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I was engrossed as I read Steven Classen's address, "*It's Not About Television: Social Histories and Media Reform*". His narrative, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi Television*, described media reform from the experience of the struggle of rights activists and race segregation over local television in central Mississippi during the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. I came to grasp his main idea on how social histories, justice and poverty, are closely connected to media reform when I was nearly half way through the paper. Although what Classen talked about is not entirely new it struck me as something he wanted all of us to think through seriously (see for example, Rodriguez, 2001, De Jong, et al, 2005). He directed our attention to the media-centric approach of media reformer in the U.S. such as McChesney and the media reform advocate. His argument was that though the analysis of the structural approach is correct, especially on the concentration of media ownership and global monopoly of a tiny number of conglomerates, it would nearly be impossible, to attain media reform in the U.S. using a media-centric approach. Classen cited Chon Noriega (2000) that, on the contrary, significant changes in U.S. media and communication policy in the past came from the rise of civil disobedience, direct action campaign, and violent public protests, and rarely, if ever originated from direct or legal intervention by the government. He offered us a historical and holistic model for media change or reform, in which popular media practices are intertwined with concerns of greater social salience such as poverty, education, and labor. In Classen's discourse, "*media reform must be imbricated within larger social concerns, visions, and movements*". The historical and holistic model informed us that in order to attain changes in media policy or practice we must begin from cultural studies basic assumption, which gives priority to everyday social and cultural contexts. The second most important thing is to make connections, or make more connections between social justice movements and concerns, and media reform agenda. Classen convinced us that the democratization of communication is only plausible through everyday social and political activism, and must be grounded in close connection

with local and global social movements rather than in stand-alone policy campaign for media reform.

Social movement and media activism

The interesting notion that I want to expand more is communication and media reform. What media reformer set out to achieve is a broad structural change that would lead to open access for a wider spectrum of people in society. Both strand of approach, if I understand correctly, have the same goal. That is to gain a truly democratic communication process for all classes. The missing concept, which Classen rightly raised in his address, is on the centrality of public debate, open dialogue and communication through the media. This would have to be firmly grounded on human communicative action, not in government policy, law or official regulation. And this is where Classen part company with media-centric reformer.

I have no quarrel with Classen's elaboration on the effective use of social history and cultural approach to advance the course of '*media reform*'. In this kind of socio-cultural contextualization communication and media must sit side by side, inseparable from the larger social movements whatever they may be. I think the strength of the culturalist approach is that it is deeply rooted in community and local politics. The social activism which brought about the transformation of the organization, employment and content of the local television in central Mississippi is exemplary of a movement that understands the signification of communication and local public sphere. It not only takes up the issue of justice but also embraces in its struggle the communication '*life line*' that propelled the movement. This is a holistic vision of discursive practice on the fight for change and social justice.

Let me go along with this line of argument for a moment. In Classen's address he is not talking about '*media reform*' per se. But he is interested in social movements and media as a tool for citizen empowerment. There are numerous examples, which showed how the media have been transformed during the course of social and political upheaval. For instance, prior to the People's Power Revolution in 1986 the Philippines, known as EDSA 1, there were underground press and many forms of alternative media against President Marcos. These media, based among the radical, the Left and social movements were able to mobilize the masses that finally ousted the dictator. During the demonstration protesters seized one of the Government television station and transformed it into the People's Channel.

It was clear that civil disobedience and the People's Revolution have triggered the Philippines media reform in the 1980s (Saracho, 1986, Boudreau, 2002, Coronel, 2003).

In Thailand, the case of the Assembly of the Poor, which is made up of several hundred local movements that formed 7 networks on issues such as, land rights, health, housing, poverty, the environment, etc., demonstrated how new social movement tackle with the mainstream media in order to gain public support and government attention. During the long drawn protests in 2000 the Assembly of the Poor drew attention from a number of the national tabloid press and television. There were news reports and debates about economic modernization that robbed the poor and the peasantry when protesters camped outside the Government House in Bangkok. Once the Government set up the committee to investigate and settled the complaints the media changed their agenda and turned to other stories. If anything, it is an example of a partially successful campaign of the people's communicative action. It has put pressures on the mainstream media to provide more space on stories that concerned the poor. But the open spaces in the media have been ephemeral without real transformation in the newsroom and editorial policy (Chalermripinyorat, 2002).

Both of the above examples show us how political and social movements are closely connected to '*media reform*'. In the case of the Philippine the seizure of Channel 4 by the people was later legitimized by a presidential decree. The new government nationalized Channel 4, and reorganized it so that it would serve the people rather than a propaganda tool of the government. In the case of the Assembly of the Poor the mainstream press soon went back to their routine, and dropped their advocacy for the struggle of the poor. Movement activists criticized the '*independent commercial press*' on their detachment from the media reform agenda. The media are reluctant to work closely with the social movement because they feel that their objective reporting and professionalism would be compromised.

Evidently, in the Philippine case it needed legal legitimization to actually put the reform in place. There must be some kind of policy and regulation from the state to support the paradigm shift on the new goal of the public television station. On the contrary, the Thai press, under the private ownership structure, could have taken up the reform agenda but chose not to. Their resistance was a question of ideology and economy. In this case, a culturalist and holistic approach is not the guarantee of a successful reform. It might, however, bring partial and temporal changes to the quality of media content and open up the

public sphere for the peasantry and their problems although not able to sustain it. Another flaw rest with the large gap between the communities of the Assembly of the Poor who reside around the country, and the national media, which are concentrated in the capital city of Bangkok. They rarely come into contact in their everyday life. As a matter of fact they do not belong to the same community in the physical or material sense of the term. They may share the so-called '*imagined national culture*' but not their local and class cultures, or their daily languages. There is a lack of the sense of a genuine community that would provide the thread of common concerns.

Nuances of local and global '*media activism and reform*'

My argument on the strategy for media reform from my experience is somewhat different from Classen. Firstly, I agree that a socially and historically grounded approach, akin to Classen's proposal, should be the starting point. Secondly, there must be a close connection between the community, the audience or would be '*communicator*' with the local social and political movements. This is seen in terms of a holistic approach movement. Thirdly, media reform could only be achieved only if there are some kinds of policy or regulation changes. This might be policy change in any of the local media organization, which would have an effect on community empowerment, and democratic communication. Likewise, changes may take place at the higher policy level or legislature to affect some kind of structural reform. Lastly, media activism, which is connected to local or global concerns on social justice, may take new form in its radical action for transformation.

From our discussion in the previous section, the Philippine People's Power movement that brought about changes in one of the government television channel is an example of a post-action policy whereas the Assembly of the Poor failed to achieve their goal on social justice as the mainstream media departed from their course. The Philippine movements were engaged with subsequent political and social reform instituted by the new government, but much less on media reform. Over time, the new public channel did not engage much of its program with the people's agenda due to its struggle to survive in the highly competitive broadcasting environment.

Let me draw one or two more examples on the nuances of social movement, media activism and reform. In the case of community radio in Thailand, which seems at first glance

a media-centric approach, has been radicalized and hundreds of communities took initiative to start their community radio stations (Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, 2003). They seize the airwaves similar to their comrades elsewhere in the world (see for example, Sakolsky, and Dunifer, 1998). In 2000, the Parliament legislated a new act on the National Broadcasting Commission and National Telecommunications Commission. The objectives are to set up 2 new commissions, the NBC and the NTC, and to reallocate the radio frequencies for the community sector and the broadcasting industry, as well as for the public sector (Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, 2005). What actually happened was a sudden sprout of '*unlicensed community radio*' stations around the country. The first micro-power community radio in Kanjanaburi province, for example, is a station that is based with the local environmental movement. The Kanjanaburi Conservation Group has worked to protect the last western forest area, bordering Thailand and Burma, over the past two decades. Its close connection with other social movements in the community provided the bedrock for the '*local media reform*' initiative. The radio station serves very clear purposes for the movements and the local community. It has set, by far, a model for other community to follow.

This is a complex example of the intertwined of the holistic, community and movement based approach, and the media-centric approach. The community radio in Kanjanaburi would not have been possible without the activism of its organizer, Boonsong Chansongrasami, who worked closely with the broader national political reform movement in 1997, and his involvement with the local environmental movement. The media reform agenda has evolved from the political reform movement, whose main emphasis was on citizens' empowerment and participatory democracy. The significant achievement of Kanjanaburi is not only radicalizing the media reform movement but it has engaged members of the community to participate in the organization and day-to-day operation of the station. Audiences have been transformed into citizens, and producers of program.

Another vital example is the case of the Pak Moon Dam protest. This is a local movement in Ubonratchatani province in the Northeast, a group connected to the Assembly of the Poor network. This particular movement is highly conscious about information and public communication. In 2000, they employed several types of media strategies to network among the villagers whose livelihood, are affected by the dam construction. They also appealed to local and national media in order to mobilize support from the public in general.

When the focus of their campaigns openly confronted the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) at the site of the dam, and the Government in Bangkok there were violent clashes, and arrests. The news media were quick to optimize on the violent reactions by state authority. But when the strategy shifted to a fasting campaign the event received less news coverage. However, with the '*non-violent*' campaign, the Pak Moon Dam protesters were able to gain public sympathy. In the chain of the movement activism the Government yielded to social pressures and agreed to hold an open public hearing at Thammasat University. This kind of post-construction hearing was unprecedented in the history of movement struggle. The outcome was a consensus to open the floodgate of the dam for a period of 4 months per year for fishing and hatching of fishes returning from the Mekong River. The Pak Moon Dam protesters subsequently demanded a total opening of the floodgate for a period of 5 years when they found that the river has regained its life as well as their own. This time the Government rejected their proposal. They were pressured to withdraw from their demonstration site in front of the government house in 2003 (Kunawat, 2003).

The significant implication from the Pak Moon Dam movement is that villagers have gradually been transformed into '*public communicator*'. They could tell their stories through many different forms of communication media which they produce, combining modern media production technologies with local knowledge on storytelling and artistic forms. They have also started their own community radio near their village by the site of the dam. As a result, their media activism continued and closely intertwined with their struggle for their livelihood. The Pak Moon Dam protesters won several battles although they did not win the war. In the process, media reform of a different kind was created. It is communication reform at the grassroots, which we are witnessing.

The strong sense of identity and citizenship in this kind of local resistance has both a local and global connection whereby the activism is connected to local / national social movements. At the same time, it is connected to global social movement and global alternative media, which they share common goals and solidarity. By comparison, at the global level the activism of the Indymedia project, for instance, evolved from the historical development of alternative media, social movement and DIY activism (Coyer, 2005). The creation of an Independent Media Center (IMC), which report and broadcast online to several

local media channels at global resistance sites such as Seattle - WTO meeting (1999), Prague - World Bank/IMF summit (2000), Genoa – G8 summit (2001), WTO meeting - Cancun (2003), showed how media activism and global social movements are capable of converging and reporting their protest actions live, while side stepping any local regulations on mass demonstrations and media organizing.

The above examples are just a fragment of the nuances and diversified social and media activism around us today. There is not one effective or correct model since each experience is uniquely located in its social and cultural contexts. Therefore, each has its distinctive characters as well as some common features to other media reform experiences elsewhere. Classen's proposal to focus on how social movement could connect with '*media reform*' is an important insight for social and media activists. In addition, we must take into account the specific transformative moment, media structure, media law and regulation, and policy which circumscribed how and what kinds of action should be taken. There is always a deep-seated inter-relationship between structure and culture. Media activists and professionals can resist, reform and re-create for social justice at the local and global levels. But more over, as Rodriguez, who preferred to look at media and communication reform from the ground, concluded in her *Fissures in the Media Scape* (2001) that;

"All this diversity should be understood as different, creative and clever expressions of the same drive – citizens attempting to break into the established mediascape, citizens' elbowing their way into a fissure where their own voices – and whatever they have to say can have a presence in the public realm...our attempts to understand citizens' media should focus on the citizens, and their creative intentionality in altering the mediascape rather than centering on the external and objective forms citizens' media can take...our attempt....should be more dynamic and should be able to follow the subject of study in its historical movements, rather than remaining trapped in static formulas that freeze citizens' media, blinding us from their mobility through time, space, and the live texture of culture and power."

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