Global Debates on the Right to Communicate

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Abstract

This article analyzes the three-decade evolution of the right to communicate debates. There are two stages of this global debate: intergovernmental and civil society. Intergovernmental efforts reached an impasse when crippled by cold war pressures and the politicization of the right to communicate. Once the domain of governmental actors, when the right to communicate was no longer on the agenda in intergovernmental platforms, civil society stepped in to promote communication rights. Many non-governmental organizations came together under the umbrella of communication rights. The Communication Rights in the Information Study (CRIS) campaign is investigated as a specific case study of transnational collective action for communication rights since it is a visible example of a global expression of the right to communicate movement.

Keywords: Civil Society; Communication Rights; Global Governance; Human Rights; Right to Communicate; Social Movement; World Summit on Information Society (WSIS).

Introduction

The concept of the right to communicate originates from Article 19 of the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers." Jean d'Arcy, director of radio and visual services in the UN office of public information, is credited with being the first to coin the term "right to communicate". Indeed, in 1969 d'Arcy said "The time will come when the UDHR will have to encompass a more extensive right than man's right to information, first laid down 21 years ago in Article 19. This is the right of man to communicate. It is the angle from which the future development of communications will have to be considered if it is to be fully understood" (d'Arcy, 1969:14). However, d'Arcy did not provide a definition of a right to communicate, and debates between academics, legal experts, and government officials in numerous countries on the right to communicate have continued for decades. Indeed, the right to communicate has become an issue on the global sphere (Calabrese, 1999).

This article analyzes the evolution of the right to communicate debates. By tracing the history and evolution of the debates, this article aims to provide context around this critical issue and provide some reasons as to why the debate has continued for over three

decades. I discuss the right to communicate debate in terms of two key phases: intergovernmental and global civil society. The first phase is characterized by discussions of the issue between actors at intergovernmental forums. This phase reached an impasse during the 1980s, which reflects both a shift in global governance structures and conditions specifically related to the debate itself, such as its attachment to NWICO. The second phase is characterized by global civil society actors picking up the right to communicate debate in the wake of this impasse. However, instead of reaching conclusions over key issues within the right to communicate debate, this phase has witnessed further questions being raised, such as legitimacy of global governance structures, the existence of a social movement around the right to communicate, and the success of non-governmental actors in influencing the debate. This article will investigate these issues through a case study of a campaign highly involved in the right to communicate debates—the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS). Beyond the questions already raised, I suggest that the right to communicate debate remains unsettled because of a lack of a universal definition of the right to communicate and because of the tension between national regulatory bodies attempting to regulate international communication issues and transnational information flows.

Importance of the Right to Communicate

Throughout history, communication and information have been fundamental sources of power (Castells, 2007). Communication, human rights, and communication technologies are tightly linked, and the issue of communication rights is fundamental. Communication rights are not tantamount to freedom of expression, but include democratic media governance, linguistic rights, participation in one's culture, and rights to privacy. These rights are questions "of inclusion and exclusion, of quality and accessibility. In short, they are questions of human dignity" (CRIS, 2005).

The right to communicate debate has a long history, and we can see two phases: intergovernmental and civil society. This distinction is based on the primary actors involved in the right to communicate debates (Calabrese, 1999; Mueller, Kuerbis, & Page, 2007; Roach, 1996). While we may distinguish debates on the right to communicate in to two broad phases, it is important to note that the second phase evolved from the first phase (MacBride Round Table Statements; Mueller et al., 2007; Roach, 1996). Throughout the 35-year time period, the goals of the right to communicate concept have remained fairly constant. However, the actors involved have changed from government to civil society (Mueller et al., 2007). We may also see an evolution in the framing of the right to communicate. Broadly, the first phase of debates mainly discussed the *right to communicate* and the second phase discussed *communication rights*. The evolution of the concept is discussed below, first from a legalistic worldview, which focused on international law, to an understanding which is less legalistic, as encapsulated in the term communication rights.

First Phase of Debates

As mentioned above, D'Arcy coined the term the right to communicate in 1969, and his "analysis galvanized an intellectual movement around a 'right to communicate'" (Mueller et al., 2007: 270). The International Institute of Communication discussed the definition of a right to communicate during its annual meeting in 1973 and during later meetings (McIver, Birdsall, & Rasmussen, 2003). Due to the aforementioned lack of a clear definition, the UNESCO General Conference in 1974 called for initiatives to formulate a definition, and the UNESCO Division of Free Flow of Information and Communication sponsored a series of meetings – held in Stockholm in 1978, Manila in 1979, London and Ottawa in 1980, Strasbourg in 1981, and Bucharest in 1982.

With the issue moving from the International Institute of Communication to the auspice of UNESCO, the right to communicate debate fell in to east/west and north/south ideological differences present in the 1970s and 1980s (McIver et al., 2003). The right to communicate became associated with the 1970's non-aligned nation's movement and the debate over a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The demand for a new world information order became an extension of the non-aligned countries' demands for a new world economic order. Linked both ideologically and institutionally to NWICO, the right to communicate became politicized and was brought to the fore of geopolitics (Alegre & O'Siochru, 2005; Mueller et al., 2007).

NWICO represents major concerns over media and information issues, and it refers broadly to the media debate in UNESCO over the imbalance of media flows between the North and South (Preston, Herman & Schiller, 1989). Global flows of news and information were the subject of intense debate in international fora in the 1970s, mainly fought out at UNESCO. Influenced by the Cold War, the West supported the principle of "free flow of information" and the Eastern bloc stressed the need for state control. The concept of free flow of information was that no national frontiers should hinder the flow of information between countries. Those in favor of a NWICO argued against the free flow of information doctrine which reflected Western, and mainly US, interests and was part of the free-market discourse which argued that media proprietors could sell products wherever they wished. In order to investigate the flows of media products, Nordenstreng and Varis (1974) documented a clear imbalance in media products, which favored the West, and argued that such an imbalance could cultivate cultural imperialism through media.

The cultural imperialism thesis argues that the values of powerful societies are imposed on weak societies in an exploitative fashion through the media (Chomsky & Herman, 1988; Golding & Harris, 1997; Tomlinson, 1991). This view argues that communication flow patterns mirror the system of domination in the economic and political order. According to the media imperialism theory, the controlling economic forces, typically American and Western European transnational corporations, use the mass media to provide the rhetoric through which concepts of social roles and personal activities are

labeled and explained, thereby imposing their values on other societies. These issues of cultural imperialism, increasing media concentration, and controversy over the free flow doctrine led to intense debates in UNESCO.

In 1977 the MacBride Commission was established to deal with controversy surrounding the concerns raised during the NWICO debates. The MacBride Commission published a report, *Many Voices One World*, in 1980, in which the right to communicate was articulated. "Communication needs in a democratic society should be met by the extension of specific rights such as the right to be informed, the right to inform, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public communication – all elements of a new concept, the right to communicate. In developing what might be called a new era of social rights, we suggest all the implications of the right to communicate by further explored" (UNESCO, 1980: 265).

The Commission's findings were endorsed, but this success was short-lived. The MacBride Report was interpreted politically as an endorsement of NWICO and met a hostile reception. Developing countries saw the right to communicate as a way for Western media to expand their market share by expanding in to their countries, whereas Western media saw the right to communicate as an attempt to control their expansion attempts (Hicks, 2007). There was international controversy over the call for a new order, which resulted in conflict between many developing countries who supported NWICO and the U.S. government and its allies. Alegre and Siochru note that, "instead of bringing the sides together, the process merely exposed the gulf between them and entrenched the positions, especially of West governments mired within Cold War geo-politics" (2005, para. 8). The US pulled out of UNESCO in 1984, followed by the UK in 1985. With the right to communicate so politicized, the issue was taken off the agenda by 1989 (McIver et al., 2003). This brings the first phase of the right to communicate debate to an end.

Second Phase of Debates

While the issue of the right to communicate dissolved in intergovernmental platforms, this did not end the international debate on the right to communicate. The right to communicate debate was picked up instead by non-governmental organizations (Calabrese, 1999; Mowlana & Roach, 1992; Mueller et al., 2007; Raboy, 2004). The change in actors from government to civil society can be understood against the wider backdrop of the increasing role of non-governmental organizations in a range of issues (Held & McGrew, 2002). Globalization has led to a proliferation of non-state actors (Josselin & Wallace, 2001), and literature from international relations, political science, and communications has noted that NGOs are increasingly occupying the world stage (Castells, 2005; Held & McGrew, 2002; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Keohane & Nye, 2000).

Siochru and Girard (2002) also note that one of the most important factors to consider about international governance organizations is who is entitled to participate. In 1968 a limited and formal mechanism for NGO consultation was established. Since then, an evolution of the quantity and quality of NGO participation can be traced. The number and

influence of NGOs has grown, with NGOs first having a very tangential role, to their influence spreading to more areas and sectors (Siochru & Girard, 2002).

The global rise of the NGO corresponds to the growth in the number of NGOs and activists interested in communication issues from the 1980s onwards, such as the World Association of Community Radio and the Association for Progressive Communications. Community radio and alternative media strengthened participatory media, and sought to challenge the dominance of corporate media. The 1980s and 1990s were the "community media era", as thousands of media projects were established throughout the world (Thomas, 2006: 295). A wide range of actors, from women's movements questing gender bias in media to those engaged in free and open source software, to Internet activists, were questioning the trends in media and communication.

MacBride Roundtable

Having established that there was a growth of civil society actors in this area, the article now turns to a discussion of the two key forums of the second phase: the MacBride Roundtable and the Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) campaign.

After removal of the right to communicate issue from the UNESCO agenda, the debate continued in the form of the MacBride Roundtable, a communications rights advocacy group, which was created in 1989 to discuss issues from the 1980 MacBride report (Calabrese, 1999; Roach, 1996). The Roundtable explicitly reiterated the principles on which the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) was based (MacBride Roundtable Harare Statement, 1989). The roundtable met annually for ten years, and we can see the transition of the debates from governmental to nongovernmental organizations, from the participants involved and rhetoric. For example, there was no government participation during the second MacBride Roundtable meeting in 1990. NWICO supporters were emboldened in their efforts to steer the movement along a "grassroots, people's" path (Mowlana & Roach, 1992: 11). The MacBride Roundtable reported in 1997 the shift to civil society: The MacBride Round Table reflects…a power shift from governments towards civil society…The various components of an international movement on media and communications, that can challenge the current neo-liberal orthodoxy, seem to be emerging. The creation of a global social movement - largely absent from the NWICO - requires a number of factors, among them a core constituency of on-the-ground activists who recognise their affinities and can mobilise in concerted actions; an understanding of the key global issues of the day and of the arenas in which they are fought out; and the capacity to get their message out both to natural allies in progressive movements and to the general public (MacBride Roundtable Boulder Statement, 1997).

The Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS)

With the aforementioned increase in organizations and interest groups around a variety of communication issues, in the 1990s, these issues coalesced into umbrella groups such as the People's Communication Charter and the Platform for Democratization of Communication, and communication rights emerged as one of the larger dynamics underlying the diversity of groups and concerns. A civil society constituency emerged to engage with the issues that had been raised at NWICO. Many of these civil society groups and activists came together in the CRIS campaign.

The Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) serves as a case study of a campaign organized around the right to communicate. It is the most visible, global expression of the communication rights movement (Thomas, 2006). CRIS can be understood as an evolution and offshoot of the 1960s and 1970s communication scholarship and the aforementioned debates in the 1970s and 1980s; the concepts driving CRIS are part of a political and intellectual movement.

The Communication Rights in the Information Society was launched in 2001 in response to the ITU's announcement of the World Summit of Information Society (WSIS). The ITU's Resolution 73 launched the WSIS process. In December 2000, a senior staff member of the ITU told the Global Community Networking conference in Barcelona that NGOs and civil society would be key to the success of WSIS (Raboy, 2004). The ITU staff member was of the impression that CRIS would be one of the first civil society organizations to be invited (Girard, 2002). With such encouragement, activists participating in the workshop began to consider their role in WSIS. A group of NGOs, which formed the Platform for Democratization of Communication in 1996, (Raboy, 2004) became the Platform on Communication Rights, and had a meeting in London in November 2001 which launched CRIS.

Social Movement Theories

Before continuing with an analysis of the case study of CRIS, we must first conceptually define the object of study. Literature on collective action and social movements is useful here. While scholars have noted that communication studies on communication policy often fail to incorporate political science literature on social movements (Mueller et al, 2004), social movement theory can be usefully applied to understandings of media activism (Thomas, 2006).

New social movement theories are associated with scholars such as Touraine and Melucci. Methodologically, Touraine's typology, as adapted by Castells (2004), provides us with three elements by which to categorize and define a social movement: the movement's identity (which refers to the self-definition of the movement), the movement's adversary (which refers to the movement's main enemy), and the movement's societal goal (which refers to the movement's vision of the type of social order they wish to attain through their collective action, Castells, 2004). Applying Touraine's characteristics to the Communication Rights in the Information Society

campaign, CRIS' identity is an "open campaign, drawing together existing groups and activists" to ground the right to communicate in society. CRIS refers to themselves as "civil society activists" (CRIS, 2005). Under the umbrella of communication rights, CRIS can combine the efforts of transnational and national NGOS and activists. The adversary of CRIS is monopoly, private ownership, and consumerism of media and communications. This may destruct the public sphere and hurt efforts to protect cultural diversity and efforts to use communications for greater social good. The goal of CRIS is to ensure communication rights are central to the information society, so that people have the capacity to communicate in their general interest and for the common good. Through mobilizing civil society actors, CRIS struggles to shape global norms. CRIS states that their vision for the information society "is grounded in the right to communicate, as a means to enhance human rights and to strengthen the social, economic and cultural lives of people and communities" (Media Development, 2002).

We may also conceive of CRIS as a network. Indeed, CRIS considered itself a network organization (Mueller et al., 2007). Transnational advocacy networks are becoming increasingly common actors on the international scene. They are composed of national and international NGOs, various advocacy organizations and individuals through "dense exchanges of information," and are motivated by values instead of material concerns or professional norms (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Networks can bring issues into international debate, and can "help reframe international and domestic debates, changing their terms, their sites, and the configuration of participants" (Keck & Sikkink, 1998: x). This accurately describes CRIS, as it reframed the right to communicate debate, changed where the debate occurred, and represents a shift of participants from government to civil society actors.

CRIS Activities

This section will discuss some of the CRIS campaign's main efforts to develop an understanding of the role this organizations plays in the debate. As noted above, CRIS was established in response to WSIS. The WSIS provided a political opportunity for the CRIS campaign, since the WSIS allowed for advocacy groups to engage with governments and international organizations about communication policy. CRIS held various workshops and seminars on the right to communicate (Mueller et al., 2007; Raboy 2004). Such events also allowed CRIS to influence WSIS planning and the role of civil society. CRIS acted as intermediaries to develop proposals for civil society participation and was instrumental in gaining a larger role of civil society participating during WSIS. Mueller et al's 2007 study documents the significant role of CRIS in determining norms of civil society participation in WSIS, and social network analysis reveals that CRIS affiliates were central in terms of its capacity to link various issue networks during WSIS.

Just as CRIS played a role in global governance during WSIS, academic literature discusses the increase in the number of NGOs in global governance. Indeed, Mueller et al (2007) trace the evolution of NGOs in global governance decision-making by focusing on CRIS in the WSIS process. Mueller and colleagues find "consistency in the political

goals advocated, but an important, thought-provoking change in the nature of the actors driving the process – a shift from state actors to civil society actors" (2007: 270). Regarding this increasing role of NGOs in global governance, Weiss and Gordenker (1996) discuss the "pluralization" of governance, which occurs as NGOs are incorporated in to the governance process. WSIS opened the door to civil society actors and the UN General Assembly resolution allowed NGOs, civil society and the private sector to contribute to, and actively participate in, the Summit.

Assessing Success of CRIS

If CRIS' success as a movement is judged by change in policy, then it is not considered a successful social movement. The right to communicate did not make it in to the final text of the declaration. The WSIS Declaration reads, "Communication is a fundamental social process a basic human need and the foundation of all social organization." (Paragraph 4, Geneva 2004).

Looking at broader assessments of social movement success, while NGOs occupy a larger role on the world stage, their influence on politics is debated. Realists argue that the nation state has ultimate control, and NGOs play minor roles in decision-making, which can largely be dismissed. On the other hand, transnational relations literature argues that NGOs produce a new type of influence, which leads to global civil society. Kelly (2007) traces the ontological evolution of NGOs in international relations as follows: as international interest groups, then transnational social movement organizations, then transnational advocacy networks, and most recently as global civil society.

The influence of civil society in general is a topic greatly debated. Siochru and Girard (2002), acknowledging that NGOs have grown in their number and ability to influence decision-making, note the limit of civil society. They argue "the invitation of civil society participation will never go so far as to threaten the core tenets of liberalization and capacity of the global private sector to extend and enforce its interests" (156). Drezner (2004) also argues that states remain the primary actors in world politics and that NGOs play a role in global governance "only under certain constellations of state interests" (484). He says, "Evidence…suggests that both IGOs and NGOs have roles to play in global governance. At times they can act as independent agenda setters, but more often they act as the agents of state interests. Only by understanding these actors as governance substitutes in the global Internet regime can one acquire a greater understanding of global governance in an era of economic globalization" (479).

While effects on policy change may be limited, it is important to evaluate the influence of NGOs not *only* by policy changes. Indeed, Keck and Sikkink (1998) propose five levels by which to assess influence: "issue creation and agenda setting; influence on discursive positions of states and international organizations; influence on institutional procedures; influence on policy change in 'target actors' which may be states, international organizations like the World Bank, or private actors…and influence on state behavior" (25). Therefore, while scholars such as Drezner conclude that NGOs have limited

influence, alterative conclusions can be reach if influence is assessed through various levels, and not just the level of influence on state behavior.

For example, CRIS certainly were successful on three of these levels. First, CRIS were key agenda setters of communication rights. Indeed, CRIS brought communication rights on the global agenda. When the right to communicate was dropped as an agenda item from UNESCO, the debate was not present outside of NGO meetings. With CRIS raising the issue during WSIS, the right to communicate entered the international scene again. Second, CRIS influenced discursive positions. During the WSIS process, the right to communicate was endorsed several times by key actors. For example, the European Commission, on their position on the WSIS, said, "The Summit should reinforce the right to communication and to access information and knowledge" (European Commission, 2002, para. 6). On World Telecommunications Day in 2003, Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, said "millions of people in the poorest countries are still excluded from the 'right to communicate', increasingly seen as a fundamental human right" (United Nations, 2003). Third, CRIS greatly influenced the WSIS procedures through the inclusion and greater participation of civil society actors.

While the right to communicate was endorsed by actors during the WSIS it did not make it in to the WSIS Declaration. However, even if it had made it in to the Declaration, the WSIS process did not have the power or mandate to establish new rights. The WSIS was an attempt to establish global governance of many communication issues, but, due to many divergent actors and their goals, the WSIS process largely failed. No global agreement was reached on how to deal with and regulate communication issues. Thus, the success of CRIS remains open to interpretation of goals.

Global Governance

Participation in WSIS is not the only activity of CRIS, although it is the most frequently investigated by scholars. Participants from the London 2001 meeting that launched CRIS note that the key objective of CRIS was to put communication rights on the global agenda, whether at WSIS or another opportunity (Girard, 2002). As CRIS participants observed, "our primary objective was simply to put communication issues on the global agenda, and if the WSIS turned out not to offer that opportunity, we would focus our efforts elsewhere." (Media Development, 2002: 1).

Thus, when communication rights did not make it in the text of the WSIS Declaration, CRIS continued their campaign in other areas such as global governance. A main tension which became evident through the failed WSIS process in general is that media and communication are global, but governance structures remain at the national level, which of course has implications for a range of communication and information policy issues. In December 2003, CRIS launched the project "Global Governance and Communication Rights: A Role for Civil Society," which was sponsorship by the WACC and Ford Foundation. The goal of the project was to promote an understanding of communication rights. The global governance project highlights the fact that a definition of a right to communicate may depend on local contexts. This project is one of the first to bridge

global and local frameworks. While the right to communicate is understood in a global framework, achieving these rights needs to be localized.

Some scholars have questioned if the global governance project stymied the CRIS campaign, since funding by the Ford Foundation set the agenda for the CRIS to focus on governance issues. Thomas notes "While the significance of media governance as a key issue in the communication rights movement cannot be discounted, the question that one can legitimately pose is whether the energies expended on stand-alone projects such as the GGP have been at the expense of larger campaign goals of CRIS that are yet to be fulfilled" (2006: 297). However, I suggest that dealing with governance issues is key for the right to communicate, and will advance CRIS' key goals. Indeed, the key issues in regards to a right to communicate are: an agreed upon definition, and how to enforce and implement such a right. Until these tensions are resolved, a global right to communicate may not be achieved.

Global governance has arisen as a concern of both academics and policy makers in the last decade of the 20th century. In an era of globalization, there has been a rise of international institutions, regimes, multilateral agreements, and international summits. Changes include "the thickening institutional density, expanding jurisdiction, intensifying transnational politics and the deepening impact of surprastrate regulation" (Held & McGrew, 2002: 8). While some argue that global governance is purely rhetoric (Gilpin, 2001), others argue that the new system is an evolution of global governance to a new complex multilateralism (Held & McGrew, 2002).

Why Now?

The right to communicate has a very long history. Thus, the question arises: why did the right to communicate emerge in 2001 as a driving force around which a movement formed? First, global dynamics give communication rights significant relevance today. As technology changes and we entered an information age and network society where communication and information are central to the social structure, various communication rights and issues re-emerge and must be examined and understood in this new context. One such issue is civil rights in the digital environment, which have been eroded under the pretext of the war on terrorism through Internet surveillance and control. Trends of corporate media dominance and the importance of media and communications in sustaining cultural diversity and its role in cultural processes also explain in part the relevance of communication rights in today's age. The structure of international politics has changed as well. Tarrow (2005) attributes two factors to the rise of new transnational activism: globalization and the changing structure of international politics. International politics "offers activists focal points for collective action…and brings them together in transnational collations and campaigns" (2005: 5). The WSIS, which represents a change in international politics through its multi-stakeholder approach to global governance issues, did indeed serve as a focal point for activists and brought a range of groups together under the communication rights umbrella.

In this sense, WSIS served as a "political opportunity structure", which offers an explanation for why a communication rights movement formed when it did. The concept of "political opportunity structure" in international relations helps us to understand why movements arise and grow and has been central to the social movement paradigm. A political opportunity structure referred to "dimensions of the political environment that either encourage or discourage people from using collective action" (Tarrow, 2005: 23). The WSIS encouraged the formation of CRIS as well as CRIS affiliates to argue for communication rights at the WSIS.

Some scholars note the shortcomings of political opportunity structure, in that it can be applied retroactively to any major occurrence of public interest advocacy. "The concept [of political opportunity structure] seems at once indispensable and uselessly vague. It can be applied retroactively to any major eruption of public interest advocacy, but as a matter of fact it does help steer researchers towards locating real changes in the institutional environment associated with the advocacy (Mueller et al., 2004: 32). While this is often true, it is not in the case of CRIS. CRIS was established because of a political opportunity. With the announcement of WSIS by the ITU, the Platform for Communication Rights established the CRIS campaign. Indeed, the purpose of CRIS was to "ensure that communication rights are central to the information society and to the upcoming World Summit on Information Society" (Raboy, 2004: 229). WSIS provided the first opportunity for international organizations to gather to discuss various issues, which came together under the umbrella of communication rights. Just as the 1996 Communications Decency Act was a political opportunity for a range of activists to unite, so too was WSIS, and CRIS explicitly saw WSIS as an opportunity to continue and raise the debate on the right to communicate. The political opportunity structure represented by WSIS served to encourage transnational links between groups and the emergence of new networks.

Framing of the Debate

While the right to communicate as an issue has been sustained over the years, there has still been evolution in understandings and framings of the concept. The 1980 MacBride Commission report recommended: "Communication needs in a democratic society should be met by the extension of specific rights such as the right to be informed, the right to inform, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public communication – all elements of a new concept, the right to communicate" (265). Here, the right to communicate is understood as a *new* right. Mueller et al (2007) characterize three worldviews on the right to communicate. Arguing for a new right can be understood in the "legalistic" worldview. This contrasts with the liberal worldview, which sees the right to communicate as a new label for traditional but evolving communication civil liberties. The third worldview is the normative-tactical worldview, which sees communication rights as a banner. Here the rights language is used to frame the debates. During the second phase of global debates, "communication rights" came to be discussed more than "the right to communicate." CRIS held a 'Framing Communication Rights' Workshop in Geneva in 2003 alongside the WSIS, since "it was clear that the question was not simply one of…adopting common terms, but one of formulating – indeed inventing and

reinventing – the concept of 'communication rights' within different national and regional context" (CRIS, 2005). Thus, this worldview dominated debates during WSIS, although CRIS continued to recount the history of the right to communicate debate and the NWICO battles in their meetings and documents.

Using the language of human rights is significant. One of the main consequences of using the language of human rights is that communication issues in this context gain meaning in the political process. It is not common for communication issues to be discussed in the context of human rights. For a CRIS associated research team in Columbia which was part of the CRIS global governance project, this language was valuable in the process of "opening a space for communication as a right, institutionally and within the framework of the demands of diverse grass-roots sectors" (CRIS, 2005: 7).

Thus, we see a move from a legalistic understanding of the right to communicate to the use of human rights language ("communication rights"). Debates have evolved from an argument for a new right to a broad understand of communication rights, which serves as an umbrella for a range of groups and advocates engaged in communication policy. Looking at the larger context of communication and information advocacy, the trend has been for organizations to move away from content and towards a rights-based approach in their advocacy work. Research by Mueller, Page & Kuerbis (2004) tracked public interest advocacy groups focused on communication and information policy issues in the United States from 1961 to 2001. They found an increase over time in organizations advocating for rights, and a particular increase during the late 1990s, as Internet-related policy issues moved advocacy away from content and towards struggles around individual rights and economics. Thus, this larger environment where organizations advocated for rights further contextualizes the CRIS movement.

Conclusion

Many social movements or collective action on media reform or Internet-related issues are national in scope. In contrast, global media reform movements are uncommon (Thomas, 2006). It is often noted that media and communication policy issues are not on par with other global movements, such as the environmental movement or the women's movement (Mueller et al, 2004; Thomas, 2006). However, the CRIS movement may represent a tipping point in elevating communication policy issues. The CRIS campaign was one of the first opportunities for a range of organizations to work together on media issues as a larger movement. Indeed, the right to communicate served as an umbrella issue for a range of actors, and CRIS brought global visibility to the issue of communication rights.

Communication rights embrace a variety of issues in one conceptual framework. This strengthens the potential for collective action and a social movement. The umbrella concept of communication rights may link groups internationally and allow various groups to connect their issues with the work of other organizations. A CRIS research team in Brazil associated with CRIS global governance and communication rights project, for example, noted that villages in the Amazon helped to build a network of

community radios with a notion of CRIS-related concepts (CRIS, 2005). Work in the Philippines echoed this experience and the research team noted that different NGOs and constituencies, from media rights, to telecom regulators, to ICT for development, came together and saw how their issues were related on the conceptual level of communication rights (CRIS, 2005). The civil society phase has been successful in uniting a diversity of issues under the umbrella of the right to communicate.

There is an ever-shifting balance of communication rights of people and democracy on the one hand and government control on the other. While the Internet was hailed in the 1990s as a force for democratization and freedom, we know now that it can be used as a tool for freedom or repression, as a tool of anonymity as well as surveillance. Governments have also sought to control communication, since throughout history, control over communication is power. New communication technologies allow government to control the means of communication in new ways. But wherever there is power, there is counter power, and struggles to regain control over rights continue. While power and control of resources are unevenly distributed in society, communication rights provide conditions for the right to communicate, which highlights why the battles and debates about communication rights are so important. Communication rights and democratic and informed communication are more important than ever before, as they play a role in cultural diversity and human welfare. Therefore, while communication policy issues, and communication rights in particular, are not on par with social movements such as the environmental movement, they nonetheless represent a crucial issue in society.

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