

# **Participation or the Popular: Where to Find a Nest for the Restless Minds of Rural Transition?**

**By Ullamaija Kivikuru**

## **Abstract**

This paper is an extension of a rural communication project by Unesco/IPDC and the Finnish International Development Agency FINNIDA, focusing on nine villages in northern Tanzania. The project was given the name Commedia, an abbreviation of "Community Media for Rural Development". Its aim was to promote grassroots communication and dialogue between the village and nation-level media. It was originally envisioned as a pilot experiment for a huge programme, finally covering all the 8,000 villages in Tanzania and shifting the urban bias in Tanzanian mass communication. The project did not work out quite in the way it was planned. The Commedia story includes the ups and downs of an exercise seeking a balance between idealism and a cruel and capricious reality, not always responding to set objectives in the way planned in the project document (Kivikuru et al, forthcoming).

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# **La Participation ou le Populaire: où Trouver la Tranquillité Pour Ceux qui Sont Touchés par le Problème Epineux de la Transition Rurale?**

**Par Ullamaija Kivikuru**

## **Résumé**

Cet exposé fait suite à un projet de communication rurale (par UNESCO/IPDC et "Finnish International Development Agency", FINIDA) centré sur neuf villages au Nord de la Tanzanie. On l'a surnommé "Commedia", qui est l'abréviation de "Community Media for Rural Development." Son but était de promouvoir la communication et le dialogue à ce niveau, entre le village et les mass média nationaux. C'était conçu comme un projet d'essai pour un programme beaucoup plus ambitieux, qui impliquait tous les 8,000 villages en Tanzanie, et qui était censé inverser la tendance des mass média dans ce pays, où ceux-ci sont biaisés en faveur des régions urbaines. L'exposé de "commedia" comprend les hauts et les bas d'une entreprise, qui cherche à établir l'équilibre entre l'idéalisme et une réalité capricieuse, qui se laisse difficilement adapter aux objectifs du projet exposé ci-dessous par Kivikuru.

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## 1. Going Grassroots

Everything started from the village, but the village was soon forgotten. Taking a look at the UN and Unesco programmes of the 1950s in the field of communication as they are described in the Unesco Preface to Wilbur Schramm's book *Mass Media and National Development* (1964, vii-xi), what strikes one most in these "programmes of concrete action" is the projection of assistance to rural communication and concern about the fact that 70 percent of the population of the world is denied effective enjoyment of the right to information. The same tendency emerges as the dominant theme of Schramm's book itself and many others (e.g. Lerner, 1958; Doob, 1961, Rao, 1963).

An indication of the historical character of communication research is the fact that the idea of directing attention to grassroots communication has been considered typically as a phenomenon of the 1980s' despite much earlier efforts to reach grassroots populations by Lerner, Schramm, and others. However, it is justified to point out that the earlier efforts mostly understood development as an educational project of modernization, while the more recent approaches have aimed at increasing local-level communication as such without specific educational objectives. Thus the scope has changed quite markedly. At first communicators approached communities from the outside with a valuable message for a better future; at present, communication within a community is considered important enough as an objective, and empowerment comes best from the community itself defining its own problems and solutions, thus challenging the previously dominant top-down model.

One of the early challengers of the educational model was Paulo Freire (1972), who refused to view communication as 'banking' in which the communicator 'makes deposits' for the people to receive, memorize, and repeat. Freire suggested a problem-posing approach in which the status difference between communicator and the audience is abolished. Communication functions as a dialogue in which both sides learn. Freire calls the process "conscientisation," which means a process of learning the causes of one's oppression.

Obviously, the set-up suggested by Freire has sounded "too alternative," because it has been popular neither among communication policy planners nor among communication researchers. Still, the objective for all community communication could be called a form of conscientisation, aiming at increasing motivation and activation for improvement of the quality of life for those living in the community. Another, and presently perhaps more popular name for the phenomenon, is maximization of social competence (e.g. Jankowski, 1992; Jakubowicz, 1988). In short, it covers an individual's ability to cope with the world around oneself in a sensible and rewarding way.

Another argument within the "new" community communication approach, closely related to the access to communication and democratization of mass communication movements in the North, is quite revolutionary, binding it with modern reception research. The argument rests on the assumption that receivers should not be considered merely as targets, or members of an audience but rather as active participants in any communication process involving the articulation of reciprocity rather than a top-down relationship. This, again, means that media professionalism, with its fairly fixed value systems and means of expression, has been seen implicitly or explicitly as a hinderer rather than a promoter of spontaneous dialogue and cooperation with members of communities. Nevertheless, appreciation of professionalism still runs high in development communication; the "praise of amateurism" so frequently found in northern access literature is fairly rare in the South. There is a "natural" explanation for this: media professionalism has obviously been perceived as a means to ensure journalism's increased integrity in relation to the political decision-making system. Hints of a challenge to conventional perceptions of professionalism have emerged lately, however:

Why was Gandhi so effective in his communication? The answer I get is that he was not a professional communicator. Although he wrote every day like a journalist, the message came from the heart and the needs of the people. (E.V. Chitnis in Stuart, 1992, 30).

In regions which are conventionally called "developing countries" or the "Third World," the presently applied ap-



proaches to grassroots communication still carry more resemblance to the previous attempts of development communication, strongly influenced by modernization thinking, than community communication models in the industrialized world, though analysis shows that the basic tone of writings about the South has changed quite distinctly. Today, much more appreciation is given to those elements of the communication already existing in these communities than those which are lacking there (e.g. Kunczik, 1984; Valbuena, 1986, 1987).

## **2. Commedia: A Project That Remained a Prisoner of the Bureaucracy**

The Commedia Project was a brain-child of the 'culturalist' wave of community communication efforts, approaching the villages without a specific message from the outside, trying to create a dialogue between the national media and village communication structures in true Freirean spirit.

The implementation of the Commedia Project took a very similar course in each of the nine villages. The aim was to adjust the Project according to local circumstances, but the reality was different. In this sense, it is not surprising that the Project seemed to fit some villages well, while in others it hardly took off at all.

Three interlinked issues turned out to be crucial here.

First, *the level of attention and activity by the local administration was significant*, because Commedia was regarded as a government project and, accordingly, responsibility over its implementation remained with local branches of the government. Officially the local administration was for the Project, but only in few cases did it actually take an active role in its implementation. In some cases, however, the local administration made a wise choice of village animators, who were motivated themselves and took responsibility over the Project in due course. Thus a few individuals were ultimately responsible for the standard of implementation in each village. This meant that the Project remained vulnerable to

various pressures, because it was not deeply rooted in the village life as such; if a village animator left the job, he or she was usually not replaced, and the Project soon died out.

Second, *the Project seemed to take off best in villages which carried omens of change but had not proceeded very far towards a particular mode of developmental activity*. Old forms of communication seemed insufficient in the new situation, and the community was open to options to intensify its communication apparatus. A few villages could have been expected to do well in this exercise because they were wealthy, financially the most well-off communities among the nine, since they were fairly mobile, and seemed to have already established a steady course for their developmental efforts. However, their performance was quite modest, and most of these villages showed little enthusiasm for the Project, either formally or informally. Obviously, attention and acceptance of this kind of activity requires a certain level of dissatisfaction with the new life situation which the community is about to enter. If this stage is bypassed, the community seems to rechannel its daily activities accordingly, and a project such as Commedia is then assessed more as a nuisance than as a significant factor improving people's quality of life. Projects aiming at vitalizing community media seem to operate only at a particular stage of societal transition.

Third, *an effort such as Commedia requires a considerable period of time for its implementation*, because it has to make itself understood properly and first after that to establish itself in the community. A period of three years was much too short; the Project ended before it had really taken off. The criticism applies to practically all projects under the umbrella of development communication. Impatient sponsors do not seem to understand the complexity involved in communication efforts aiming at sustainable change. The solution to problems is not to reject these projects, but to allow them more time and to reduce the resources allocated to them only gradually.

All these three conclusions resemble the experiences of Hartmann et al. (1989) in the Indian villages they studied: the social set-up in the village is crucial to any change, and



'a *communitas*' is rarely a harmonious community but a source of contradictions and conflicts similar to urban societies. Because of these, an organized communication effort might provoke quite unexpected results, and the changes are always slow and gradual. Thus from a research point of view, the small variation in Commedia implementation was interesting, because it enabled comparisons which would have been impossible otherwise. It could also be questioned, whether tailor-made variations in implementation originating from differences in the base-line data would really have resulted in more appropriate communication efforts. The data collected was still quite crude. Variations developed gradually in the course of the Project implementation could perhaps have been more fruitful.

Does this mean that the whole exercise was futile? It was certainly not. The concept was solid and based on genuine needs, though these needs had not yet been made explicit either in the communities concerned or at the national implementing organs. The basic components of the implementation plan were balanced, and the division of labour followed the existing institutional structure in information distribution; no new resource-sapping institutions were planned. The trap was hidden in the very same issue, however. Because of the justified decision to use existing institutions for Commedia activities and simultaneously to force these institutions into full cooperation, the Project in fact was made a prisoner of the existing media structure. Everybody was eager to collect the benefits such as training, trips, vehicles offered by the Project, but as soon as the Project caused extra work, these institutions one by one started to neglect their Commedia-bound tasks, and finally many of them practically abandoned the Project. Perhaps interim benefits made available would have motivated the implementing organs and people attached to them to make the necessary changes.

Part — and the most valuable part — of Commedia implementation was carried out well, however, particularly the training component. The substance of all the training on various levels was solid, and this training obviously triggered new ideas concerning journalistic professionalism among

those who attended the courses. In Tanzania, there have been various plans and a few attempts to train rural communicators, but the concept of grassroots orientation in the Commedia training component was far better defined and thought thorough. What made the exercise even more valuable was the fact that the concept was obviously approached so consistently and in such a manner that such people with limited educational background as the village animators were able to grasp it. This was quite an achievement, because the professional climate in Tanzania espoused totally different values — a typical malaise in developing countries as pointed out by William Hachten (1993, 8).

Thus, in its core activities, Commedia had a radically different approach to communication practice. Above all, *the village newsletters were an important experiment in rural communication*. They became popular, and they indicated signs of developing flexible publishing profiles. With time, they could have integrated with their respective communities and valuable experience of the potential of rural journalism could have been collected. Unfortunately, these papers died before they were able to develop a 'voice of their own', a style characteristic of that particular medium. With the support of a well-established village paper and a motivated village animator, other unique forms of village communication activities could also gradually have emerged. A village-based exercise aiming at consistent mass communication is also rare internationally, though regional literacy papers have been used for decades. Obviously settling at village level brings both benefits and disadvantages; problems with printing technique and distribution are minimized, but maintaining integrity against pressures from local decision-makers is obviously difficult to attain.

*The idea of 'grassroots' reporters in villages was unique in Tanzania* as well, because consistent news-gathering has so far stopped predominantly at the regional level and rarely reached the districts. Their operational potential was great. A motivated village animator could start many activities if allowed to operate relatively freely. It is also a commendable practice to involve young villagers in mass communication activities. As it often happens, the weakest ones carried the



heaviest burden in the case of Commedia: village animators remained unpaid. Most of them abandoned the Project, because they had to earn a living. Those who remained with the Project had a profession either as fishermen, tailors, or small businessmen which they easily combined with Commedia duties; the Project brought these young men prestige denied them by the traditional societal structure of respect for old age.

Tanzanian villages are well-known for their ideals of togetherness and participation; there is also a long tradition of working together in communication exercises such as radio fora, self-help or cultural groups (e.g. Ng'wanakilala, 1981, 79-105). But as long as the exercise concerns "independent" mass communication without a strong educational component, *ujamaa* citizens are obviously as helpless as any others. Coordination of efforts in educational activities also seemed complicated. Most Tanzanian villages are prepared for developmental efforts which are part of the national social policy. Various village committees are in a better position to mobilize residents and to ensure that projects are integrated into village plans and activities; this is how the continuation of a project could be secured. Commedia villages had various programmes going on, most of them on a self-help basis without external funding. In all of these exercises, the Commedia Project could have been instrumental in fostering an integrated approach among these horizontal enterprises, but little collaboration between these projects was achieved. The Commedia Project was not rejected by villagers, but it did not get a sustainable reception. Hence, it withered as soon as external funds were exhausted.

In certain aspects an analogy between the Commedia Project and any major communication exercise could be pointed out. The initiative usually comes from the outside, and the experiment involves extremely few people at first, because most people happily remain mere receivers even in an ideal situation (Jakubowicz, 1988). Still, passive participation also includes feedback and feedforward elements, as has been indicated in integrated models including socio-cultural as well as economic aspects, developed recently by several experts in development communication (e.g. Nwosu,

1993, 18-20). The problem of these models is, however, that though they try to cover various aspects of the rural life, they still lean towards a campaign type of activity with a fixed time-table, and set goals and objectives; this bias tends to link them with the modernization school of thought rather than the more culturalist approaches emphasizing social competence (e.g. Casmir, 1991).

In short, it is easy to pay lip service to participatory communication, but the launching of truly local, participatory media is an extremely complex exercise. However modest the yield of *Commedia* as such was, it was an important trial for the Tanzanian media system facing new challenges in the near future.

### **3 In Search of Transitional Modernity**

Anthony Giddens presents a basic contradiction typical of transitional societies, though his focus in the following quotation is on the industrialized North:

In conditions of late modernity we live "in the world" in a different sense from previous eras of history. Everyone still continues to live a local life, and the constraints of the body ensure that all individuals, at every moment, are contextually situated in time and space. Yet the transformations of place, and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the centrality of mediated experience, radically change what "the world" actually is. Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global. (Giddens, 1991, 187)

The tension between the local and 'the world' is clearly less marked in a Tanzanian village than in an urban centre of the industrialized world, but based on the results of the *Commedia* Project, seeds of the same "push and pull" game between local socio-economic experience and world-building via images offered through such mediations as the mass media are found in the nine Tanzanian villages also. The surprisingly abundant "quiz knowledge" gained by some village alerts provides evidence of that. People form various news spheres around them, and the placing of a particular item or process in these spheres indicates its relevance in the eyes of the



villagers; people want to cope with the world around them, and names, places and dates are good "identification poles" in these processes. John Tomlinson (1993) has warned that this type of phenomenon should rather be called quasi-globalisation and that an approach emphasizing global features in a particular culture easily leads to over-simplification. His warnings are justified and worth considering, but the existence of the phenomenon itself cannot be denied. The intrusion of the world to isolated, semi-traditional communities is a reality, frequently associated with expanded exposure to the mass media, but not only that. Changes in the mediascapes of the villages is basically a question of changing values. People do not respond to media quests if they find no relevance in them.

Modernity is assumed to reside in the future, and the key to a better future is national integration. The nation is seen as an ideal of total homogeneity, a society without contrasts (Gomes de Matos, 1993, 344-346). Accordingly, any attempt to stretch a rural community to wider societal dimensions brings with it a need to develop and establish modes of public participation, extending beyond the burden of everyday rural life. Public participation might take very passive forms, however. Acceptance of collective representations such as the political spectacle presented by the mass media are regarded as public participation. In fact this spectacle, though experienced in dispersed forms, leaves the media audience just an audience, rather than a community.

Still, *participation* is the concept most frequently used for any form of communication activity aiming at partnership in democratic societal change and the well-being of members of the community. The key concept used here is not, however, participation but *the popular*, because the popular seems to reflect more exactly the spontaneous and capricious dimensions of the phenomenon, lacking the semi-official, organized and linear character which is frequently attached to participation in presentations dealing with development communication. The popular is here seen as *the hidden creativity of everyday life*, creative action that is marginal to the dominant rationality in human life (Martin-Barbero, 1993, 81-83).



In the traditional mode of living in rural Africa, tradition and oramedia provided opportunities for this "other logic" of the popular, introducing current events of everyday life into religious discourse, transforming the narrative of a miracle or oddity into a form of protest against the unalterability of the dominant social order. The complex and highly structured language of, say, the African drum (Asante & Appiah, 1979, 8) allows articulation of a multiplicity of expressions in the popular realm. The situation is changing, however; most Tanzanian villages cannot be described as traditional any longer but rather transitional, going through a process of transformation into a living mode that has quite capriciously adopted characteristics of modernity.

Thus *what is viewed as nation-building and development from a macro perspective, appears as a change of life style from the perspective of individuals in transition*. It means the reordering of social life across space, time, and geographical location, often leading to an asymmetrical, conflict-ridden process of partial globalization (Negus, 1993). In the case of the nine Tanzanian villages, it might be more justified to talk about marginal globalization, hardly anything more. The phenomenon is still able to lead to unexpected consequences in the rural Third World. Fluid and indeterminate processes heading to globalization have everywhere been characterized as dialectic by character (Giddens, 1990, 67), but they could be anticipated to take an even more dramatic course in developing societies. Actor Turner says that human groups utilize symbolic and institutional instruments to make sense of the interplay of order and disorder in life; he sees these developments as characterized simultaneously by processuality of life and nature and by the appearance of the unexpected, sometimes in the form of crisis and disaster (Turner, 1977). In these processes, developments of both *re-membering* — acknowledging one's root paradigms of life, linking them in a new manner in search of a new consensus, which is a composition leading to new collective identity fitting the changed framework — and *dis-membering* — cutting the bondage with certain elements of the past and present to enable societal action — occur. Anthony Giddens (1990) employs the terms of *re-embedding* and *dis-embedding* of



roughly the same phenomena. In short, a transitional community liberates itself from ties thought unnecessary or perhaps counter-productive and creates new linkages. People experience this liberation as allowing them increased motivation and activity, but also feeling increased insecurity. "The homeless mind" is a state frequently ascribed to modernity (Shinar, 1993).

This means increased value given to the domain of the popular in such circumstances as in the Commedia villages. The transition has been smooth in Tanzanian villages where the "other logic" of the tradition is still quite strong and the experienced need for urban-style popular culture is not yet marked. However, as indicated previously, the tradition tends to form a vacuum in the village communities. *Division of labour, the growing role of professionals and vertical administrative activities tend gradually to castrate the creativity embedded in the tradition.* Tradition follows its own logic, but separated from the dominant way of life. Gradually it might appropriate a role similar to that of religion in many industrialized societies: it is there, well-known and respected, but packed into a 'tin' to be used on Sundays and special celebrations, and lacking a vital connection to everyday life.

People in transition need vigour, passion and "affective alliances" in order to release energy for societal change (Grossberg, 1992, 86); in these alliances, such forms of communication as music, drama and cinema play a far more vital role than news. The popular does not stand for the popular culture in its conventional meaning, but in a far broader sense.

Popular culture does not refer to something foreign, but rather to a remnant and a style. It is a remnant made up of knowledge unusable for technological colonization, but by being thrown away, charges everyday life with symbolic meaning and transforms it into a space of mute and collective creativity.

Popular culture is also a style, a plan of operations, a way of walking through the city, a way of living in a home, of seeing television, a style of social interchange which becomes a place for technical inventiveness and moral resistance (Martin-Barbero, 1993, 83). In their attempts to revitalize

mass organizations, cooperatives as well as regional and local communication, Tanzanian decision-makers have shown their sensitivity to the cultural effects of transition in the rural areas, but the problem is that the grotesque realism of the popular does not fit together well with such noble notions as nation-building and development. One of the basic problems concerning development communication in any society is the tendency to deny the burlesque dimensions of human life; those processes which liberate social energy but lack rationality and logic. The other logic of tradition encompasses, for example, a wide range of humour and laughter; not only entertainment and pleasure, but also expressions of opposition, and challenges to the seriousness and well-structured value systems of the official world are included in the "obscure peasant mythologies" (ibid., 67). All these carnivalist extensions of the tradition are now to be gradually replaced by the popular, still retaining a connection with the rural mode of living.

What this means applied to the Tanzanian villages is that an enormous volume of creativity, joy, and pleasure is accumulating in the search for new channels of expression and new modes of articulation. Simultaneously, there are articulations of rationality available in abundance, on nationalism, development, progress, and even participation. These two often bypass each other, and the rational even tends to deny the existence of the burlesque dimension of creative communication.

In principle, conventional mass communication in all its vulgarity and built-in contradictions, could be regarded as a convenient arena for the popular, because journalism commands an array of textual devices for the production of authenticity and a phenomenon that could be called "time-space cosmology" (Ekecrantz, 1993), aiming at "naturalization" of the social universe described by the media. A local community with its past and present is linked to a wider societal consensus partly through articulations of the general tendencies of development, progress etc., partly through journalistic gimmicks such as underlining dates and places, eye-witness reporting, interviewing, use of the present tense, and narrative sequencing.



In practice, the connection with traditional values and the rural mode of life seems complicated to retain even in efforts conspicuously labelled as development communication, not to mention conventional journalism (e.g. Ansah, 1984; Kasoma, 1990). Above all, there does not seem to be any avenue open for extending the oramedia tradition (Ugboajah, 1984) to conventional mass communication. These two seem to form two distinct entities.

Conventional mass communication, even when appearing in such a miniature form as the village newsletters, seems to be attached to modern values, or in the case of Tanzania, more exactly to the sphere of development. Without exception, the village newsletters (Tables 1-2) bore names that connected them to the official optimism expressed by development vocabulary (Maendeleo stands for "development," Pambazuko means "sunrise," etc.), and their content was also very serious. The only affective material accepted by all of them was sports reporting. In all of the village newspapers studied, the emphasis was almost entirely on the socio-political agenda, though on village level. Thus, despite their focus on local issues, the newsletters were in fact omens of modernity brought to the village level. Some national media have published more narrative elements and poetry than the village newsletters. (Table 3).

The village papers formed a mediation with modernity, but they left the local versus global tension untouched. Educational material on health and agriculture was not at all localized, while the papers were not able to utilize the broader dimensions of local problems such as road conditions, home brewing, hygiene, malnutrition. References to the home region were made rarely, let alone the nation. Local authorities were given much publicity. A dichotomy remained in the mediascape (Appadurai, 1992): important issues existed "there," while "our problems" were pressing but genuinely ours, totally lacking general features. Perhaps this could be viewed as an unintended attempt to avoid the "mental homelessness" accompanying cultural transition. However, contrasts between "them" and "us" in the nine villages were not as drastic as in a recent study in an Indian

village, where teenagers watching television stated "America is an advanced country, and there are no untouchables there". One nation ("they") was advanced, while the other ("us") was nakedly backward. The Indian nation state was viewed as a source of political instability and terrorism only. (Pendakur, 1993, 102-104.)

However, the Tanzanian mode is probably not the way to form affective alliances increasing an individual's social competence in the new situation, either. As unorthodox as it might sound, the solution would more easily be found in the realm of entertainment. The vacuum surrounding tradition and traditional communication should be broken only carefully and attempts made to rechannel storytelling and narratives partly via conventional mass media, thus searching for an integrated mediascape giving due attention to its roots. As indicated frequently (e.g. Wang & Dissayanake, 1984), a harmony between "untouchable" traditional communication and more flexible popular communication which accepts the challenges of new channels, is not easily found. However, it is more easily found with tradition and domestically or regionally produced entertainment than with tradition and transnational assembly-line products.

#### **4. A Gift from Heaven: Pleasant Surprise, Not Taken Seriously**

A project that "drops from the heaven" as Commedia was felt to have done, without involving members of the community in its implementation is hardly capable of commanding popular support. The pleasant side of Commedia was that it did not demand much of the target population but gave something extra: papers, radio set, newsletters. It still also had the potential for operating as a megaphone, if it was able to give an articulation to popular meanings. Mass communication has this unique dimension; it is able to operate as a megaphone for spontaneous creativity, to mediate expressions of the popular will. The main question is whether members of the community are made participants in this mass communication exercise.

There was a danger inherent in the Commedia set-up. The



population was assumed to accept the role of receivers in the village-level exercise. Villagers were "audienced," doomed to various stages of passivity. Commedia was not able to develop into a self-help exercise demanding full participation.

Initiatives for modern forms of communication to be used in any setting, urban or rural, could and often do come from the outside. Those adopting the media exercise first form a distinct minority; they could be called "alerts," those eager to form ties with the outside world. Their curiosity grows out of excessive capacity to cope with issues outside their immediate surroundings, but they hardly have such a respected status as the so-called opinion-leaders in the classic two-step flow theory of innovation distribution (e.g. Katz & Larsfeld, 1955).

One of the main theses here is that as a prerequisite for finding relevance among the people who are supposed to be "shareholders" in a mass communication exercise, the basic needs of these people should be fulfilled first, because mass communication is an "excessive" demand in society, empowering "excessive" deeds such as developmental efforts, but also requiring the very basic framework of life to be in order. A hungry person concentrates all his or her activity on acquiring food, and "mental leftovers" are not available; thus, the choice of target villages from wealthy areas for the Commedia Project was justified. On the other hand, it is impossible to imagine a community opening its societal horizon beyond its borders without an activity serving the function of mass communication, traditional or modern.

Processes of acceptance and rejection are obviously far more subtle and sensitive than exogenous "communication intruders" with a good message and a sincere mind imagine. "It is palm oil that I carry. Person bearing rock, don't spoil that which is mine. It is palm oil that I carry," says a Yoruba proverb from Nigeria, and the proverb fits well with projects initiated from outside the local community. A thoughtless person or project might destroy more than he or she is able to build, everything happening in the name of development. In the case of Commedia, the palm oil did not splash, but no sustainable changes took place, either.

Ordinary members of the society might accept the new

mediascape if they feel like gaining something of, say, information made available on land reprivatization, or media articulations helping to cope with such recent challenges as multipartyism or AIDS. This material could certainly comprise news and comments but also films or popular magazines suggesting ways and means to break the existing social order and still remain socially competent; this requires processes of re-memembering and dis-memembering to take place, because the new societal developments seem to threaten security and thus trigger fearful resistance, as the uniform "no" to multipartyism in the villages suggested. Some of these processes of change do not require strong media support in the long run. Obviously, resistance to multipartyism would presently be much weaker, if the survey were to be carried out now; people have already accumulated experiences of multipartyism and found no danger to their personal security. Still, the role of the media in the legitimation of the new articulations is significant.

In the present Tanzanian situation, the domination of news and rationality and the subordination of pleasure and the narrative are obvious in the conventional mass communication filtered in the villages; this imbalance has two types of consequences. First, affective alliances are hardly built on the basis of news transmission only. Transitional people also develop a hunger for affective experiences, because the role of tradition weakens. Second, the news bias might lead to an uncontrolled situation later. An overflow of mass culture products could take place in the rural areas in the future, when market-oriented mass communication grows stronger in the country and "detects" the market potential in the rural areas. There is a latent quest for pleasure and entertainment seeking articulation in the villages, but consistently ignored by those in power.

The supply of conventional mass communication reinforces and directs the demand for mass communication as well. This fact has two different types of consequences, both weakening or at least restricting the status of traditional communication in the villages exposed to increased conventional mass media.

First, as soon as a steadily operating mass medium is



established, it is more easily supplemented with various other forms of mass communication, because a 'hunger' for mass communication grows as a supply of media messages becomes available on a regular basis. Efficiency of mass communication is, to a large extent, based on habitual behaviour, reinforced and strengthened by daily doses of the mass media made available in the community.

Here communication efforts differ from most other development projects: their rationale is not as easily explained as the rationale of a bore-hole bringing safe water, or a school building strengthening education, or a dispensary improving health services in the community. What use is a news bulletin or a village newspaper to someone suffering from malaria or malnutrition? In the case of Commedia, not a single target village had requested for such a project, but the improvements in mass communication supplies, brought by the Project, caused an increased number of complaints concerning media circumstances. People wanted more as soon as they were given something, but when the reward was irregular or delayed, the Project caused dismay and dissatisfaction. People were not able to appreciate what they had gained, because their media hunger was greater than the supply as soon as it was triggered.

Second and partly contradictory to the first consequence is the fact that the mass communication apparatus in a given community tends to mainstream contents coming from various channels. Processes which have frequently been viewed as professionalization are basically conservative by character: mass communication is defined in such a way that in its articulations, genuine local needs tend to be ignored and a bias toward uniform mainstreaming develops instead. This is an in-built contradiction of mass communication; news criteria remain standardized also in circumstances lacking the linkage to time-bondedness and assembly-line production which limit journalism in larger units and make uniformity of news criteria understandable. The rough proportions of substantial material in the village papers were very similar (Table 4), and this material resembled the news horizon of the national media. In fact, the village newsletters represented mini-scale urban journalism, these papers being

interested in the same subjects as the conventional media, though the authorities used and the issues covered were local. Mass communication seems to remain a battlefield for centrifugal and centripetal tendencies, on any level, but the centrifugal usually remains stronger.

So far, oramedia communication has operated as a sense-making mediation between mainstream-biased mass media in the villages; through interpersonal communication, the most relevant elements of national mass communication have been filtered in the rural communities and also to those people who are not reached by conventional mass media. Incomprehensible or irrelevant elements have been deleted from the news narration process. The strength of supplementally and sense-making mediations — women at the well, men in the bar, ngonjera recitals and narrations combining a recent event with an ancient format — is probably the main reason for the fact that in all the villages studied, some alerts reached a very high retention level. These people retained issues and items taking place far away because there was an interpretation apparatus of interpersonal communication for the messages.

This is one of the few areas where the oramedia and the mass media have been able to mix their articulations. But the combination operates in the sphere of news and current affairs alone, not in the domain of pleasure, and in the Commedia findings, no evidence was found supporting the claim that the mixture takes place on a regular basis. Oramedia enter the picture whenever the news values are distinct, even vulgar — when the item is exciting, odd, fearsome, loveable. Thus, for example political news most often falls outside this definition. This could be interpreted as an attempt to underline the meagre affective alliances available in news transmission. Tanzanian media have so far represented a highly traditional concept of journalism which makes a clear distinction between fact and fiction, news and pleasure. The distinction has remained, though new elements such as sensationalism have entered the arena. It is as marked as the border between news and opinion. It leaves the ambiguous realm of the popular on its own.

Thus mass communication, traditional or conventional,



offers both a chance for genuine popular voices to make themselves heard and seen and a counter-force denying any relevance for deviant forms of the popular taste or needs. To use Clifford Geertz's (1973) vocabulary, mass communication gives a chance to epochalist, forward-reaching, modern tendencies in a community, but it might also reinforce essentialism in the community; tendencies linking present-day phenomena with historical experiences and established habits. Both are needed, and in principle, a relevant mass communication system could develop into a balancing apparatus for epochalism and essentialism. In practice, however, mass communication seems to fall into established practices which, in turn, frequently ignore cultural novelties emerging from the community and replaces them with mainstream discourses originating from outside the community. In the name of professionalism, standardized articulations of standardized quests are transmitted to local communities. Mini-scale urban journalism is not the answer to rural needs, but rural media needs might, in the long run, be standardized according to the requirements set by urban journalism. Several relatively well-educated people defended the national media covering the rural areas so poorly by saying, "There is not much to report in the villages."

Presently the Tanzanian village mediascape is characterized not only by the scarcity of conventional mass communication but also by its two distinctly separate media spheres, the limited sphere of conventional mass media and the presently dominant sphere of traditional communication. The proportions will doubtless change when the domain of the mass media grows, but the sphere of tradition will remain as a base of essentialism perhaps for a longer period of time than expected in the urban culture, if the conventional media do not adjust their profile more according to rural needs. The extremely rare examples of rural journalism such as village or literacy papers can hardly change the basic course of Tanzanian journalism, so far acknowledging a very rigid concept of professionalism.

A delayed process of "de-traditionalization" as such would be healthy, making societal changes smooth, if the sphere of tradition remained vigorous. In most communities, however,

the traditional realm has lost much of its creativity along with increased "competition" brought by the conventional media (e.g. Wang & Dissanayake, 1984). If this happens in Tanzania, the villages really offer an open market for transnational entertainment, on the one hand, and a base for various popular and perhaps also populist grassroots movements operating outside the media, on the other. New affective alliances will be created, new forms of tension will be articulated between societal groups and structures, but the role of mass communication, traditional or modern, will remain limited. This brings transitional communities into an intriguing situation, because mass communication not only offers a channel for processes of re-memembering and dismembering; it also regulates these processes. If there are two totally separate and at least partly contradictory control mechanisms, the situation is far more complex.

## **5. From Mass to Nation, from Nation to World Business**

According to Jesus Martin-Barbero (1993, 163-165), the mass media should always be studied as articulations and mediations of both the political and the economic spheres. In Latin America, two quite different stages of the history of mass communication can be distinguished in relation to the above aspects, and a third one is presently emerging. During the first stage, reaching from the 1930s to the end of the 1950s, the formative role of the mass media was their ability to convey the challenge and the appeal of populism, which transformed the mass into the people and the people into the nation. This appeal came from the state, but it was effective only to the extent that the masses perceived in it some of their basic demands and forms of expression. Film in many countries and radio in practically all of them gave the people of different regions and provinces their first taste of nationhood.

The second stage started after 1960, when the myth of development with its technocratic solutions and encouragement of a consumer society began to replace the worn-out



populist policies. At this point, the political function of the media was removed and the economic function took over, though the state continued to maintain the rhetoric that the air waves were a social service, says Martin-Barbero. The poor were made to dream the same dreams as the rich, and the rapid transnationalization of mass communication was welcomed. These processes standardized or at least pretended to standardize what was called "world culture." In the 1980s, mass culture in Latin America was again riddled with new tensions that had their origins in the different national representations of popular culture and the new conflicts mobilized by transnationalization. This meant the emergence of the third phase, still at the stage of developing its contours. Thus the relation to the popular becomes into the central element in this development.

Latin America is a unique continent among the so-called Third World countries, but still Martin-Barbero makes relevant reading to those also interested in present-day Tanzanian mediascapes. So far, the Tanzanian media system has clearly represented the first phase in Martin-Barbero's analysis, but signs of a rapid move towards the second phase are recognizable. It is exactly this change that makes the situation in Tanzania so intriguing just now, and this mediation also links the Commedia Project to national communication policies and practices. Naturally, the Tanzanian transformation takes a different form and takes place at a different time to the Latin American development, but there are many joint features.

Throughout the decades since independence, the Tanzanian ujamaa politics, as well as media policies based on it, have emphasized the political role and the socio-cultural well-being of the masses, especially the villagers in the rural areas. "Others try to reach the moon, we try to reach our villages," Mwalimu Nyerere has said, and strong nation-making has characterized the 1960s and 1970s. Obviously the masses have also responded to the challenge, as the strong support of the Revolutionary Party CCM in the nine villages indicated. However, the radical politico-economic changes which the country has experienced in the past ten years have indicated that true popular support might actu-

ally be in the hands of those who work for multipartyism, economic liberalization, and private mass media.

It looks as if Tanzania could be approaching a rapid transnationalization phase in its media sphere, and most obviously it is welcomed as warmly and without reservations in Tanzania as in Latin America in the mid-1960s. The situation looks — and indeed partially is — as if a breeze of freedom of expression were circling around the country. Almost 30 private papers are flourishing in Dar es Salaam, filled with political debate, gossips and scandals and predominantly published in the language spoken by the majority, namely Swahili. The papers are distributed in larger towns. Private local radio stations, filled with religious broadcasting or Western popular music and rap have taken off in Dar es Salaam; some private radio stations, expected to take off soon, are registered also in other larger towns. Three private satellite-ground TV combinations have started in Dar es Salaam already, and 14 more are registered, while implementation of a planned public television system has met serious financial problems. International assistance organizations clearly favour privately-owned media for the present public media system.

No doubt that these new efforts are going to change the formal journalistic style still dominant in Tanzania. No doubt that all these enterprises are still going to use the rhetoric emphasizing the social service character of mass communication, because this ideology is deeply rooted in the country and is still given as a task of all mass media in the country's Constitution. The social service emphasis in turn implies that the rural areas are not looked at only as an unused marketing area but also as a source of relevant information and as a challenge to be met by various mass media. But it is equally clear that at the first stage, all these new advertising-based media efforts are actually going to bypass the rural areas, because their marketing value is limited. It seems as if the new multiplicity of the mediascapes in towns had developed at the cost of the rural areas. The haves are given more, while the have-nots remain at the fringes of the new system. In fact, the total circulation volume of newspapers has decreased in the country, though the number of newspa-



per titles has multiplied. There is now one newspaper copy per 10 Tanzanians, while the figure 10 years ago was one per 6 persons. Furthermore, distribution of newspapers, weak even before, has still deteriorated, because the government is not at all interested in assisting to spread private papers, often heavily criticizing the very same government.

Though the purchasing power so far remains in urban areas only, it is sure that gradually the attention of media industries is going to be directed to the rural areas also, but it takes time, because there is still much expansion potential in urban areas. Hence, while more and more villages will enter the transition phase between tradition and modernity, their mediascapes will remain restricted, haphazard and poor, perhaps poorer than ever before, because the attention of media industries is paid to urban areas only.

The new challenges should also be put into their proper framework. The Commedia newsletters died out as soon as the foreign funds were exhausted in all the nine villages. The foreign support should have been in the villages at least for 10 years or more to establish the new form of activity properly, but even then it would have remained questionable, whether these papers would have taken off and what this might really have meant for media content and mediascapes, locally and nationally. Commedia had, in principle though not in practice, the full support of the government. Perhaps its destiny gives some hints about the future of other attempts to establish new modes of mass communication in the country with a weak tradition of the mass media and with a wide and poor rural population, not used to excessive use of conventional mass media and not prepared to invest funds in mass communication. The difficulties might be roughly the same for very conventional newspapers and radio stations and avantgarde modes and formats, because the tradition of mass communication is weak in Tanzania.

Obviously any extensive new forms of media operation in Tanzania require foreign investment; the domestic potential hardly exceeds the amount needed for running of 1-2 weekly newspapers or a limited radio station, though a large private domestic media house has been established recently. Still it could be argued that in the long run any extensive develop-



ment in the area of media industries has to be sponsored from abroad. Equally obvious is that this sponsorship will be predominantly market-oriented, because public assistance organizations might release funds for arranging seminars and training, but hardly for such sustainable efforts as running a newspaper or a radio station.

Thus, the sad story of the Commedia Project and its attempts to strengthen village-level communication could be widened to symbolize more generally also the scant potential of national mass communication during the stage called by Martin-Barbero, the transnationalization phase in Africa. The official policy and legislation might allow anybody to start new media operations, but Tanzania will perhaps never be able to have a nation-wide television system of its own, because transnational or international companies have the resources to run such activities effectively and at reasonable expense. Perhaps regional and local papers or regional broadcasting — not to mention local media such as village papers — however welcome they are at this point, are after all never able to emerge, because they are simply not economical and history does not support them, though the present law might actually encourage such activities. Foreign investment or assistance interests hardly last long enough to establish national mass media, because although it is fairly easy to set up a mass communication enterprise, the running of it easily becomes overwhelmingly costly and complicated. The end of such an effort might resemble that of the Commedia Project: only eight megaphones are left from a project that once existed. One village newsletter, *Moiwaro Leo*, has made two comeback attempts recently, with an interim period of silence which lasted almost two years.

However, media operations are not reflections of economic viabilities only; the link to the popular also has a say in these enterprises. Thus, in a society with strong traditions in regional mass communication, it is easier to find support for continuation of economically weak regional papers or radio stations, but in a society totally lacking an endogenous media history, it is much more difficult to organize activities which are not economically viable. Knowledge about the usefulness of such enterprises has to be imported from



abroad, and they are not always credible, if freedom of expression is articulated as an appendix to commercial media. Tanzania is a special case, however, because 'public service' orientation is an integral part of the political rhetoric in the country. Perhaps it is easier there than in other poor countries to implant various types of public service media. And, going back to Martin-Barbero, the system cannot survive devoid of popular support. One day the rural population will see what they are entitled to in the media sphere, if public service is kept as a leading slogan in media policies.

## **6. Power to the Megaphones**

Martin-Barbero's message is not as pessimistic as the message advocated by the first generation of dependence advocates. He does not believe in cultural purity but rather "the process of cultural hybridization" (1993, 159), which means the re-elaboration of various cultural sources in a new synthesis. Martin-Barbero believes in mass culture because it represents "popular informality and bourgeois concern with upward mobility." Furthermore, he attributes to populism an experience of social class which nationalizes the masses and gives them citizenship. Though populism as a state project in Latin America might be a thing of the past, its influence as a phase in which the popular sectors are established as a political force persists (*ibid.*, 162). It is through populism that new resistance to transnationalization is gradually formed.

Application of Martin-Barbero's thought might bring relief to African urban slums, but not necessarily to villages. The author's strong belief in the power of entertainment as an articulation of the popular is a healthy policy, obviously disliked by decision-makers predominantly interested in news and other serious forms of mass communication. In general, Martin-Barbero's media ideology does not fit Tanzanian villages, which have never been overwhelmed by any other form of entertainment communication than storytelling and other forms of traditional communication. He still makes relevant reading for analysers of Tanzanian media circumstances also, because he supports the same proposi-

tion as emerged from the findings of the Commedia Project: that local communities should be left on their own in their media operations as much as possible. Ideally, outside interventions should be restricted to "laying the table," to preparing various infrastructural options available, since media needs hardly develop without a catalyst. Exogenous guidance frequently slows down endogenous processes which might lead to new hybrids combining traditional communication and modern mass communication. But this is only an ideal, because in principle, the media are brought to rural communities to reinforce and support change, not to form articulation arenas for genuine or hybridized local quests.

Exogenous origin of the media content or control as such should not be feared. Hybridization means a mixture of the indigenous and the exogenous, and it sounds like a relevant combination for the homeless minds in transitional communities. As Tomlinson has observed:

The construction of a discourse in which the cultural "other" (or even "enemy") lies beyond national boundaries may lend a spurious legitimacy to whatever cultural forces can assert themselves as representative of the "nation" or whichever culture manages to speak as the national culture. (Tomlinson, 1992, 73)

The particular problem in the Tanzanian situation is that foreign sponsors can hardly be expected to pay much attention to local needs and interests in transitional communities, either genuine or hybridized. As happened in the Commedia Project, the new media meant to serve the rural communities will most probably be adjusted to the existing mainstream media structure and format and not vice versa. However, the game is not lost yet. The fact that the megaphones are the major remnant of the Commedia Project in the nine villages should not be interpreted as hinting that Commedia turned into a comedy. Without irony, the result may be modest but it is promising. The villagers accepted what was relevant to them. They willingly grasped to an exogenous aid which fitted their needs best and which was able to survive the hard life in rural Tanzania. A sustainable change was after all brought to the village mediascape, though the framework for bringing such a change was definitely disproportionate. The outside world deserves the blame for this imbalance between objectives and results, because the objectives obviously were



not given a form explicit enough to be relevant in the eyes of the villagers.

But the villagers still use the megaphones for transmitting messages of their own or made into their own, because more and more frequently local messages are actually mediated from the outside; dis-membering from ethnocentrism is required, but due and sound respect for the roots remains. The power of the popular is where it should be, in the villages. In addition, the Project no doubt brought into these nine villages a glimpse of a radically localized mediascape as well. This time the glimpse turned into an illusion only, but who knows about the next time? The illusion has already been articulated.

## **7. Epilogue**

Lakshama Rao (1966) revealed that a village is no more an ideal than an urban centre. Conflicts and contradictions are an integral part of village life; nevertheless, he suggested the same medicine as Daniel Lerner (1958), modernization being the answer.

Paul Hartmann & al. (1989) stressed that even the poorest villager is not a passive receiver to be looked down upon but a full-scale person, contradictory and selectively active in all his or her doings. But the research team remained helpless before this challenge. They required respect for the complexity of the human mind, but were not able to suggest much more than emphasis to be put on "soft" research.

Manjunath Pendakur (1993) found that a village view of the rest of the world was dramatically contentious. The nation-state appeared as a source of oppression, while countries further away were idealized. He again advocated the standard answer of more research to be carried out on the subject.

Paul Ansah (1984) saw that development efforts frequently left the villagers outsiders in their own affairs. His solution for relevant communication to be supplied to the villages was a combination of decentralized administration efforts and on the side of the implementors, a state of mind allowing due respect to indigenous interpersonal communi-

cation already existing in the village.

These texts on village communication are abundant in base-line data, recommendations on project implementation and perhaps even analysis of the socio-cultural dimensions of rural communication, but their theoretical considerations after the exercise remain hazy.

More theoretically oriented researchers apparently have more answers. Jan Servaes (e.g. 1986) has seen two doors simultaneously open to a community in transition; one is able to guide the community and individuals living in it to find their cultural identity, pride and prestige, while the other leads to a vicious circle dominated by oppressive endogenous and exogenous pressures. The key for the upward circle is participation, says Servaes, and he is not the only one advocating this answer. Participatory development and participatory research especially in the 1980s, have almost become a dominant paradigm.

But what is really meant by participation? In the context of the Sri Lankan Sarvodaya movement (e.g. Ariyaratne, 1989), participation appears as a natural and understandable solution. The sharing of one's time, thought, and effort in the awakening of all emerges as the crucial element of the self-development and empowerment of people, but the holism of Sarvodaya is rarely an option in ordinary development communication, because Sarvodaya is simultaneously a politico-economic movement, a religion, a culture, and a moral code. One cannot and should not separate communication from this totality.

The mystique surrounding African oramedia and co-pus communication (e.g. Vansina, 1985), leaving the division into senders and receivers indeterminate, could be interpreted as a kind of Sarvodaya approach. The oramedia are a histography of the past, an account of how people have interpreted the world around them. The oramedia are indeed relevant, respected, and participatory but are in fact partly an appendix to a life-style slowly fading away. They have rarely appeared as advocates of societal change, because the status enjoyed by the oramedia rests predominantly on the status quo.

In fact the oramedia stand for two popular and inter-



twined concepts, participation and indigeneity. But how far does one get with these concepts?

Is indigeneity any more feasible as a leading principle of communication implementation in transitional communities, when the transition actually means linkages to the outer world will be strengthened? A claim could be made that the hybridization of culture, advocated by Jesus Martin-Barbero, is actually the only choice available. New hybridized oramedia might emerge, more fit for rural communication under transition through crisscrossing networks of social linkages, the outdated weakening and the fresh simultaneously becoming more marked.

But are there any means available for guiding these processes of dis-membering and re-membering, or is it more realistic to leave the villages on their own — or is that a realistic choice, either? Most villages in the world are today either in the middle of transition or approaching a basic societal change linking them politically and economically to a larger entity. It is clear that such administrative efforts as advocated by Paul Ansah are highly necessary; decentralization forms an "insurance policy" for hybridized indigeneity, because it enables voices from the villages to be heard in the offices where decision-making takes place. But it also brings us back to the concept of participation, which seems to form a part of the insurance policy for relevant rural communication.

In normal cases of development communication, participation frequently looks like a rabbit which has been pulled out of a magician's hat, a facile answer to be accepted without further enquiry. How, for example, to exercise participatory communication relevant to both Pendakur's Indian village where the young people find the nation-state hostile and frightening and a Commedia village where the attitude to the nation-state is labelled with curiosity and perhaps frustration, but never hostility or fear? Whom does the participation objective apply to when the conflicts and contradictions repeatedly mentioned by researchers do occur in the village and endanger a communication exercise? Does a participatory communicator remain aside and thus perhaps sacrifice the basic ideology of development, when a

human being or a group of human beings are oppressed or humiliated in the name of traditional values? Is there any sense in attempts to extend one single concept to cover phenomena and situations obviously lacking any other common denominator than the fact that they all might ruin a rural communication exercise?

Parallel to the rise of participation, another development of the same lineage has taken place, predominantly in the North. It could be called a revitalization of the ideal — which never existed according to the village research. A significant turn to the grassroots took place among researchers and international assistance organs in the early 1980s; restricted rural projects are preferred to large national interventions. This was a healthy phenomenon as such, aiming at the reduction of the urban-rural contradiction by working with the poorest and most oppressed sectors of Third World people. Unfortunately this sound change in policies has not led to intensified and consistent gathering of knowledge on the grassroots, especially on the nature of transitional societies. Thus the idea has frequently been twisted in the administrative processes preceding assistance and research projects. As a result, the grassroots appear as a cheap slogan only, vulgarized by simplification of locality. Exogenous organs and experts denying the existence of local contradiction and conflicts of interest, or failing to recognize them actually do much harm in the fashionable name of the grassroots and the concept underlying the modern development praxis; namely, participation.

Participation is justified as a broad umbrella term simply describing a departure from the top-down and spoon-feeding attitudes underlying modernization research. But it hardly deserves status as a key concept in the theory of transitional communication. Perhaps theoreticians interested in development communication have been bewildered by a legacy from the modernization period. Though it has been rarely explicitly mentioned, they seem determined to find one basic solution, a single option for improving the world. As in cancer research, this might simply be impossible. Development communication might be more justifiably envisioned as a hybrid theory, a mosaic composed of a variety of uncoordi-



nated elements, adopting its final spectrum of shades from the society around it, changing with time. Sometimes the spotlights of politics focus on the village arena, demanding keen cooperation with the power centre, while at another time a transitional village could be left fairly much on its own, allowing expressions of apparent indigeneity to sprout. Thus there is no single solution for problems in rural communication, and this is perhaps the reason why rural communication is so difficult to implement, where empathy, common sense and participatory attitudes are not powerful enough vehicles in the effort.

Rural communication has all the characteristics of subordinate, peripheral communication; a particularity typical of mass communication, in the North as well as in the South, is that the strong ones tend to grow stronger, while the weak ones remain weak. Moreover, the weak are targets of cultural domination in various forms. In a rural village, this domination is multiple. Indigenous domination is exercised by the double legacy of the past having its origin partly in tradition, partly in colonialism, both reinforced in many forms in the everyday life and in each individual experiencing the transition. Another source of domination is the present, appearing in transition conflicts and transitional people adopting modernity, often in a highly haphazard mode. Still another source for domination is the multi-level nation-making machinery from the domestic centre, also experienced on societal and individual levels. Finally, domination originating from international and trans-national mass communication infrastructures is very real also — it is exactly this form of domination that will become more and more obvious, perhaps even overwhelming in the Tanzanian villages, either directly or mediated and modified by the national media system. The villages might react with excited naivete to the calls by this domination machinery, because it is partly equated with modernity and intellectual liberation.

These complex tensions operating parallel make development communication a very demanding exercise. Paulo Freire suggests another way of looking at the matter. He simply encourages people to reject the sender-receiver formula and to join a dialogue of learning, leading to an understanding of

the causes of one's oppression and thus adding to the potential of doing something about that oppression. The Freirean approach easily becomes overwhelmingly romantic if it remains only rhetoric. If it is applied to practice, the complexity of realities undresses the robe of romanticism. As Freire says, analysing liberation from illiteracy:

The knowledge of the earlier knowledge gained by a learner as a result of analysing praxis, in its social context opens to them the possibility of new knowledge. The new knowledge going far beyond the limits of earlier knowledge reveals the reason for being behind the facts, thus demythologizing the false interpretations of the same facts. And so, there is now no more separation between thought language and object reality. The reading of the text now demands a reading within a social context to which it refers. (Freire, 1978, 24)

It is an adventurous *safari* to the grassroots reality that Paulo Freire is calling us to, not to a laboratory experiment in which the testing tools are changed if they do not bring proper results, but in which the observer always remains an outsider. The particular circumstances of the villages naturally make rural communication a specific case in the realm of communication, but the temptation remains to suggest that perhaps the failure to develop a true theoretical perspective for rural communication is not a failure of rural communication or the North-South dilemma only, but something more basic. In recent years, lively debate has been carried out on the 'humanitization' of communication research, dominated earlier by social scientific approaches. Some researchers have expressed their fears of the dangers involved in this process — perhaps the field is going to lose its roots totally, ending in amateurish zigzagging between the two paradigms.

In the 1960s, modernization theorists operated on a broad sector. They did not specialize in development issues only, and the optimism of their considerations on development reflected their communication thinking in general. Today we do not share optimism of Schramm et al., and rural communication has changed into a specialized field of its own, a side-track of the mainstream of research interests in the field.

Perhaps it is time to reconsider the whole issue. Rural communication is no doubt one of the blind spots in the field,



clarifying the need not to give up either media sociology or media literature but to accept and utilize these double roots of communication theory in parallel. The challenge faced by development communication is actually a test for the theory of communication in general.

In sum, two perspectives emerge from the *Commedia* exercise, which continued the weak but persistent tradition of village communication, starting from Rao. We have not proceeded very far, because profound scrutiny shows both sides of the concept to be ambiguous. We still have both the dilemma of the village and the mystery of communication in our hands.

Researchers in rural communication should be given credit for their effort, because it is not easy to study those villages where the majority of the mankind lives. Culturalist researchers do not go to the village to hunt percentages or to preach the salvation of development; they know the limitations of being an outsider much better than communication researchers operating in other sectors of the field. Researchers in rural communication enter the village with a laudable social concern, and they base their operations on a broad theoretical apparatus. Yet, is it not almost tragic that they are not able to squeeze out of the exercise much more than some exotic particularities, perhaps totally insignificant from the village horizon? Isn't it even more tragic that such well-meaning interventions as the *Commedia* Project have not been able to carry through sustainable changes?

*Commedia* was received with pleasure, but not too many were surprised that things did not work out as they should; obviously the intervention did not touch the vital activities of the village. *Commedia* was like an overcoat which was taken off when the rain was over; and in the tropics it is not a disaster to get wet anyway. Intervention or not, life in the village goes on and the village remains a dilemma for communication research.

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