Presentation

IAMCR's Political Economy Section's EPTIC on Line special issue

By Janet Wasko, Vincent Mosco, César Bolaño and Valerio Brittos*

EPTIC on Line is an academic journal, based on the Observatory of Communication (OBSCOM) from the Sergipe University (UFS), in Brazil. Published since 1999, it is part of an extended network of scholars from different Latin American and European countries. It has strong links with different academic organizations of the Communication Sciences field, specially the Latin Union of Information, Communication and Culture Political Economy (ULEPICC), founded in 2002.

Articles can be published in all Latin languages and in English, but the majority are in Spanish or Portuguese. Each issue includes a special topic or discussions involving certain groups in the field. For example, in 2008 a special issue included selected papers presented in the ULEPICC-Spain section Conference. We are pleased to present this new special issue, organized jointly with the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR)'s Political Economy Section.

IAMCR is the worldwide professional organization in the field of media and communication research. Its members promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical research in the field. Its objectives include strengthening and encouraging the participation of new scholars, women, and those from economically disadvantaged regions.

The Political Economy Section is one of the active sections of the IAMCR. Its members examine the role of power in the production, distribution and exchange of mediated communication. Drawing from the rich history of political economic theory, section members study social relations in their totality, consider how they have developed historically, evaluate them according to standards of social justice, and intervene to bring about a more just and democratic world.

The research interests of section members include developing a richer theoretical foundation in communication research by incorporating an understanding of how structures of power operate, particularly in the process of transforming messages into commodities. Specifically, this means research on the global political economy, which is centrally dependent on communication for its growth and on transnational media companies, which are increasingly in control of communication systems. It also includes research on how this global political economy is constituted out of various national corporate and government institutions as well as class formations that mediate global and local power.

Research interests also include the conflicts that arise over who benefits from control over communication resources. This research documents the interventions of workers, particularly over the consequences of an increasingly sophisticated international division of communication labor, and of women and racial minorities who seek to redress fundamental imbalances in global communication power. Recently, this research has expanded to include social movements in the communication arena, the state of the public sphere in an increasingly privatized audio-visual space, and the status of citizenship in a world that addresses people primarily as consumers.

Political economy has an historic commitment to praxis or the unity of research and social intervention. As a result, it has attracted members with a wide range of commitments to social change. Over the years this has always included involvement in the movements to bring about a New World Information and Communication Order, now focused on the McBride Roundtable process. In addition, the section has attracted members with commitments to the rights of workers in the communication industries and of citizens to the fullest access to the means of communication.

In recent years the section has worked to support its commitment to multidisciplinary research by organizing joint sessions with other IAMCR sections on the topics of gender, race, ethnicity, community communications, and cultural studies. The section recognizes the need to engage questions about the relationship between social class, historically a central coordinate on the map of political economy, and gender, race, and nationality. It is also committed to examining how political economy, and its particular understanding of power as embedded in markets and institutions, relates to the field of cultural studies and its focus on the social construction of meaning in texts and of power at work in the micro relations of social life.

In Latin America, the Political Economy of Communication field has a long history,

influenced by Marx, the Frankfurt School, and critical social theory, including especially the classics of Latin American thought such as CEPAL's development theory and the theories of cultural dependency. Latin American political economy of communication developed during the early 80's was born as an internal critic of these important schools, but was more articulated in the 90's, especially after the EPTIC network constitution in 1999.[1]

Members from ULEPICC and from the EPTIC network have been increasingly active in the IAMCR Political Economy Section since the beginning of the 90's, when a new generation of Latin American critical thought in communication sciences started to replace the NOMIC generation. These new intellectuals recognized explicitly the importance of the old generation - theoretically and, mainly, as academic activists - and assumed the condition of mediators between them and the totally new generation of students formed in the years of the so-called cultural or linguistic derive.

Developing critical thought, including a critical perspective in relation to the NOMIC generation, but recognizing the important of influencing the production of knowledge in communication in Latin America and in the world supposes a necessary relation with IAMCR. Within this organization, the home of Latin American critical thought is the Political Economy Section.

The section recognizes the need to take up the new challenges of recent years referred to above, even as it addresses its historic mission of research and social intervention on the manifold dimensions of a global political economy increasingly shaped by the power of transnational communication and information companies.

The growth of the section in recent years – when younger scholars have embraced the study of political economy of media and regularly present their work in the section's conference programs – involves the same challenges faced by the intermediate generation of Latin American political economists, previously mentioned, that is, renewing the theory and research agenda, without forgetting the essential contributions of the previous generation.

This identity of, not only theoretical paradigms, but of historical challenges makes cooperation between IAMCR's PES, ULEPICC and EPTIC network a fundamental strategy in the communication field. Many initiatives have been started since a historical meeting of these

[1] For more information see BOLAÑO, César; MASTRINI, Guillermo; SIERRA, Francisco. Global changes in the economic system and in communications. A Latin American perspective for the Political Economy of Communication. *In: Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture. Ljubljana, Slovenia, vol. 11, n. 3, p. 47-58, 2004.*

groups in the Museum of Modern Arts of Porto Alegre in 2004. One important initiative involving the participation of political economists was the signature of an agreement between IAMCR and ALAIC, the Latin American Association of Communication Research.

This issue is yet another example of cooperation. The papers were presented at the IAMCR conference in Stockholm, Sweden, in July 2008. After the conference, a call for papers circulated among the participants of the Political Economy section's program. Revised versions of papers were received and reviewed by a group of referees. The result is a good representation of the research being done in the political economy tradition by emerging communication scholars from around the world.

*Part of this text is adapted from the description of the Political Economy section written by Vincent Mosco, appearing on the IAMCR website at https://www.iamcr.org/content/blogcategory/115/357/.