial-up fee.

Given this broad spectrum of diversified transnational news flows, it seems that the global public sphere as an extra-societal political space is increasingly transformed by new 'differentiated' segmented 'microspheres' which operate differently in times of peace and times of political crisis. For instance, transnational microspheres around Arab issues have been established which can be accessed worldwide and reveal a unique spectrum of perspectives within this political context. The global microsphere in terms of the current political crisis includes Al Jazeera and MBC as well as CNN, which has recently launched an Arab language website. Other microsphere 'players' are so far unknown news organizations of global political organizations (e.g. UNESCO TV), news bureaus of regional and continental political organizations, partisan political organizations (e.g. PLO TV,

Afghan Media Center, South Africa Now), as well as publicly funded national broadcasters and political and private broadcasters, who operate in very defined niche news markets of the global public sphere.

Global public sphere and dialectical spaces

Given these developments, it is obvious that journalism also gains new responsibilities. The terms of 'foreign' and 'domestic' journalism become obsolete within this environment. Within this global public sphere journalism gains a new role as a 'mediator', 'mediating' between new political discourses – the global public sphere and microspheres – but also mediating between diverse political media environments. One format of this 'mediator' role is that of 'reciprocal' journalism, as described above, which provides discourse platforms for otherwise restricted media environments. The role of 'mediator' also includes new cooperation modes as well as presentation formats, such as Mediachannel.org.

However, it is somewhat surprising that communication theory – and this notion applies to communication theory in Europe as well as in the US – still seems to overlook these important transformations of the international communication infrastructure as well as the related paradigm changes within the discourse of 'globalization'. International communication theory is still based on the 'modern' paradigm of, in the original sense, truly international communication, i.e. communication between nations in conjunction with a 'modern' role of the media within nation-states (see for instance recent publications such as Tehranian, 1999 or Chuang, 2000).

Communication theory still discusses 'communication imbalances', as for instance debates initiated by the 1980 UNESCO MacBride Report, now debated as 'digital divide' (Norris, 2001), 'cultural imperialism' (Schiller, 1976) and 'international cultivation' (Morgan, 1990), now rephrased in conjunction with cultural studies. The context of a 'global' culture has not yet entirely re-framed the concept of 'international communication' but constitutes a niche debate within the

communication theory landscape, where at least some aspects of new paradigms are debated. Without any doubt, these issues have a great importance, in order to achieve a balance of global communication. However, viewed from the perspective of the network paradigm, issues of 'imperialism', 'cultivation' and the 'digital divide' appear in a completely different light.

Whereas the sociological discourse on globalization has already included notions of 'modernity' and 'post-modernity' (which radically reviews the role of the nation-state), this discourse also deals with new formats and patterns of 'inter-connections' (Robertson, 1992: 2) in the context of the (global) 'whole', such as identity, politics, religion and economy. Communication theory (in the US as well as in Europe) has rarely discussed the consequences of the paradigm change from 'modernity' to 'globalization'.

Proponents of a 'modern' globalization process, such as Giddens (1990) and Beck (1996), argue, for instance, that 'globalization' is a de-constructive three-way process, i.e. de-constructing the nation-state: 'pulling away', 'pushing down', and 'squeezing sideways' (Giddens in Slevin, 2000: 200).

Globalization 'pulls away', for example, in the sense that the powers once held by agencies of state or large economic organizations have been weakened by global developments. Globalization 'pushes down' in the sense that it creates new burdens and new options for local identities and interaction. Finally, globalization 'squeezes sideways' in that it re-orders time and space, cutting across old boundaries and creating new horizontal alliances. (Slevin, 2000: 200)

The concept of the 'public sphere' involves an increasingly dialectical relationship between the spheres of privacy within a society and public life. The dialectic consists in the slow transformation of public matters into the private sphere and the growing interdependence between private and public issues. This relationship reversed itself in the 20th century, when these spheres separated (see Habermas, 1992 and Stichweh's article in this issue of *development*).

Given the current news infrastructure, it could be argued that the national public sphere is

transformed by a new dialectical relationship between supra- and sub-national political contexts. The national 'gatekeeper' role is still exercised by national media outlets today. However, it is increasingly directly paralleled and influenced by the inflow of new transnational news media, reaching not media systems but worldwide 'life-worlds'. Today's transnational news flow directly enters the 'life-world' arena, via a globalized satellite system and increased bandwidth of cable and other access technologies.

In this advanced and complex stage of the current globalization process, the 'life-world universe' seems to become a new space of opposing and contradicting supra- and sub-national, polarized worldviews, which I describe – in conjunction with the terminology of political discourse – as 'dialectical' spaces. Dialectical spaces include the new 'gaps' between the local and the global, between the media as an increasingly authentic world system, and the surrounding culture, but also conflicting world images distributed via these supra- and sub-national 'network' modes, i.e. via CNN and Al Jazeera, via *China Today* and the BBC, via *The Hindu* and *Pakistan Daily* and 'authentic' worldwide available news groups and individual homepage viewpoints. These dialectical spaces, which we have not yet begun to understand, increasingly impact on public participation, notions of political identity and 'citizenship', the agenda of political journalism as well as the formatting of 'news' within the global public sphere (Volkmer, 2002).

I claim that these processes – within the political

global space – de-balance conventional national public spheres because they shape – on the individual level – political identities, notions of 'connectedness' and 'disconnectedness': processes which create a new concept of (world) citizenship in a political 'vacuum', between political coordinates of the 'global' and the 'local', between universal and particular contexts, between the longitudes and latitudes of a network infrastructure.

Although globalization processes have already been associated with a new 'vacuum', today's 'dialectic tension' affects real-worlds in a new way, and includes not only (pop) cultural issues but also political processes.

Within the framework of the global network, content, which represents a variety of viewpoints, can be accessed. In western, democratic societies, whose political systems believe in 'freedom of expression', the global content discourse provides an additional information source, which is composed under different circumstances. The possibility that critical content which is suppressed in one country can be located on worldwide servers, provides a new political network, which began to unfold in the transnational television era (see translocal television as described above) but has been fully unfolded on the Internet.

These 'dialectical' spaces shape 'worldviews' but also political identity (and participation), based on conflicting images (i.e. by CNN, Al Jazeera and national news angles) and refine political reasoning 'rationality' within the national public sphere.

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