

# Communication and Peace: a possible dialogue

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## Abstract

The main scope of this text consists in demonstrating that it is possible to relate Communication with Peace culture, both understood as a dynamical tool to change social realities. In order to develop this idea, firstly it is done a bibliographic revision of Communication and Peace studies, identifying the convergences and divergences, both in methods and contents. Secondly, following the pragmatics of Journalism method (MOTA, 2007), which allows understanding the facts in depth and identifying the hidden interests, it is performed an analysis of the Arab Spring as it is shown by *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Finally, in a third topic, having as reference the Arabian case, we present what we understand as Communication and Active Peace and how both can establish more critical and transforming actions, generating a fairer and more harmonious society.

**Keywords:** Communication. Journalism. Culture of Peace. *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

## Introduction

The following text is aimed at introducing some considerations for those who believe in the so-called Peace and Active Communication, understood from the perspective of immersion in social structures, and their subsequent transformation to implement models and principles that lead us to

think of a permanent Peace, relying on Communication studies and more specifically Journalism. To this end, firstly a bibliographical review of Communication and Peace Studies has been made, as suggested by Stumpf (2005), which seeks to identify the concerns and issues raised by these two areas of knowledge in their recent history. The author of this text has found a great similarity both in methods and content in the studies performed in these two fields of knowledge. According to the aforementioned Stumpf (2005), a fundamental aim of the bibliographical review would be to show the cumulative aspect of scientific knowledge generated about a certain subject, Communication and Peace in this case.

Secondly, to focus on the course of Communication and Peace studies, we proceed to perform a concrete analysis of a recent episode, the 2010-2011 Arab Spring, as presented by a critical newspaper such as *Le Monde Diplomatique (Dipló)*. The method of procedure is pragmatic Journalism as proposed by Motta (2007), which allows for an in-depth understanding of facts, by identifying the hidden agendas of those events present in the Media. Finally, thirdly, we present our understanding of Active Communication and Peace and how they should proceed to act together to develop more critical and transformative actions.

### **An approach to Communication and Peace**

This text is not intended to undertake a comprehensive review of the concept of Communication for Peace, a task reserved for epistemological studies involved with the origin, structure, methods and validity of knowledge in that field of science. Communication and Peace, being very recent areas of study, introduce substantive issues for anyone who cares about verifying the level of effectiveness of scientific knowledge. However, their use and social importance are growing with expressive strength, from the perspective (supported by authors such as THOMPSON, 1998; MORAES, 2006; BRAGA, 2006) of our being inside a Media-driven society where the influence of mass Media on society is such that what does not pass through them is virtually non-existent.

The same applies to Peace, a present and current topic much desired by nations and individuals. In view of this finding, it is necessary to discuss some of the pillars on which Communication and Peace are based, since the same goal is pursued by both: to establish more supportive relationships in the social field and in the promotion of citizenship.

Much of the revisions on Peace studies identify three major historical stages around this issue (MARTINEZ GUZMAN, 2005, 2008; NOS ALDÁS 2008). The first one (1930-1959), characterized by a negative vision of peace, reflects the concern of its times, marked by world wars, a reason why peace is identified as the absence of war. The second (1959-1990) is an extension of the first and is defined as positive peace, that is, not only the absence of war but also as implying transformations capable of minimizing social inequalities. Finally, the third (1990-to present), includes a new variable into the above: the concept of a culture of peace as an alternative to cultural violence.

For Lopez Becerra (2011, p.2) “from the sixties, with the creation of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, research involved justice, equity, welfare, economic and social rights, and, in some cases, affection, solidarity and other forms of peaceful resolution of conflicts”. In practice, it resulted in an extension of those studies aimed at defining the ways in which inequalities are generated and replicated, going beyond conceptions concerned only with identifying the various ways in which they appear in society.

This development deserves further reflection because actions arising from these conceptions show a breakthrough in Peace studies. Over time, it was acknowledged that Peace, understood as the mere absence of conflicts among countries, did not guarantee a peaceful coexistence among nations. Other issues needed further study to understand their direct or indirect influence in the creation of conflictive situations, such as unjust social and economic structures that forged the most varied forms of confrontation.

Rawls (2002), is one of those authors who has thought over these issues and championed the end of social inequalities and

even proposed that social and economic structures should be thought of in such a way that they result in greater benefits for the neediest members of society. His thesis on equity is controversial because a classic dilemma of liberal thought arises: How to harmonize the material ambitions of the richest and powerful with the aspirations of the most disadvantaged who want to improve their lives and social position? Rawls assumes that the most advantaged ought to understand altruistically that their comfortable situation should be put at the service of the community and the needy, which remains a utopian thought to a large extent. Concrete results arising from his thought may include Affirmative Action Policy and the compensation policies which in the United States, in fact, allowed some neediest sectors – mainly ethnic minorities that had previously been excluded – to get out of a precarious situation and access public goods.

After the eighties the world underwent profound structural changes that had a direct impact on Peace studies. It is a global phenomenon involving at least three dimensions: global delocalisation of production and financial activities, increased power of financial speculation and strength of information technology. This phenomenon, known as globalization, based on neo-liberalism, raised production to unimagined levels by integrating the economy in a global context, limiting nationalism and autonomy, mainly of the poorer countries. The result was a deregulation of markets and a gradual removal of all restrictions on the free movement of capital and goods to the clear hegemony of the most industrialized sites.

These dynamics were based on the technological revolution of telecommunications, speeded up as a result of implementing digital technologies, optical fibre and nanotechnology, which allowed for a quantitative and qualitative advance in information transmission. According to Castells (1999), networks are created, interconnecting financial markets and allowing for transfers to be made at maximum speed in all directions.

If we combine the above elements a basic principle in neo-liberalism can be identified – the supremacy of economics over other

activities – which leads us to the following conclusion: humankind will not dispense any means for the purposes of the market (Hayek, 2000). Very timely, Berrera López (2011) reminds us that the investment made by neo-liberalism raises a new problem to positive Peace and concludes that a methodological turn in Peace studies is required, so that Peace becomes a fundamental social priority. Thus principles and actions valuing Peace would be built despite their environments of conflicts and violence.

Communication studies and their relation to social structure become relevant at the beginning of the twentieth century. Unlike Peace studies, Communication became popular very quickly (SANTAELLA, 2001). Its consolidation occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, coinciding with a substantial growth of the mass Media and mass culture. Its ability to influence social processes became apparent following the Second World War when the Media were used as forms of persuasion both to consolidate an ideology and to discourage the enemy. Such a development allowed for Communication to be regarded as a strategic field of knowledge, generating theories and ways to interpret social phenomena.

Although we have pointed to the second half of the twentieth century as a period of Communication boom, in previous decades it was already possible to identify a trend of research within the functionalist sociology, where Lasswell and Lazarsfeld stand out, that would extend until the eighties (WOLF, 1987). Three important stages are encompassed. The first one, headed by Lasswell (1900-1940), introduces quantitative research related to political and social issues. The second (1940-1960), where Lazarsfeld is the best known figure, occurs at the height of the mass Media, is focused on an attempt to understand their role in people's lives, mainly whether or not they influence individual and collective decisions. Finally, the third stage (1960-1980) is focused on Communication processes, i.e. the role of Media professionals in the shaping of social reality once decided what should or should not be published and, consequently, what is or is not news.

Almost simultaneously to functionalism, the so called Critical Theory emerges in Europe, with authors such as

Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin and Habermas, among others (MATTELART, 2011). For Muñoz (1989), that group, not unanimously, became interested in the cultural production processes and the formation of subjectivity in capitalism. Their innovation lies in the application to culture of the Marxist concepts of alienation and commodity, originally arising from class society, culture, which led them to conceptualize culture as a commodity raised by the cultural industry to maintain order and prevent social conflict. The issue that fosters such idea is that, having a subjective and symbolic value, cultural production interferes not explicitly but decisively in social formation and may become an element of mass manipulation (alienation).

Such an advance in Communication was not followed by studies on Peace. Champions of Peace culture did not understand that transformation and thus lost space and the possibility of becoming more aggressive in their claims. They failed to believe that a wish for power was not inconsistent with the defense of Peace and understanding among nations. Attitudes such as Gandhi's, for example, that interfered with the social and political system, would only receive attention many years later. Near the end of his life, his views were critical of social and political models that did not favor equality and he clearly denounced violence as originating in social inequality (RHODEM, 1977).

Critical Theory certainly contributed to better thinking about culture and its influence on the formation of social values, although showing a certain determinism generating consumers' passivity and submission to the constant information flow to which they are subjected. In that sense Communication moves forward and is inclined to accept that there is a negotiation in the Communication process. While the transmitter has a number of interests, the consumer is an active agent, a carrier of values and life experiences interacting with the mass Communication products. Somehow it was realized that studying Communication was something more complex than functionalists and Critical Theory thinkers had proposed. It would be impossible to list all the ramifications arising from such a turning point in Communication

studies, therefore we will only attempt to summarize some of the most important ideas found in these trends that are of interest to us for the purpose of this text. More and more importance is given to the recipient, to horizontal perspectives, to alternative Communications for social change, to local studies and technology as a possible way to democratize social relations. These approaches generated study topics such as identity, hybridization, cultural mix, diversity and otherness which seek, among other things, new ways of thinking about Communication and society, something that undoubtedly annoys the prevailing Communication Media. This is a chance to rescue the actors and issues neglected by hegemonic interpretations, while Peace studies are required to focus on the formation of subjectivities and their role in the consolidation of people's beliefs.

Drawing some consequences from the above positions is essential to maintain a positive agenda capable of fighting for social harmony and involving Communication and Peace. In this sense it seems clear that progress in the studies of Peace and Communication suggests that we must be concerned with local issues and topics not previously considered relevant. Most important is to think about the local environment as the most favourable for the reconstruction of social life in its various aspects, both in Communication aspects and in the key factors triggering Peace and social harmony.

Thus previous approaches favoring studies on State or governments as key players in building peace and communicative actions are being shifted and limited. Now issues related to societies' daily lives, their past, their values, their traditions, need to be highlighted, in order to avoid making mistakes. In other words the search for Peace, through Communication, cannot be met solely by studies of societies' macro institutions. It is in a micro environment where cognitive, affective and creative relations between individuals are expressed, which are then transferred to social action and may take the form of resistance to the established order regarded as valid. As Richmond emphasizes (2011, p.23) "Prior to institutions, daily practices give meaning

to life and the community, and form the basis of peace, although it would be helpful if they were expressed by later resulting institutions”.

If in today’s world Communication makes contributions that can help – or not – increasing the culture for Peace, it remains for us to perform a specific exercise in news analysis to see how it is possible to build a positive scenario for enhancing dialogue and understanding in conflicting areas generally “forgotten” by the mass media. The ultimate aim is to understand how the strategic use of Communication contributes to building Peace. To do this, we shall analyze how the Arab Spring was addressed by an alternative newspaper, *Le Monde Diplomatique* (*Dipló*) in late 2010 and early 2011, in an attempt to identifying the complexity of the conflicts, a complexity not always taken into account by scholars of Communication for Peace.<sup>1</sup>

### The Arab Spring in the pages of ‘Dipló’

When in late 2010 and early 2011 the world was shocked by the phenomenon known as “Arab Spring”, mass Media immediately tried to decipher such an upheaval. An interpretation stood out: the uprisings in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and other countries would wipe out the traditional political and social models – regarded by the Western press as “secular dictatorships and fanatical theocracies” – incompatible with the liberal models of democracy and political representation, based on freedom and plurality of election, claimed for by protesters.

With a different approach *Le Monde Diplomatique* saw this phenomenon from a different perspective, more complex and not as simple as some Media clamored. To illustrate this statement it suffices to read: *Os árabes estão prontos para a democracia?* (Are Arabs ready for a democracy?). Published by the newspaper Estado de São Paulo in its issue of March 3, 2011, this text by Nicholas D. Kristof (2011) denounces the Western world skepticism as

<sup>1</sup> We will especially study dossier No. 6 devoted to an analysis of the Arab world. It can be read in full on [http://www.diplomatique.org.br/edicoes\\_especiais\\_det.php?id=6](http://www.diplomatique.org.br/edicoes_especiais_det.php?id=6).

whether the Arabs were capable of exercising democracy due to the fact of their not having experienced democracy in their historical trajectory<sup>2</sup>.

By contextualizing episodes and trying to find the mentioned factors, the *Dipló* moves away from generalities and identifies agents and forces involved in the riots. Thus, it shows the interests of the colonizing countries, notably France and the UK, and their interference with local dynamics when artificially creating a Jewish state, resulting in poorly defined borders. This issue of boundary demarcation conceals the existence of economic interests with a certain “smell of oil” and the making of leaders in tune with countries alien to the demands for “democracy and political openness” of the local population.

Another trigger for the riots factor lies in the 1967 War. The Arab defeat to the Israeli military had a splitting: the activities of radical religious groups and the consolidation of governments contrary to the interests of the most impoverished and popular sectors. This would be the source of corruption and the rise of radical currents with different positions. Among them the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists various branches stand out (preaching a more conservative and pro-jihadist radicalism and Arabic purity) Thus the *Dipló's* approach is a reply to the so called modernization of the riots so praised by the Media. From a religious perspective what is happening is a dispute over theological visions and concepts of the Koran that can be characterized more as the supremacy of conservatism than proper social and political progress.

Cultural transformations in the years before the riots have a prominent place in the *Dipló*. The approaches found on its pages generally show a scenario, within Arab countries, open to the social and political transformations fed by some programs published on mass Media and very close to the Western model. One of those debates, presented by the *Dipló*, is the TV show “Tash Ma Tash” characterized by performing a harsh critique of social customs, traditions, administrative and political procedures, religious puritanism, discrimination against women, cultural and sporting

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.estadao.com.br/noticias/impresso,os-arabes-estao-prontos-para-a-democracia,686945,0.htm>

male sexism, government corruption, state bureaucracy and the remnants of tribalism. In this area, the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network TV became an icon with enough strength to displease Greeks and Trojans, partly by making live uncensored debates and having editorial independence, which allowed it to open up to dissent and to include those groups that had been left out of the official Media controlled by autocratic states (HIRST, 2011).

Abuse of power, increased prices and reduced wages arise in the pages of *Dipló*, as the immediate factors that contributed to a widespread social discontent, more marked among the youth. The use of social networks in the coordination of the riots is emphasized. Most analysis agree that social networks played a major role in Egyptian and Tunisian protests, but the *Dipló* draws attention to the importance of traditional Media in organization and coverage. According to Marie Bénilde (2011), groups created on Facebook are to be highlighted; but as she herself stresses Twitter was used more marginally to send messages, especially abroad. As evidenced by the numerous arrests of journalists, authorities turned their attention to television and Journalism, more traditional and more widely used in Arab societies.

Although social networks were used to encourage the revolt, the *Dipló* warns about other forms of organization that channelled social discontent, such as the sermons of mullahs in Friday prayers, talks on mobile phones and word of mouth disclosure. As Bénilde (2011, p.1) claims:

The Egyptian revolution and the precedent in Tunisia showed the power of the new mass media, the difficulty of fighting them with the usual forces of control and repression, and the coordination – generally diminished – with traditional media such as TV and newspaper.

Following the above, certain considerations are necessary. The special dossier on the Arab Spring does not identify radical Islam as a causative effect of the riots but it does exhaustively contextualize anchoring the meaning of the insurrection. This way of treating the Arab affair is very reminiscent of Traquina's definition (2005) of news understood as a constructed reality

which is valid by itself and contributes to a critical education about the world inasmuch as news are made from specific forms applied to events that generate a meaning on episodes which are not always clear to their readers.

The *Dipló* texts are fairly consistent with the aspirations of the majority of the population, the youth, the excluded, who yearn for more democracy, more respect for their situation and, above all, the desire to participate in the social and political life according to more open and less rigid patterns. Within this perspective, readers can trace a map that allows them to understand power relations in the societies focused on.

Following a critical line, the *Dipló's* Journalism looks for contradictions in the topics covered and becomes an important tool to implement measures designed to ensure actions for Peace, which certainly is not established only with free elections. The mixture of beliefs, different groups and situations of inequality are ingredients of a whole which should result in a proposal to address such diverse interests. Thus Communication and Peace can help each other in the desire to transform an unjust situation marked by conflict and social unrest.

### **Active Peace and Communication: an initial approach**

The concepts of Communication and Peace, as they have been presented above, give rise to some thoughts that affect their inter-relation. It is very clear that attempts to unite them, though valid and important, miss essential criteria, not intentionally but because the two areas had not had a real engagement to transmit their proposals. Recent changes in the world are leading us to reconsider previous approaches and make us think of active Peace and Communication from a multidimensional perspective that emphasizes the study of structures as key elements of the social, economic and political organization of any society.

One point stands out in this perspective: structures created in the course of time have been uneven, unfair and exclusionary, affecting humans in all dimensions of life, both individually and

in groups. Negative Communication and Peace Negative helped to reinforce this concept because it was thought that by simply eliminating war an environment that allows to increase Peace was achieved. But in truth, both Communication and Peace, as champions for democracy and freedom, accepted the values of the Western model as unique and valid. That led to interesting statements of principles, such as the United Nations General Assembly declaration of year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace. A significant proposal but insufficient to address the complexity of social relations.

Active Communication and Peace can help reverse this notion once some principles are adopted. Following Kant's ideas (2006), at least some of them, we want to rescue the idea that the Earth belongs to all as a global community. Therefore Peace results from the force of law and a legally organized and institutionalized cooperation among all states and peoples. Communication exercised from below, from the receiver, would contribute to transparency and visibility of actions aimed at the common good and not masking interests or concealing potential benefits to a minority. Thus Active Communication and Peace would become strategies and tools that are committed to increasingly horizontal actions, where society's information flow and its *raison d'être* come from the grassroots, from civil society, to achieve a sustainable transformation.

It is important to work for sustainability from the perspective of horizontality and its implications for Active Communication and Peace. Decisions arising from social community that express the collective will are recognized as valid for such purpose. The example of the Arab Spring and the way it has been presented by the *Dipló* will be useful to explain in detail what we mean by Active Peace and sustainability.

The analysis performed by the *Dipló* shows a lively, dynamic region with a significant background in which conflicts erupted. These countries form a whole that contains hidden, anomalously built components in its development. A Jewish state artificially created, a border demarcation made by colonizers, a mixture in

the same territory of groups as incompatible as Kurds and Muslims: the sum of these components creates an iconic framework, tense and ready to explode that should not be ignored by those who advocate for Active Peace.

Taking the above into account, active Communication and Peace would work towards actions that respect local diversity and the plurality of concepts involved in the process of overcoming conflicts. They would understand that each local system is different and you need to allow their peculiarities and find convergences that propose objectives and actions with the goal of reaching peace. Communication would be the tool to externalize the discords of the members of the various communities involved in these locations. Communication would not hide or deny the tensions that must be addressed. Neither would it try to make a partial reading dragging on pre-values and pre-judgments or ideal models from other countries or regions.

Thus not only differences become apparent but also the need to accept interdependence and tolerance, encompassing diversity of social, ethnic, cultural and religious views, without which a plural society such as the Arab, for example, as we saw above, cannot be formed. That is why the *Dipló* calls into question technologies and interpretations made from the point of view of the Western Media. In fact, which view do they represent? Do they accept the legitimate pluralism of all peoples and ethnicities or do they want to impose other models? In the Arab case it is very clear that interpretations followed by the West, based on social networks as their source of information, were not aware of the breadth of issues to be considered in the events, which allowed to foresee the continuity of conflicts.

Culture plays an important role in consolidating Active Peace. In addition to permitting the rise and respect for identities it should create attitudes such as understanding, tolerance and intercultural solidarity. It is not sufficient to identify cultures, it is necessary to respect them since a large part of social manifestations is based on beliefs, values, references that are the ingredients of cultural manifestations. The *Dipló* emphasizes this perspective

when do studying the Arab Spring. By accepting that a television program helped to criticize the traditions that led people to misery, it acknowledges culture as a possible transformation of daily life but it is also aware that this will disagree with other more traditional cultures, alive and practiced by part of the population. The exercise of citizenship involves respecting and finding solutions for these antagonisms.

If culture works to promote structural change, whoever works for Active Communication and Peace has to make a critical reading of the present without forgetting its context. The present lights up the current contradictions and ends up being a springboard for events, but it does not change a civilization quickly and dramatically. Whoever accepts Active Communication and Peace understands that changes manifest themselves in different ways and that they affect all components of social life, both visible (objectivity) and invisible (subjectivity). No texts are found in the dossier showing the continuity of the status quo, but on the other hand no texts are to be found proposing changes that have no basis in peoples' experience and history. Religious radicalism present in the riots is shown but not praised. Active Communication and Peace require criticism and if necessary confrontation with those who do not want to accept otherness as legitimate and valid.

What is being proposed is not an easy road since at times it requires conflict in the sense of confronting individual and collective positions. Champions of Active Communication and Peace should be wary of information and make choices based on horizontality and an equitable participation of the people involved. The hope is to move towards complexity and keep in mind that experiences should be evaluated and if necessary rectified. Only then, in addition to accepting criticism, progress is made by removing barriers and proposing changes necessary to begin to understand Active Communication and Peace as a process constantly under construction.

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