## MEDIEN IM NORD-SÜD-KONFLIKT

Schwerpunktredaktion: Bettina Köhler

# Inhaltsverzeichnis

Cees J. Hamelink
**New Media, the Internet and the North/South Conflict**

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1948 United Nations conference on Freedom of Information the international community has debated the 'media and development' issue. During the first decades this debate was strongly influenced by the experience of colonialism and the subsequent process of de-colonization. The great divide between information-rich and information-poor countries, the paucity of media resources in the latter and their dependence upon foreign media imports, were seen in formerly colonized countries as consequences of colonial exploitation and oppression. Technical assistance programmes and the cultural strings attached were denounced, by the movement of non-aligned countries, as post-colonial attempts to retain colonial power. In their analysis, administrative colonialism was exchanged for cultural imperialism. New information and communication technologies that emerged in the 1990s seemed to promise new empowerment potential for a definitive break away from colonial power relations. This promise needs to be critically investigated. It might be that today's digital technologies are instruments in a re-colonization process rather than liberatory forces for a de-colonized world order.

## 2. Debates, Negotiations and Summits: The Problems Just Remain

In the earliest meetings of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations the inadequacy of information facilities in the less developed countries was highlighted. Diplomats representing these coun-

tries stressed that, with the existing disparities, there could be no reciprocity and equality in global communication. Several resolutions by the Council and by the General Assembly (UNGA) expressed the need to improve information enterprises in the less developed countries, and in 1957 the General Assembly requested the ECOSOC Commission on Human Rights to "give special consideration to the problem of developing media of information in under-developed countries" (UNGA 1957: 142). One year later the United Nations General Assembly requested ECOSOC to formulate "a programme of concrete action and measures on the international plane which could be undertaken for the development of information enterprises in under-developed countries". The specialist agencies were invited to contribute to this initiative.

UNESCO was asked to study the mass media in the 'less developed countries' in order to survey the problems involved in the development of communication. This was no new terrain for the organization. In its early history there had been an effort to reconstruct and develop mass communication media in war-devastated countries. At its third General Conference in 1948 a resolution was adopted that added to this "the provision of raw materials, equipment and professional training facilities [...] for under-developed areas" (UNESCO 1949: Res. 7.221). This was the beginning of assistance to Third World countries; this received special impetus when, in 1958, the General Conference explicitly requested the Director General "to help develop media of information in the underdeveloped countries". In response to the request of the General Assembly, UNESCO organized a series of expert meetings (in Bangkok, 1960, Santiago, 1961, and Paris, 1962) to assess communication needs and to design ways to meet these needs. The organization also prepared a report that was presented to the General Assembly in 1961. This report on *Mass Media in Developing Countries*, formulated minimal levels of communication capacity and concluded that for some 70 per cent of the world population this minimum was not available (UNESCO 1961).

The report recommended that communication development should be considered part of the overall United Nations development effort and should thus be incorporated in the UN Technical Assistance Programme. In response to the report, ECOSOC suggested in 1961 that the developed countries should assist the developing countries in the "development of

independent national information media, with due regard for the culture of each country". In 1961 ECOSOC recommended to the General Assembly that the UNESCO programme should be included as part of the activities of the First United Nations Development Decade. In 1962 the UNGA confirmed this by stating that "development of communication media was part of overall development". Subsequently, a multilateral programme of technical assistance to the development of mass communication capacity was launched that was unanimously supported by the UN member states (see Hamelink 1984: 197).

### 3. Technical Assistance and Dependence: The Non-aligned Movement

In the 1970s the Non-Aligned countries recognized that this technical assistance did not alter their dependency status and that, in fact, their cultural sovereignty was increasingly threatened. They therefore opened the debate on the need for normative standard-setting regarding the mass media. The key point on the agenda for this debate was the demand for a new international information order. This demand expressed the Third World concern about disparity in communication capacity along three lines.

Firstly, there was concern about the impact of the skewed communication relations between North and South on the independent cultural development of the Third World nations.

Secondly, there was concern about the largely one-sided exports from the North to the countries of the Third World and the often distorted or totally absent reporting in  the Northern media about developments in the South. The disequilibrium in the exchange of information between the North and the South controlled by few Western transnational information companies began to be criticized by the non-aligned movement as an instrument of cultural colonialism. The Tunis non-aligned countries' symposium of 1976 stated that, "[s]ince information in the world shows a disequilibrium favouring some and ignoring others, it is the duty of the non-aligned countries and other developing countries to change this situation and obtain the decolonization of information and initiate a new international order of information" (International Organization of Journalists 1986: 276). The

New Delhi Declaration on Decolonization of Information stated that the establishment of a New International Order for Information was as necessary as the New International Economic Order (ibid.: 285).

A third line of concern addressed the transfer of media technology. On balance it was concluded in the early 1970s that preciously little technology had been transferred and that, in the main, only technical end products had been exported from the industrial nations. This was often done under disadvantageous conditions, so that in the end the technical and financial dependence of the receiving countries had only increased.

As from its Algiers summit in 1973 the Non Aligned movement continuously articulated its position of strong support for the emancipation and development of media in the developing nations. UNESCO became the most important forum for this debate.

In a first phase (1970-1976) the international debate was characterized by the effort to 'decolonize'. In this period political and academic projects evolved that fundamentally criticized the existing international information order and that developed proposals for decisive changes. Several years of declarations, resolutions, recommendations and studies led to the demand for a New International Information Order (NIIO).

## 4. NIIO and NWICO

The NIIO concept surfaced at the Tunis information symposium in March 1976. With this concept (formally recognized by Non-Aligned Heads of State in August 1976 in Sri Lanka), a clear linkage was established with the action programme for a fundamental restructuring of the international economy (the New International Economic Order, NIEO) that had been presented in 1974 by the non-aligned countries.

Although the precise meaning of the NIIO was not defined, it was evident that its key aspirations were national sovereignty and cultural autonomy. The NIIO reflected the Non-Aligned aspiration for an international information exchange in which states that develop their cultural system in an autonomous way and with complete sovereign control of resources fully and effectively participate as independent members of the international community.

In the end, the debate did not yield the results demanded by the developing countries. Their criticism of the past failures of technical assistance programmes led to the creation of yet another such programme: the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). For many Third World delegates this programme was seen as the instrument with which to implement the standards of what had in the meantime been transformed into a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The UNESCO General Conference of 1980 had stated that among these standards were the elimination of the imbalances and inequalities which characterized the situation at the time, the capacity of the developing countries to improve their own situation, notably by providing infrastructure and by fitting their information and communication means to their needs and aspirations, and the sincere commitment of developed countries to help the developing world (UNESCO 1980). The IPDC was not going to meet these expectations. Apart from the inherent difficulty that IPDC built on a definition of world communication problems that had, in the past, not worked to the benefit of Third World nations, the programme would also, from the outset, suffer from a chronic lack of resources.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) that had been since 1952 involved with the United Nations development assistance programmes, decided, in its 1973 Plenipotentiary Conference, to establish a 'special fund for technical cooperation' and in 1989 the Plenipotentiary Conference in Nice adopted the formalization of ITU's role as both executing agency for UNDP-funded telecommunication development programmes and as a development institution in its own right. The Nice conference created the Bureau for Telecommunications Development (BTD) and gave it a mandate that included the responsibility "to promote the development, expansion and operation of telecommunication networks and services, particularly in developing countries" (ITU, Nice Document 508-E, June 19, 1989, R.3/12).

At an earlier conference in 1982 the ITU had established an independent commission to study the problem of Worldwide Telecommunications Development. In 1984 this Maitland Commission, as it was named, issued a report entitled *The Missing Link*. The report recommended more investment in telecommunications in developing countries and more resources for training and transfer of technology. In response to the Maitland report the ITU established the Centre for Telecommunications Development (CTD)

Cees J. Hamelink

in 1985, which was expected to contribute in a significant way to the development of telecomunications. It failed to meet this expectation; the limited and sporadic funding that was provided may have played an important role in this, and the Centre fell victim to the ambiguous attitude of the developed members of the Union.

Throughout the 1970s extensive negotiations took place within the UN on the international transfer of technology. The paramount concerns in this field were related to the conditions of access to knowledge and the terms of its transfer, to the adverse business practices of large transnational technology producers, to the monopolization of technical knowledge through the international patent system, and to the development of independent technological capacity in the Third World. The larger background to these concerns is the quest of Third World countries to complete the decolonization process and to achieve a level of self-reliant development.

Extensive multilateral cooperation supported by a binding and robust accord in the area of technical knowledge transfer became ever more urgent as Third World countries were rapidly losing their natural resource leverage in international negotiations. This was largely due to recent developments in technology. "Discoveries in new materials and processes lower the demand for many raw materials traditionally supplied by developing nations. Automation and quality-control requirements make unskilled and semi-skilled labour a relatively less important component of manufacturing costs, decreasing the advantage of locating operations in labour surplus countries" (United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations 1990: 10) The new patterns of foreign direct investment suggested "the emergence of a type of technological 'convergence club' of the world's leading industrialized nations, plus perhaps a small group of advanced developing or newly industrializing countries which are positioned to make similar progress" (UNCTC 1990: 11). As technological capacity is an important factor in determining direction of FDI flows, a majority of Third World countries were left behind in the new world order shaped by the members of the 'convergence club'. This was particularly worrying as current trends indicate that access to technology is getting more and more difficult for the Third World. Restrictions on technology exports and stricter rules on the protection of industrial property made the acquisition of technical knowledge from the North more expensive and less feasible.

## 5. New Information and Communication Technologies: the WSIS

The new technological developments of the 1990s, such as the Internet (with the WWW) and mobile telephony promised fundamental changes in the North/South ICT disparity. An outspoken advocate of these new opportunities was Al Gore, then US Vice-president. During the ITU conference in 1994 at Buenos Aires he launched the proposal for a Global Information Infrastructure (GII) to which everyone should have access. "The GII will circle the globe with information superhighways on which all people can travel. These highways will allow us to share information, to connect, and to communicate as a global community". He added that the GII would resolve basis problems like poverty, unemployment, environmental damage and would usher in a new age of Athenian democracy. This rather crude form of technological determinism represented the new wave of modernisation thinking by means of which new ICTs were promoted through a discourse of social progress.

The 2003 and 2005 sessions of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) were strongly inspired by this thinking. The most striking feature of the WSIS preparatory documents and final texts was the lack of any serious and critical structural analysis of the politico-economic context. It would seem that the WSIS discourse took place in a societal void without any awareness of the politico-economic environment within which statements were made about information and communication technologies and their possible applications. Even during the preparatory proceedings, most of the visions of the Information Society, as they were presented by the various stakeholders, described the Information Society as inclusive and open for the broadest possible participation and access. The Information Society would create an enabling environment and support capacity building. Governance of the Information Society would be democratic. Primary goals were sustainable development, cultural diversity, and gender sensitivity. The general feeling was that the Information Society could yield an unprecedented win-win situation and could contribute to a better life for all citizens.

Although all these intentions are very laudable, it should be noted that they were offered as mere visions, without any empirical evidence as to how

Cees J. Hamelink

the Information Society would deliver on this potential. In the preparations for the summit one looks in vain for a serious and critical analysis of the socio-political context in which all the promises of the Information Society would have to be realised. This is troubling because most of the laudable visions of what the Information Society is or should be, are part of a well-known international agenda for a better world. All the buzz-words from past decades were back: democracy, diversity, capacity, participation, gender, bridging the gap. The nagging question is, however, why such aspirations have so far not been taken seriously by the international community. Why has the international community been unwilling – in recent decades – to engage in real efforts to implement what it preaches?

The WSIS discourse steered away from such political questions and remained unclear (probably intentionally) about questions of power and control. These notions were not part of the official WSIS discourse. And yet, the question of distribution and execution of political, economic and military power and the control exercised by those powers is essential to a meaningful discussion about informational developments and societal arrangements.

There is not a single phrase in the key documents about the effects of the dominant neo-liberal globalisation process or about how the information society as promotional concept fits remarkably well into a vision that puts Western 'civilization' at the centre and forces others to trail behind the model. One finds solemn statements about cultural diversity that have no meaning since the texts of the Final Declaration and the Plan of Action do not offer proposals as to how, in concrete political situations, 'trailer societies' can retain their own course towards the future.

In the WSIS discourse there was a strong tendency to consider the global digital disparity as a problem in its own right. This divide is not primarily seen as a dimension of the overall global 'development divide'. Since this bigger problem was not seriously addressed, a romantic fallacy prevailed which proposed that the resolution of information/communication problems, and the bridging of knowledge gaps or inequalities of access to technologies, can contribute to the solution of the world's most urgent and explosive socio-economic inequities. However, the solution of the 'development divide' has little to do with information, communication or ICT. This is a matter of political will, which is lacking in a majority of nation-

states. Instead of the strong political commitment that is needed, the WSIS discourse focused on the possibility of a 'Global Digital Solidarity Fund' (www.dsf-fsn.org). This is an almost scandalous proposition in view of the fact that, since the 1970s, all the efforts to develop and sustain such funds for communication development, telecom infrastructures or technological self-reliance have failed because of the lack of such political will. The WTO Ministerial meeting in Cancún (September 2003) demonstrated once again that not all stakeholders are equally intent on solving rich-poor divides. As Walden Bello (2003: 16) commented, "[n]ot even the most optimistic developing country came to Cancún expecting some concessions from the big rich countries in the interest of development". Fortunately, the poor countries understood that the rich countries (particularly the USA and the EU countries) intended to impose yet another set of demands on them that would be very detrimental to their societies and their people. In this sense the Cancún meeting was a great success. That same sense of critical awareness did not inspire the representatives of the poor countries at the WSIS.

The WSIS discourse on the digital divide did not critically address whether rich-poor divides can be resolved at all within the framework of the prevailing development paradigm. Following this, development is conceived of as a state of affairs which exists in society A and, unfortunately, not in society B. Therefore, through some project of intervention in society B, resources have to be transferred from A to B. Development is thus a relationship between interventionists and subjects of intervention. The interventionists transfer such resources as information, ICT and knowledge as inputs that will lead to development as output. In this approach, development is "the delivery of resources" (Kaplan 1999: 5-7). This position is reflected in the conceptual framework of the WSIS discourse: development is delivery. This delivery process is geared towards the integration of its recipients into a global marketplace. There is no space for a different conceptualisation of development as a process of empowerment that strives "to enable people to participate in the governance of their own lives" (Kaplan 1999: 19).

Cees J. Hamelink

### 6. The Internet: Colonialism in Digital Disguise?

The current phase of world history is often described in terms of post-colonialism. This is misleading since colonialism never went away. Its key ingredients are still very much alive in the international arena. These are: inequality in power relations, dependence upon monopolistic providers, exploitation of labour, dispossession of resources, limits to autonomy, and local internalisation of foreign standards.

The North/South conflict is today still largely the clash between colonizing and de-colonizing interests. New media are rapidly expanding the production of information and the access to and utilization of information sources around the world. These processes offer new opportunities for people's empowerment and new challenges to the world's existing power relations. It needs to be observed however that the availability of technical and informational resources remains starkly skewed along lines of affluence versus poverty, and that availability does not necessarily imply accessibility and affordability. Moreover, there is no empirical, historical evidence to support the expectation that such variables as technology and information determine fundamental societal changes. Their so-called revolutionary or liberatory potential is usually restrained by the relations of power and the powerful interests that prevail in the existing historical context, a context that today is largely shaped by the protagonists of neo-liberal capitalism: the G-8 countries, the World Trade Organization, and the Fortune 500 corporations. These forces have little interest in a radical re-distribution of the world's wealth. They may occasionally pay lip-service to the alleviation of global poverty but are not likely to support the 'alleviation of wealth' as the most urgent mission for the international community.

In the early 21$^{st}$ century advanced information and communication technologies, in particular the Internet, are proliferating around the globe with the optimistic, almost euphoric announcement of the end of the 'zero sum society' wherein there need no longer be winners and losers. Nevertheless, however significant these technological innovations may be, there is no empirical evidence that basic social arrangements will be restructured.

The determinist position suggests that technological progress is in itself positive and should be adopted by societies as historically inevitable. The problem is that such uncritical adaptation to technological developments

does not hold any guarantee of social improvement. On the contrary, precisely because technological innovation stems mainly from the powerful sectors of society (the military, the large industrial and financial corporations), it is likely to reinforce existing forms of control and inequality. When all the propaganda and sales talk for the 'Information Age' is stripped away, there remains the sober observation that the next decades will witness a pervasive, all-encompassing utilization of ICTs. To expect however that this will terminate the 'zero sum society' and will herald the definitive conclusion of the Colonial Age seems unrealistic and deceptive. Such projections seem to ignore the historical context in which this proliferation takes place. The South continues to be largely excluded from global trade and finance and hardly benefits from international technology transfer. The current process of economic globalisation is driven by a socio-political ideology (often called 'neo-liberalism') that is characterized by its exclusionary effects. The process has very unequal effects around the globe; in particular, those living in Southern countries are excluded from the advantages of market expansion and income growth.

Colonialism has always been characterised by 'dispossession' of the resources of its occupied territories; under 'informationalised capitalism' (Schiller 2007: 23ff) this continues unabated, by outsourcing production and service activities to cheap labour in the South and by exploiting resources such as Col-Tan (most of which is mined in the Congo), which is essential to stabilize electric circuits in mobile telephony. The recent World Trade Organization arrangements for the protection of intellectual property rights have facilitated and legitimized the plunder of genetic resources from poor countries. Many of these countries are rich in the bio-genetic diversity that is essential to the manufacturing of the bio-products that are popular with Northern consumers. Moreover, these trade policies have increasingly 'enclosed' the spaces for independent policymaking in the less powerful countries by defining global limits to forms of national protection, for example of infant-industries.

In the midst of neo-liberal economic globalisation, which can be seen as the largest expansion of capitalism in history, poverty persists and, despite, the availability of financial and technical resources to resolve this, the North lacks the political will to do so. The UN Millennium goals promise that by 2015 the number of the world's poor will be cut in half. This is the bizarre promise to achieve by 2015 half of what could already be realised today!

Cees J. Hamelink

The colonial concept of development was based on the notion of 'deficit'; the colonized people lacked qualities that the colonizers possessed. The transfer from colonizers to colonized may have been largely in the interest of the former, but was packaged in the discourse of social progress for the recipients. Development as transfer to address deficits implies that external standards are imposed while internal standards are ignored or – if needed – violently oppressed. Those who attempted to create local space for the liberation and facilitation of interior standards were commonly neutralized by colonial administrations. Throughout colonial history the colonizers have used the discourse of social progress as an instrument of control. They brought education, administration, trade, medicine, technology, and religion as a 'civilizing' mission but used this instead to strengthen their hegemonic project. From the beginnings of colonial history it was clear that foreign hegemony could not be sustained on the basis of physical coercion alone. This type of colonialism was too labour-intensive and too expensive. Once civilized and modernized the colonized people would welcome the colonial project as being in their best interest. This required a persuasive discourse that equated Northern-style development with the overall improvement of individual and social conditions. The new media that are on offer to address problems such as world poverty come with the promise of this developmental discourse. Admittedly, the technologies are wonderful, such as the $100 computer that MIT has developed for poor kids in the South. They do not, however, address the basic problems of these children. Each day some 30.000 of them die an avoidable death (Sandrasagra 2005) and the ingenious little computer will not change that situation! While recognizing that good and genuine intentions may be among the driving factors, the 'sales' campaign looks very much like selling spectacles to the blind without curing their blindness. Much of colonial history was characterized by such efforts.

Colonialism was based upon the unequal distribution of power in the world that limited, in the less powerful and colonized countries, the space for independent policy-making concerning the production and distribution of communication, information and knowledge resources. These skewed power relations are manifest in the issue of who currently controls the Internet. In June 2005 the US Department of Commerce announced that "it would indefinitely retain its existing oversight authority over the Internet

Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers" (Schiller 2007: 137), an authority which forms the core of all Internet operations.

New media suggest a global culture of freedom and participation and creative peer production; this is to some extent realised in projects such as Wikipedia. However, much of this not-for-profit creativity is exploited by such giant Internet monopolies as Google for commercial purposes. Internet users are becoming co-creators of content but recent studies indicate (Forrester 2007) that most users of User Generated Content (some 86 %) are passive consumers. This is the case even with Wikipedia users.

The commercial market shows no signs of letting the new 'prosumers' off the hook, and actually steering and manipulating them has become easier since users leave so much information about their preferences on the sites they visit. Companies such as Google and Yahoo have no specific interest in the creative commons the users offer but in the profiles they leave as 'metadata' to be sold to advertisers. Google has recently announced its intention to develop – like the non-profit Wikipedia – a global digital ency-clopaedia, most certainly inspired by market motives. Around new media and particularly the Internet sites a struggle has emerged between not-for-profit co-creative peer production and market-based exploitation of user-generated-content.

The Internet is a constitutive element in the 'network society' (Castells 1996) in which more and more people live. Network space tends to be asso-ciated with openness, de-centralization, and inclusion. Upon closed inspec-tion, however, the network society fits remarkably well into an asymmetrical capitalist world order characterized by exclusion. The majority of the world population continues to be excluded from living in the network society, as Manuel Castells (1996) has convincingly argued. The network society is a society of exclusion and division and has all the crucial features of the colo-nial society. The Internet is not, as is often suggested, a series of flat connec-tions between sovereign and open entities. It is a hierarchical system of connections between interdependent closed entities (capsules). The regu-latory authority (governance) of the Internet is centralized, as is its tech-nical and financial management. The Internet is increasingly 'colonized' by market forces and is part of a world economy in which colonial relations of power prevail. It is difficult to see how poor and less powerful countries with inadequate technological, financial and educational resources, with

local 'comprador' classes and fragile democracies or authoritarian political structures can de-colonize.

To present new ICTs as de-colonizing forces is misleading. Relationships between technology and society cannot be analysed merely in terms of technological determinism versus the social shaping of technology. Both positions ignore the fact that the identification of causality in chaotic and complex systems is very problematic, if not impossible. Technology and society relate through multi-layered interactions between human extensions (McLuhan 1964: 4) and human contexts. There is always 'context' for which extensions are developed which then become part of the new context that inspires the development of yet other extensions. The crucial question for analysis is whether, in the historical process, the context really changes. Since the 15th century the capitalist colonial word order has provided the prevailing historical context for the relationships between tools and power. None of the remarkable technical inventions of past centuries, none of the innovative human extensions, have changed that order. They have all been put to good use in reinforcing a divided world where centres and peripheries may shift but where the basic Centre versus Periphery structure is retained. In a time in which capitalism has become the only hegemonic force, its appearance as 'information capitalism' does little to allow us to expect that the hopeful declarations of the WSIS will become reality.

### 7. Digital Dissociation

The digital divide cannot be bridged in the context of an asymmetrical world order unless such closure is beneficial to this order. Bridging the global digital divide could mean that more consumers can be added to the market and that more surveillance and control can be exercised over more people. It might well be that making all people 'digital' world citizens is more beneficial to the colonial order than their exclusion from the digital revolution. It might well be that if people were to refuse the blessings of digital colonialism that this would be the most unsettling and challenging act that the colonized can perform.

Therefore, we should possibly consider it a blessing in disguise that initiatives proposed during the WSIS, such as the establishment of a Global

Digital Solidarity Fund, have failed. Their success would likely create new forms of exploitation by integrating the South into a global technological order that largely benefits the North by making Southern countries dependent upon Northern monopolistic technology service providers.

The de-colonizing potential of new technologies will have to be assessed in relation to the broader context in which innovations are developed, manufactured and applied. The contemporary context for the assessment is the 'Pax Americana', the hegemonic order imposed on the world by the power elites in the USA and their accomplices.

It would seem inexcusably naïve to expect that his order will realize politics of inclusion, as it is based upon the doctrine of the 'state of exception' (Agamben 2003) following which the sovereign state decides whom will be excluded from the protection of basic human rights. Nevertheless, the discourse of the WSIS outcome documents was strongly 'inclusive'. Both the Digital Solidarity Agenda and the Declaration of Principles (Geneva 2003) talk about an information society for all. The recurrent keyword is 'all'.

Just as I argued in the 1980s (Hamelink 1983) for 'cultural dissociation' as the optimal strategy towards achieving cultural autonomy, I would today plead for 'digital dissociation', i.e. a process of disconnecting before connecting with more negotiating capacity, technological mastery, and with a better defence against the deceptive promises of colonizers in digital disguise. It could well be that future inclusive information and communication societies need to go through a historical process in which 'exclusion' is not experienced as a disempowering force but as an effective tool for self-empowerment.

### References

Agamben, Giorgio (2003): Etat d'Exception. Paris: Seuil.
Bello, Walden (2003): The Meaning of Cancun. In: South Letter 39, 16-18.
Castells, Manuel (1996): The Rise of the Network Society. Oxford: Blackwell.
Forrester (2007): Forrester Research. www.forrester.com, 4.4.2008.
Hamelink, Cees J. (1983): Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications. New York: Longman.
Hamelink, Cees J. (1994): The Politics of World Communication: A Human Rights Perspective. London: Sage.

International Organization of Journalists (1986): International Information and Communication Order, Sourcebook. Prague: IOJ.

Kaplan, Allan (1999): The Development Capacity. Geneva: UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service.

Maitland Commission (1984): The Missing Link. Report of the Independent Commission for World Wide Telecommunications Development. Geneve: ITU. http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/sfo/missinglink/The_Missing_Ling_A4-E.pdf, 4.4.2008.

McLuhan, Marshall (1964): Understanding Media. London: Routledge.

Sandrasagra, Mitre (2005): WSIS: This Cranked up Computer could Close a Gap. www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=31103, 8.3.2008

Schiller, Dan (2007): How to Think about Information. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations (1990): The New Code Environment, UNCTC Current Studies Series A, No 16. New York: United Nations.

UNESCO (1949): Records of the General Conference, Third Session, Beirut 1948; Vol. II, Resolutions. Paris: UNESCO. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001145/114593e.pdf, 22.3.2008.

UNESCO (1961): Mass Media in Developing Countries, Reports and Papers on Mass Communication, No 33. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO (1980): Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade 1980; Vol. I, Resolutions. Paris: UNESCO. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001140/114029E.pdf, 4.4.2008.

UNGA – United Nations General Assembly (1957): Tabulation of studies initiated by the General Assembly under Article 13 (l) (b). http://untreaty.un.org/cod/repertory/art13/english/rep_supp2_vol2-art13_1_b_and_2_e.pdf, 4.4.2008.

**Abstracts**

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are a persistent element in the North/South conflict. Inequities in access to these technologies have been debated since the early meetings of the UN General Assembly, were at the core of the 1970s UNESCO negotiations about a New International Information Order (NIIO) and were prominent on the agenda of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (2003-2005). Two factors were constant in all these debates and negotiations. One factor was that costs and benefits of ICTs were usually couched by marginalized actors in terms of colonialism versus de-colonization. The other factor was that the most powerful actors in the world arena appropriated a discourse

on social progress as a vital instrument of hegemonic control. The new media and in particular the Internet are proliferating rapidly around the world and are 'sold' with this discourse. Moreover, in spite of all the declarations about our times as a post-colonial era, the Internet Age is part of a continuing process of colonization. De-colonization can only be realized once the colonized expose the deceptive promise of global digital capitalism and resist control by the colonizers in digital disguise through a process of 'digital dissociation'.

Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien (IKT) sind ein permanentes Thema in Nord-Süd-Konflikten. Fragen des ungleichen Zugangs zu diesen Technologien wurden bereits in den ersten UN-Generalversammlungen diskutiert; sie waren in den 1970er Jahren Gegenstand von UNESCO-Verhandlungen über eine Neue Internationale Informationsordnung und standen auf der Agenda der UN-Weltinformationsgipfel von 2003 und 2005. Zwei Elemente charakterisieren diese Debatten und Verhandlungen. Zum einen werden die Kosten und Nutzen von Informationstechnologien von marginalisierten AkteurInnen sehr stark als Frage von Kolonialisierung versus Dekolonialisierung thematisiert. Zum anderen propagieren dominante AkteurInnen die Frage der globalen Verbreitung von digitalen Medien, insbesondere des Internet, vor allem im Rahmen eines Diskurses von sozialem Fortschritt – ein Diskurs, welcher sich vielfach als Instrument hegemonialer Kontrolle entpuppt. Vor diesem Hintergrund kann das Internetzeitalter, trotz aller Verlautbarungen über eine post-koloniale Ära, als Teil eines fortgesetzten Kolonialisierungsprozesses interpretiert werden. Eine De-Kolonialisierung ist angesichts eines globalen digitalen Kapitalismus nur dann möglich, wenn sich die Kolonialisierten der digitalen Kontrolle ihrer KolonisatorInnen durch Prozesse der „digitalen Dissoziation" entziehen.

Cees J. Hamelink
Burg. Hogguerstr. 279
1064 CP Amsterdam
The Netherlands
hamelink@antenna.nl