

The challenge of the Present Continuous

Oscar Hemer

When, in the spring of 2010, we started the planning of the present special issue, in collaboration with the academic journal *Nordicom Review*, we did not realize how timely it was. A year later, when it started to materialize, I was quite convinced – as I believe that most of us were – that we witnessed the beginning of an historical revolution that might or might not turn out to be even more far-reaching than the one unleashed in 1989.

I say *convinced* in the past tense, because it is quite amazing how fast perceptions change. Much of what was said about “the Arab Spring” a year ago already seems strangely dated. The revolutionary euphoria has somehow been replaced by more sinister and even cynical reflections. The fluctuations in the public opinion, and not least the Western media’s reporting on current world events, hence demonstrate another striking contemporary phenomenon; what anthropologist John Postill has called the dilemma of the present continuous, which could also be phrased as the tyranny of the imminent, with little if any historical perspective. We seem to be constantly imagining a near future that rarely happens.

Yet, there is little doubt that we are actually in the beginning, or midst, of a transition process on a global scale, politically, economically, and culturally. Former imperial powers are in decline, whereas former colonies in the global South are on the rise as emerging dominant players of the New World Order. And communication plays a key role in all the current transformational processes, be it as the mobilizing force of the so-called social media or as less democratic and even destructive aspects of the same communication power.

Glocal Times was launched as a web magazine in 2005, coinciding with the publication of the anthology *Media and Glocal Change: Rethinking Communication for Development*. As its title suggests, the anthology was an innovative attempt to inventory a field that, at the time, was in a state of bewilderment and identity crisis, largely due to globalization. At the same time, there was a renewed interest in strategic communication among donor agencies and other players in international development cooperation. Apparently, this new interest reached a momentum with the first World Congress on Communication for Development in Rome 2006, which managed to mobilize over a thousand participants from both academia and development practice. But instead of an expected break-through, the WCCD strangely rather marked an implosion of the field, and it is only recently that communication for development has started to gain a new momentum.

This special issue, developed by *Glocal Times* editor Florencia Enghel and guest editor Karin G. Wilkins, from the University of Texas at Austin, could be seen as a follow-

up and up-date of the *Media and Glocal Change* anthology. It comes very timely, as we are now seeing a series of new institutional initiatives in the field of ComDev, such as e.g. the very recent proposal, by UNICEF in conjunction with The Communication Initiative, to form a global association of ComDev researches and practitioners. (This is an initiative to which we shall surely have reason to return.)

But it is perhaps even timelier in the face of the challenge to the field by the present continuous. Whereas “the world is moving our way”, as the director of The Communication Initiative, Warren Feek, put it in a consultation workshop recently held at UNICEF’s headquarters in New York (30-31 August), the world is also moving ahead of us, and if the field of ComDev does not seize the moment, we run the risk of being left behind.

This special issue, published in print format by *Nordicom Review*, also marks *Glocal Times*’ move from web magazine to Open Journal. It is a crucial step that will imply many changes and improvements. The content of all the 16 previous issues will eventually be indexed and searchable by author and article. We foresee that one section of the journal will in the future be peer-reviewed, whereas another section remains open for articles by graduates from Malmö University’s ComDev Master program and debate of current issues in the field by guest contributors. The full transformation of the journal will require some time and you may have to bear with some transitional inconveniences. But I am confident that this substantial double issue will provide full compensation in the meantime.