The overall objective must be to enable our research field to answer questions about the role of media with regard to the distribution of power and influence in our societies, in addition to questions relating to media content and the role of media in everyday life. We should not lose sight of the fact that, as Peter Golding recently emphasized, power, identity and inequality are still concepts of vital relevance in media and communication research (Golding, 2005). The outcome of this process will depend on our degree of involvement in discourses outside our institutions and closest circles.

Reference

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The problem of internationalizing media and communication research

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The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) is celebrating its 50th Anniversary in July 2007.[1] Mainly, but not exclusively, an academic organization, IAMCR describes itself as the worldwide professional organization in the field of media and communication research. Its members aim to promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical research. Its objectives include strengthening and encouraging the participation of new scholars, women, and those from economically disadvantaged regions, including researchers from African, Asian and South and Central American countries.

The association was founded in Paris in 1957.[2] When it was established, many of its leading scholars had a clear purpose. Its early members were involved in research that aimed to bridge ideological divides of various kinds. The association's membership was drawn mainly from the high income countries, principally Europe, but also from the Eastern Bloc states and from low income countries. Cold War ideologies were frequently contested and many IAMCR members

supported UNESCO's efforts to stimulate debate on the New World Information and Communication Order or NWICO.[3] In this period there was an underlying politics to the research fostered by IAMCR. This is not to argue that all members, or even all participants in IAMCR's conferences, shared this agenda, but IAMCR members' research was often informed by a deep awareness of the need to challenge mainstream conceptions of the role of the mass media in society, conceptions so frequently 'naturalized' within universities in the wealthy countries of the world.

The association's statutes highlight its ambition to provide a meeting place for academics and others with an interest in our field of study and to seek 'to improve media and communication research, policy and practice, especially from international and interdisciplinary perspectives'.[4] These could be the aims of any academic association. What, if anything, enables me to claim a distinctive role for IAMCR?

Professor Daya Thussu has challenged the media and communication research community to reflect upon whether we can 'internationalize' media and communication research. Several aspects of what IAMCR's project has been historically are important to recall in the light of this challenge. In a world today characterized by globalization, inequality, and substantial social injustice it would be immodest to suggest that IAMCR has been internationalizing since its inception as its members come from all over the world. I want to argue instead that if IAMCR is to claim a distinctive project in the years to come, and a seriously international one, we need to link the internationalizing project to a specific positioning with respect to an interdisciplinary project. If IAMCR's next decades foster a 'critical interdisciplinarity', that is, a stance towards research problems that unveils some of the contradictory ways in which media and communication are implicated in social relations today, then we may be able to preserve a distinctive place alongside other academic associations that may not explicitly adopt this stance towards media and communication research problems.

I first encountered IAMCR in 1984 just as I was completing my doctorate. My early years as a member were influenced by the British scholar, Professor James Halloran, during his tenure as President. I valued IAMCR as an alternative to the International Communication Association (ICA) which was then clearly dominated by US-based researchers, mostly working within the dominant or 'administrative' tradition of that time. My research interests had been influenced by the political economy tradition and especially by the Canadian, Dallas W. Smythe, whose notions about the value of 'cultural screens' (Smythe,

1981) were being hotly debated. This was Smythe's way of indicating that resistance to American dominance of the Canadian cultural industries would be essential to the preservation of a Canadian state; a state that might not be concerned exclusively with supporting American hegemony. The IAMCR offered a meeting place where these arguments could be debated.

Since 1990, when Halloran stepped down, the IAMCR's leaders have been drawn from Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States.[5] The membership base is international, but still strongly oriented towards Europe. All IAMCR's Presidents, but one, myself, have been men. With this profile, how can IAMCR claim to uphold its claims to inclusivity? If we do make that claim, how should we ensure that we do not succeed in promoting the values that help secure exploitative communicative relationships and an uncontested media environment?

The Cold War and NWICO debates provided a focal point for IAMCR members initially. Today, IAMCR members are more likely to be found focusing their research on the inequitable results of globalization, on the increasingly varied role of the media and communication networks in that process, on the rise of networked social movements, and on concerns about both empowerment and disempowerment as a result of a huge array of mediation processes. What role might IAMCR play beyond its 50th year?

I suggest that it is not so much internationalization of our field that is needed but rather the fostering of a distinctive interdisciplinarity; one that favours inclusivity. It must be concerned not simply with the blurring of the boundaries of disciplines that sequester research. Instead, it must be concerned with questions about power, its redistribution through time, and its different consequences for those who reside in specific places. This suggests a political project in the sense that Shome argues for:

> The issue is not one of interdisciplinarity for interdisciplinarity's sake; rather it has to do with the 'how,' and the ends or goals of interdisciplinarity; it has to do with asking what kinds of interdisciplinary engagements are necessary at a given time. (2006: 2)

In the present era of mediated communication, the goals of our research need to be explicitly debated. If they are not, there will be little chance of achieving what Shome calls 'transnational interdisciplinarity', that is, an interdisciplinarity that is politically aware and aimed at crossing the boundaries designating places and the borders that distinguish the spaces within which communicative relationships are

cultivated. She insists that researchers need to: 'engage in, and try to connect to, knowledge formations and vocabularies that reside in other modernities and other temporalities that are either refused recognition, or are not adequately translated, in machines of knowledge production in the West' (Shome, 2006: 3).

She refers to Calhoun's (2002) observation that the disciplines upon which the field of media and communication draws are bound up with the histories and politics of specific countries. Similarly, intellectual associations are influenced by their respective politics and histories. The contestations change over time and are articulated in different ways within and between national, regional and international associations (see for example, Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2007). It is essential to acknowledge this and to take into account our limited abilities to fully understand the role of the media and mediated communicative relationships in perpetuating difference, often in ways that maintain discriminatory relationships. If we are serious about mobilizing an 'internationalization' project then it must go hand in hand with a critical interdisciplinarity project.

The associations in our field host conferences and maintain websites and discussion lists. We are all developing means of exchanging research ideas and encouraging collaboration across borders. These efforts provide the forums for debate about the concepts and empirical questions that offer the most fruitful ground for future inquiry in our field. There are debates about the centrality of the media and these are reflected in the theoretical positioning of researchers and in their empirical practice. Some begin with societal problems, turning to investigations of unequal power relations that give rise to global and local instances of exclusion or poverty and the role of media and communication in these contexts. Questions are posed about the purposes of those who produce, consume or govern the media and global networks.

Critical scholarship often raises questions about which practices and actions are consistent with, or divergent from, sets of (often themselves contested) principles. Whatever the position of the researchers, their answers to these questions ultimately inform their ideas with respect to how one 'should' act as a researcher in the media and communication field. On this issue we encounter deep fissures between those who espouse a research agenda with a politics, with a concern about consequences and the way research is implicated in power relationships, and those who are not so much concerned.[6]

I suggest that those who want media and communication research to be more inclusive than it is today have an obligation to support a

critical interdisciplinarity. This is likely to orient our associations towards an international inclusiveness that acknowledges the political nature of that project and of research conducted in its name. A failure to do so will lend support to those theories and empirical agendas that become 'naturalized' within influential scholarly institutions, mainly in the wealthy countries of the world. Neither IAMCR nor ICA, for instance, which now aims to extend and deepen their membership throughout the world, can make individual political commitment the criterion for membership, but it is essential to acknowledge that political commitment is an important issue and that it matters today as much as it has mattered historically. Such commitment is what will shape the direction of research that is fostered by media and communication research associations in the decades to come. That direction will not be a natural outcome of excellent scholarship alone.

For this reason all aspirations towards 'internationalizing' our field need, at the very least, to be problematized. We need to inquire into what this term implies. If it leads to research that is unaccompanied by critical interdisciplinarity, what are the consequences, and for whom? As Alhassan (2007: 104) puts it, 'what is the relationship between the margin and the centre in the epistemic economy of communication studies? How is it established and maintained?' This is what we should be discussing as we seek to embrace members in diverse locations around the world.

Notes

1 I write in my personal capacity and my views should not be taken necessarily to represent those of IAMCR. I serve as President of IAMCR, 2004–2008.
2 IAMCR's legal seat is Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 54 Boulevard Raspail, 75006, Paris.
3 For a short history of the debate on this issue see Mansell and Nordenstreng (2006).
4 Article 2 of its Statutes states its chief aims as being: 2.1.1 to provide a forum where researchers and others involved in media and communication can meet and exchange information about their work; 2.1.2 to encourage the development of research and systematic study, especially in areas of media production, transmission and reception, in the contexts in which these activities take place and in those subjects and areas where such work is not well developed; 2.1.3 to stimulate interest in media and communication research; 2.1.4 to disseminate information about research and research needs – not only to researchers but also to those working in the various media and others responsible for communication policies; 2.1.5 to seek to improve media and communication research, policy and practice, especially from international and interdisciplinary perspectives, and to exchange information on practices and conditions that would improve the quality

of media and communication practice and media and communication research; 2.1.6 to contribute, by means of appropriate research, to the development and improvement of the education and training of journalists and other media professionals.

5   Australia (Frank Morgan), Canada (Robin Mansell, but based in Europe), Europe (Cees Hamelink and Manuel Pares i Maicas), and the United States (Hamid Mowlana), but not in this order.

6   For an indication of the contested nature over which research questions, methods and theories can claim to be 'critical' see Eid (2004).

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