

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نپاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Joan Pedro-Carañana

29.10.2023

It's time to say enough to the media's abuse of power



Sources: Context

Des Freedman is a professor at Goldsmiths, University of London and an activist for democratic media reform in the UK. After his lecture at the VIII Congress "Communication and Peace" of ULEPICC-Spain (Latin Union of Political Economy of Information, Communication and Culture) at the Complutense University of Madrid, we talked about the state of the media system and the possibilities of moving towards a media democracy.

In relation to his work as a teacher-researcher, he has devoted a lot of time to activism for the democratization of media, especially in the [Media Reform Coalition](#) (MRC). Could you remind CTXT readers what this coalition is all about?

The MRC was created to try to hold the media to account, as a lobbying group for the government to develop policies that address the concentration of media ownership, that

introduce more effective levers to support journalists who really want to hold media power to account.

What difficulties have you encountered?

It has been very difficult because media reform is not an issue that the media themselves want to talk about. But they are not our main audience: the people we speak to are the political parties, the trade unions, civil society, to whom we say "take seriously the ownership of the media, the lack of transparency, the need for accountability, the exclusion of whole groups of people on the basis of class or ethnicity, and start getting organized." If you're a trade union or a group that campaigns for the environment, you have to talk about media representations, because a lot of people find out what goes on through them. You have to put the media and its lack of diversity at the center of your campaign. If nothing changes, I'm worried about other movements as well.

It reminded me of what Umberto Eco said, probably idealizing the past somewhat: the media used to be open windows to the world, but they are increasingly talking about themselves: they announce their own programmes, share talk shows, reference each other, etc. However, Eco never mentioned that the media does not talk about its owners and interests, such as financial groups.

They're obsessed with each other! At gala dinners and on Twitter, it seems to exist so that journalists and editors can talk to each other. What is much more difficult for them is to elucidate some basic questions about the concentration of ownership of the media in which they work.

How do you try to reach your audiences?

We have been to many political party conferences and hold an [annual festival on media democracy](#) that brings together journalists, activists and university students. We have written [manifestos](#), conducted [research](#), and [produced reports](#) on who owns the media. Sometimes the publication of these reports has had some coverage, but most of the time there is very little interest from the media, so we will continue to insist.

The MRC is a reference for ULEPICC and for many other colleagues here in Spain and in Latin America. But, for now, there is no possibility of launching something similar.

There are a couple of things I would like to say about this. First, we took some of our tools from the media reform movement in the US. It was really inspiring to see the construction work of *Free Press* done by people like Robert McChesney. I went to a couple of his lectures. They were very large and a bit messy. Patti Smith was the keynote speaker at one

of them. It was a fantastic day, and they really appealed to other movements, especially diverse communities. They've had ups and downs, like many other movements, but we've learned from them.

Here in Spain you had possibilities. At the height of the social movements, Podemos might have considered the reform and democratization of the media as absolutely central to them. People shy away from the topic because they want the editor on duty to say, "Please come to the show."

I have to say that Jeremy Corbyn, former leader of the Labour Party, was an exception to this trend and was therefore absolutely vilified, crucified by the British media. He gave our keynote address a couple of years ago and laid out these issues. He was a victim of media harassment and exposed it anyway. In general, frontline political actors do not want to touch the power of the media because they know they will be bitten. Well, maybe sometimes they have to bite you.

It seems that Podemos saw media reform as an issue of possible defeat in the battle for hegemony, so it kept it off the agenda. It still doesn't appear with Sumar.

That reproduces media power unless you start saying "enough." It's wonderful when you see it, especially on TV. There have been many strikes in Britain recently and a union leader, Mick Lynch of the railway union, has a habit of confronting interviewers and saying, "Why do I have to answer that question? Why don't you make me this one?" With the power of the media, you have to say "wait. High. We have to reconsider." It is not fair that a tiny number of giant companies hold media power in this way. You can't call yourself a democracy if the means by which we communicate are concentrated in the hands of a few. It's as if other perspectives aren't considered worthy of entering. We don't have a democracy if that's the case.

One of the MRC's lines of work is public media and cultural policies. Could I develop?

We are trying to combine bottom-up and bottom-up approaches. We try to design policies that develop much more pluralistic structures. This is a top-down approach. There was an opportunity when the audiovisual law was passed in the UK before it was overturned. There are always moments of opportunity, and if you're not there proposing policies, it's a waste.

On the other hand, if all you do is contribute to public policy-making, I'm worried you'll become another policy expert, a policy nerd. It also takes grassroots discipline and energy to facilitate a new kind of democratic and diverse media power in which ordinary people

see their opinions expressed. Hans Magnus Enzenberger said 50-odd years ago that audiences should be producers. We have to rediscover that. And, of course, technology should allow us to do that.

In this sense, Frantz Fanon is really important. He wrote that radio became a tool of the oppressed in the war against the French occupiers in Algeria. It was also a tool of the oppressors, who spread propaganda. And, when they realized that the voice of ordinary Algerians could be mobilized through the radio, the French immediately tried to shut it down, but they were unsuccessful.

You don't have to fetishize either. I will learn from any community that tells me that things can be done differently. I want to learn from the working class of Britain as much as I do from the fantastic history of media democratization in Latin America, and from people like Fanon theorizing about Algeria. Putting all this together, we get a panoramic view of the situation, because there is a relationship between the social movements and the high-level government and business strata. Your vision of what's possible comes from what ordinary people have done, but, at the same time, you try to use it to say that things have to change at the top, too.

You talk about the contradictions of media power, a dialectical approach that questions deterministic and mechanistic approaches that only see the media in terms of social control. It also proposes to focus on the possibilities of action, of change, of intervention and of democratization.

It's an optimistic approach. Even though I don't always feel optimistic, there is an underlying optimism because situations are never stable. We learned that from Gramsci. You can theorize about hegemony all you want, but please don't think of hegemony only as a tool by which consensus is produced. As a revolutionary, Gramsci pointed out that hegemony is not an established thing. The question is always how to exploit these contradictions. How to widen cracks? How do you bring ordinary people to that stage?

I suppose this underlying optimism is strange, because most of the time we spend criticizing the mainstream media. I like *HBO's Succession*, which couldn't be a more commercial network. The market system has produced this wonderful program, but its appeal comes from a widespread dissatisfaction with the logic of the market, with the extreme forms of capitalism. *HBO*, as a capitalist company, is tapping into that kind of anti-capitalist ethos that these super-rich characters are horrible people.

Also, I don't think people are empty vessels. It's not just that propaganda fills our brains; We also resisted.

There seems to be more creativity, freedom, and diversity in fiction and entertainment than in information, where control is much tighter, especially with wars and issues related to elite power. Even so, he has also analysed the contradictions in the field of information and journalism.

Exactly 20 years ago, when the Iraq war was taking place, the United States and Britain were dropping devastating bombs and occupying territory, and we all know what consequences this had. The *Daily Mirror*, one of the biggest tabloids, launched a series of really controversial, almost anti-imperialist front pages. The paper's editor was Piers Morgan, whom you probably wouldn't associate with an anti-imperialist. It's not! But he was in a complex situation, in which the anti-war sentiment of millions of people around the world was growing. In this context, it was possible for a large newspaper to publish on its front page photos of Tony Blair with blood on his hands. We need to rediscover social movements – the peace movement, the anti-war movement – and at the same time make sure that our demands on the media are clear.

He has been one of the keynote speakers at our conference on communication and peace. Could you give us a few glimpses of how you see the relationship between the media and the binomial war and peace?

Here we have talked about communication and peace, but the real discussion is about the media and war, because war sells, and peace does not. Who wants to know about peace? The media business model is much more conflict-oriented: just think of the whole issue of post-11/11 terrorism, which was always framed as a matter of national security and defense against terror. Fear sells, while peace is a hard sell.

What the heck does that mean? In the nuclear age, peace must be the number one issue. That's where most of the energies of the media, academics and social movements should go, but the business logic of the media is not conducive to peace and, besides, there are too many governments that are nervous about being portrayed as peace-loving or weak. We must bear in mind the intimate connections between the military and governments: they are so entrenched that we are fighting all the time to make peace seem like a desirable goal. We see this with the war in Ukraine. There is hardly any questioning of the idea that there is a tacit consensus to continue arming Ukraine, whatever the consequences.

There are very brave journalists who have gone to cover wars and have brought terrible behavior to light. The U.S. war in Vietnam had some of the most nefarious front pages, glorifying the invasion, but there was also some really brave coverage. It's similar to the war in Iraq: because of the growing anti-war movement and fissures in the military, news

networks began to get nervous and ask questions like, "Are we going to win the war? Should we stay?" I'm in favor of exacerbating those tensions all the time to make sure that the voices against war and the prospects for peace come forward.

There is a lack of debate in the media about possible negotiated solutions to the war in Ukraine. They do war journalism, but what do you think of peace journalism?

Peace journalism is valuable in many ways, such as in its challenge to accepted notions of objectivity and impartiality. It has helped to say, "Wait a minute, is there such a thing as objective journalism?" It is very useful because it addresses the root causes of conflict. But, at the same time, I'm not sure it draws attention to the root causes of the media's abuse of power. That's where it fails. That's why I'd like to work on peace journalism, but also expand it.

Source: <https://ctxt.es/es/20231001/Politica/44286/joan-pedro-carañana-des-freedman-medios-abuso-democracia-guerra-ucrania-entrevista.htm>

Joan Pedro-Carañana is a lecturer in the Department of Journalism and New Media at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM).

Transcription and translation: Iván Navarro Flores (UCM).

Rebelión has published this article with the author's permission under a [Creative Commons license](#), respecting his freedom to publish it in other sources.

Rebellion 28.10.2023