INTRODUCTION: COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Thank you very much for the invitation to participate in this Conference of the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). Specialising in communications has been my way as an anthropologist to analyse culture and society, as I believe that the inclusion of the cultural industry and the most recent forms of communication, not only the local ones, is necessary in order to do anthropology.

I feel a little insecure on the subject of human rights because I haven`t dealt with it in a very focussed way. As all of you, I am aware of the current human rights issues and their history. I have been involved with several institutions dedicated to this subject. Currently, I am working with the Asociación Mexicana de Derecho a la Información.

It is very important that the Organizing Committee for this Conference chose this subject, as it is of worldwide strategic importance and quite relevant to the current situation of the media. I applaud the choice of Mexico as the location of this conference as, without a doubt, it is one of the countries in which human rights are more frequently violated, a condition that the social movement is trying to solve.

I recently attended an artist's discussion panel. They talked about human rights in contemporary art. One of the participants, a specialist in gender issues and feminism, said that while the most widely known and dominant media event is perhaps that of the *Muertas de Juárez* (The dead women of Ciudad Juárez), in recent years there have been many more deaths. That´s the way it is, we live in a situation in which femicide and gender violence remain, without a doubt, very important matters. However, violence against indigenous people and other discriminated groups throughout history are just as important and their scope covers all of society.

The Italian movie *Gomorra* is currently showing in Mexican theatres and in theatres in almost every country, as one of the effects of globalization's simultaneity. If you have seen it, you will have noticed that, at the very end, there are some notes on the effects of the narration being presented as fiction and document. One of the facts mentioned is that the Italian *Camorra* has an enormous impact on the international economy, as it invests in many countries around the world. For example, it has invested in the reconstruction of the New York Twin Towers. Another scandal mentioned–and it is in fact a huge scandal–is that over 30 years the Camorra has assassinated four thousand people.

In the past two years, twice as many people – more than eight thousand – have been killed in Mexico. It is in the face of situations like these which take place in our nation, as well as in others, that I would like to begin with the question: Actually, who cares about human rights? Research and discussions of this issue have been headed by lawyers, philosophers, politicians and members of social movements. At this conference, I mainly want to discuss two perspectives developed in recent years: that of anthropology and that of communication research. I am interested in these two disciplines because of the way they present the universal problem of human rights and of the different approaches they consider.

The other question we have to ask ourselves is related to the first one: Can it be said that human rights are universal? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is actually more a desire than a reality. Let us take an example: the French Revolution, as the background for the creation and recognition of human rights, took place more than two centuries ago. Yet, more than a century and a half after that historical event, in most countries around the world, women could not vote.

In that sense, we know of the different perceptions on humanity, culture and individual and collective rights in western, Asian and African countries. Notwithstanding the differences, perhaps it would be possible to generalise the form and content of culture and communication rights. The differences between cultures and the way in which they understand human rights are further complicated by the differences between knowledge disciplines, from philosophy and theology to the social sciences.

This is why I want to briefly refer to the need for an interdisciplinary approach to cultural and communication rights. As you know, each of the social sciences offers a different way to study societies. For anthropologists, this investigation implies working mainly with differences and worrying about the things that make us homogeneous. Sociologists stop and observe the movements that make us equal and those that increase disparity. Specialists in communications tend to think about

differences and disparities in terms of the inclusion and exclusion of information and entertainment media. According to each of these disciplines, cultural rights are understood using different codes.

For anthropology, which specialises in differences, cultural rights have to do with community membership and the possibility of communicating with others. From the perspective of some sociological theories critical of inequity, culture is something that is acquired by being part of the elite, something that adheres to thought and taste. Cultural differences arise, according to some authors, like Pierre Bourdieu, from the unequal appropriation of economic and educational resources. Communication research believes, almost always, that having culture means being connected. Therefore, the communications debate on cultural rights often refers to freedom of expression, intellectual property and media access. Given these differences, it is not possible to imagine an evolving process of substitution of some theories for others.

The problem is to find out how community culture, distinction culture and *dot com* culture coexist, collide or ignore each other. It is a theoretical issue and a key dilemma for the social and cultural politics of this transdisciplinary project, which consists not only of recognizing differences, but of correcting inequities and connecting majorities to the globalization networks. To define each one of these three terms, difference, inequity and connection, we have to think of the how they complement and differ from each other. None of these subjects have the same format they had 20 or 30 years ago, and even less so, 50 years ago when the IAMCR was founded. Above all, they have changed since technological globalisation simultaneously interconnected nearly the entire planet and thus created new differences, inequities and disconnections. Where is this debate and this transdisciplinary relationship situated in Latin America? In statements made by government organisations of modern western countries, cultural rights seem to circle around the development of personal potentialities and the respect for differences between groups. Human rights are thought to be related to the preservation of language, of homeland, of community relations. In recent years, organisations such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) have given socioeconomic rights a central role: work, social security, food, education, housing, and equal access to such goods. In their studies, ECLAC, and IACHR, as well as other institutions, have broadened the notion on human rights to cultural rights. Even the individual notion of cultural rights–which considers them to be more than only language or local cultural rights–shows that the assessment

of differences must be complemented by what I would call connective rights, i.e. participation within cultural industries and communications.

The right to be different is analysed together with integration and equality rights, along with relative participation in the various exchange networks. In Latin America we don't have a unified way to organise differences, inequities, connections and disconnections, nor do we organise rights in these three areas. Some prefer to stress ethnic, national or gender differences and that is the reason why they sponsor autonomy projects as diverse as the Aymaras natives project (which seeks to transform Bolivia into the Republic of Qullasuyo), the Mexican Zapatistas and analogue movements in Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Guatemala, which seek to attain community self-government and so gain respect for their positions within the modern nations in which they exist.

Governments that assume, at some level, differences and national interests, but commit themselves to sponsoring more independent projects for endogenous development, are in another sociopolitical category. In these cases, at the core of the political project, there is not an ethnic difference defined in identity terms, but the characterisation of internal and international inequity as a problem generated by a history of unfair exchanges. These governments consider the asymmetry produced by the first liberal era of capitalism an historical outcome and ask themselves how to overcome inequities arising from the irresponsible opening of national economies; the dispossession of educational, economic and cultural resources and the transfer of wealth from majorities to unproductive and speculative national and international financial elites.

The traditional left sectors and so-called populist movements pursue the mobilisation of popular fronts, including blue collars, unemployed, indigenous, agricultural worker associations, and urban citizens in countries like Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico and many other countries in the region, arguing for the recovery of national management capacity, the improvement of wealth distribution and a fairer position in globalisation negotiations.

There is a third and less developed view that highlights the decisive role of information and communication technologies in transnational restructuring and in labour, commercial and consumption processes. It posits that the key to developing an efficient program is the inclusion of broad sectors in technological advances. The political programme of this position seeks to overhaul education, update the production system and mobilise and expand modern resources. Not all supporters of this view behave in the same way, as some of them are more technocratic and others try not to connect elites with transnational business

movements without questioning the social implications of this internal and global articulation.

It is difficult to picture any type of transformation towards a fairer regime without policies that are able to communicate these different approaches towards the claiming of rights. Such approaches should be able to give voice to those who are different through ethnic, gender and regional policies and to correct inequities arising from such differences and other inequitable distributions of resources while at the same time connecting society with information, with the health, welfare and cultural repertoire that is expanding on a global scale.

We know little about efficient ways to operate simultaneously within these three approaches and how they mutually reinforce each other. I think this is one of the major challenges for communication and cultural research. The theoretical and cultural positions of the three approaches I have explained conceive differently of the citizenship that entitles us to demand rights. As Amartya Sen demonstrated when he articulated the problem of poverty as complete dispossession, the threshold for citizenship is achieved not only by respecting differences but by achieving the minimum amount of resources that qualify us for participation in society. What are these qualifying resources? Work, health, purchasing power and other socioeconomic rights, along with what he calls the basket of education, information and knowledge, that is, the skills that can be used to get a better job, more income and to communicate information to the world.

Segmented and unequal access to cultural industries and particularly to the interactive products that provide updated information broaden, according to Amartya Sen, "the distances in access to timely information and the development of adaptive abilities that allow more possibilities for personal development and thus generate better chances of effective socioeconomic integration".

In this context, we come to the point of asking what are appropriate cultural rights and communication policies in a time of economic concentration and polarisation of what here we will call *unequaled differences*. We know that diversity exists not only because different sectors of society choose to develop in different ways but also because they had unequal chances to access goods. In conclusion, there are ethnic, linguistic, gender and age differences that are not necessarily conditioned by inequity and there are other differences caused by inequity.

The Argentinean author Ana María Fernández published in the Colombian but internationally renowned magazine *Nómadas* (volume 30, April), a very interesting article that proposes this notion of unequaled differences to describe the construction of differences through the mechanism of power: gender, class, ethnic

or geopolitical. It points out that differences are not formed first and followed by an unfair and unjust society. Therefore, the question is not only the description of differences or inequities but the elucidation of the different hermeneutic categories that allow the visualisation and formulation of the production-reproduction of the different biopolitical devices that configure in one movement this difference and this inequality. It is not enough to count the poor and talk about poverty, to describe the cultural characteristics of a subordinate community or to reveal women´s specificities. Instead, Fernández points out, we must explain the biopolitical devices that construct identities in such an unequal manner, to expose the multiple domination and subjection networks between subordinates and dominants in the construction of their identities as unequaled differences.

Both forms of diversity, those that exist historically among cultures and those that generate socioeconomic and communicational inequities, are affected by the procedures that we could call a *media funnel*. The variety of styles and forms of interaction and the coexistence of cultures are reduced as they are captured by the media. Sociocultural plurality that was before homogenised by unification or national *mestizage* policies is now suffering a major reductionism, proportional to the monopolistic concentration of publishing and audiovisual industries under journalistic and transnational music media companies.

In the moment when social sciences and cultural policies of various states recognise and investigate heterogeneity, it is selected and impoverished through what Brazilian anthropologist José Jorge de Carvalho has called intercultural equalization policies. This author uses the well-known concept of *world music* as an example. Such a concept attempts to avoid the extremes, even collecting different kinds of music and subjecting them to a unified and stereotyped melodisation, compatible with the hearing formed on other continents.

What is currently happening with diversity policies and the rights of those who are different? In issue 4 of magazine *Pensamiento Iberoamericano,* coordinated by Alfons Martinell and myself, both specialists in ethnic, gender, education and media diversity in Latin America and Spain, we presented an assessment of the progress and setbacks in these areas. There is a general conclusion: diversity is undeniable. Yet it has little power. Declarations made at Ibero-American and presidential and culture ministry summits tend to recognise such diversity and at the same time they underline shared historical tendencies.

Why then are integration programmes so ineffective? Similar questions brought about the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted in 2001 by the member states of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization (Unesco) and the Convention on Cultural Diversity, approved by an overwhelming majority, opposed only by the United States and Israel, at the 33rd General Conference of Unesco, in November 2005, and whose delayed application to specific processes shows more and more difficulties than achievements. At the same time progress has been observed when constitutional articles include recognition of *multicultural countries*–Colombia in 1991, Ecuador in 1998. However, discrimination and interethnic conflicts persist and the rights of the excluded reach but little effective recognition.

What then are the consequences of these discrepancies between multicultural declarations and social processes in which the respective rights are denied? Is national cooperation in the defence of human rights possible? Again, we encounter cultural diversity and the difficulty to generalise coexistence.

I would like to once again take up some ideas from a text I read at the meeting held in Buenos Aires, involving Spaniards and Latin Americans, a few weeks ago, on the current situation of cultural cooperation in our region. I find it appropriate to remember that we now think that so called Latin American unity–it is a bibliographic common place–exists less as a common identity than as a sociocultural space. Instead of looking for an essential definition of *Latin Americanity,* we would best talk about a shared cultural, political, socioeconomic and communicative space for the coexistence of heterogeneous audiences with different identities, languages and itineraries. There are no biological grounds, nor is there any common tradition, to assure a shared and unified development or the creation of equal rights for everybody. Yet, it is not such diversity that creates more difficulties when facing cooperative development, human rights and communication policies but the despising of differences and the worsening of socioeconomic and communicational inequity.

How can these ineffective processes and frustrations be overcome? At the very base of the spoiled cultural, development and cooperation relationships, some authors find chronic differences between education inequities and the inability of schools to incorporate current demands for development. How do we educate the new generations on migration and multilingualism and provide them with the ability to understand the connections between cultural industries and digital networks that create new modes of access and intercommunication? If access to cultural goods is conditioned mainly by education, because of the educational lag and decadence of education systems in Latin America, almost all links to development and progress of social and cultural rights are hampered.

How far can a generalised education, which is said to guarantee access to national shared values, go if the necessary updating and specialisation for global

innovation is not included? We now are at a different stage from that of last century, when meetings like this one discussed media diversity. The unresolved diversity and intercultural issues have become more pressing as audiovisual industries join in digital circuits and thus create new differences and inequities, not only territorial or historical, but according to new modes of access. As the management of these interactions falls more and more into the hands of transnational companies in the editorial, cinema, television, and digital service fields, the cultural rights of every citizen and society are diminished.

Political integration and the goals of equality and justice are diminished in the face of the new commercial negotiation agendas. The multiplication of integration experiences amongst states, like the Southern Common Market or those between Spain and the European Union with some Latin American countries, have shown few common continuous results. Partly on account of political instability and also because of the weak structure of public agencies and relationship divides among country blocs, arising from economic confrontations between private and state interests. Within the field of communications, both the European integration process and the precarious Latin American integration programmes have done little to overcome communication gaps or broaden rights.

Can we aspire, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, to research and cultural policies leveraged in strategic circuits or in digital networks, both in private and public access and in online creativity? Or is it barely possible to expect them to continue handling the ancient "protected species": books, museums and author cinema? What human and communicational rights are we able to exercise and promote? If we look to what is happening with policies trying to develop culture, the conclusion is that wrong notions prevail in anachronistic places. It is fatigue without imagination. Most of the national cultural policies and the international cooperation policies still revolve around people, material goods, and institutions located in a physical space. All of the above is useful. Yet, in the era of the dematerialisation and digitalisation of symbolic goods, culture departments devote most of their budgets to managing museums, to the construction of cultural centres that function as spectacular architectonic references and to paying the salaries of institutions such as museums, theatres, orchestras, and libraries, representative of illustrated culture and situated in specific points of the city.

The states that, since the massive expansion of the media, have ceded to private companies unilateral decision-making powers over content and economic conditions about the use of theatres and television do not assign funds or personnel to researching and promoting the contribution of digital communication to the

restructuring of the digital public sphere of rights of access to communication networks.

In an era of transnational communication, the activities of government and most social sectors–even many non-governmental organisations, trade unions, and social movements–still place at the centre of their concerns convincing people to visit the institutions located in major or average-sized cities, in privileged neighbourhoods, the theatres, museums and concert halls, and creating some kind of resource for editors and publishers to survive and to make youth read more. Public polls on public subsidies for these institutions and their reading habits show that young people–and not only they–watch more movies than before, but not at theatres - on television, video and through the internet, via downloads. What use have they made of the computer, internet and mobile phones in recent years? They have used them to stay informed, to send and receive messages and to study, do homework and share data. All of them are forms of written expression. However, in the iPhone era, there continue to be books and government publications that pit books against television.

In recent years the ministries of culture of some Latin American countries have finally been driving research on cultural consumption, as there still remain localised consumption practices, spawning interest in research of the people that attend theatres, cinemas, libraries and museums. Nowadays, we would appreciate if policies were reformulated to fit such data and better serve a population's cultural rights, but we are in the era of access. Besides fostering independent movie clubs, supporting non-commercial publishing of classical authors and supporting the arts that galleries and biennials won't show, if we want to seriously meet the articulation of culture and communication with development, we must face uncomfortable questions.

I quote only two examples. International cultural cooperation on coproduction and joint distribution seems to now be a first need. The only continent that has made some relatively important progress in these areas is Europe.

One of the few post-rhetorical programmes generated by chiefs of state summits in Latin America is Ibermedia. It was created in 1998 and, after 10 years, it exhibits measurable contributions to the growth of film production in Spanish and the recognition of diversity. It has given grants to 348 films and fostered coproduction networks and cooperation agreements that favour the established filmmaking industries in Spain, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. These projects have included 14 more countries that could increase their production, ranging from Colombia and Chile to Ecuador, Panama and the Dominican Republic, that now have their own relatively significant film production.

Ibermedia directives acknowledge that they are only the first steps towards the creation of an Ibero-American audiovisual space, until now hampered by distribution and exhibition issues. Of course, in first place we would have to mention the obstacle of American hegemony in theatres, but also the lack of policies to access other media–television, video, and DVD–that would pay for production costs. Though it represents progress on cooperation and coproduction, such a step is not enough without achieving a co-distribution that would actually improve circulation on new screens and the formation of audiences willing to assume their rights as spectators. Filmmakers benefit from coproduction, especially in peripheral countries, as this method helps promote the creation rights of such filmmakers. However, only redistribution programs promoting the multicultural exhibition of every continent would contribute to affirming audience rights and achieving an intercultural understanding of the world.

The last issue I will address is maybe even more complex and difficult: How to work with those included, those excluded, and with those that don't want to be included in cultural development policies? The defence of cultural rights of universal access to goods, almost always, involves a social universe that rotates in an apparently coherent way around an axis. However, the modern world, interconnected by technological globalisation and an interdependent economy, breaks up and then disintegrates in crises such as the one we are currently experiencing.

Economist Paul Krugman quotes William Butler Yeats to describe global disorder as a "turning and turning in the widening gyre". I remember this Nobel Laureate that already in March 2008 spoke about the tendency of many economies to disconnect themselves from the American recession and the ones that follow it. This has brought, among other consequences, the cutting of credit lines and investment between countries which deactivates international cooperation programmes for more balanced development. One of the main effects of this disintegration and world crisis is the cutting–even in the United States and in some of the main European economies–of credits and investments in cultural and communication fields and also of the necessary investments for innovation financing such as digitalisation of audiovisual media that could broaden access rights to cultural goods.

Serious problems existed before the technological and digital bubble burst, but the end of the real estate bubble and other cuts have worsened the thinning budgets of museums, theatres, publishing houses and cultural television channels in the United States, Europe and Latin America. The metaphor of a universe rotating around an axis is being replaced by that of fragile bubbles and repeated budget cuts.

I want to stop a moment on the image of uncoupling, not only of some economies from others but that of some broad social sectors. In development literature, cultural and communication activities were said to be inclusive resources. Social and cultural policies were better valued when they favoured institutional participation and citizenship exercise. Today, rejection of these claims is rife. I want to mention a few examples. In the catastrophic Argentina of 2001, crowds in the streets demanded that "all of them get out!" In many of the recent elections in Latin America, presidents have been chosen from outside political parties, from Alberto Fujimori and Hugo Chávez to Fernando Lugo. The growing number of people who do not vote, especially among young people, is obviously linked to a growing political dissatisfaction, to the search for employment in informal markets, to piracy consumption and, in its more drastic expression, to the country´s abandonment of its migrants. All of these are active forms of distrust towards the prevailing social organisation. Recent polls among young people in Spain, Mexico and Argentina show their lack of interest in the state´s participation and wellbeing proposals and scepticism that civic activities–like voting in elections–would broaden the exercise of their rights. Many of these youngsters prefer inclusion in more experimental networks among people their age, with those that provide employment–even if precarious or illegal–and consumption and communication goods–even if pirated. Even remote communication through digital media provides them with more specificity, as voice and imaging make the relationship instantaneous and provide them with verifiable effects that take place in expressive networks, not abstract structures.

To conclude, I want to underline that I chose these two examples to point out the double risk that makes necessary a relocation of the culture-development-communication-human rights articulation. One register is the political activities within institutions and existing programs; that is why I spoke about Ibermedia. The other aspect is one situated in a field usually taken as anti-politics. This tendency involves people suspicious of grand institutional accounts who do not care to be included therein but who prefer to explore group development or collective methods which cannot be reduced to the exclusion-inclusion antagonism.

Assumption of this double track involves understanding the current conditions beyond the modes of interconnectivity and belonging structured by the legal culture on which inter-governmental and national agencies are focused. It implies such radical changes as not calling free downloads of cultural materials piracy and not thinking that non-corporate communication networks are a threat to development.

Perhaps, issues regarding the diversity of development and human rights would seem appealing to the new generations if we were able to picture culture as something more than just a Google commercial portfolio, five or six publishing houses and two or three record companies interrupted by the presence of underground videos on YouTube. Perhaps, the words *culture*, *communication*, and *human rights* are reinventing their sense of expression in other constructions of meaning whose power depends on what happens with the intellectual rights of creators and the connective rights of audiences.