

The Intersections of Women Centered Media: Funding and the Struggle for Our Human Rights (*)

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Abstract

The rise of women centered media, their activist teachings and their extension to give voice to many different women starting in the late 1960s demand a sea-change in awareness and support within women's movement and funding circles. Recounting numerous examples of women centered media—especially around six funding models—from Feminist International Radio Endeavor (FIRE) to Young Parents No Fixed Address Network, common threads are drawn pointing to an evolution of a feminist public sphere and the ability of these works to stimulate change. Some historic markers are drawn, such as the Third World Conference on Women at Nairobi as well challenges for today by human rights leader Sirlatha Batliwala and communication activist Sally Burch.

Key Words: Women Centered Media; Feminist Media; Value-Driven Journalism; Participatory Media; Feminist Public Sphere; Interventionist Media Maker; Women's Media Ownership; Media Justice; Transnational Network.

Introduction

Women centered media, or women owned media, has evolved since 1968 when the first journal "*No More Fun and Games*" from Cell 16 in Boston was published, and the first women's films from Community Newsreel rolled on projectors. The central aim of such a movement continues to be telling the stories of women and girls, largely in their "own voices", empowering them to be engaged to speak about the real conditions of their lives. Ranging from newspapers to online videos, women centered media also encompass radio, blogs, zines, advocacy, films, broadsides, magazines among others. Set in opposition, against the prevailing backdrop of the increasingly tightly controlled mainstream corporate media, it is important to highlight that women centered media are under resourced and often little known outside the women's movement. From an activist involved in this movement, I am alarmed for the longevity of this particular, yet essential multi-layered forum for feminist voices to articulate theory, exchange ideas and advance the movement *and* increase women's visibility and effect on everyday life.

In their book, *The Race Beat*, Gene Roberts and Hank Kilbanoff describe the dogged dedication of the US black press without which they underscore there would not have been a Civil Rights Movement in Post-WWII for Afro-Americans (Roberts & Kilbanoff,

2006). In 1977 Allen and Densmore wrote a 10-point feminist analysis of mainstream media where they encapsulated the basic principle that an advance for women and women's issues could not be achieved without having a strong women-centered and women owned communications system. They synthesized this conclusion into the succinct term: "No Women's Media, No Women's Progress". This premise is paramount. The larger women's movement, and women centered media within it, is at a crossroads. Feminists – leaders in human rights, economists, reproductive justice activists – are all in various forums re-evaluating the focus of women's collective efforts. Sally Burch especially challenges us about our information systems explaining that there is a new urgency for "movement building" (Burch, 2007). Although some funders have responded, there is still a conspicuous absence of awareness, understanding, and the deep support of the vital role of the feminist media in building the movement. This paper is a critical commentary around the present funding sources for women centered media and the need for vastly increased support. A deeper analysis and need for a human rights framework—Women's right to information for their lives as well as the right to express and shape information and knowledge into many media—is vital.

Drawing from my activism in this field, this commentary intends to draw theory from practice. It is argued here that through stimulating a greater dialogue among academics and activists specifically around feminist communications issues, policy, history and economy, a real attempt could induce more study and awareness about women centered media.

Value-Driven Media: The Core Dilemma

On May 11, 2008 Ammu Joseph, an Indian journalist and blogger posted to the largely US based *Women In Media and News* website a most precise comment about the purpose and success of a women's media group in India. She explained that an Indian online journal had recently referred to the *Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI)*:

In an increasingly market-driven media climate, a network that nurtures value-driven journalism among women has proved to be a lifeline for professionals who believe that there's more to the media than news brands. Charumathi Supraja reports.

(May 11 2008, www.wimnonline.org/WIMNsVoicesBlog/?p=1043)

Yet, as Ammu Joseph reports this accolade, she underscores that *Network of Women in Media, India* is hanging on by a thread, in wait of the next funds. In a nutshell, this is the classic dilemma. Acclaimed for great success to "nurture value-driven journalism" yet denied the support to persist; A perfect Catch-22.

Figure 1 - Masthead illustration by Manjula Padmanbinan



Courtesy of Network of Women in Media, India <http://www.nwmindia.org/>

Can we not take the notion “nurtures value-driven journalism” and give it a value, especially in contrast to mainstream market-driven media which is devoid of “value-driven journalism”, like such papers in the U.S. that prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq bought Bush administration hyperbole hook, line and sinker with no questioning or argument? Surely, those in women centered media see that a threat to *NWMI* is a threat to us all. Does Charmumathi Supraja writing for an Indian journal see that connection? That the success of her work is in some way connected to the achievements of women media makers working within the framework of *Network of Women in Media, India*?

Within the US, comprehension of mainstream media and the largely unacknowledged presence and role of women centered media allows almost no awareness to the interconnection between the dominate public sphere and the feminist public sphere (Ross, 2006). The mission to make these connections and broaden awareness lies before us. By exploring some roots and history of women centered media, we can start to see the depth, difference and scope of women centered media; how it has evolved, and what steps are still necessary.

Some Early Roots

“*There is no audience for women’s films,*” distributors told Sheila Paige and myself in the early 1970s. By the early 1970s we had four films made under the banner *Women Make Movies*. While today *Women Make Movies* (WMM) is known primarily as *the* international distributor of women’s films and video, its very earliest roots were as a production group. *Women Make Movies* first formed from city-wide Women’s Liberation Movement meetings in New York City in 1969. In Hollywood, one could count women directors on one hand, one can barely notice any stories about women on the evening news. The *Women Make Movies* main vision is to mainly make real stories about women’s real lives. Paige and I, then both teachers in what might be called the “first wave” of the youth media movement, joined two other women from these women’s liberation meetings to start our first production on mothers and daughters.

By 1972, Paige and I, to a large extent because of advantages from our film teaching jobs (a task that gave us free access to editing equipment), were the remaining two original members of WMM. In the winter of 1971-72, we incorporated WMM as a non-profit educational organization. Specifically, it was intended that WMM teach film, video, and

radio to community women, for that, the Chelsea neighborhood in NYC was selected to be our home base given its diverse and mixed neighborhood.

Flyers were posted in laundromats, beauty parlors, and supermarkets throughout the community. We knew instinctively that women would bring fresh ideas and lively visions to stories important to them. In our first year, and given the support of a \$9,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts (based on our teaching background with Young Filmmakers's Foundation), we were able to work with women from the age of 16 to 65 and get five short films completed. In June 1973, these community women filmmakers were invited to present their new short films and speak about their making at the Women and Film International Festival in Toronto.

Figure 2 - First flyer of Women Make Movies posted at laundromats, beauty parlors, and grocery stores throughout Chelsea, NYC, Spring, 1972



*Used with permission
from Women Make Movies collection.*

As we started the community workshop, we immediately launched a distribution program, since we thought it wise to have a stream of revenue, as well as having a degree of sustainability through this revenue (if ever there was a time that funders would not support our work). We clearly understood feminism was political. New Day Films, Appalshop, Third World Newsreel, California Newsreel, Filmmaker's Library, Caynon Cinema were parallel organizations of the period also distributing independent film. Today, in 2008 and 36 years later, the primary support for WMM is the income from distribution, which is now about \$1.4 million. About 50% of that is returned to the filmmakers, and earned income creates the first model of support (Zimmerman, 2008).

A National Movement

At the time when WMM's standing was formed, we joined not dozens, but hundreds of others media activists—not only in the US but other parts of the globe—who claimed media as a social change tool, and began to start counter-structures to the entertainment

and the commercially driven media industry. At the time, none of us explicitly saw our media work within a framework of Article (19) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. As that deeper analysis and understanding would come later, yet, this vital media and information work paralleled the evolution and development of our fellow activists who were attracted to human rights work; environmental work; development work and other forms of social change activism.

In 1975, when WMM held a conference of women's film and video organizations within the US, we identified 78 separate women's film and/or video groups and women active within mixed groups. As a way for the groups to keep in touch, we published their contact information in a booklet for the conference. At the top of the list it states: "The list is a process" (Dougherty et al, 1975). Today few of those groups remain; yet, there are new ones that have emerged.

Martha Allen's, *The Development of Communications Networks Among Women, 1963-1983* remains the best record of early WMM media. She identifies and lists about 600 multi-issue publications; and 600 single-issue periodicals. She delves into many more aspects about women's media—such as video, film, music groups, etc. Her work is not a deep analysis, yet, it provides a historical record of the period, serving as an important reference point for future activists and scholarship.

Multi-Levels of Demanding Media Change and Connecting Internationally

In 1983, the Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice has been formed aiming to stop deployment of nuclear and other weapons to Europe. The US action was a direct outgrowth of the highly successful Greenham Commons mobilization in England. In a brazen move, women bought a 52 acre farm that butted right up to the military installation in upstate New York that harbored the weapons prior to shipment to England. Within the Seneca Women's Encampment, the leadership had a clear policy on media. For example, male reporters could not go past the front lawn of the house; and if a media outlet sent a male crew they would not have full access. Later women reporters came up to the organizers and said:

I want to thank you, I have been trying to get in the field [to] be an investigative reporter and I could not. It was the Encampment that allowed that door to open.....by you all holding your ground and saying that we couldn't have access to the true-behind the scenes story without it being women. We were given a shot.

(Michelle Crone interview, 2006)

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt also held women-only press sessions within the White House in the 1930s. Her intent was very similar as the Women's Encampment—to broaden the professional media opportunities for women. In 1948, she brought the same wisdom and leadership to the creative breadth and dynamics in creation of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Figure 3 - Newsletter from the Women's Encampment



Used by permission from
<http://www.peacecampherstory.blogspot.com/>

A newsletter was the primary tool of outreach for the Encampment; dense with information and news on actions, it was mailed to thousands of women across the US. Nevertheless, it also became an effective grassroots fund raising tool as women, in a steady stream, sent in contributions to keep the Encampment going. One can see here that one media tool becomes the effective vehicle for a second model of funding: grassroots contributions.

The Women's Encampment was so inspiring that it led to creating an entirely new women's media team. In Boston *Women's Video Collective (WVC)* came together to specifically cover events at Seneca. The video, *Stronger Than Before* was the story of the Encampment that evolved from their many hours of shooting at Seneca.

The video collective played the daily "rushes" each evening in the barn at the encampment. They also presented a great deal of the raw footage on community access channels back in the Boston area and at numerous community screenings. WVC worked hard to engage their community in the salient women's issues of the time. Nancy Clover comments that "It was such a period of growth and change" (Clover, 2008). This growth and development was universal during the 1980s for the global women's movement as peace initiatives like the Seneca and Greenham Commons encampments were center points of solidarity.

Figure 4 - The Boston Women's Video Collective



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An international reach and perspective was eagerly sought. Boston WVC sent a crew to document activities at the 1985 Nairobi women's international conference. Undaunted by the technical challenges, they also arranged for a live feed broadcast of a roundtable discussion from Nairobi back to Boston (Kelemen, 2007).

First Transnational Meeting of Women Centered Media

The first major effort to create a transnational network among women centered media came in 1985 in Nairobi at the Third World Conference on Women. Gerry Rogers—who worked in *Studio D*, the women's film unit in Montreal of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB)—envisioned the possibility as she had the economic security to formulate such a vision, because she sat within a well funded, yet women centered unit, with the NFB. Hence such leadership, and concepts, could emerge. Rogers gathered together 60 representatives of feminist media organizations from all over the globe to meet in Nairobi. Over several days of work, they mapped out a plan: a global network of support, development and action (Rogers, 2008). The concept was, however, ambitious and way ahead of the collective ability to execute. But an intent and vision were certainly articulated. At almost every international gathering of women since Mexico 1975, there has been a vital evolution in a media platform within the governmental sessions. This particular effort among the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in Nairobi was unique in that it was a considerable first effort to organize transnational women centered media organizations across the globe. Sadly, the pioneering director of *Studio D*, Kathleen Shannon, stepped down shortly after Nairobi. By 1996 this far-sighted and ambitious division within the National Film Board was axed in budget cuts (see: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/002026-714-e.html>). So the impetus *Studio D* lead in Nairobi, largely, floundered. The key architecture from the Nairobi meetings was

that organizations in the North take responsibility and leadership to ensure that sister organizations in the South were equally funded (Rogers, 2008). At the time, it was hard to comprehend how fickle support even among many groups of the North really was. Groups such as *Cinema of Women (COW)* who participated in the Nairobi meeting, like *Studio D*, would disappear by 2000.

Inheritor from Nairobi: One Woman's Support

The most significant beneficiary of the transnational meeting of women centered media at Nairobi was the creation of *Feminist International Radio Endeavor (FIRE)* which Genevieve Vaughan attended. By this time, through the Foundation for a Compassionate Society, she had been funding *Women's International News Gathering Service (WINGS)*, a radio syndication, and "*Let the People Speak*", a public access television series, both out of Austin, Texas. Vaughan took the mandate for North Americans to assist funding media efforts in South America seriously. Over the years, but especially in 1991, she assisted in support of *FIRE*, which represented a dynamic radio collective, based in Costa Rica that served at once a regional population and a global community of activists.

FIRE's first broadcasts were by shortwave radio; then moved to internet radio in 1998. Produced in Spanish and English, "by all means connecting voices, technologies and actions, amplifying women's voices worldwide" became its slogan (Thompson, Anfossi-Gómez & Suárez, 2005). As activist media *FIRE* has always been connected to various social and political movements, the radio collective is deeply committed to its audience having interactivity with its users—both listeners and website users (*FIRE*, <http://www.radiofeminista.net/>), where its interactive ICT (information and communication technologies) gives *FIRE* a global reach.

Figure 5 - María-Suárez Toro
Educator, human rights activist, radio producer



Used with permission of Reclaim the Media from
<http://www.reclaimthemedias.org/mediaheroes?page=2>

Over a five-year period, its audience was researched to both understand and better serve its diverse constituency. *FIRE* serves as an important leader in its region of Central and South America, not solely about media but on many social justice issues. The organization has provided leadership among women centered media internationally. In advance of the Beijing, held in NYC in 2005, María Suárez of *FIRE* conceived the idea of the *Women's Media Pool (WMP)* as a way to broaden the reporting on the sessions. WMP is an amalgam, now, of 48 women's media and other organizations from pockets across the globe with the objective to "give voice to all issues that are of significant importance to women's lives in the present global context" (<http://www.womensmediapool.org/objectives.htm>).

One Fund...Many Grassroots Media Projects

Since 2000, many scores of different women's grassroots media efforts in several dozen developing nations have various projects supported by the single most active fund specifically directed to women's media. First named *Women's Radio Fund*, now called *Women's Media Fund*, and housed at the *Global Fund for Women*, this initiative has been nurtured along by Dorothy Abbott since its inception (<http://www.womensradiofund.org/about.htm>). Filmmaker Julie Parker Benello has partnered with Abbott since the move to the *Global Fund for Women* to create a Field of Interest Fund "that uses media as a principle strategy to advance women's human rights worldwide" (<http://womensmediafund.org/index.htm>).

In 2005, the *Women's Media Fund* awarded a total of \$95,500 to 11 groups in as many countries: (3 groups from Africa; 3 from South America, 2 Eastern European, and one each in Turkey, Fiji and India). The actual scope of the media is equally diverse. *Mujeres Públicas*, founded in 2003, addresses the "political through the creative". The grant was to continue their street savvy confrontational use of public space to force issues of "women's humanity, citizenship, and rights" to the surface: "Through the use of creative print campaigns, the group utilizes public spaces and public images to address and challenge ideas that are destructive or harmful to women or lesbians and their full expression of their rights" (http://womensmediafund.org/grantees_2005.htm)

Figure 6 - Members of Mujeres Públicas Posting one of their Posters in a Public Space



Photo used with permission of Mujeres Públicas
<http://www.mujerespublicas.com.ar>

In Mumbai, India, the *Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women (SPARROW)* (<http://www.sparrowonline.org/>) also was awarded a grant from *Women's Media Fund* in 2005. Formed in 1988, the dynamic organization collects information and images of women, creates films, audio and print media, and functions as a resource center for scholars, policy makers, activists and organizations interested in women's history.

Archiving contemporary history encompassing the social, political, and cultural history has not traditionally been considered an activity that is crucial to development processes in India. As the group notes, 'it is necessary that lives are documented and this is made available so that development plans can reflect reality and are not formulated in a void'.

(http://womensmediafund.org/grantees_2005.htm)

For 2007, the most recent year listed for funded organizations, the *Women's Media Fund* awards went to a smaller grouping, among these recent grants was one to *Women, Media and Development (TAM)* (<http://www.tam-media.org/english/home.htm>) in Bethlehem, Palestine. Formed in 2004, *TAM* addresses the under representation of women and gender issues in media coverage in Palestine. "TAM's mission and projects directly address the use of media and internet to promote and enhance the image of women, create room for dialogue on many "taboo" issues relating to gender, and promote more networking between women's organizations and individuals" (http://womensmediafund.org/grantees_2007.htm). With support from Women's Media Fund, *TAM* was able to create a website to serve artists, writers, activists and journalists linking Palestinian women from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The "Brave" Funder

“Mama Cash invests in taboo breaking initiatives of women across the world,” states the Netherlands’ based fund (<http://www.mamacash.org/page.php?id=1>). They have not extensively supported media, however, they did fund a very imaginative, lively project, *StudioMobile – Accent on Action* from Georgia. As in Palestine, women’s issues on television are non-existent in Georgia. *StudioMobile* creates TV and radio shows, then, the women producers literally take them on the road. As they travel into remote mountainous and rural villages, they gather village women together and show the programs. The community women are encouraged to talk about their lives. Then *StudioMobile* women create new shows in collaboration with the village women.

A new women’s group from an isolated mountain village wrote to us: ‘They arrived in a van, got the young women together and showed us films about our lives! We didn't know anything about women's rights; we didn't know that a women's movement existed. Following their visit, we started to have meetings and make plans, and we asked them whether they would help us set up a group ourselves’. So this project had an immediate effect.

(Esther Vonk, European programme officer)

The Norwegian Model

One especially intriguing and revolutionary, funding model exists for at least one woman centered media. Through its national chapter in Norway, the *International Association of Women in Television and Radio (IAWRT)* receives support from Forum for Women and Development in Norway (FOKUS). At present, 71 separate organizations within FOKUS have their international solidarity work coordinated and fiscally supported by the Norwegian umbrella organization.

The affiliated organisations in FOKUS include traditional and radical feminist organisations, environment and solidarity organisations, women in trade unions and workers organisations, immigrant- and refugee women and women's units in development NGOs, church organisations and political parties.

(<http://www.fokuskvinner.no/English/2228>)

That both “traditional” as well as “radical feminist” organizations are delineated is a rarity. FOKUS is to be commended for its recognition of a wide spectrum of political views within feminism. Its inherent goal of women within Norway linking arms in solidarity and working with women in other sectors of the globe is truly remarkable.

Supported by FOKUS, *IAWRT* was formed in 1951 to perform vital organizing and networking for women in broadcast journalism across the globe. *IAWRT* chapters conduct regional projects like film festivals, and hold regional meetings, as well as its biennial international gathering. As an international non-governmental organization (NGO) they have official UN consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

(<http://www.iawrt.org/>). It is important to mention here that, in some ways, the FOKUS support of *IAWRT* follows the design from the Nairobi meetings.

Media as Participatory Activism

In Fall 2007, Ann Jones a writer and photo journalist, joined International Rescue Committee's work in West Africa in its Gender Based Violence unit. She worked with groups of women in small villages in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone; and is now in Democratic Republic of Congo. Outwardly she teaches still digital camera skills to girls and women to combat violence against women in a project (the *Global Crescendo*) whose aim is to give a voice to women in conflict zones.

Digital cameras are the tool. I arrive with them and lend them to women, most of whom have never seen a camera before. I teach them to point and shoot—only that—and then I turn them loose to snap what they will. I ask them to bring me some photos of their problems and their blessings. They work in teams, two or three women sharing a camera and very nervous at first. (Some women actually shake.) It takes the whole team to snap the first photos: one holds the camera, another points, another shoots.

(Ann Jones blog, May 14, 2008)

Ann Jones is the first to underscore that the aim is not photography per se (Tomsdispatch, 2008), rather, the main goal is teaching these media skills and getting the women to document things in their communities. Small groups share use of a camera, but each woman receives her own memory card. The power relationship of the women changes instantly within their communities. Previously excluded from the use of the most basic technological tools (such as the radio), all of sudden these women, seen with digital cameras, and are treated with *new respect*, and most importantly, the women come to see themselves differently.

Jones selects only two works of each woman for a public exhibition, where each of speaks about her photographs. For women, some who were forbidden even to look at a village chieftain, speaking in public is both powerful and empowering.

Figure 7 - Global Crescendos



Gender Club advisor Mr. Shariff holds the megaphone and listens attentively as 12-year-old Isata Amadu presents a photograph she took of him. Isata is about to bring down the house. Used with permission from Ann Jones, 2008. Courtesy of International Rescue Committee

In reality, *Global Crescendos* is about assisting women to stand up and speak; encouraging them to become advocates for themselves. In the Gender Club as the young girls discussed their photographs this is what they did.

They speak of early pregnancy and sexual exploitation. They speak of the importance of girls' education. Then 12-year-old Isata Amadu connects the dots. Pointing to a photo of Mr. Shariff, she says: "*He gives us information to help us in our lives. I took his picture because all teachers should follow the example of Mr. Shariff—and they should desist from impregnating schoolgirls.*" Parents gasp. One mother shrieks. The room buzzes. The headmistress puts her head in her hands. Isata returns to her seat while the other girl photographers cheer and throw her high fives. Shy little Isata has voiced the unspeakable truth that everybody knows. She speaks for every girl in the room. She speaks for every girl who wants to get an education, every girl who wants to contribute to her community, every girl who wants to be all she can be. Isata herself wants to be a teacher.

(Ann Jones, April 3, 2008)

A parallel project to *Global Crescendos* is the National Film Board of Canada's Filmmaker, initiated with St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. Katerina Cizek, a creative and sensitive filmmaker, was attached to "the frontlines of an urban hospital", identifies as an "interventionist" media maker. She described "interventionist and participatory media" with this question: "How can documentarians work to make media *with* people instead of about people?" She advocates "building media projects with partners that aim

to change world-views, lives, policies, conditions—and tell good stories too” (Cizek in, the Canadian Screen Training center).

The project at St Mike’s was designed as a process, not a product. The very high number of homeless teenage girls giving birth evolved into a special project within the larger project. Cizak wisely choose digital still cameras as the appropriate tool for these young mothers to document their lives. Next Cizak organized a photo blogging workshop which came to be identified as *Young Parents No Fixed Address Network*. On-line the young women created an evolving photo diary. Through the photos of these young women, the nurses and other hospital personnel were better able to see and understand their perspectives as homeless teenage mothers.

Figure 8 - Exhibition of the Photographs from the Young Parents No Fixed Address project



Used from permission from the National Film Board of Canada

There was a public exhibition of their work, where young women were hired by the hospital to create images for a report. These new parents, thrilled with their new found voices, demanded that the pilot short-term photoblog project continue. They are seeking ways to use the photoblog as a political tool to communicate about an emerging controversy in a neighborhood in Toronto. Lastly, they are using the photoblog to advocate for their own housing. A large wait list for housing on average creates an eleven year backlog for a home.

Shabnam Virmani of the *Drishti Media Collective* based in Ahmedabad, India holds an activist belief that people in communities can use media to speak with one another. In a self-examining and highly informative article she wrote for *Feminist Media Studies*, Virmani states: “Video and other popular media can be used to ‘close the loop’ and move us away from dominant, vertical modes of communication into more dynamic lateral and circular ones” (Virmani 2001, p. 234). Learning from an earlier film, Virmani expounds on a similar participatory film methodology as Cizek:

.....through a series of workshops and unstructured interaction, women get involved in defining the content, the script and ultimate usage of the film. They genuinely begin to use the film as an opportunity for self-expression. They develop a sense of ownership about the film.

(Virmani, 2001, p. 236)

In this manner, a much more collective concept of the production emerges. By enlarging the circle of women with a vested interest in the story and the actual making of the film, the activist use and frequent presentation of the film is guaranteed. Therefore the film's effect as an educational and consciousness raising tool will impact more people in more communities.

Defining Women's Centered Media: Articulating the Right to Communicate

What are some common threads to emerge in these varied projects? At the core of women's centered media is the commitment to extend, educate, encourage women to find their own voices and to explore, experiment as to what is the most appropriate tool in making that voice come alive. Public exhibition and speaking are vital, and there is a common understanding that media must evolve from needs, not impose some prescription of commercial media onto people. Awareness about women's actual conditions is paramount to better strengthening content as well as drawing audiences. The actual form of media creation and delivery must remain flexible, innovative and dynamic to address the real live circumstances of women and girls. In short, it must be participatory and inclusive. Lastly, it includes a wide variety of outlets *before the public*. The human capacity for intelligent communication and dialogue creates the possibility for formation of ideas, sharing knowledge, development of cultures and building societies. It follows that communication is a fundamental need of all humans, and as such, should be guaranteed as a right.

(Burch, Executive Director of *Agencia Latinamericana de Informacion*, 2007)

Via meetings and developments within civil society over the last few decades the issue of the right to communicate has evolved. Article (19) in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* has been an anchor in this analysis and its evolution, as we all struggle against the neo-liberal hegemony that centers the market at the core of social organization. As Burch summarizes: "communication has become too important a social issue for it to be a concern solely of those directly involved in this sector" (Burch, 2007). Burch goes on to outline several democratization efforts, especially those to codify communication rights into international law.

In many sectors of the today's women's movement, women are seeking a re-evaluation and a re-invigoration for the movement. Sirlatha Batliwala, a long time women's rights advocate and a Civil Society Research Fellow at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, Harvard University is one such individual. In her capacity as President of the Board of Directors of Women, Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), on March 6, 2007 she presented a challenge before the UN General Assembly:

There are some magic bullets popular in the area of women's empowerment and gender equality: gender mainstreaming, micro-finance focused on lending rather than women's empowerment, and quotas for women in formal political systems. All three are good ideas, indeed, they are interventions that the women's movement itself advocated, but they have been divested of the complex transformative strategies within which they were originally embedded and reduced to formulas, rituals and mantras. Some of these approaches have resulted in women joining a polluted stream, as WEDO's founder, Bella Abzug once said; they are leading to women disappearing from gender, and power being taken out of empowerment. There is growing evidence from research and grassroots experiences that mechanical and depoliticised implementation of these strategies ensures that none of these, singly or together, necessarily empower women. More importantly, these strategies have, in many contexts, merely shifted greater responsibility and burden for economic survival and political change onto women themselves, or ended up as a numbers game. They are not able to uproot the deeply entrenched relations of power between men and women, and between the dominant and oppressed.

(Batliwala, "*Walk Beside Us*", 2007)

She adds that "we need to consider whether the issue is to mainstream gender equality in a deeply flawed and unequal system, or to give priority and take lead in formulating and building a different 'information society,' one that is founded on human values, participatory communications and equity across gender, culture and geographic barriers" (Burch, *The Right To Communicate: New Challenges for the Women's Movement*, 2007).

Mainstream media are failing women; something radically new is needed. Within the women's movement the intersections between those of us working in media and those working on human rights, and other issues, need to be strengthened. Collaboratively we need to build a more on-going communications system, so that information about all types of women's work and accomplishments are more universally available. Media Justice demands, "if media work and media reform is not your first issue, it should become your second" (Soundararajan, 2007).

We need to dust off the plan of the 60 media activists who met in Nairobi in 1985. In light of new and vastly more far-reaching technologies now available, we need to revise it. Adding real teeth to an updated vision is paramount. Might the *Women's Media Pool* become a viable component of this development? Lastly, women centered media organizations, along with feminists in other arenas, need to enact this new updated plan. And, of course, secure the necessary funding.

Expanding the Resources

To date, only a small amount of support has been available to meet the huge need of a broad, diverse, dynamic and global women's media movement. Six very different models have evolved thus far: (1) earned income, which as example, has made *Women Make Movies* a sustainable organization; (2) grassroots contributions at varying levels of support; (3) a key individual donor, though she worked through a small foundation; (4)

initiative of another individual donor that has grown into a special fund with more contributors within a larger fund; (5) a dynamic fund that recognizes media as one of many tools of change/empowerment/human rights (there are other funds which fit this model, but not enough); and (6) state support. In this later case, the state support in Canada of *Studio D*, was really through a back-door and because of one person's persistence, and is no longer. As for FOKUS in Norway, the model is intriguing, but may not be universally applicable to more women centered media activity. This analysis is a first step in dissecting the funding conditions of women centered media

Money does, however, come into women centered media from a broad range of other sources beyond what I outline in this paper. Women are very resourceful. Simply, though, is not enough. And, more importantly, it is not sustainable. Like so much of women's movement activity, it is time for a considered number of new donors, especially of sizable means, to view women's centered media in new light. Strategically directed support of women centered media by a vastly increased donor base will attract additional capitalization and resources from yet other means to these specific, and essential, means of communications for women's issues.

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Notes

(*) A skeleton, altered version of this paper was presented in the 58th Annual Conference of the International Communications Association, Montreal, Canada (May 22, 2008): Bridging the Divide Between Scholars and Activists / Mapping Research Needed for Social Impact

A special thank you to all who sprang quickly into action to provide permission for the important images which enhance the telling of this story. I am indebted to your swift care, and of course, to your on-going work.

Sirlatha Batliwala is writing a major paper for The 11th Association in Women and Development International Forum on Women's Rights and Development, *The Power of Movements*. This global forum will be held in Cape Town, South Africa, November 14-17, 2008. Details about the conference can be accessed at (<http://www.awid.org>); and more on Barliwala's different writings can be found at (<http://www.justassociates.org/bio.htm#sirlatha>).

Drishti Media Collective is a fascinating process that has evolved a number of excellent models based on empirical experience. Shabnam Virmani's article in *Feminist Media Studies* is a must read on feminist media pedagogy. The collective's current activities can be accessed at (<http://www.drishtimedia.org/>).

Genevieve Vaughan has been a compassionate advocate of the Gift Economy. More information about her theory and practices can be found at (<http://www.gift-economy.com/practice.html>).

"No More Fun and Games", Cell 16, Boston, MA, USA 1968-1973, all issues, except #1 are still available online at: (<http://www.greenlion.com/cgibin/SoftCart.100.exe/NMFG/nmfg.html?E+scstore>).

Studio D and its pioneer leader, Kathleen Shannon are historically important in women's media, a short description is available at (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/002026-714-e.html>). Further the NFB now has two films on this remarkable studio that turned dust into gold.

Vessel, a documentary in-production on Women on Waves, and the organizations' social justice challenge to the international law and reproductive rights. Details about the film can be found at (<http://www.vesselthefilm.com/Vessel/Home.html>).

Young Parents No Fixed Address project and other aspects of the Filmmaker in Residence program at St. Mike's can be explored at (<http://www.nfb.ca/filmmakerinresidence/blog/?cat=5>) as well as the filmmaker's group blog at (<http://www.onf.ca/filmmakerinresidence/blog/>).

About the Author

Ariel Dougherty has worked in the women's media and cultural communities for 40 years. She produced *Women Make Movies* award winning film, *Healthcaring*, in 1976. More recently she directed and edited *Colonized, From the Interior* featuring Vandana Shiva discussing biotechnology in advance of the Earth Summit, 1992. In the November-December 2007 issue of *Women's Review of Books*, she reviewed *Women & Media: A Critical Introduction* by Carolyn Byerly and Karen Ross, Blackwell, 2006. At present, she serves as associate producer on Lynn Hershman's documentary/memoir on the Feminist Art Movement, 1968-2007, *Women, Art and Revolution* due out in 2009. She is Senior Research Consultant for Women's Media Equity Collaboration, an academic and activist project that is conducting a survey of the field of US women centered media organizations and analyzing sustainable funding models. The Social Science Research Council supports the project with funds provided by the Ford Foundation. Ariel can be reached at: arielcamera@gmail.com.
