



Dossier Periodismo Intercultural

Savage Mind and Postcolonial Representation in Colombian Journalism

Mentalidad salvaje y representación poscolonial en el periodismo colombiano

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RESUMEN

La lógica de la dominación hegemónica establecida en Colombia y América Latina después de la Conquista está basada en un esquema elitista de poder. Usando la perspectiva del sociólogo italiano Vilfredo Pareto, estas élites pueden ser clasificadas en “leones” o “zorros”. Los primeros usan fuerza y violencia (la combinación de Weber) para imponer su soberanía; los segundos, persuasión y mascarada (*herrschaft*): la propaganda. Este poder está basado en una legitimidad más estable y es capaz de transformarse a sí mismo en una realidad de efecto “Matrix”. Este artículo expone el panorama de los medios comunitarios con una perspectiva étnica en Colombia, que se espera que funcione como un proceso para facilitar la creación de vínculos sociales basados en el diálogo, la reconciliación, el respeto y la participación, actuando como organismo de control del poder económico y político, informando sobre la injusticia en busca de una solución de paz en la región.

Palabras clave: Medios étnicos, noticias étnicas, violencia cultural, discriminación, Colombia

ABSTRACT

The logic of hegemonic domination that was established in Colombia and in Latin America after the Conquest, is based on a scheme of elitist power. Using the perspective of the Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto, we can classify these elites in “lions” or “foxes”. In the first case, they use the force and the violence (the match of Weber) to impose their sovereignty; in the second case, they use persuasion and the “masquerade” (the herrschaft): the propaganda. This power is based on a more stable legitimacy and is able to transform itself in a “Matrix-effect” reality. This article will expose the panorama of community media with an ethnic perspective in Colombia that hopefully works as process to facilitate the building of social links based on dialogue, reconciliation, respect and participation, acting as watchdog of economic and political power, reporting the injustice and looking for peace solution in the region.

Keywords: Ethnic media, news ethics, cultural violence, discrimination, Colombia.

1 Authors' translation. The original text was: "Hay un único lugar donde ayer y hoy se encuentran, se reconocen y se abrazan, y ese lugar es mañana. Suenan muy futuras ciertas voces del pasado americano muy pasado. Las antiguas voces, pongamos por caso, que todavía nos dicen que somos hijos de la tierra, y que la madre no se vende ni se alquila. Mientras llueven pájaros muertos [...] y se convierten los ríos en cloacas, los mares en basureros y las selvas en desiertos, esas voces porfiadamente vivas nos anuncian otro mundo que no es este mundo envenenador del agua, el suelo, el aire y el alma. También nos anuncian otro mundo posible las voces antiguas que nos hablan de comunidad."

2 In Colombia, people use the term *indio* in a derogatory way in order to refer not only to the native people, but also to someone vulgar or nasty.

3 Considered as an advertisement in a newspaper or magazine that is designed to look like an article by the writers of the magazine.

4 One of the most recognized touristic destination of Colombia.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is only one place where yesterday and today meet, recognize each other and embrace, and that place is tomorrow. Certain American past voices, very past voices, sound very future. The ancient voices, for instance, that tell us that we are still children of the earth, and that the mother is not sold or rented. While raining dead birds [...] and rivers become sewers, seas become dumpsters and jungles turn into deserts, those voices stubbornly alive announce another world, not this world that poisons the water, the soil, the air and the soul. Another possible world is also announced, by the ancient voices that speak to us of community. (Galeano, 2005, pp. 32-33)¹

The voices that the Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano refers to are ancient voices, to be honest, but they are alive, and still they are kept quiet. They are the voices of those millions of indigenous people who were the inhabitants of this continent once before, of this America that is preferred to be called Latin to forget its native soul. They are those voices that do not find any room in the media, because of their little commercial nature.

"The Indian does not sell anything, my friend. Unless he has got a pair of feathers on his head..." This was the end to a conversation that I had with a colleague, a journalist from an important publishing house in Colombia. Her words resume the hypocritical situation that the ethnic minorities of this country (and also, from the whole continent) have to face: the sometimes tragic daily life of the native, considered in this case as an *indio*², does not have an editorial interest, in other words, a commercial interest. It is obvious: "the Indian does not sell". In the same way as it has not sold after five centuries of conquest, plundering, or as some others prefer, colonization. Actually, the exotic face of this America is what really sells: perfect bodies, ornaments of colourful macaw feathers, rhythmic dances and fluent moves, mysterious rituals and other unexplainable practices. Anyway, the jungle; the land of nobody that the journalist and writer Joseph Conrad (2004. [1898]) described splendidly, the same that anthropologist Margarita Serje has identified as the place in the border where the fragile governments of those developing countries, and specifically Colombia, cannot find the means to exert their arbitrary sovereignty in a full way (Serje, 2005). It is this proximate and superficial vision that we had to face when I was trying to publish an article about a community of Arhuaco Indians from the Sierra Nevada (*Snowy Mountain Range*) of Santa Marta; I had to convince the entrusted editor that in fact there were native communities in the Colombian Caribbean who lived at almost 4,000 meters above the sea. It

was impossible to believe for him: to his reasoning, result of the humanistic custom of having the media as his knowledge sources (perhaps in his light version), *Indian = Jungle = the Amazon*. Besides, the fact that the peaceful Arhuacos did not show signs of cannibalism or anthropophagy on their daily cultural practices did not make things better: the unequivocal conclusion of the editor was "if they're not savage, they're not Indian". Obviously, the article was not published. Instead, they preferred an advertorial³ about the tourism in Providencia⁴. Since then, a lot of indigenous communities from the Sierra Nevada have been displaced. Maybe, they have been murdered. However, it was not shown on television. And even if it had happened, the passive audiences exposed to the media would have preferred something different. They call it entertainment.

2. THEORETICAL FRAME

2.1 COLOMBIAN JOURNALISM: A COLONIAL SPACE?

The logic of hegemonic domination that has been established in the continent (and the whole South regions in the world) is based on a reproduction of power scheme that transform Latin America into that elites cemetery that Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto (1968 [1916]) talked about almost a century ago.

Following Pareto's perspective, in this continent groups of power -this is elites- have been developed, which have 'lions' and 'foxes' attitudes, taking into account a differentiation already described by Machiavelli. In the first case, they use some kind of coercion, a force (Weber's match) to impose their sovereignty; in the second case, they use persuasion and dominion (*herrschaft*): something that in the academic literature is called propaganda, which can be defined in a more prosaic way as a "lie" (an extensive distraction about Chomsky's statement, 1995). It is the power of the lie that persuades, the one that wins the race in a long term, due to the fact that it relies on a steadier and lasting legitimacy: it knows how to become a reality.

This way of social control has allowed the members of the continental elites to take advantage of the natural resources in an uncontrolled way that goes hand in hand with the native and African descendant's labour. This control is based on a capitalism (savage in this case, as defined by John Paul II in his papal statement *Centesimus Annus*, published in May, 1991 for the centenary of *Rerum Novarum* by Leo XIII, Ioannes Paulus PP. II, 1991) very close to the media that have shaped our Latin American Culture: an imaginary that, despite its apologetic drive, has remained nationalistic, populist and in the end, frustrated to make an artificial attempt to hide its real identity. This identity should be, at least statistically, more Afro-indige-

nous than Euro-American, more feminine than masculine, a reality that has become a pathetic Carnival and which disguises into a male Caucasian. The regime creates myths associated to soccer exploits as Diego Armando Maradona, or Pablo Escobar's wealth, ignoring the suffering of more than two hundred million of poor people who have to struggle every day (mostly natives and African descendants).

The pillage capitalism that has worked in the continent for five centuries needs a docile and respectful citizenry of that illusion called democracy here. To reach this goal, it has leaned against those cultural industries that, as social scientists associated to the Frankfurt School since 1930 described, are not only companies devoted to the production of services: they are organizations that create meta-realities, in order to enlarge their profits, where the audience becomes tamed and willing to get rid of their citizen duty to humble into the role of mere consumers.

The analysis of post modernity structures, taking into account the different perspectives of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, Teun Van Dijk, Ernesto Laclau (just to name a few), has always considered the increasing influence that the media has to establish a social mass, indifferent either in its formal appearance or in its thinking homogeneity. The cinematographic fantasy shape our minds from a "Matrix effect" to a "Truman Show universe", where our media-consuming reality ends up being manipulated by those meta-powers which, due to their meta identity –in other words, superior– are difficult to identify and, of course, to make responsible.

The media consumers, incapable to remember their social landscape of reference, prefer to be dazed by slogans with a mere advertising character, which swamps the informative fields of the media; nowadays, it seems more important just to get a boost in the ratings. That is why in this forgotten land called Colombia, people and media create an image of the country as "the best corner in America", and an image of lots of Colombians who sing happily "Colombia is passion!" A town that, as the Gabriel García Márquez's Macondian imaginary, lives hypnotized in an anachronistic and "Martian" magic realism (the meta-reality). The snake charmers, in this case, have been the cultural national industries and the multinational companies which, taking advantage of their huge production, at least in numbers, have imposed some colonial identities in all the Cultural fields, identities which were created to satisfy the needs and likes of a reduced minority (the elites). Everything would have been more simple, but there were some antagonists as those free journalists and civil society spokesmen, result of that

intrinsic capitalism that Marx described some years ago (Marx, 2000 [1867]), who still have an influence in the media. A paradox explained by the American journalist and movie director Michael Moore as a blind greed that encourages the behaviour of the big media corporations (Achbar, 2003). As he admits it, most of his profit comes from the broadcast channel FOX, the same channel that became the first to show the denunciation documentaries that Moore himself directed. It is amazing, but Moore denounces FOX in his documentaries. The audience wants to watch Moore's work. FOX acquires the broadcasting rights of Moore's documentaries, which also criticize FOX, but FOX does not care about it, because broadcasting his work means more profits for the channel. Using this strategy, Machiavellian in its roots, a journalist as Michael Moore loses his "power to blackmail" the institutional structures of power. In other words, the multinational companies of that meta-reality have found in the strategic market a way to fight and keep the research journalism quiet, the one that denounces and that tries to show those victims of the injustice after our rush to become a "modern world no matter what".

2.2 JOURNALISM AND ETHNIC ISSUES: A CRITICISM OF FOUR ANALYTICAL SHORTCUTS

This "Matrix" scenario is being set up in a contradictory context: On one hand, the Latin American countries constitutions (including the Colombian one, 1991) grant collective rights to a very reduced part of the territories which natives used to inhabit traditionally; and on the other, they assign a priority value to the strategic policies for an economic liberalization in the continent. In order to do that, the collective property acquisition became an obstacle to the development programs planned by the global productive scheme. According to Porto-Gonçalves, one of the causes of the massacres that the continent have suffered during the past years can be this process called territorial attributing, recognised in the Magna Charta, due to the fact that it has motivated the owners of those territories to fight with those people who tried to take them away, stimulating a raise on the violence (2006). In the Colombian case, billions of natives in all the country have suffered from the impact of human displacement since the emanation of the National Constitution, (Villa, 2005). Besides, there has been an occupation of that territory by the army groups, an illegal sale of the collective titles to private companies or straw men, deforestation of large areas, and a different use of this land, resulting in an expansion of agro-industrial crops (mostly that of African palm and coca. Romero, 2003).

Nevertheless, this contradictory scenario does not seem to be of interest to most of the media, which prefer to avoid covering complex stories. If they are obliged to do it, they tend to simplification after taking some analytical shortcuts, which purpose is to avoid a critical analysis of the difficult aspects by the audience. It is possible to recognise four vicious strategies that cultural industries and official information organizations use frequently when dealing with ethnical issues.

The most common vice is exclusion, in other words, the strategy to select the information that does not show to the audience any topic that can result uncomfortable to the editorial groups controlling the media. This selection takes away any element that, in despite of its public interest, does not generate big sales to the media nor share the point of view of the powerful elites (that is to say, their approval).

The second shortcut is the invisibilization. It is a hypocrite process which tends to erase the ethnical traces of the reality, making the public opinion forget the obvious characteristic of this conflict, which results in a paradox: the absolute majority of the victims and the executioner in the continent belong to the ethnic minorities. It was fairly recognized by professor Jaime Arocha that the social conflict in Colombia and in all the American continent is becoming “ethnicized” (Arocha, 1992), which is demonstrated by the data: however, the media show us a very different reality where it seems that the only social actors who deserve some attention are the members who are more integrated to the urban life (despite the fact that they represent just a mere minority of the demographic reality).

The third vice is the exoticism, which makes the most superficial characteristic of the indigenous cultures a “phenomenon”; for instance, the hybrid ways to heal that is now a topic of the showbiz (Uribe, 2008). The Taitas *diplomados*⁵, as they call themselves ironically, have found in the citizen-consumers of that hegemonic culture (the same that would have to lead them from its savagery stage to a non specified civilization) a heterogeneous community of people willing to trust the mysterious secrets of the jungle with no limitations. We have to admit it, the indigenous is part of the other and this is why it attracts us, even more if it is shamanic. It is like this that the ethnic issues disappear from the newspapers, more exactly from the pages devoted to politics, economics, justice or culture, to be found again in the showbiz pages, reminding us that the term indigenous is fashionable nowadays: the designers use geometrical designs to decorate dresses and accessories, they create objects based on their ancestral graphics, teenagers want to get tribal tattoos, the lovers want savage affairs and the tourists want

some exotic holidays. This exoticism is just a way to remove the problematic aspect of this whole issue in order to show a more attractive, interesting and saleable side. A postmodern and pop version of that racism and discrimination that is the only and the saddest ideological legacy of a century that is just over.

The last shortcut is sensationalism, a vice more obvious every time that a new discovery related to ethnic issues is made. Cyclically, we are accustomed to the existence of journalistic services and sensationalistic scoops about a “lost tribe” in any of the jungles of this continent. Thanks to the commodification of the news that reduce any intensification that a journalistic product would need, the sensationalism makes us probably forget that those indigenous communities should be considered as survivors, not as “lost”; it is illogic to think that they have been lost in those jungles that have always belonged to them, their natural landscapes and ancient territories.

These shortcuts have made our passive audiences to be accustomed to stop researching, analyzing or giving a critic point of view about the problematic issues of this reality. The triviality is not found in the criminal hands that commit an injustice: it is found in the silence of entire populations that, apologizing because of their lack of information, allow more crimes to be committed day after day.

3. ETHNIC ISSUES AND STEREOTYPES

Some weeks ago, there was an article in an important newspaper from Lima, Peru, *El Correo*, where the author Andrés Bedoya was trying to make the *chunchos* (natives in Bedoya’s jargon) responsible of the actual underdevelopment in Peru (Bedoya, 2009). According to him, those natives who inhabit the rural territories of the country “barely deal with the Spanish language” and “their mother tongue does not go further than 80 words”, becoming the principal obstacle to the modernity that the Peruvian deserve. His point of view is based on all those shortcuts that we just reviewed, awakening the phantom of the “bad and cannibal native”, a description that was very useful to approve the slaughter of natives at the beginning of the last century (Pineda, 1995). A nonexistent phantom, as suggested by the Latin American anthropology for more than a century (Serje, 2008). This phantom allows the capitalist enterprises to justify the ethnical murders (genocide in the law jargon) in those territories considered important due to their richness of natural resources and their geographical position. Those enterprises, helped by the cultural industries (and by journalists as Bedoya), are in charge of introducing the exis-

⁵ This neologism is used to refer to the native people who make of the Colombian showbiz. It comes from the union of two words in Spanish, *diplomado* that means graduate, and *pluma* that means feather, as the feather used by native for their traditional ornaments.

The Latin American journalism has developed a polarized imagery of those ethnic realities of the continent. There are two ways to show the native. The first, a native victim of exotization, victim of a historical and irreversible curse. The second shows the native as a savage individual who refuses to allow the natural development of the History. In the first case, we found an opportunistic journalism ready to focus on the tears of those poor groups and ready to take advantage of the victims. In the second case, we found a racist journalism, one that does not want to understand that the native do not leave their ancient territories to allow the opportunity to development mainly because that land belongs to them.

tence of an enemy, making of the native an opponent not also for the big companies, but also for the common citizen, willing to sacrifice his individual welfare and his needs of mass consumption, risking important values as the social justice and the ethics.

The Latin American journalism has, in this way, developed a polarized imagery of those ethnic realities of the continent, showing the natives according to the objectives of the media. There are two ways to show the native; the first, a native victim of exotization, victim of a historical and irreversible curse. The second shows the native as a savage individual who refuses to allow the natural development of the History. In the first case, we found an opportunistic journalism ready to focus on the tears of those poor groups and ready to take advantage of the victims, nourishing itself to find its reasons to exist. In the second case, we found a racist journalism, because they are playing an ignorant role, one that does not want to understand that the native from the continent do not leave their ancient territories to allow the opportunity to development mainly because that land belongs to them. *Mutatis mutandis*, it is obvious that nobody would like that a bunch of unknown people take the place where they live.

This lack of depth has hidden in the construction of a *totemic* imagery that calm down the spirits of that audience who really think about all those problems, an audience which is supposedly emancipated. There have been some virtues associated to this totem in a process that works as catalytic converters of those bad activities in this world. In this way, the native (that other that we never wanted to get to know) is associated to issues as wisdom, naivety, malevolence, creativity, mystic, nature, and the environment. These are nothing more than stereotypes that help the cultural indus-

tries to feel less responsible and guilty, and that avoid that the audience notice the deception. These stereotypes provoke schizophrenias against those native towns, obvious in cases called by the media as “environmental conflicts”.

We can take a look to the case of the policies for the total conservation of a forest in Colombia that has generated a strong contradiction between the needs of its settlers and the functions that the State has assigned to those territories (Correa H., 2004). The final purpose of the forests is considered by the institutions in terms of engrossing their profits through the trees exploitation, changing the use of the soil and, above all, transforming the place into a touristic site. In 1964 the Australian sociologist John Forster had warned the readers of the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* about the possible sociological consequences of the tourism, called ecological, which only tries to objectify the nature. Nature transforms itself in a museum work, behind a piece of glass represented by the borders of a natural park, which access is restricted, in fact, to its ancient inhabitants, in a continuous process of commodification of nature (Forster, 1964). Almost forty years after, his American colleague Charles Geisler, on the pages of the *Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales*, an important publication edited by UNESCO, used these same reflections to the case of the natural parks, observing that “the development of protected areas aims to manage the biologic diversity, even more, it is “exportation” material that attracts more money, new infrastructure and a big number of investments that make part of the classic development paradigm” (Geisler, 2003). The author connected these factors by observing how the preservation policies in a protected area represent a development strategy, contributing to the impoverishment of its inhabitants (also see Gallet, 2003). This problem has led the international community, and especially the United Nations, to implement a specific policy for protec-

tion and guardianship of those considered as “environmental refugees”, which demonstrates the importance and relevance if this subject globally (McNamara, 2006).

All of this could seem incongruous, even more if this is taken into consideration: the traditional systems of usage of the natural resources –mainly those of an indigenous origin– are still thought as the most sustainable in terms of environmental preservation, as shown in an important research found in the magazine *Land Economics* in 2001 (Nelson et al., 2001. Also see WRM, 2002). Indeed, the traditional indigenous philosophy, or even better their *ecosophy*, does not work making a real distinction of the functions of the human being and the environment that provides him whit shelter. After their constant search of an environmental balance, the natives have followed a complex ethic system aimed to contain the use of the benefits of the nature opposed to any modern conception of the natural resources that, as it has been explained before, implies a relationship between the use of the environment that leaves aside any valuation different from that one with a mere commercial objective.

In the light of these considerations, it can be understood why during past years the civil society has supported the indigenous cause and its environmental recognition in a global level: the native populations are standing out as better guardians of the biodiversity in the world (Nazarea, 2006). In this way, a great number of public enterprises and private associations have appropriated the “indigenous speech”, standing in for the natives themselves, and acquiring a considerable power to take decisions, mostly in behalf of the technical knowledge that staff member who, allegedly, would have to stimulate the “development” of the struggling indigenous groups (Serje, 2003).

Paradoxically, the media do not show the reality in a full way, leaving the assumed neutrality which does not know how to denounce that evident scandal in more than half of the Colombian territory. The indigenous territories are transforming into museums (the so-called natural parks), or even worse, into amusement parks. In order to do this, an indeterminate number of people have been forced to abandon their ancient territories to allow that just a few can take some vacations in the eco-touristic paradises. The injustice is evident. Journalists remain quiet.

4. JOURNALISTIC MORAL “BETWEEN ETHICS AND ETHNIC”

The fragility of the Latin American information systems and

their almost total submission to the demands of the global economical and financial markets is cornering the journalists in the continent, restricting their ability to practise their profession in a responsible and ethic way and their research work associated to their jobs.

In this way, legions of coward journalists have been created, journalists incapable to denounce any crime, crimes that could have even been stopped. Their complicity has justified the existence of other more radical journalists who have assumed a discriminated tone (sometimes racist) with the only objective to favour the polarization and the social conflict. The effort made by those journalists called in France *BoBo* (*bourgeois bohémian*) is too little, and despite their formal critic attitudes, they defend themselves with the shield of the journalist neutrality to avoid denouncing in an effective way all the injustice that they know. It is them who just inform instead of communicate (Ramonet, 2001). Fortunately, there are still a lot of journalists (not legions, but enough) who believe that the most important responsibility of a professional who deals with critical information is to control the flaws and weak points of the system, in order to create an environment of real social justice. This way, the journalists assume the role of *watchdogs* willing to watch the non-fulfilment of the “social contract” by the Leviathan through oversight citizen committees in a constant and detailed way.

Finally, we must remember in a more radical way the committed journalism: it is in those cases where the correspondent becomes a human shield for threatened people or groups, because to kill a journalist only brings problems. It is the fact that helps as deterrence for those who would want to perpetrate criminal actions.

The issue of professional ethics has acquired a moral level, most of the times individual. We strongly believe that this is because there is a total inexistence of any ethics with a real role in the journalism field. Ethics, according to the ancient Greek philosophers, is something that can be considered universal to all citizens. But is there a more common practice to all Colombian or Latin American journalists? The answer cannot be negative nowadays. Perhaps, there was a place and a time when all journalists where honest, eager to search and find the biggest number of sources, ready to research and willing to denounce: in other words, journalists abide by ethical and human rules. However, this is not the reality. The Latin American journalists have abandoned their principles: if they have them, their work will answer

to the ethical canons which they used to quote; if they do not have them, they will merely inform the community in the way the directive editorials require it to.

5. PLAUSIBLE SOLUTIONS

This quick review of vices (many) and virtues (few) of journalism exercised daily on the continent do not want to stay just as a lamentation, standing in *pars destruens*. Any revision, if constructive, can contribute to the improvement or certain practices. And this is, if possible, the objective/aim of this lecture.

Firstly, we consider that any measure of positive discrimination, in this case, does not fit in the –paternalistic– criterion that underlies these practices. A measure of this kind would need a legal support that, instead of integrating citizenship, would allow the application of a variable geometry logic that would not make easy the resolution of conflicts in any way, generated by the differences of our media democracies.

Secondly, our professional and teaching experience would advise us to look at bottom-up strategies that, instead of seeking an institutional top down control from above the information (with the obvious risk of being tempted by the deviations of censorship), strives to generate skills in the journalists which allow them to practice their occupation in a moral and dignified way.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to begin working on the same academic and professional training centres, which must show the multiethnic and multicultural reality of the continent, and must train their students to develop the essential skills to research and report competently, the injustices that they witness, a competition that should also be terminological. The universities, as centres of social construction, should promote the creation of research groups devoted to develop citizen functions and media observation to analyze, in an informed and scientific way, the discourse that is produced about ethnic minorities through cultural industries. It would also require an effort to train journalists in the execution of their field work (defined in a more precise way by anthropologists) that is the only contact between the reporter and the reality.

The opportune development of journalists' networks, aimed to exchange information based on a principle of solidarity and justice, cannot facilitate these processes, and the existence of a "Web 2.0 reality" makes this challenge more easily available. The new technological tools at disposal of the journalists allow the creation and management of community media that, because of their economy and simplicity of usage, can contribute to empower communities and groups away from the urban centres. The new forms of ethnic, public or civic jour-

nalism (Merritt, 1997; Miralles, 2006) are based precisely on these computer platforms that allow those people, absent from the public arena, to speak up, those silenced members of the imperfect democracies of the continent (Merkel, 2001).

In the end, we must be optimistic. As rightly acknowledged by the Italian philosopher Antonio Negri, the "Empire" –this kind of postmodern Leviathan– leads, just like the capitalism of Marx, to an incongruity *in nuce*: it provides the "crowds" (networks and social communities movements) the same tools used to disarm them (Negri, 2000).

6. FINAL REFLEXIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

I do not believe in journalism that calls itself impassive, nor in the objectivity in the formal sense. The journalist can not be a witness unmoved, he must have that what in psychology is called empathy. The so-called objective journalism, dispassionate, cannot exist in conflict situations. (Restrepo, 2007, p. 54)⁶

Nowadays, it is possible to identify an underlying concern among many communicators about their social responsibility or, in other words, their competence in information management as a social good. The abundance –even the superabundance– of information, the speed that needs its treatment and its commercialization are factors that today undermine the independence and the capacity of social construction of the communicator and, especially, the journalist. The pressures of political and economic kind which the journalism goes through have made the journalist leave aside the fulfilment of their principal function: to bring citizens close to the necessary information so they can take better decisions, be guided into public life and know what they cannot experience directly, controlling those who exert power. The factors mentioned before have led, among other things, to the sacrifice of life quality for immediacy, confusions and lack of credibility among readers, the absence of data verification, and the eagerness of sensationalism that seem to be the model imposed by large newspapers chains.

This brief reflexion has sought to show how the vast minorities of the Latin American continent have had to suffer the most perverse effects and inconsistencies of our socioeconomic system, a system that has allowed –leaning on with the instrumental communication of the cultural industries and mass media– not only the natives (one time masters of this continent) but also the African descendants (which in case of Colombia, Brazil, Venezuela and almost all Central American countries represent the statistical majority of the population)

⁶ Authors' translation. The original text was: "No creo en el periodismo que se llama a sí mismo impassible, tampoco en la objetividad en su sentido formal. El periodista no puede ser un testigo impassible, debe tener eso que en psicología se llama empatía. Por eso el llamado periodismo objetivo, desapasionado, no puede existir en situaciones de conflicto".

to suffer the direct and cultural violence of the brutal conquest that is based on discrimination and exclusion.

In this way, the purpose of this article has been to show that fortunately we count on means to reverse these tendencies, favouring communication proposals with a really inclusive purpose. We strongly believe that times, cultures, and even technologies, demand the isolated and objective journalist that barely transmits some information, to become an important social actor in public life, including people as citizens and favouring the public debate, transcending the role of just informing. In Latin America,

the journalism is asked to be conscious about its role, being a crucial link in regards of a community peace, contributing to the existence of bonds which allow the dialogue, a dialogue that also promotes reconciliation, respect, and participation. A journalist that serves as a watchdog, a person who fights for the conquering of rights, denounce any form of injustice, and search a pacific solution.

Finally, we hope that this article can contribute to generate a new debate: the construction of peace in need of an original perspective, and why not, utopian.

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