



MEDIA, DEMOCRACY AND GLOBALIZATION

PhD candidates meet established scholars

Zeenath Hasan



In November 2008, the Wahlgren Symposium on Media, Democracy, and Globalization, held in Lund University, Sweden, brought together five PhD candidates and five eminent scholars to discuss different approaches to the convening theme. The one-day seminar was part of the Wahlgren Foundation's ongoing effort to support multidisciplinary research in the field of media. Zeenath Hasan, one of the PhD candidates, reports.

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INTRODUCTION

The Wahlgren Foundation, a private entity contributing to media research efforts through grants to projects and individual researchers, supports the doctoral tenures of the five PhD candidates¹ whose work was discussed at the *Media, Democracy, and Globalization* Seminar held in Lund University in November 2008.

What does it mean to be politically engaged in a post-national mediated world? How can academic research and public policy tackle transformations in the information environment? Does media content preference affect political participation? How has marginal cinema affected ideas of globalised sexuality? How to think through travel writing studies in the context of globalization? This provoking and seemingly motley array of questions framed the vibrant presentations of invited scholars.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONTEMPORARY WEB-BASED POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Tina Askanius'² project looks at the interrelations between the development of new digital media and the changing nature of democracy with respect to the emergence of global public spheres and transnational

citizenship.

Her guest for the seminar was Natalie Fenton³, Reader and Co-Director of the Center of the Study of Global Media and Democracy at Goldsmiths University in the United Kingdom. Askanius' interest in Natalie Fenton's work stemmed from a paper by the latter entitled *Contesting Global Capital, New Media and the Role of a Social Imaginary*⁴, which persuades scholars to consider real time struggles of political projects rather than be overwhelmed by the utopian visions of online political activism.

At the seminar, Fenton presented a paper entitled *Politics as Being and Being Political* and argued that mediation and representation have played negligible roles in mainstream and activist political projects. She attributed this lack to the homogenous ideals of a liberal democracy (for instance that of a democratic public sphere). Challenging political agents, Fenton suggested that, on the one hand, mainstream political processes must include alternative voices, and on the other hand, new social movements must come to terms with the fact that they cannot exist in endless anarchic political controversy. Challenging peer scholars to criticize the consensual principle of political decision-making, Fenton called for being alert to the terms with which political engagement is addressed. In analyzing commercial, academic and alternative perspectives on political engagement or 'being political', Fenton called for the radicalization of democratic ideals, or 'politics as being'.

MEDIA GOVERNANCE IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND POLICYMAKING

My doctoral work⁵ is a practice-based exploration into the role of digital networked media for social change in the Indian subcontinent. In collaboration with open source software developers and grassroots advocacy groups, my project's aim is to develop and deploy a digital networked interface for civil society to monitor the decentralization process in the south Indian state of Karnataka publicly.

I invited Vibodh Parthasarathi⁶, Visiting Professor at the Center for Culture, Media and Governance at Jamia Millia Central University, in Delhi, India. I have followed Parthasarathi's work in communication theory and media policy, since I am interested in his work on the comparative materiality of media and the institutional structures that influence the media landscape.

Parthasarathi presented a paper entitled *Perspectives in Media and Governance: Information, Informatics and Informatisation in India*. The rapidly changing information environment and the inability of Communication and Media studies to engage with these transformations methodically motivated Parthasarathi to develop Media Governance as a site that addresses the concerns of both public policy and academic research. While policy frameworks have stayed within the nation state, communication technologies have taken on wider dynamics. According to Parthasarathi, Media Governance offers the moorings for a nuanced view of the contemporary media landscape. Examining the inter-relationships between organizations with a stake in political advocacy, national governance processes and changes in technology, Parthasarathi suggested that policy studies should assess not only evolving policy frameworks, but also the institutional connections and conflictive interests affecting the stakeholders involved in the creation of feasible environments.

DETERMINING FACTORS OF POLITICAL INTEREST, OR VIRAL POLITICS

Nils Gustafsson⁷ is interested in the effects of social media on political participation.

He invited Markus Prior⁸, Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School and the Department of Politics at Princeton University, in the US.

Prior presented his book *Post-Broadcast Democracy: How Media Choice Increases Inequality in Political Involvement and Polarizes Election*, an outcome of his doctoral dissertation. In addition, he discussed new media, content preferences and the development of political interest and analyzed media environments that affect political behavior. Examining new survey data and social networks of individuals and households, Prior suggested that the wide range of content offered on terrestrial, satellite and digital broadcast media has led to unequal political involvement and a homogenized electorate.

UNDERSTANDING GLOBALISED SEXUALITY THROUGH A HISTORICAL STUDY OF SEXPLOITATION FILMS

Elisabet Björklund⁹ intends to examine concerns surrounding the globalization of sexuality towards the end of the twentieth century in the context of the Swedish Welfare State. Her research project is entitled

“Movies and Welfare Institutions in Sweden”.

She invited Eric Schaefer¹⁰, film historian at the Visual and Media Arts faculty of Emerson College in the US. Schaefer, author of *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films 1919-1959*, specializes in exploitation film and other marginalized cinemas.

Schaefer's presentation, entitled *Sexploitation, Education and the Promise of Democracy*, drew a historical trajectory for ideas of sexuality in the context of democratic ideals during the sexual revolution in the US through the 1960s and 1970s. He suggested that the consideration of exploitation films provides the inertia necessary for a re-evaluation of sexual exploitation in the context of post-war consumerism.

WHAT THE GLOBALIZED TRAVEL WRITER WRITES

Emilia Ljungberg¹¹ is interested in juxtaposing the colonial origins of travel writing to its current context of globalization.

She invited Tim Youngs¹², Director of Nottingham Trent University's Centre for Travel Writing Studies in the UK. In his presentation, entitled *The Globalization of Travel Theory*, Youngs shared his ongoing ruminations on the state of travel writing studies in the context of globalization. Dwelling on recent misgivings connected with the institutionalization of travel writing scholarship, he addressed representational authority, narrative strategies, post-colonial irresolution and other states of flux that travel-writing studies are currently undergoing.

Video documentation from The Wahlgren Symposium on Democracy, Globalization and the Media See

<http://webzone.k3.mah.se/projects/liveseminar>

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2. PhD candidate in Media and Communication at Lund University. See <http://www.lu.se/o.o.i.s/11899>

3. <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/media-communications/staff/n-fenton.php>
4. <http://mokk.bme.hu/centre/conferences/reactivism/submissions/fenton>
5. See http://webzone.k3.mah.se/K3ZEHA/user_cmt02/default.asp
6. See http://jmi.nic.in/cjns/vibodh_cjns.htm
7. PhD candidate in the Political Science department of Lund University. See http://www.svet.lu.se/Dynamic/personal_page/Personal_homepage.lasso?-token.kod=NGU
8. See <http://www.princeton.edu/~mprior/>
9. PhD candidate at Lund University. See <http://www.sol.lu.se/staff/person.html?personid=637&language=EN>
10. See http://www.emerson.edu/media_arts/faculty.cfm?facultyID=445
11. PhD candidate at Press Studies department of Lund University.
12. See http://www.ntu.ac.uk/research/school_research/hum/staff/57711gp.html

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