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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Forums

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BHUTAN CENTRE
for MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

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Foreword

Democracy gains depth through the exchange of diverse views that strengthens civil society and opens up healthy discourse.

The Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy creates the space for such discourse by conducting regular forums on issues that are vital to the understanding of democracy. This includes the evolution of the media in Bhutan's rapidly changing society and concepts and ideas that help construct democratic thinking and a culture of democracy.

We aim to spread this discourse to involve a wider section of the population, beyond officialdom, looking at issues that matter to Bhutanese society. We believe that it is important to confront these issues to deepen the democracy that we are committed to build.

This publication is a compilation of some of the forums hosted by BCMD.

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Can we have democracy without public space?

Mark Mancall

Throughout the 20th Century, everywhere in the world with the exception, perhaps, of Bhutan, Nepal, and one or two other countries, a major, sometimes titanic, struggle was taking place between Capitalism and Democracy.

After the Second World War, there was a temporary lull in the struggle, but now, at the beginning of the 21st Century, it is beginning again. With the collapse of the neo-liberal form of the global financial system, particularly in the developed countries, wherever one now turns this struggle has become the center of political and economic discourse, and this is as true of the developing countries as it is of the developed countries.

When Bhutan began to slowly enter into the world system at the beginning of the 1960s, it entered not just into relations with one or another national unit or international organization; it entered into the discourse within which the debate between capitalism and democracy was, and is, taking place.

As students began to go abroad and return to become administrators and policy makers, wittingly or not they brought the seeds of that debate back to Bhutan with them. And when, in 2008, Bhutan took the fateful first step on the path to what we are describing as democratization, we placed ourselves firmly within the history and the discourse that, in the final analysis, derives from outside our kingdom's own ancient traditions, indeed from outside our region's historical experience.

Of vital importance for the discourse, for the debate, is the fact that the Fourth Druk Gyalpo recognised that Bhutan had to find a third way between the two sides of this debate, that it had to find a middle path between Capitalism and Democracy. He called this "Gross National Happiness". He sought a way to go beyond the dilemma of this opposition, the dilemma that confronts all developing societies, as a glance at any daily newspaper can prove.

This dilemma ultimately is not the choice between GDP and GNH, as it is all too often posed, but, rather, a choice between different sets of values and institutions of governance that vie in modern history for supremacy. Educational policy, environmental policy, investment policy, economic growth policy, ultimately all are and will be defined within the context of this debate, this discourse. Every policy decision is, when all is said and done, a decision consciously or unconsciously determined by the terms of the discourse and debate, which in turn, defines Bhutan's position in that same discourse.

The purpose of this forum, and of others that I hope will follow, is to revive or perhaps bring to the surface. I think for the first time in modern Bhutan, the shape of this dilemma and to encourage public discussion about it. That is why I want to talk about "public space" or the "public sphere" because it is within that public space or sphere that the discussion about democracy and capitalism must take place.

There are many ways of organising the governance of society, and each way shares some elements with other ways. However, each way is defined by a particular constellation of elements organised in a particular fashion that gives shape, body, and process to it as opposed to other forms of organisation of governance. I want to emphasise the differences between the different mechanisms of governance. It may be that at certain levels of abstraction,

the philosophical level and the experiential level of ordinary human beings, all forms of governance share something in common, but that is a matter for another discussion.

It is important for us, at this moment that we try to describe, and even more to think of, the particular elements that are **sine quibus non,** the indispensible conditions, for any definition of "democracy". I must admit that whenever I hear the expression "Bhutanese democracy," or "democracy with a Bhutanese flavor," I am puzzled. I have yet to understand what that means.

There are two problems with the word "democracy". One is its popularity. It has become so common an element in modern and contemporary discourse about many things that it has been drained of any intrinsic meaning.

Regimes as different as the dictatorial party states of China and the former Soviet Union and the social democratic states of Scandinavia all call themselves "democracies" but except for some very formalistic elements, a body that it may be called a Parliament or a conference, a building that is called a parliament or a chamber of deputies – these need not share almost nothing in common other than a word.

The word "democracy" slides along a scale from near black to near white, so that its meaning is lost and it becomes a word that points to - what? Furthermore, it is used even in inappropriate places. We must always be careful of the language we use because it defines the world in which we live, and if we lose control over the meaning of our words and the ways in which we use them, we lose control over the things to which they refer.

There are "failed states", states that are unable to exercise sufficient or appropriate governance over their populations, their territories, their institutions. There are also failed democracies, states whose organisation formalistically

looks like other states that call themselves democracies, but from whose institutions anything we might call real democracy has been drained, so that the content of the word "democracy" is radically different in one case as opposed to another.

Against the background of this observation, I would like first to list and very briefly discuss what I think are some of the constituent elements of "democracy" as we like to use that term, as it appears we mean to use it in our Bhutanese national discourse, our national political discourse.

I will list these in order that I think is important in order to arrive at the element that I most want to address and discuss at our first forum. But it is my hope that in the future there may be other forums at which some of these other elements may be the focus of discussion.

We must begin with the concept of **community**, a group of people who define themselves as members of the community, of that community, a particular community, on the basis of certain characteristics. Without these characteristics, the community fails, transforms into something else. Fundamentally, I think these, characteristics are the following:

Trust: a community must be a group of people who trust each other, who share a sufficiently common view of the world, a common understanding of the world, to the extent that they share a sense of what is right and wrong, what is acceptable and unacceptable. Attacks on trust are attacks on the community. That is why crime and corruption are so dangerous. They eat away and undermine the sense of shared trust that allows me to shake my neighbour's hand and assume that the agreement we have arrived at will continue on the basis of this sense we have that we can trust each other. I must know my neighbour well enough to believe that he will act as he says he will. And you must

trust me in the same way. If I cannot trust my leaders, I have no reason other than fear of them to follow their leadership.

Community must exist on the basis of **solidarity**, the sense that we all stand shoulder to shoulder in the face of natural, social, economic, political problems and calamities. Solidarity means that my failure to support the members both individually and collectively of my community diminishes my claim on their support. We are all parts of the community that is bounded by a sense of solidarity. At the local level, when my neighbour is sick and facing difficulties I will go to the neighbour's help. At the Universal level, when the world's ecological system itself is endangered, the human race must stand with solidarity in such a way that it can protect the environment in which everyone lives and from which everyone benefits. The quarrels, for example, that led to the failure of the Copenhagen environmental conference showed how little solidarity the human race shares in confronting the gravest problem that we as a species face. We do not yet have a human community in anything but poetic terms. If I have no feeling of solidarity with other people on other continents or even in my own region, there is no "human community" of which I am a member.

The members of the community must share a sense of **mutual respect**. This means that we must possess a sense of sensitivity toward the interests, emotions, and sensitivities of our neighbours and allow them the space to be themselves within certain communal bonds much as they must have that same respect for us. Without mutual respect, we are reduced to being animals scavenging in the jungle, each out for himself or herself. Even in nature, there are communities in which the animals show each other a certain respect, defend each other's interests, and so forth and so on.

There are two other dimensions of community that I would like to mention briefly. A community is defined by a **shared structure or set of norms** of behaviour. I can be a member of the community to the extent that I share the expectations of behaviour that characterise that community. If I step outside the norms of behaviour, I may no longer be considered a member of the community. In ancient Greece, for example, someone who stepped outside the boundaries of the norms of expected behaviour was exiled, which meant that the individual was actually sent away from the community to live outside its walls or outside its habitable areas. Greek myths and Greek history are filled with such examples.

The last characteristic of the community that I think is germane to our purposes is the presence of a **shared narrative** that gives that community existence into the past and into the future. Whether that narrative is what we may call history, or a philosophical narrative such as the concept of karmic consequences from the past acting in the present and from the present acting in the future or a shared literature or art or music, the narrative is the basis of the culture that defines my community from the community next to mine and it gives me an identity both in the present as well as in the past and the future as a member of that community.

"This is my story, not the story of the guy who lives in the next valley and whom I do not know and do not understand." We think about the future because of the narrative that extends our present into the future through the coming generations and derives our presence from the past through our ancestors. If that narrative breaks apart, if it falters, if it becomes unintelligible, the community may no longer have a basis for existence. It is vital for us in Bhutan to pay great attention to the construction or maintenance of a national narrative that transforms us into a real community.

These, then, are what I think are some salient aspects of community, of that group of people about whose governance we will now speak briefly.

We define our system of governance as "democratic" or, at least, as a system that we hope will become democratic as time passes and experience accumulates. But what are the essential, the absolutely necessary, components of democratic governance? We really need to think about this because our decisions about these matters, the selection we make, will define not only what we are but also how we fare in the future.

In this regard, permit me to point out that the Constitution itself is not democracy. Democracy may be a result of a process that begins with the Constitution or a democratic process may end in a constitution. We, in common with many other communities in the world, have accepted a constitution from which we hope democracy will develop. Britain, on the other, has a long history of gradually evolving democracy and has never had a constitution, in the written sense of the term. There are innumerable books about "the British constitution" but that constitution is a congeries of behaviours and institutions, not a constitution that has ever been written down in the sense that we or the Americans think about it. So what are some of the constituent elements that are actually necessary if we are to have a democracy in the way we like to think about it?

First, there must be a **public will** to democracy. There must be a communal sense that we as members of the community prefer a democratic system of government to any other. This does not mean that there will not be differences of opinion about what that government may consist of, but there must be a general will that we want democracy rather than autocracy or dictatorship or oligarchy, or any of the other forms of government that political theorists discuss. Public will.

There must be a concept of the **citizenship**. This I think is extremely important. There is a difference, a very profound difference, if I say, in English, that I am a subject of the King of Bhutan and that I am a citizen of Bhutan. I may be subject to the Queen of England but I am a British citizen. In America nobody could even conceive of being a subject of the President but it is common to say that "I am an American citizen."

So we must have a clear concept of citizenship, and I would very briefly, and in an admittedly shallow fashion, define citizenship as possession of the quality of equality with other members of my community, along a horizontal axis, while being a subject means occupying a position in a hierarchy of differentiable social, political, and other statuses. If I am not a citizen, if my community does not have as one of its building blocks the concept of citizenship, over and above the concept of being a subject, I cannot claim the quality of democracy for our system of governance.

The community must have a system of **accountability**. This is to say that everyone in the community must be accountable and must be held accountable for all her or his public actions. If we have a well-defined distinction between public and private domains, what may go on in the private domain, depending upon the particular culture, may be subject to accountability only when it impinges on the neighbours. The food I eat in my dining room is none of my neighbours' concern, but if I throw the garbage that is left after I have eaten the meal onto my neighbour's house, then I must be held accountable by my neighbour and by the community for that act. Similarly, a community's leaders who are not held accountable by its people or a people who is not held accountable by its leaders cannot be considered either a community or a democracy. Accountability is absolutely essential, and that accountability must be open, transparent, and constant.

I would ask you to compare the difference between the American system of democracy and the British system of democracy from the point of view of accountability. In the American system of democracy, the leadership is held accountable once every two or four or six years, depending upon the category of leadership. In the British system, the leadership is held accountable at least every five years but also whenever, through certain mechanisms, it can be strongly suggested that the leaders have lost the support or the confidence of the people.

In other words, in Britain, there may be a five-year limit on the term of office of Parliament, but the leaders may be held accountable at any point in time by a vote of no confidence in Parliament, which could lead to a new election. In fact, the election held recently in Great Britain shows that the people did not have sufficient confidence in any leader to be able to form a single government. That is an extraordinary expression of democratic sentiment.

Democracy requires that **the law be the same for everyone**. Citizenship, equality, requires that nobody be outside the law, theoretically, legally, or by action. Crime and corruption set one outside the law and deny to the individual engaged in such activities the characteristic of citizenship in the community. Neither status nor wealth nor any other characteristic can differentiate one citizen from another with respect to the law.

This concept of the supremacy of law is wonderfully illustrated in perhaps the most famous story from ancient Greece about the first great philosopher Socrates. Some of you know that story. Socrates was condemned by the people of Athens, meeting in what today we would call an assembly, for having tried to seduce the youth of Athens into questioning their society, their values, their institutions. Having been condemned to death, he withdrew to a place where he was supposed to drink a poison as - and

this is very interesting - a form of punishment he would inflict upon himself because of the condemnation of the community. A friend came to him and said, "You can go somewhere far away and continue to teach and continue to express the values you hold dear."

But Socrates refuses to go, and there is a dialogue between him and his friend about why it is his duty to the community to die, in this case to execute himself, even though he disagrees with the condemnation of the community and with the judgment of the assembly. This argument is both very simple and very difficult: he says that Athens is the laws that define it. Athens has been his mother and his father. Athens has been his educator. And if he now runs away and does not accept the primacy of the laws of Athens, with which he disagrees, which have in fact condemned him to death, if he does not accept them then he is undermining the very concept of community as being subject to law. He would be stepping beyond the bonds of community itself if he did not accept the judgment with which he himself disagreed. This is an extraordinarily noble story. But it also raises to a very high level the necessity for us to think about what citizenship in a community, in our community, means.

There must be **self-censorship** for the community to exist. There is that old problem which undergraduates sometimes like to discuss in college: do I have the right to yell fire in a theater or a crowded room when that may result in a stampede that will kill people. Does my right to shout fire belong to the realm of freedom of speech? Many people, and I would include myself, would argue that you do not have the right to shout fire in a crowded room when there is no fire, and when the result might be the death or injury of other people.

Now we do not necessarily have a law defining that. In fact, it is next to impossible to have laws or regulations of

such specificity that every possible contingency is covered. But common sense, a sense of common solidarity with our fellow human beings, and the understanding that we all have to behave in a self-conscious way in the community so as to maintain the welfare of the community itself, tells me that I do not have the right to shout fire in that situation.

I must censor myself, I must always be careful that I do not step beyond the bounds wherever those boundaries may be drawn over time and must always be careful about that. However, I must also, if I do engage in such activities as crime, corruption, endangering others, be prepared to take the consequences. That goes back to the lessons of Socrates. I must be prepared to take the consequences of my actions even when I believe that my actions are the right actions, in order to maintain the solidarity of the community.

Two last characteristics that, in my opinion, are absolutely essential for us to call ourselves a democracy: **First, there must be a means for the continuous assessment of public opinion**. The people must continuously participate in the making of, or at least approving, policy and decisions. It is not sufficient for the people to hold leaders accountable only periodically. We see that everywhere in the world. One may hold an election that is a poll of accountability. In the run-up to the election, those contending for leadership will make all kinds of promises in order to gain votes. When the election is passed, they forget those promises or ignore them or find excuses not to fulfill them. Later, whenever the next election comes, in the run-up to the next election the leaders will then revert to those promises.

If the people are not sufficiently well informed and sufficiently involved in the constant assessment of their leadership, they will again be fooled by the leaders into voting for them, and the same process will continue to repeat itself over time. Let us be very clear about this: this does not mean that one has an election every day. There

have been societies in history where elections have been very frequent and in some places they still take place in that fashion. But it does mean that a mechanism for holding the leadership accountable must always be present, must be functioning every day, and at the same time there must be a way for the people constantly to participate in some way in the formation of policy and the passing of laws.

This brings us directly to the issue that we will go into in greater detail in future forums, the function of the media. I would like to remind you that the media are traditionally referred to as the fourth estate, and it would be good for us to recall why it is called the **fourth estate**.

In France, before the French Revolution of 1789, society was divided into essentially three "estates": the aristocracy, the clergy, and the bourgeoisie, that is, the people who live in the city. Peasants were not considered part of society. But there was a fourth estate, unofficial, which was the developing press, the media. And it was well understood that the media were a mechanism, a tool, for constantly expressing the public's sentiment to the rulers, to the leaders. The media were the vehicle for the participation, on an almost daily basis, of the people, at least those who could read and write, in the governance of the country. The Latin tag, "Vox populi," the voice of the people, is the voice of the people in the process of governance, and it is often used to describe the role of the media, of the fourth estate, in the process of governance. There is a lesson in this for us to learn.

Finally, there must be in every democracy what we may call **public space**. What is public space? Public space is that area - it may be a physical area, it may be an intellectual area, but whatever kind of area it is it must always exist - in which all these other characteristics that I have described or ascribed to democracy appear and function.

It is that space in which we can enter because we trust each other. It is that space in which we find ourselves embarked upon a common objective as a community that finds one of its expressions in the sense of solidarity we share with each other. It is that space we enter with mutual respect for each other. It is that space in which we develop, write and rewrite the ongoing narrative that defines our community. It is that space in which we can participate, on a continual basis, in the assessment of our society and of our leaders, in which we can hold them accountable, and, most importantly, it is that space in which we can discuss everything that concerns our society, in which we can hold a discourse, the discourse of our society, the political discourse which helps us understand the past, live in the present and define the future of the governance of our society.

All these ingredients must be present in that public space if we are indeed to be able to call ourselves a democracy. Above all else, that space must be characterised by a freedom of expression that is constrained only by our respect for each other as citizens and by our self-censorship with regard to those issues that would endanger the very existence of our community.

Moreover, all citizens should be able to enter that space equally and to converse without constraints due to any other factor than reticence. Too great a disparity of income, social and gender inequalities, anything that gives sufficient power to one to deny to another the sense that she or he has a right to speak out in public space, is undemocratic. This is not to talk about any absolute equality, only to say that no inequality of any kind can be allowed to disarm or constrain participation in public space. The least educated citizen must have the same right to enter public space as the most educated.

As I said, I think that each one of these subjects needs discussion but all of us - in the public space that we have

yet to truly develop in our society - if we are to truly walk down the path the end of which will be the beginnings of true democracy in our kingdom, must enter the Public Space. Public space has always been the central necessity for any kind of political life to develop beyond that of autocracy. Without public space we have no democracy.

As I said before, by choosing to start down the path toward democratisation, we have placed ourselves in a narrative that we need to know if we are to understand what we are about. So I'd like to turn, for a few moments, to discuss the history of this concept of public space. I'm going to do so by showing you illustrations of public space, and as we move through these illustrations I hope to be able to convey to you how vital, how important and how material, this concept of public space is to political development, to the evolution of democracy.

What is really very interesting to observe in the course of history is the absence of public space. For example, in feudalism, in a feudal society, there is no public space.

So let's now begin with these illustrations, and I will try to show how over time this concept of public space has evolved. This very brief narrative about public space that I am now going to begin is the narrative of democracy, of the evolution of the concept and practice of democracy, within which we have indeed placed ourselves by the very act of accepting a constitution that sets in place institutions and processes that we call democratic. I will argue that however we may try to justify and legitimate this Constitution and its institutions with reference to our own traditions, the fundamental narrative we have joined, we have accepted, is the Western narrative of the evolution of democracy.

Whether we always understood that is another question. Whether we want to think of this as a "Modern" narrative rather than a "Western" narrative is a matter of choice

consequent upon how we find a particular explanation satisfying and beneficial to us. The rest of the world, however, will always measure what we have done and are doing and will do here in our own country by those standards and practices that are standards and practices that derive from the narrative of democracy as it developed in the West.

When push comes to shove, whether the Iroquois Indians in North America practiced a kind of rudimentary democracy is an interesting footnote to the main narrative of democracy, as we understand it today. And one last point before I turn to the illustrations: this is a story that is constantly evolving and changing. The struggle for real democracy understood as full popular participation in one or another form of governance is still going on everywhere in the world including in the advanced industrial societies.

In Great Britain during the recent election, the Liberal Democratic Party made the point - and it has been central to discussions between the three parties since the election - that the British system of elections in which the winner of a seat in Parliament is the one who wins the most votes in a constituency is old-fashioned and undemocratic, and the Liberal Democrats party is arguing for a different system of elections. That issue will probably continue to be debated.

In the United States of America women did not have the right to participate politically until 1919, less than a century ago. They were not citizens in the contemporary sense that we understand democracy. Until the civil rights movement in the middle of the last century, large segments of the American population by virtue of the color of their skin were given a formalistic legal but substantively no right to participate in the political life of the nation.

In other words, they may have had the right to vote but they were prevented from voting, and in some cases did not even

have the right to vote. So we must always be aware that the narrative that we are talking about is constantly evolving and changing. The failure to recognise that that narrative changes over time, must change over time in response to changes in society, changes in the economy, changes in popular opinion and even, for that matter, changes in the natural environment, the failure to recognise that process will lead to endangering the system and eventually to even more dire consequences.

We saw a very few decades ago the collapse of one of the most enormous empires in the world because it had become sclerotic; it had become paralysed by virtue of its very inability and unwillingness to recognise that the narrative of democracy must always change, and that there must be mechanisms for change that are sensitive to the necessity for change. All right, now let's turn to the illustrations and discussion of open space.

The discussion of open space may begin in one of two places. It may begin in the realm of myth, that is to say, in the realm in which myth and theory try to define the origins and nature of society. I will give you two examples.

In the Judeo-Christian Bible, the God creates the world in six days, and the act of creation is an act of ordering all of existence, including human society. The story of Adam and Eve, for example, is the story of the ordering of relationships between men and women in society. At no point in the Bible do the people in that long narrative sit down to discuss what would be the correct or just relationship between men and women. There is not even a hint of open space anywhere in that narrative. Democracy is nonexistent. And when, indeed, the people in the story decide that they want a king to rule over them instead of their God, the one and only time there is an expression of popular opinion, they are warned that this is the most profound betrayal possible and that the world will go downhill toward destruction

from then on; and, indeed, that is exactly what the narrative tells us happened. Disintegration of society, enslavement, discontent, all lie at the end of the road that begins with the turning away from absolute authority, or so the story says.

The myth on the basis of which public space *must* exist is a myth created, classically in our opinion, by the great French political philosopher Rousseau. He posits the beginnings of society in the exact opposite way from that of the Judeo-Christian Bible. He says that in the beginning people - that is individuals, perhaps small groups - it doesn't really matter - come together in a clearing in the forest. There it is, a group of people standing around in the forest, aware of the fact that they are surrounded by, for example, wolves, tigers, lions, any kind of dangerous animals humans can imagine, and they have to come to an agreement to defend each other against the dangers that surround them lest, in fact, they be devoured by these wild animals.

I'm simplifying the argument because of the contingencies of time, but the argument is very obvious. So they arrive at what is called a "social contract". They sign with each other, as it were, a contract to establish society so that they may defend themselves more effectively against the dangers that are waiting for them individually.

The foundation of the society is the willingness of each person entering into the contract to surrender a certain degree of freedom in order to acquire a certain degree of security. Notice that this meeting, this mythical congregation, takes place in a physical space in the forest, at least according to the story created to explain the beginnings of society. If there had been no open space there could have been no society in the sense that social contract theory suggests.

In the Judeo-Christian biblical narrative, there is only law, the law of God, which is conveyed to the people in

a variety of ways. But the people had no opportunity to participate in the creation of that law; they are only subject to the law. And failure to obey the law results in very, very severe punishment. In the social contract narrative, the one from which democracy develops, the narrative of the beginning of democracy as well as of society itself, the people participate in a discussion of the terms of the contract that they are each going to sign in order to create society.

These are two diametrically opposed concepts of society. It is very interesting to note, by the way, that in the most powerful institution in our contemporary world to derive from the Biblical narrative, mainly the Roman Catholic Church, there is no democracy; it is an autocratic system, a feudal system. The Protestant Reformation was, to some extent, an attempt to democratise in its own strange fashion the Roman Catholic Church, and today, if anyone follows the story, we are living through a period in which the church, in which the people of the church, the common ordinary church members, are in many areas trying to break the bonds, in one way or another, of a bureaucratic system.

Another example is the state of Israel, where the far right wing of politics insists that even the state itself is illegitimate because it was not established by the word of their God. They want to substitute religious law for secular law. This idea of a society without public space is still a field of contention in our contemporary world. Both of these examples – the Roman Catholic Church and the State of Israel – suggest that even in the 21st-century without public space there can be no democracy.

A public space (some prefer to refer to it as a "public sphere," thus emphasising its intellectual character, but in fact it depended very much on such material objects as physical spaces and publications like newspapers) began

to emerge in the 18th Century through the growth of coffee houses, literary societies, and other organisations, including voluntary associations.

The anti-democrats sought to control this public space (sphere) in order to keep the institutions of government and popular representation (elections leading to membership in parliament, where free speech could reign) under control.

The successful growth of the public sphere depended on universal (or at least as universal as possible) access, autonomy (which means a lack of coercion), equality (in denial of hierarchy), the rule of law, and education, which assured a high level of reasoned and reasonable public discourse.

It is true, of course, that the absolute ideal of a free public discourse in a free non-coercive public space was really achieved historically. Social and economic distinctions, which meant differences in the power to exert influence or to control, class interests, gender inequalities, all gradually diminished in the 19th and 20th Centuries, in some though not all part of the world.

But the public space, and hence public discourse, has never been completely free nor have differences of power to control the space and discourse ever diminished; indeed, the evidence is that they have increased, as witnessed in the control over the distribution of news and information through newspapers, radio and television.

Put most simply, very few ordinary citizens have the wherewithal to publish and sell a newspaper, own a radio station or a television channel. The great contemporary German thinker, Jurgen Habermas, writes of a "refeudalization" of power whereby the illusion of public space is maintained in order to support the leaders'

decisions, and the power to make them.

The struggle for public space never ceases, and victory is never assured. Only through insistence on debate, on dialogue, discussion and discourse, on the free and untrammeled expression of opinion through a variety of speech acts, can access to public space be kept open. This is not restricted only to parliaments, coffee houses, cafes and town squares. All kinds of voluntary associations, from sports clubs to professional organisations, are public space; the struggle for free access must take place in all of them.

In our contemporary world, media literacy is a vital instrument for the maintenance and enlargement of public space. The ability to dissect and analyse the statements of leaders depends on critical thinking and on literacy. Without information concerning public issues, the public cannot really participate in the debates about its own future.

The management of the news and the control of information by those in whose interests it is to create the illusion of participation inevitably lead to the abortion of democracy. The "spin doctors" who have become so important in the politics of many Western nations are no friends of democratic development. One need only observe the recent debates on the science of climate change to realise how thin our ability to trust public information has become and how we must never let down our guard in the struggle for the kind of information that allows us to judge the validity of the arguments that Authority hurls at us in support of one or another political decision.

I have concentrated on the question of public space as physical space. I want to reiterate, in closing, that I do not for a moment want to suggest the public space is only

physical space. Quite obviously, the media, the Internet, and many other phenomena also have to be considered as part of public space. Essentially, I've been using the metaphor, and the image, of public space, to represent a larger concept that is in many aspects non-material, not just material. But I think that it is very useful for us, at this point in our own development, to think of public space in almost physical terms. Where and when, as citizens of this place and this time, do we gather publicly to discuss public issues?

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Journalism and Democracy in a Changing Media Landscape

James Richard Bettinger

Right now in much of the world, the traditional media, the mainstream media, the legacy media is undergoing what the economist Joseph Schumpeter called "creative destruction". By 'creative destruction', Schumpeter meant that established businesses and established economic forces are inevitably becoming disrupted by creative new forces that come along or innovative forces that disrupt the old business and eventually make them go away and become obsolete.

It's not a bad thing. Out of creative disruption we get new forms, which are better suited to a modern world. The lesson that I would encourage you to think about is not that what happened in the United States or what happened in Europe is necessarily going to happen exactly the same way in Bhutan because it will not. But, I believe that it's foolish to think that nothing similar will happen in Bhutan because the forces that are shaping this change have an impact everywhere in every kind of society.

Let me begin by describing what the news media had been in the United States and elsewhere, i.e. what the old media looked like. This was true when I began as a journalist in 1969 and it continued through until a very short time ago. Let's say at least until the year 1995, or possibly a little later than that. That media, that journalism, was what I call "appointment Journalism", and it consisted of a package of news, opinions, commentary, features and photographs that was assembled to be read or watched or listened to at a particular time.

If you subscribed to a daily newspaper, you know that it would come in the morning or in the afternoon or whichever one that you chose, and that's when it was designed to be read. If you watched the national evening news on television, it appeared at a particular time. That's the only time you could watch it. The news came at 7 pm, and if you didn't get home until 7:30, you didn't have an option - you just missed the news.

This is true for radio news as well. If you subscribed to a weekly news magazine, that news magazine came on a particular day and you read on that day or perhaps some days after. The journalists who prepared these magazines, these newspapers, they understood that that's when you were going to read it, and they were all focusing on assembling that package.

I think when I worked for a morning newspaper, we would pay more attention to what people would have known during the day and basically say that, 'okay; tomorrow morning when people read our newspaper, here's what it has to be, so that it's an appointment with the news, major appointment with the news for people to read, watch and listen to it under those circumstances.' And it was very much a package. It was some national news, it was some local news, it was some sporting news, it was some features, it was some business news, it was all of these things and they were put together in a single package for you. If you subscribed to a news paper and you didn't really want the national news, you only wanted the local news or the regional news, there was no way to get just the local news or the regional news; you had to take the entire package.

If you watched the national television news at 7 pm, there was no way to get just one or two stories; you had to watch all of the stories. If you didn't want to watch it, you could turn it off, but you couldn't skip a story. You had to wait until the story that you weren't interested in was finished

before you could hear something. It was very much a package and it was aggregated and there was no way to disaggregate it, which is to say that there was no way to sort of pull all the pieces apart.

Keep that in mind, because after that, great changes happened. This is disaggregation. These packages were all aimed at being comprehensive. When I worked at the *San Jose Mercury News*, a morning newspaper in California, we wanted a package of news every day that we could say to people, 'If you read the *Mercury News* in the morning you will know everything important that went on you don't need other sources of information. You give us your money for the subscription and we will give you a package of news that will be comprehensive, complete and that you won't get somewhere else.'

These news packages were sold that way to advertisers. Advertisers and media throughout the United States, and other places as well, are a key element of paying for news coverage. In the United States, basically if you own a television you can watch television news for free. There is no license fee; there is nothing that you have to pay once you have brought the television. The entire cost on putting on a television news broadcast was paid by advertising who paid to get access to viewers. There was a phrase in Journalism in the United States which basically was 'in the business of selling eyeballs to advertisers'. I'd go to an advertiser and I say, "If you advertise on the national news, I will deliver to you five million people who will watch you every night and they are like captive audience. They cannot go anywhere else."

In newspapers, the general assumption was that the subscription costs would pay for a small proportion of newspapers about $1/5^{th}$ of the total cost of the newspaper. The other $4/5^{th}$ was paid for by advertisers. One way to think about it in the United States was that if I pay 25 cents for

a newspaper, that 25 cents basically paid for the paper and the ink. The raw materials, everything else, the cost of gathering the news, the cost of assembling it, the cost of selling advertising, the cost of distributing the newspaper, etc. was paid for by the advertisers.

Just in the same way that you couldn't get just the part of the newspaper, advertisers just couldn't get some of the subscribers. So if you advertise in the *Mercury News*, you had to pay for all 300,000 of those subscribers even though it is a very small number that would have actually been interested in what you were selling. You had no other option. This way of funding journalism paid for the news that would otherwise be too expensive to carry out.

For example, it paid for foreign news coverage. It's very expensive for any newspaper to have a bureau in a foreign country. The correspondence have to be paid a premium, they have to pay for housing costs that are very expensive, transportation costs. It is an extremely expensive proposition. It also pays for investigative reporting, which individual reporters work for a long time, maybe a year, to produce a story or a series of stories. It paid for government reporting what we refer to United States government 'watchdog reporting', in which the journalists are keeping eye on the government to make sure that its not doing things that are wrong. If you try to pay for those things individually with relatively few ways to pay for it, you make up for it by being part of a package. The people who bought the paper for the local news also end up paying for the foreign news and the people who bought the news for the comics, also end up paying for the investigative reporting. It was not a perfect system, but it was a system that worked very well.

Back then there were relatively few news producers. By these producers, I mean newspapers, television stations, and broadcast stations. For one thing, it was really expensive. If you wanted to publish a newspaper, one of the first

things that you had to buy were printing presses. Printing presses are big, complicated, expensive pieces of machine. Nobody that I know and have worked with can pay for it. You had to be very well off to be able to buy that or at least be able to show a lender that you are going to be able to pay for it. So that was a considerable bar to publishing a newspaper. If you were in broadcast, you were dealing with licenses for government and government issued licenses that were very scarce.

In the United States, as in most countries, the government controlled who got a television license and, because they are scarce, how much they paid for it. So if you wanted to own a television station, you needed a lot of money before you were able to do that. Over a period from roughly the 1950s to the early 1990s, journalism institutions newspapers, television stations, radio stations and news magazines were stable and strong to a certain degree. Some of them had business problems, some of them weren't with a business, and not everyone was strong, but for a long time these journalism institutions were very strong and stable. They didn't change very much. I am describing United States because it's the country I understand best, but it's the same in Europe and other places as well. It provided a key role in democratic societies. The core role was in providing information to the citizens so that they could make informed decisions. That's the core role of journalism, of the news media in democracy providing information to citizens so that they can make more informed decisions.

In order to do that, it is essential that these institutions are independent; and I mean not just independent from government control, but independent from economic control. If you have a newspaper that is economically weak, there could be an important advertiser that wants to exert political pressure on that newspaper. So it's important that these institutions are economically strong and independent. In the United States and many other places, the new media

and the journalists all function almost not just as a branched government, but the key role in governance because they help to set the agenda for government. They are responsible for monitoring the activities of the government. They are responsible for conveying public opinion to public officials and are the key element of democracy because they are responsible for finding and publishing in many cases information that the government didn't want published.

William Randolph Hearst, a famous American newspaper publisher, once said that, "News is something that someone doesn't want published; everything else is advertising." That's a little hyperbolic, but it's an important role journalists serve providing independent information. They also serve as the representative of the public in witnessing things, in witnessing events, in witnessing processes and other kinds of activities of government. That means that they are witnessing, watching, and reporting on the legislative sessions. They are reporting on the activities of regulators in government. They serve as a witness and when I say 'witness', I mean it in a couple of ways: one is to watch, but the other is serving as a stand-in for the public in for what is being done in the public's name.

I think that the clearest example of that is coverage of nations when they go to war. When nations go to war, they do all sorts of things. People are killed, cities are damaged, and many things happen; it is the responsibility of the news media to watch what is going on, to understand it, and to stand in for people who can't be there themselves. Ideally we would say everybody would want to be where the government is acting so that they can see for themselves. But obviously, that is not possible; the news media and the journalist have the responsibility to stand in for the public in that way. They serve as the champion of the powerless and the bulwark against the powerful.

In every society that I am familiar with, there is a division of power; some people have more power and other people have less power—political power, social power, economic power. One of the responsibilities of the news media was to look at for the interest of those who didn't have power. They serve to mediate not only the information that's flowing from the government to individuals, to citizens; but also to mediate the information going the other way, from citizens through the news media to the government.

They are the conduit for popular sentiment. They served in essence as the concept of canaries in the coal mines. In the past, there was this test to make sure there weren't any poisonous gases in the mines in which the mining officials would send in canaries to make sure that the air was breathable. If the canaries survived, then they knew that the air was okay. So this is one of the functions that the news media provided. If the people or citizens were upset with something, this sentiment would find itself into the newspaper or to the television broadcast or the radio broadcast, and public officials who wouldn't otherwise know about it became aware of it.

They served as arbitrators, an arbiter of importance. They said, 'this is important, and we will pay attention to it and this is not important and we won't pay attention to it'. And by this, they served the function of setting the agenda. At its core, the news media were an indicator of the strength of democracy. There's been some research done in the last 10 to 15 years that seems to indicate that this is all kind of imperfect. For a long time, people who have studied democracy and political processes have thought that elections were the most important indicator of democracy.

It is a considerable sentiment now that independent news media is a stronger indicator of democracy because it goes towards the effort of independent information. This is not to say that we are not prone to problems within this jour-

nalism structure. I can tell you from personal experience that the mainstream media in particular tend to ignore people that were on the fringes and often, despite its charter, ignore people who didn't have power.

They tend to report on what the powerful people did, what the government officials did, what the business officials did, what the people who already had a standing did without necessarily paying attention to the people who didn't have a standing. I mentioned that you had to have a lot of money to start a newspaper, to keep a newspaper publishing or television station or broadcast station and guess what: people with lots of money want to protect that money. So quite often, the owners of these journalism institutions - newspapers, television stations and so on would protect their political business interest through their stations, which was obviously not what was supposed to happen. In the United States, we saw through the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s an increasing number of monopolies. By a monopoly, I mean a citizen of a certain town or country had only one newspaper that was serving that area.

This was bad in lots of ways. First of all, it had only one source of information. It also meant that if the newspaper owner had a monopoly, it had less incentive to spend money on news-gathering, on the kinds of expensive journalism that I talked about. If you already had all the subscribers and they can't go anywhere else, you'd ask, 'why spend extra money?' **It's just as Lord Atkins said "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely".**

The power that many journalism institutions had corrupted some of the people who were in those institutions and so there was some bad journalism that was done, unfair journalism. And because of the monopoly and the stable nature that I have described, it didn't get caught. So that's a broad view of the journalism that was strong up until probably the middle of the 1990s, and it was strong despite

several disruptive cycles. There are three that I will just mention.

In the early part of the 20th Century, printed newspapers were the only source of information. In the 1920s, radio came along and greatly disrupted newspapers because radio was much more immediate. If something happened at noon on Wednesday, the soonest that you could find out about it in the newspaper, the regular edition, would be Thursday morning. Now there were these things called 'extras' if there were big events, sometimes newspapers would publish extra editions but that was very rare. Radio comes along, it happens at noon on Wednesday, and it's on air on 1pm Wednesday. That greatly changed the nature of the journalism that the newspapers would do. So that was the first disruption.

The second disruption was television. Television disrupted both newspapers and radios. The newspaper could produce the written word and the photographs, but not until the next morning. Radio could produce news right away, but there were no pictures. Television could produce both the news and the pictures right away, so that was disruptive force at each point. When radio came along, newspapers had to rethink how they could create their package and sell the news. And when television came along, newspapers and radio both had to do that. And along came internet, and that disrupted everything. And I mean everything.

The rate of change, what has happened in the United States, has boggled just about everybody's mind. No matter how fast people thought it would change, it changed faster. Every year I meet with the board of my organization, and for the last probably five years I have said this. Last year we said, "boy, the change can't get any faster" and it did.

Every year, I had to say that because it has just gone faster and faster. And what the internet has done (and what I am

sure it is doing here) and will do, is change two things, two ways about the way that information travels.

Each of the journalism institutions that I have talked about are similar in one way - they mediate information. If it was through newspapers to readers or through radio to listeners or through television stations to viewers, there was always somebody in the middle there. That's what media means - in the middle.

The internet made it cheap and easy to get information without going through these media. You could find out things that you could have never found out before and it also made it cheap and easy for anybody to publish that information. You didn't need printing presses. All you needed was an AOL account. You didn't need a broadcast station, you just needed a video camera and Youtube connection. So that changed the definition of who was able to publish and broadcast news, and the impacts on news media have been profound.

There's has been a huge decline in audiences for this major mainstream news audiences. The percentage of people who read a daily newspaper has gone somewhere around a 100% in 1960 to about 50% now in the United States. The percentage of people who have watched the evening broadcast news, the three broadcast networks, have gone from something around 70% to about 25%. That may have led to a decline in the advertising. If you don't have as many eye balls, you can't sell some as high rate to advertisers and also it is meant that advertisers don't feel a necessity of buying that entire package.

Advertisers can now target individual in a way that they couldn't before based on what they view on. So if you Google a particular topic and all of a sudden, there is a series of ads coming on the site and they are specially based on the fact that you Googled some term. If it's automobile

tires, you are going to get tire manufacturers. If you Google some health element, you are going to get some advertising from pharmaceuticals. The income from advertising has gone down, and that's lead to a decrease in the amount of money spent on news-gathering and expensive foreign reporting that I was talking about.

Almost no US news or newspapers have foreign correspondence anymore, and this is from a country that is lawfully not isolated, but just doesn't care about the rest of the world in the way that it ought to. It's also a matter of proliferation of publishers by bloggers, independent journalists, and even business and government celebrities. The way things are now, if the US government doesn't want to go through newspapers, it can just publish its own news on its own. It doesn't cost anything, doesn't have to have a printing press, and it can just put the news out there. This is not a bad thing; I am just describing them in a neutral way.

There's some that I use, and I would imagine that many of the news do too. It gives individuals the ability to assemble their own power of news, what they want so you don't have to know just what the *San Jose Mercury News* sends you. You can read the *Guardian*, you can get sports news from *The Sporting News*, or you can get entertainment news from *Entertainment Weekly*, and you could put all that together and you could read it anytime you want. And in fact, if you can't get it anytime you want, you will go to another source of information (for those of us who are 'news junkies'). This is great because I can find out anything I want to, anytime. It also means that individuals can aggregate around a single issue in topic and that people who are really interested in environmental issues can really collate around issues and connect with each other.

So that's what's happening; here are some of the implications for democratic society that I think are profound and need attention. As these journalism institutions get weaker,

it means a weakening of one of the few institutions in society that can serve as a bulwark against power, against governmental power, economic power, businesses and social power. It's always been the news media that's been a counterweight to that. It means that government officials have the ability to communicate directly with the people without the mediation I described.

This has a profound affect I think because it makes it possible for officials and politicians to communicate a particular version of events to the public without any one being in a position to fact check or provide a different perspective. It means that individuals can organise and exercise influence without going through the mediation of news media. It used to be that if you wanted to get anything done as a grassroots organisation, you had to organise and then get the attention of the news media, which then brought it to the attention of the politician. That's no longer necessary at all.

This means that the government and businesses have a chance to operate without expert independent scrutiny. Obviously one of the things that news media brought was independent scrutiny and an authority of scrutiny to people who were well versed in the process of government could look at some things happening and say, 'no, that's actually not what the political leader said because this was tried once before and here's what happened.'

It also reduces the chances to have a single conversation, and I think that this is something that we have seen in the US. And it's one of the things that I am most concerned about. Again, I am stipulating that the way things were before were not perfect; but if there was an important issue, all of the journalism organisations would focus on that issue and that would be the thing that people would talk about the politicians, the government leaders, the business leaders and the individuals. They would say, 'this is the

issue, what is before us right now' and it happens several times in the US because of the news media.

There was a huge debate in our country about the subjugation of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement - the attention of the news media paid to that and made that part of the conversation - and also during the controversy over the war in Vietnam. And the Watergate scandal in our country where the government tried to thwart the constitutional processes. In each of these there was a possibility of a single national conversation because the journalism institutions were strong. Now that's not possible in the same way. You have lots of smaller conversations, and some of those conversations are more intense but are still a more fragmented way of having a national conversation. So these are some implications of a democratic society. Again I am speaking of what is happening in US and Europe, the rest of Asia, and Latin America. Not necessarily what is happening here, but I will tell you-change is a flick. Change is happening, and don't think for a minute that it can be staved off.

I would say to you that you have a great opportunity; an opportunity to learn from what's happened elsewhere and not to try to stave off online journalism or online forces, but to try and figure out how to use them, to make the society (my words, my goals) more democratic, more egalitarian, and by that a chance where everyone has the opportunity to do their best.

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Journalism and Society

Rinzin Dorji

One of the vital strategies contained in the Anti-Corruption Commission is to educate the government and build an informed citizenry so they can play their role while carrying on with their own responsibilities.

I would like to very briefly introduce the anti corruption strategy that has been adopted by the government and share some points with the forum in case you are not aware of what we are doing. This is because one of the interests in our society is the investigation of cases that the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) carries out, and most people feel that all we do is investigate and nothing more. But that is not so, and I will touch briefly on the strategies of the ACC and also the perceptions in fighting corruption and how people feel about it.

In fighting corruption, it is all about who is going to be responsible and also how the media can help the government and the people in creating this transparency.

If you look at the ACC's strategy to fight corruption we are actually using a three-pronged strategy. Actually, there are four, the last being networking. This has been drawn up from many other anti-corruption agencies, such as the Independent Commission of New South Wales, the Anti Corruption Commission in Hong Kong and the CPIB in Singapore, which is slightly different from what we do, as they mostly focus on enforcement, which in our language means investigation.

Before the establishment of the ACC in 2006 corruption did exist, but wasn't really recognised as corruption and was always discussed in hushed tones. In some sectors you may also notice that it was more or less accepted as normal, so

educating the public at this point of time is very important.

We also do a lot of prevention and as the saying goes "prevention is better than cure" and we are trying to see if we can study the systems that are vulnerable to corruption and on the detection of systemic flaws. We would like to make some suggestions and recommendations to see if we can correct the system so that corruption doesn't occur again, which means the burden should be less on investigation.

As to any investigation we would like to see this particular strategy been taken up as a last resort. However, this is just the starting point and things don't happen that way. Investigation is already proving to be a very good deterrent for curbing corruption. Although the ACC is an independent agency, we cannot find out about corruption on our own without the collaboration of the media and other agencies. This is where networking comes in, so I have highlighted the media because it can play a huge role in terms of fighting corruption.

Perceptions of people on fighting corruption

We have been told by many people that fighting corruption is only the ACC's job and nobody else's, but the ACC cannot fight corruption alone. I think I'm already pre-empting you with how you can help us: people only seem to act when they are personally affected, yet not when there is a larger impact of corruption on our society.

If you are talking about public resources, you are talking about resources that are meant for certain developmental activities, so the impact should concern everyone. But what happens here is that people do not report any case of corruption, unless it effects them. It's also the case of the small "society syndrome". I think there is no need for further explanation on this because as Bhutan is such a small country, we also are small family. It is a place where everyone knows everybody, so nobody wants to point the

finger at somebody else and accuse them of corruption.

I think you will agree with me on this that being a Buddhist in a Buddhist country we are also compassionate, which has actually led to this high tolerance of corruption. *Ma bay wai animchi di namey samey din mindu tey* (Don't be too harsh, it is not a big deal). However, if we want to have a clean society, and the vision of ACC is to build a society that is happy and harmonious in line with GNH policeis, then we need to have a corruption free society. If we are to build a corrupt free society, then I don't think we cannot afford to be so compassionate.

I have looked at some policy documents and at the practicalities and how we and the media can collaborate in terms of fighting corruption.

The media as a watchdog has been named as the fourth arm of the government. It is also sometimes referred to as the fourth estate. If you look at the anti-corruption strategy then we must also talk about the media's critical role in promoting good governance.

One other important thing, and also within the realm of our education strategy, is what the ACC has been doing in raising public awareness on issues that are of national importance, issues that affect people at large. I think we have a big role to play, not only in the media, but also as citizens.

The majority of our population live in rural areas and may not be as educated as those of us who are living in urban cities and working for government offices and corporations. So there is a real need to raise public awareness. The media can also help play an important role in this.

The media can also deter corruption and establish accountability through investigative journalism. This is not a new subject for the media, but it is a new subject for me. I've also been told that it was in 2006 or 2007, that the

ACC had actually organised a workshop on investigative journalism and if you look at how things are being done elsewhere, or just look at the world-wide news channels, the media has been very involved in investigative journalism.

When I say that the media has a big role to play to deter corruption and establish accountability through investigative journalism, I'm also aware that you need the right environment and everything has to go hand in hand, and we could do much more. Every time the ASCC networks or holds press conferences for the media, during these kind of exchanges we have been encouraging the need for investigative journalism that will help in terms of exposing so many things in the government, or things that are not been done correctly. This could both help us and also the people in getting what they are supposed to get. The media can also encourage citizens to participate in governance programmes and decision making. The fact is, there is so much more we can do in this area.

We can educate people on the policies, on the laws and on what their rights are, but only if we really help people understand what the government actually does. I agreed with one of my colleagues who had worked in the media before, when he said that everyone has this perception of serving the government (*zhung gi chazumi*), where in fact civil servants and people working in public agencies should be serving the people, not the government.

We need to help the people understand the government in terms of how they act and what are the processes and the rights of the people. I don't just mean the rights that are guaranteed by the constitution but other rights. For example, if you have an agency "A" that is providing services "B" or "X" then what are the rights of the people in terms of obtaining that service? These are things that we need to educate people about.

We also need to educate people on both the choice of their leaders and the leaders who will be serving them. So there

is a real need to change the mindset of how people see things, because ultimately it is the leader who is going to be serving the people. This is how we look at things at the ACC.

We have organised many sessions at the GYT (Gewog Yargay Tshogchhung) level, at the DYT (Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchhung) level, at the GT (Gewog Tshogde) and at the DT (Dzongkhag Tshogde) level. We have also visited schools to educate students on corruption and its impact, and the bottom line is that we have been telling people that corruption is anti GNH and that they should not tolerate corruption. We cannot do much more and the media can help us in educating the public on corruption and their rights. There has also been much discussion on what has been done in a series of discussions on TV, plus coverage in the print media, but I think we still need to do much more on this. This is where the media can help us.

The investigation of cases of corruption is of real interest to the media because it is sensational and people are curious. At the same time as you will have noticed that we have not been able to disclose information in relation to any investigation because it is going to be subjudiced before we can prosecute a case, so we cannot share any information.

What I'm trying to say is that we have some sort of disconnect between what we want and what the people in the media want. This is one of the things I want to clarify. We have always encouraged the media to not only get involved in investigations, but have also asked the media to report on the prevention strategies that the ACC has done. We also asked them to cover any government agencies that are trying to improve the services to simplify the procedures, when the procedures are lengthy and the procedures are cumbersome; when the roles are vague and when the roles are unclear. When there is so much discretionary power among the people, that is where corruption can thrive. So we talk about time reduction. These are the system

strategies we talk about and if we can also get coverage on that, it will be a positive step.

There is also the "corruption reduction" management tool. This is the tool we want to promote to cover all the public agencies that are using public resources. However, there is not much understanding about these corruption risk management tool and here too we can join forces to educate the agencies and the people. The national anti-corruption framework has been a huge achievement, because now we have a comprehensive and a very holistic document in terms of anti-corruption strategy. At the same time we are also looking at the status of the implementation because by the time we investigate it is not a very pleasant process

One of the rights that I was talking about was in terms of educating people to be aware of their rights in regards to standards of service. We do not have any agencies that work on service standards, but if they can be created they will go a long way in curbing corruption and providing fast and efficient and reliable services to the people. I think most of the media has been very active in this particular area, especially in terms of day to day activities. I'm referring to activities involving corruption and we have been reading things on lapses in procurement, nepotism and favouritism in personnel recruitment, so I think media is doing a good job and we would like to request you to carry on doing that.

In the long term, the media will have plenty of interaction not only with a few agencies or a few people but all over the country, so there is a lot the media can do in terms of educating people on ethics and honesty. If we are able put this into the mainstream and inculcate honesty and ethics into our younger generation, then I think we will have no corruption in the future, and that will lead us to having a corruption free society.

If the rule of law is applied there should be no problem in terms of delivery of services, but judging by the complaints

we simply do not have this rule of law in practice. If people are not getting what they should get, and if they can't find an avenue to take those grievances, then the media can play a role in being a voice of the people.

To end my presentation I would like to say that if nothing moves, if all the things I've mentioned cannot be done due to resource constraints, there is still something that we can all do. What we can do as citizens or as media people or as government officials or as ordinary citizens is to advocate these three Rs: to Resist, Refrain and Report corruption. The number of complaints that we have been receiving at the ACC is now over 2,300. If nothing else can be done, please report corruption. Don't let it thrive in the agencies or sectors.

Rinzin Dorji is the Director of the Anti-Corruption Commission of Bhutan

Journalism and Society

Mary Sheila Coronel

The media play many roles. Some of them are circus dogs - they entertain you with sensational stories, stories about celebrities or the bizarre and the supernatural, stories that amuse but do not provide any public service, that do not help you become better citizens of your society.

One of the most important roles of the media is that of watchdog. This is a very different role: it means acting as the guardian of the public, it means holding the powerful accountable for what they do. In many societies, the media are not allowed to play this role freely. In my years as a journalist, I have personally seen what happens if the media as a watchdog is muzzled.

I grew up during the era of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, where everything that was in the newspapers had to pass through censors. The press was not free to write about the abuses of the government. It was only later, when Marcos fell from power, that most Filipinos found out about the millions that he had stashed away in Swiss banks accounts or the thousands who had been tortured and summarily executed by the military. In 1986, Filipinos rose up against Marcos, two million people massed up on the streets of Manila and faced the tanks and guns of Marcos. The protesters were unarmed, led by nuns and priests who stood before the tanks and pleaded with the soldiers not to shoot. They didn't. They could not bring themselves to fire at the nuns, priests and ordinary citizens protesting against a corrupt regime.

Marcos fell after three days of a popular uprising. He and his family fled the country on a helicopter filled with boxes of money and jewels. Only then did we realise how much

he had stolen. We still don't have a full accounting, but most experts say that during the 20 years he was in power, Marcos stole from the people anywhere between five and ten billion dollars. A lot of this ended up in bank accounts in Switzerland and fancy apartments and buildings in New York.

Not a word of that abuse was reported by the press in the Philippines because the press was controlled. Would it have been otherwise? What if the Philippines had a free press during the 20 years that Marcos was president? What if journalists had been able to report freely? Would we have been able to deter corruption? If the press during the Marcos era had been able to act as an effective watchdog, would we have fared better? Would we have been able to stop the looting of our country? Perhaps the answer is yes. If the press is able to report freely, then those who want to steal the people's money, who want to commit crimes and other wrongdoing against the people would not have been able to get away with it so easily. A watchdog press is real deterrent to the abuse of power.

This is why journalists play such an important role in free societies. We are the watchdogs. We help prevent wrongdoing from taking place. If we bark, if we shout and scream, if we write about the abuse that is taking place, hopefully we can bring an end to the wrong that is being done.

The media in my country, as in many countries that were under dictatorship, played very important roles in the struggle for a democracy. The media defied restrictions. In Indonesia, in Thailand, in the Philippines the media were big supporters of the democracy movement. Despite the constraints, they struggled to expose what was wrong.

Journalists enjoyed the freedom that democracy had to offer, but they also had a hard time adjusting to it. Used

to confrontation, they found it hard to strike a balance between attacking the government for its wrong policies, while also supporting a well-meaning government that was trying its best to build a democracy. Until now, we are still trying to find that balance. If journalists scrutinise too much, you may weaken democratically elected governments. If you do not scrutinise enough, then you may allow abuse to go on and flourish. It is a very fine and difficult balance. Journalists and society help to try and find the balance between the reporting that causes distrust and cynicism about government and the reporting that allows wrongdoing to continue because it has failed to act as an effective watchdog.

On one hand, we have seen in many democracies in Asia, in Latin America, in Africa , how the press has really played a positive role in making and ensuring the wrongdoers are punished.

Investigative reporters in many countries have exposed wrongdoing in high places. In Costa Rica, for example, a newspaper called La Nacion investigated corruption in high office. Their investigations led to charges being filed against three presidents, two of whom eventually ended up in jail. Our investigation of corruption by former Philippine President Estrada led to impeachment charges being filed against him. Estrada was then charged and sentenced to prison. We've seen in many countries how journalistic exposure of corrupt officials led to their ouster from public office.

Investigative reporting has also changed policies that are ineffective or simply wrong. For example, the Philippine press did a lot of reporting on logging and deforestation in the country, showing how the destruction of the forests was linked to floods and other natural calamities. The result was a public outcry that eventually led to Congress imposing a ban on commercial logging. By drawing the

connection between deforestation and disaster, the media raised public awareness and brought about policy change.

The media's reporting also raises attention to issues that are neglected, like child labor, violence against women, the impact of mining on the environment, the plight of people who live in remote areas who do not get proper health care and education. Without the media shining a light on the issues of sectors of society that are forgotten, these issues and sectors of society will not get the attention that they deserve.

The media around the globe have played a positive role in democracy, preventing further corruption and changing government policies and forcing the government to pay attention to neglected issues and areas. But media reporting has also had negative consequences, sometimes forcing the government to shift its focus from what its real priorities should be. In the US, for example, you see a great deal of media attention on things like whether President Obama should be approving the construction of a mosque near the 9/11 site. That news has grabbed the headlines and consumed a lot of TV air time, distracting the attention of government away from more important issues like how the US should deal with worst economic crisis since the Second World War. The US is embroiled in war in Iraq and Afghanistan and yet the media has succeeded in diverting the government's attention away from these important issues toward less important ones.

The media can succeed in promoting educated debate, but it can also lower the level of public discourse by focusing attention on the petty and the unimportant.

The media when it doesn't do its job well can also intrude unnecessarily into private lives and provide too much scrutiny into private concerns that it discourages good people from going into public service. The level of

scrutiny of those in public life can be destructive and can discourage good people from entering the government. The media therefore have to maintain a balance, to strive to be constructive rather than destructive, to raise the level of public debate rather than lower it.

Let me end with a pitch for openness; the great battles of this century will be battles between secrecy and openness. Today over 80 countries, every country from Albania to Zimbabwe, have laws providing for the right to information. In the next few years, many more countries will be joining them. At the same time, the Internet has made available so much information, including about the private lives of individuals. We have Wikileaks, a website that makes public government secrets. This has caused somewhat of a backlash, with some government arguing for more restrictive public access to information.

Not all information needs to be public. There are real grounds for nondisclosure of information, grounds like national security, protecting trade secrets and safeguarding the privacy of individuals. You don't want your medical records to be made public. We recognise that certain things should be kept private, but at the same time we also need more openness. As they say, sunlight is the best disinfectant. No country in the world is free from corruption and the only way you can expose corruption is by providing citizens with more information. This is why we need officials to declare their assets and why we demand that governments inform us how they are spending our money. We want details about the national budget; otherwise, how do we know whether our money is being used wisely? Officials therefore should recognise that we need to have a certain level of transparency to ensure that the government remains honest. But journalists should also recognise that the government has to impose certain limits on openness so the government is able to do its job properly.

So I would like to end by saying that what we need from all sides, from both the government and the media, is responsibility and maturity. A democracy cannot mature if its officials, its media, and it citizens are immature. We need journalists who are able to report responsibly and with context, we need officials who are willing to disclose information that are of public interest and we need citizens who can use and act on the information they get in a responsible manner.

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Journalism and Society

Reginald Chua

I will just start off by following up on what Sheila talked about – the balance between journalism being a public service and, on the other side of it, essentially getting audiences and making reports that are interesting to people. It is a balance that every individual news organisation faces everyday. And it's a balance that you have to look at across a whole country, since no single organisation controls all the media except in certain countries, and as Sheila has pointed out, that generally doesn't work very well. So, to have one news organisation be responsible but another one not, still starts to skew the balance in your country.

But let me just begin by saying, before all of that, the media is a profession, we do have ideals, we do have goals, we do want to work in the public service. But it is also a business and that's a very critical part of it.

In my current job and the previous jobs that I have done, I had to balance the business role of the publication as well as the public service role. We want to fulfill the public service role but also want to be able to fund ourselves; that means we need the publication to make enough money to pay for the work that we do. Television, radio, newspapers are expensive businesses in many ways so we have to figure out how to do that job, and to do it well.

That has always been a difficult task but it has become especially difficult these days. There are number of trends that are affecting the media industry around the world; to a lesser or greater degree they affect news organisations here as well, but sooner or later they will have an impact here. In fact, some of the same trends are affecting Bhutanese media differently from the way they affect media in other

countries but none the less, these are the same trends.

The first trend is that the business model that most of us are used to has changed drastically. We used to depend greatly on advertising; in fact, we used to make the bulk of our money by advertising. But that is all changing and even before the Bhutanese media can get to a point that they are able to build up a robust advertising model, which will be able to fund the seven newspapers here. Certainly in the rest of the world, the funding for newspapers for news organisation through advertising has started to change very quickly – that's the first trend.

The second trend is the easy entry into the media space that's very much a function of technology; the fact that everyone can set up a blog and so on. Consider Wikileaks, which is essentially one man in Sweden; one man starting up a website having a tremendous impact on news. He managed to get quite a lot about going by himself. So anyone can be a journalist today; anyone can set up a news organisation and in theory reach a large audience. So that is another change that's happening and it is certainly happening here. There are bloggers here; the leader of the opposition blogs. I know, because I found it from outside of Bhutan quite easily. So people are getting into spaces that journalists used to have to themselves. Some people like to put down bloggers as people sitting in their pajamas sitting around and writing whatever they feel, but in fact there are many experts who are blogging. Some of the best sites on finance are written by accountants, some of the best sites about Iraq are written by academics who studied Iraq, and so on. These are people who are really bringing a different level of knowledge to the world. In some ways, well beyond the knowledge a journalist can provide.

Then there is the third trend, which is less visible in some countries: Technology is changing the way we communicate with each other. We communicate with our friends on

Facebook, but in a different way than in person. We pass information to each other in different ways. And then those of us who like to explore databases and information have found fresh new ways to look at huge amount of information that is now available.

So it is very hard in this new world for media organisations to thrive the way they used to thrive, and that's even before considering the public service mission. For example, at the South China Morning Post, we are looking very much at shifting from the model of the general newspaper to have much more focus on a smaller number of key topics instead. The goal for many news organisations in the future is to focus much more on a few areas that we are really concerned about. There is the year-old newspaper in Bhutan that focuses on business, for example; that is the sort of thing that will happen much more in the future. People will look specifically at sports, government policy, agriculture, perhaps even at anti-corruption activities, investigative newspapers or websites, and so on. So there is going to be much more in the way of focus and because of technology, we will also be able to build communities much more easily. People will be much more engaged, because newspapers will no longer be something you simply read, but will be much more a place where we talk about shared interests together.

The news organisations that have been successful are the ones that have spoken to a community and built and attracted a community. As I said, we are not alone anymore in bringing information to people; anyone can do that these days.

Since there are many more ways for people to join in and more ways of communicating, I think what it means is that there will be some major changes in information and how it relates to society. It may take longer in some places, but I think eventually it will happen everywhere.

First, information is going to be available whether you like it or not. Much more access will come Wikileaks has in a sense proven this. You may like it or you may dislike it but it is happening. Information is coming out and when that information comes out people will take it and then they will analyse it. If there is some information about Bhutan, a Bhutanese person may analyse it or maybe an Indian will, or an American may; but somebody will do it, because it is so easy to get information and so easy to play with it. There are lot more tools out there to do that.

And if they analyse it they will publish it, I guarantee you that as well. As with Wikileaks, even if many people say it's irresponsible and that they won't publish it, someone else will. And when they publicise information, people will discuss it, there will be a community forming around it.

So if you take this as a universal truth to some degree, then it becomes critical for society and that means media and that means government –to engage in those discussions because if you don't, it is not easy to sit and then dismiss it. It is very easy to say it's just those people from Wikileaks, it's just those bloggers, it is very easy to dismiss them like that but they will continue to exist and then you will not be part of the conversation. And those conversations will can go on without you.

It is also very easy to pander to the greater desire and access to information. For example, you can start digging into the private lives of officials that have no bearing on their public duties. Yet somewhere in between pandering and public service, you still have to engage, you can't just ignore it. Media have learnt to their cost and government have learnt to their cost that if you just ignore it, it can build up a head of steam and you cannot manage it. Ground rules on the discussion get set even you don't show up.

I think in a world like this where anybody can set up a site, anyone can start a media organisation and anyone can decide what they want they want to cover, it becomes harder and harder to keep the debate in a public interest mode. As I said earlier, every newspaper goes through internally – "should we do this should we do that story, does it make sense, is it a responsible thing to do."

That's within a single newspaper; if ten out of 11 newspapers decide to be responsible but one doesn't, then the information still gets published and there's potentially an issue. In a world where there are not 10 or 11 newspapers but there are potentially 700,000 independent news sites it becomes much more difficult to decide to manage that public service debate. And the truth is that there is no real answers about how it is going to evolve, because it is so new.

But I think the critical part is getting people engaged; giving them a chance to debate issues, so that you can try and set the ground rules. You can discuss what is important and establish the parameters for what a discussion should be, because I think the more people are pulled into a community that has some ground rules and where everyone understands the purpose of what it wants to achieve, the more strength it has. And if the majority of the people in Bhutan or any other society decides that the critical issues to be debated are whether the US climbs out of crisis or Obama should sign up for a mosque at ground zero or whatever, then the larger community will win out.

If you look broadly at Bhutan, it is a country with a growing educated population, it is landlocked, it has certain industries. If there is one critical advantage Bhutan has, it is that it can take advantage of the new information age – the digital world doesn't really have any borders and Bhutan does not have to go through all its neighbours in order to tap into the world of information. It is a tremendous

opportunity for the country and I would say one way or the other, Bhutan's future is going to be a lot in the use of information. And for that reason I would certainly make the plea for openness and real engagement in information and real engagement in information technology, and to use that as something that will have great opportunities for the future.

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Digital Media and Public Health

Adrie Kusserow

I'd like to start out with an example from my own family and my own college where I teach, to try and illuminate the relationship between many cultures over romanticisation and saturation of digital media on the one hand, and lower grades, gender stereotypes and an inability for sustained, deep, critical thinking and writing among students on the other.

In more and more schools in America the logic has become, if the students can do something on the computer to learn, then that is the route to take in teaching a subject. My daughter Ana is 11 years old and in fifth grade. She goes to the same school I went to at her age, the main difference being the amount of time she is expected to be on the computer or digital screens to learn and research projects.

This change in her school can be seen across the United States, where schools are increasingly equipping themselves with computers, Internet access and mobile devices so they can teach what is perceived to be "the students home turf." Schools are proudly intensifying efforts to use technology in the classroom, advertising this in their brochures, seeing it as a way to connect with student culture and give them essential skills. Determined to engage 21st Century students, and look modern, principals are building web sites to communicate with students, share school news, securing funding for iPads to teach languages. There is the sense that anything technological represents progress. For example, in my daughter's class, there is a class website where all the assignments are listed, email addresses of teachers, last minute updates, school newspapers. As a parent I now feel hesitant about approaching the teacher

personally rather than through email, since I know she is busy.

In math my daughter Ana is expected to use a computer program called FAST MATH, in which she plays a kind of video game in which she guides a troll through an underground cave and tries to avoid getting boulders dropped on its head by giving the correct answers to her multiplication tables. Aside from the adrenalin, and fear this associates with learning, there is also the violent image of the troll squashed by a boulder she has to contend with and not be bothered by.

5x7 pops up and she only has a certain amount of time before the troll is belted by a boulder. Not exactly a compassionate or patient response.

For spelling, she logs on to a program called SUPER PRINCESS SPELLER where she is a princess spelling her way to the top of a castle. If she misspells a word, she falls down from the castle into the arms of an ugly man. The princess is of course blonde and thin and sexually mature like no other 11 year old I have ever seen. Her movements and behaviors as she tries to climb up the ladder to the handsome prince, are very slightly sexualised, coy and filled with feminine grunts and groans. She pouts when she doesn't get her way, and resists the ugly man.

This is what I refer to as the Walt Disneyfication of learning in which case early sexualisation of girls and violent images of boys/trolls are absorbed by students as they learn spelling and math. The assumption is that kids will only want to learn if it resembles a Disney film or video game.

What these assignments do, however, aside from reduce face to face interaction between she and her father and I, and get her adrenalin going by doing a video game as fast as she can, it also puts her on the computer while she

is home after school, and from there, she, like most other kids, becomes quite skilled at checking out other sites, like her Gmail account, you tube videos, internet (none of which I have consciously instructed her how to find, but it is one of those things young digital natives seem to absorb in school/peer culture now).

Once kids are on a computer, they usually end up surfing up to three or four other sites while doing their homework. It starts to build a pattern in her brain, do a little homework, check her email, do a little homework, look at how to make cupcakes on the web, do a little homework, write a few sentences, look for a new winter coat. It also leads to a nervous policing by the parent if they feel they need to monitor where she is going on the computer. Many families in my town now have the computer right in the kitchen so that a parent can watch over the child's use of it and make sure they stay on task while they are preparing dinner for example. But what parent needs yet another policing role as they attempt to make dinner?

My daughter's brain, like the brains of children all across America, is also getting used to wanting and needing to switch back and forth between multiple stimuli. When she has done her "homework" she inevitably starts cruising around other sites, while ads flare up, so I literally have to pull her off, often ending up in a laptop fight.

Before this assignment, my daughter and I went outside and did her multiplication tables while she jumped on the trampoline, and I would personally quiz her on her spelling as we sat next to each other on the couch. Many students in America, required to do research projects in social sciences, start to learn how to sneak in bits of social media and entertainment between spelling, math, between words, paragraphs or topics. It is easy and fast and your parents can't tell from a distance.

Research has shown that the developing brains of young kids can be more easily habituated than adult brains to constantly switching tasks, and gradually get less and less able to sustain attention. Developing brains are becoming habituated to distraction and to switching tasks, to needing multiple stimuli, rather than the joy of prolonged, deep, sustained focus. The Kaiser Family Foundation, found earlier this year that half of students from 8-18 are using the Internet, watching television or using some other form of digital media most of the time while they are doing homework.

This is what Jon earlier referred to as media agglomeration. Michael Rich, from the Center on Media and Child Health in Boston, says, "Their brains are rewarded not for staying on task but for jumping to the next thing, the worry is we're raising a generation of kids in front of screens whose brains are going to be wired differently. If you've grown up processing multiple media, that's exactly the mode you're going to fall into when put in that environment, you develop a need for that stimulation"

By the time they reach college, it has become quite rare for a student to just sit down and write a paper without checking their facebook, twitter, google, you tube, itunes, email, cell phones every other paragraph of a philosophy paper on something as weighty as the Catholic notion of sin. For the generation of college students I teach, in some ways, sustained critical thinking and genuine depth of thought seem to be a thing of the past. Professors talk more and more in America about how they can't expect students to read an entire book anymore, why should they when they can get a two page summary on a convenient website? But nor can they also follow the increasingly schizophrenic, disjointed papers that come in, with sound bites of writing that have no connecting thread. Professors at my college are reporting less quality academic work in papers, that paragraphs and thoughts don't even connect,

as if the person wasn't fully there when they wrote the paper or read the material.

Digital multitasking would be fine if it worked. But it doesn't. Students are only under the illusion it does. Despite students saying they are doing high quality homework while multitasking and multi-surfing to other social medias, evidence has shown that in fact their work is of lower quality than if they had focused on one task only. Some critics have started to call this inability to stay on one topic, "google" brain or horizontal thinking. Student papers more and more resemble scattered bits and pieces without a true focus and depth of critical thinking in a complex and subtle way. In my own classes, I will schedule 20 minutes for a student led discussion on a topic like modern day slavery, a topic one could spend their whole life pondering, and to my astonishment, students dart up from their desks after five minutes, saying, they are finished and start texting under the table.

Children it seems, become especially habituated to immediate gratification, having a jumpy brain that can't sit anywhere for too long without becoming bored, agitated, fancy for the next fix. Hence, on news shows, the complex realities of our world, global warming, poverty, racism, violence, get reduced to MTV like sound bites or Hollywood dramas, bad music videos, or the loud and manic previews for a violent movie, in a mad attempt to entertain the viewer and keep them glued, knowing the restless brain of the average American will be jumping to Google, iTunes or Facebook in about five seconds anyway.

Nature shows on Animal Planet, supposedly showing the raw instinctual nature of lions and tigers for example, are accompanied by so much hype and dramatic music, that elephant courtship becomes like a soap opera, with gender stereotyped elephants described as coy or brave, and dramas and plots overlayed about what the tiger or giraffe is

thinking, what I refer to as the media anthropomorphisation and soap operatication of nature shows. It is more and more rare now to see a nature show depicting an animal without intense music and narrative telling us what to think about it. After all, the more stimulation, the better.

It is a vicious cycle. Our brains change….news, math, spelling, science, nature shows are presented to us in a way to satisfy the restless Hollywood brain, making our brain want more of the hyper stimulation flow it is already getting. This romanticisation of all things technological in turn influences how teachers feel they need to teach now (like an MTV star, with a flashy powerpoint, fast talking), how class websites need to look (provocative, colorful, in your face), how newspaper articles get written (one page max since the attention span is so short) and how advertisements get made (shock the jaded, restless viewer).

As we've already heard in some of the previous presentations, this restless quality of the brain starts to bleed into all areas of students lives, such that very common now is the itch to text during class, the need to check Facebook between classes, the need to answer a call while someone is speaking to you. Students juggle three screens while exercising at the gym, listening to songs on their iPod, tapping out a quick email on her phone and looking up at the high-definition television the gym or grocery store has installed so exercisers and shoppers don't get bored.

Social media now fills the tiniest gaps of time, like lines, traffic lights, walking to and from class, or even lulls in dinner conversation. Hence the brain gets no "down time" – downtime to the brain is what sleep is to the body. Time when it is simply resting. Recent imaging studies of people have found that major cross sections of the brain become surprisingly active during downtime. These brain studies suggest to researchers that periods of rest are critical in allowing the brain to synthesise information,

make connections between ideas, form memories and even develop the sense of self. When the brain is constantly stimulated, you prevent many learning processes that can only occur without constant stimulation. But as one student said, my iphone is like another limb of my body, I feel weird without it, I can even check it while I go to the bathroom and brush my teeth.

I really believe as Bhutan embraces the worship of information intake, it is vitally important for teachers to keep a critical eye out for what else is being absorbed by students (violence, gender stereotypes, early sexualisation of girls for example) and what kinds of experiences are being taken away in this process as they go about seemingly innocent multiplication and spelling programs. What is lost is inchoate, but nonetheless vitally important for any culture, namely human connection and all that is learned in simple face to face encounters by humans (patience, empathy, tolerance to name just a few). Understandably, many Bhutanese teachers probably feel if they don't join these global trends they will be left out. No doubt access to the internet can open up many worlds. I use film in my classes to bring students closer to the cultures they have never personally experienced.

But when, for example, in the domain of education around social justice, is too much information perhaps counter productive? Again, a simple story from my own college where students have access to internet 24/7 and use it to research issues of social justice and social inequality which I focus on in my anthropology classes on poverty, for example. At the beginning of every class, at the start of the semester, I give them a survey about how they feel about all of the information on social justice, poverty, world hunger, they receive through news, emails, internet, you tube, CNN. I want to get a sense of where they feel on the scale from empowered to disenchanted and numbed out. Unfortunately, as the years go by and they are more

plugged in, I hear students saying that more and more information has actually made them feel numbed out, with an attitude of why bother, the problems are just too huge and immense. Instead of feeling empowered, they feel overwhelmed.

To quote one student, "Sometimes I feel like a body with too many wires plugged into it and I just can't take it anymore, all the bad and sad stories, like I'm going to short circuit." Another student said, "I'm a news junky, and sometimes I feel like if I see one more image I'll explode and I just want to give up and hide."

Ironically, the goal in my classes on social inequality is to empower students and so I now find that what is more effective than 30 articles, images and blogs on suffering in South Sudan, is to limit the number of internet articles they read to a few good, very powerful, well written ones. Sometimes, having them read a book, a novel about war in a country, where they are quiet, and focused on one thing seems to have a greater impact on their levels of empathy and apathy, then if they are multi tasking and channel surfing, with six windows open on their computer, exposed to the global circuits on too many fronts.

So, I ask you to question your relationship with information. Often hailed as the more information the better, have we really answered the question, is the human psyche meant for such an intense overload of information? Are we better humans if we inhale more and more kinds of mediocre media? In what ways have we traded experience for information? Rather than having them cite 20 internet sources on aging and loneliness, I have them visit an elderly person in rural Vermont in the winter where isolation is acute, no cell phones allowed at the visit. They are to sit and simply listen. Ironically they come back with a fired up sense of responsibility from this human encounter, and often follow up in political and social ways they might not

have if plugged into the barrage of media outlets that lack this human connection and sometimes leads them to short circuit and just go drinking instead.

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