Cosmopolitanism and Communication Rights in a Postdigital World

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Abstract *The notion of communication rights is informed by a cosmopolitan worldview. The right to access information, to participate in public communication, to be heard and understood, and the right to privacy apply equally to people everywhere, according to UNESCO. This chapter asks what is happening to those rights in postdigital settings. In focus is the journalist-audience relationship, which is the point at which the right to inform, the right to be informed and the right to privacy intersect. Both the philosophical-regulatory discourse on communication rights and the scholarly discourse on changes in the journalist-audience relationship tend to be couched in general and sometimes universal language, that does not fit easily with empirical realities on the ground. The chapter considers these discourses in a reading that is informed by the experiences of journalists reporting on unequal conditions from a global perspective, and tech activists who are concerned about what developments in communication technology mean for people living in places where liberal notions of rights are not a taken-for-granted starting point – perspectives that are specific, and grounded in individual experience, rather than generalizing and universalist. It is argued that the tension between the right to information and the right to privacy makes it difficult to maintain what Arendt called 'proper distance'.*

Introduction

Shortly after the Al Jazeera network launched its English-language news channel in 2006, a young boy began peering at its viewers through a space in a wall on the screen. The space is both an opening, possibly the result of an explosion, and a barrier, blocked by metal rods. Judging from the way he is dressed and the satchel on his back, the boy was hurrying to school when he caught sight of the spectator, stopped and made eye contact. The boy and his curious gaze turned up at regular intervals throughout the year, in an advertisement typical of those used by global news providers to promote their way of working. "You need to be able to see the world from many perspectives in order to report the world back to itself", was the sense made of the moment by the reporter's voiceover. The image is a useful

heuristic because of its ambiguity. It is not clear whether the boy is on the outside looking in, or the inside looking out, which is apparently the point.

Figure 1: Still image from a 2006 advertisement on the Al Jazeera network for its new English-language news channel.

Narrative techniques such as these are enduring traits of global communication. They can be considered part of a repertoire that represents, and can conceivably cultivate, a cosmopolitan outlook. In Silverstone's terms, they are part of the "mediapolis" in which "relations between self and other" are conducted in a global sphere, and "through which we learn about those who are and who are not like us" (Silverstone, 2007: 22, 31). They can also be related to the communication rights that have long been enshrined in United Nations discourse. In the two decades that have elapsed since Al Jazeera (AJE) first aired the advertisement described above, digital technology has added a number of striking, and often pedagogical, techniques to the communication toolbox. Location data, drone journalism and Geographical Information System (GIS) interactivity are making it possible for journalists to draw new maps of the mediapolis, forge stronger connections with their audiences, and to tell stories to and for people who have previously been "off the radar". It is not so much the case that emerging communicative technologies and practices replace extant ones, as that they overlay and become imbricated with them. What news consumers have come to experience, and what scholars need to capture in their research, is hybridity rather than replacement of one communication technology with another (Bollmer, 2019; Chadwick, 2017).

The same can be said of power relations. New technology can give a voice to the voiceless, to use Al Jazeera's catchphrase, but it can also be used to reinforce and indeed expand the might of actors, be they economic or political, who have historically wielded power and exercised control in society, to the disadvantage of others. The international regulatory discourse on communication rights calls for protection against the nefarious wielding of such power, and for the benign use of digital technology. Like the scholarly discourse on changes in the journalist-audience relationship, however, the discourse of regulation tends to be abstract and couched in universalist language. This does not always fit comfortably with empirical realities on the ground.

In this chapter, communication rights are considered from the perspective of journalists reporting on unequal conditions to global audiences, and from that of tech activists who are concerned about what developments in communication technology mean for people living in places where liberal notions of rights are not a taken-for-granted starting point. These perspectives are specific, and grounded in individual experience, rather than generalizing and universalist. Apart from these voices, the discussion in what follows draws on data from an analysis of global news reports broadcast between 2008 – not long after the boy stopped to look through the space in the wall – and 2020 (Robertson 2021). It begins, however, with a brief overview of the global, regulatory discourse which these empirical realities enact (or not), and an explanation of how both can be related to cosmopolitanism.

Communication Rights in a Postdigital World

A touchstone in the discourse on communication rights is the Mass Media Declaration of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1978), which grew out of debates on imbalances and inequalities in global communication. It was followed by the influential report of the MacBride Commission, *Many Voices, One World* (MacBride Commission, 1980/2004) and calls for a New World Information and Communication Order to resist what was perceived as an emerging global media landscape unfairly formed in the interests of multinational capital and the new technologies used to promote those interests. Such resistance is the red thread running through subsequent declarations, comments and reports, up to the Tashkent Declaration of 2022, the most recent statement by the global community on communication rights. While highlighting the problem of a lack of transparency pertaining to the deployment of algorithms, with concerns about data retention and detrimental effects on equality and inclusiveness in digital settings, the declaration nevertheless emphasizes the importance of online space for access to information (UNESCO, 2022: 2; 6).

There is no consensus as to what human rights in the digital realm are, or "who should take the lead to govern them in the increasingly complex media and communications landscape" (Horowitz et al., 2020: 299), but Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been understood, throughout the years, to involve the right to communicate, to be heard, to be understood, to learn, to respond and to share (Padovani & Calabrese 2014: 10–11). Fundamental aspects of communication to which people everywhere have rights include those of access and participation (Landry et al., 2020: 333). With information increasingly produced, distributed, accessed and maintained in digital form, it is acknowledged that the internet and digital platforms "play an important role in creating an enabling environment for the right to access information" (UNESCO, 2022). But communication rights also include protection from hateful speech and the invasion of privacy. The Tashkent Declaration emphasizes, moreover, that disinformation, and government misuse of emergency situations to monopolize the flow of public information can pose risks to these rights (UNESCO, 2022:3). Communication rights thus have both positive and negative aspects. In positive terms, they grant something (access, for example), and emphasize the importance of equity of communicative resources (e.g. news about the diverse societies in which we live). In negative terms, they entail the right to be spared something, such as disinformation and digital surveillance (Robertson & Schaetz, 2022).

Journalism scholars have, in recent years, devoted considerable attention to the impact on journalism of the increasing availability of data and how new technology has enabled unprecedented sophistication of analysis and representation (Ausserhofer et al., 2020: 953). The development of new tools for interaction with news content has led to diversification of platforms and more complex communication flows. Virality driven by audiences is a key feature of this. As Carlson (2020: 231) notes in a helpful essay on journalistic epistemology, the relationship between journalists and their audiences has been changed and rendered more complicated by the proliferation of information in digital spaces, and the knowledge paradigms that arise in these. These changed circumstances also impact both positively and negatively on communicators (Manninen et al., 2022; Mellado, 2021; Christin, 2020; Tandoc, 2019; Bakker, 2014). On the one hand, data journalism is providing resources to help news providers do their jobs well (Newman, 2021; Felle, 2016; Felle et al., 2015; Appelgren & Nygren, 2014; Lewis & Usher, 2014). On the other hand, new technologies compel journalists to work harder to maintain the boundary between the professional purveyors of knowledge (them), and the audiences that inhabit, share and contribute knowledge to the same digital spaces (us) (Humanes & Roses, 2021; Wolfgang, 2021; Wölker & Powell, 2021).

One way of maintaining authority is the continued use and repetition of familiar journalistic practices. Journalistic legitimacy, according to Carlson, is the product of "a discursive performance realized in the ritualized manner through which

journalists present information to audiences" (Carlsson, 2020: 233–4). The proliferation of platforms notwithstanding: The authoritative anchor in the newsroom studio, the knowledgeable correspondent in the field, and their conjoined act of relaying information, remain familiar features of media ecologies in the hybrid media system. This is the term used by Chadwick (2017) to conceptualize the conditions under which what he terms "old" and "new" media interact (what is old and new at any particular moment being an empirical question), and what happens when the technologies, genres, norms and behaviours associated with each synergize with those of the other. The emphasis on immediacy in research on journalism in such ecologies, while important to an understanding of the impact of rapidly developing technologies, tends to obscure the routine, quotidian structures in which news about the world is packaged. It is salutary to keep in mind the tension, or dialectic, between the new and potentially revolutionizing opportunities offered by digital trace and location data, on the one hand, and the more conservative tendencies of journalistic storytelling on the other, through which the events, people and processes of the public sphere are relayed with the help of narrative features that are familiar and well-rehearsed (Robertson, 2010).

The discourse on communication rights uses words like "information" and "data", not storytelling. But it also refers to the right to be heard and understood, which is the realm of narrative rather than data. The discourse is very much about ethics. Wasserman (2019) makes the point rather vividly. An ethical media in the digital age, he argues, is "one that listens to audiences", so that it can make sense of what they have to express. It seeks to imagine what it must be like to stand in the shoes of an ordinary media user (Wasserman, 2019). Put differently, it imagines how things look on the other side of the space in the wall. It is thus a cosmopolitan discourse.

Cosmopolitan Narratives

In his work on cosmopolitanism, Delanty (2009: 195–197) has written of what he calls "cultural translation", a communicative act that takes the perspective of the Other and negotiates meaning. The insight that such translation can entail a loss as well as negotiation of meaning puts Delanty in the company of Hannah Arendt. Understanding, according to Arendt (1994), is not the same as access to correct information. It is "an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world" (Arendt, 1994: 307–308). Being at home in the world in Arendt's terms involves the activation of imagination to make the standpoints of absent others present in the mind, keeping things in their proper distance and bridging the chasm between us

and others – narrative work that can be seen in the output of at least some global news outlets (Robertson & Schaetz, 2021).

Descartes bequeathed to modernity the idea of a detached observer who views the world objectively and dispassionately; an observer with a rational mind but without a body, location or social roots (although he was almost certainly a white, European man). On the one hand, this observer is omniscient. On the other hand, his detached, delocalized perspective renders him for precisely that reason incapable of "seeing the world from many perspectives". This 17th century ideal continues to have currency in the 21st century, with data and AI having become intrinsic parts of information flows. In addition, the political economy of newswork means that some "power-geometries", to use Massey's (1993) term, organize mediated worlds in terms of abstractions like "London" and "Beijing" rather than taking viewers to the places where people struggle with the fallout of a policy decision or referendum enactment. Power geometries are also evident in news reporting of global crises like migration, dominated by northern countries that bicker about refugee quotas rather than the countries that actually host the majority of people-on-the-move (Robertson & Schaetz, 2021).

From their different disciplinary homes, Soja (2009), Fraser (2010) and Bhabha (2004) have all drawn attention to how people experiencing unequal conditions find themselves unjustly situated in space, or at the margins. In the place of the omniscient Cartesian individual, post-structuralists remind us that the observer is always situated and that our viewpoints are always "partial, incomplete, and power-laden" (Warf, 2009: 76). In her influential work on the reimagining of political space and the public sphere under globalization, Fraser (2010) directs attention to the key issues of whose interests count, whose voices get heard, and to whom we have moral obligations when new forms of representational injustice arise in global settings. Beyond this is the injustice Fraser refers to as "meta-political misrepresentation" which happens when a placeless or "high helicopter" view (as AJE news executives dismissively call it, Robertson, 2015) is used to frame shared issues. In the process, they exclude the affected from the frame and deny them a role in determining that frame. Bhabha was perhaps the first to use the notion of "third space" to designate a hybrid space in which people who do not share a geography can come together and relate to each other. It has inspired scholarship that explores "how news media assign meanings to environment through narratives of space" (Gutsche, 2014: 487).

The image of the boy and the space in the wall is a quotidian illustration of the influential argument pursued by Massey (1993) that distinctions usually thought easy (to the extent that they are thought at all), such as inside/outside and near/far, are called into question by a relational politics of place. Such differentiations are not only artificial, it has also been argued: they are "always embedded in each other and mutually constituted" (Warf, 2009: 75). This brings us back to Silverstone's mediapolis, and to Arendt's work of the imagination. What she refers to as "visiting" can be

translated, in news terms, as the fashioning of stories of an event from each of the many perspectives taken by people who have an interest in telling it, and being able to imagine how we would respond if we were a character in a story that is not our own. Arendtian visiting is "not to see through the eyes of someone else", explains Biesta (2016: 187), "but to see with your own eyes from a position that is not your own."

When it comes to the right to be heard and understood, it is worth considering whether and how the well-rehearsed features of news reporting contribute to this. As intimated above, there is abstraction in the structures of news broadcasts just as there is in the regulatory discourse of communication rights. Stories of the world can be packaged as short telegrams, or as a report read by a studio-based newsreader and illustrated by agency or generic images. They can take the form of a newsreader interviewing an expert or stakeholder in the studio and quizzing them about the event or problem. They can be told by a reporter on site chatting with the newsreader in the studio at home ("two-way lives"). All of the above can be thought of as the sort of "non-places" that Augé (1995) says are characterized by their lack of specificity and interchangeability. In contrast to this sort of omniscient, disembodied information purveyance, the stories can be told by a correspondent on site, be she an Arendtian visitor or simply a tourist.

A study reported elsewhere (Robertson, 2021) measured the "size" of the newsworlds of leading global channels by coding the countries that appeared in the headlines of broadcasts that aired in Europe during prime time, in 2009 and 2019 (one broadcast per channel each week of each year). It established that AJE had the "biggest" newsworld in both years, with 61 different countries featuring in the headlines in 2009 and 67 in 2019. And in both years, CNNI had the "smallest" newsworld, with 36 different countries in the 2009 headlines and 30 in 2019. The measure is a simple one, but also one characterized by an almost perfect measure of inter-coder reliability, and is striking in its stability, both in terms of temporal comparison and the placing of each newsroom. Using these results as a jumping off point, a closer look was taken at the reporting of those two newsrooms on issues pertaining to social inequality. A total of 207 broadcasts were coded and found to contain a total of 526 reports that focused on or made reference to an issue pertaining to social inequality (ranging from austerity policies, unemployment and threatened livelihoods, lack of food, unequal access to health care or education, homelessness, human trafficking and refugee flows). Among other things, coders documented the position of the reporter in relation to the people concerned or being represented, i.e. those with the right to be heard and understood, in the language of regulation. Were they detached observers in a non-place (the studio), or on the same site as the people being represented (in the field)?

Table 1: The place of the journalist. Percentage of all reports on social inequality in AJE and CNN in the sampled year, in which the journalist is at the news site, or elsewhere (in descending order of proximity).

Report type	AJE 2009 n = 195	AJE 2019 n = 186	CNN 2009 n = 45	CNN 2019 n = 100
Report from field	44.6	44.1	26.7	29.0
Two-way live	5.6	14.0	28.9	30.0
Report, journalist not on site	13.8	8.1	6.7	9.0
Report by newsreader	2.6	5.9	4.4	7.0
Studio or online interview	11.8	6.5	2.2	10.0
Telegram	16.9	18.8	26.7	11.0
Other	4.7	2.6	4.4	4.0

As can be seen from Table 1, there are noteworthy differences between the narrative strategies of the two newsrooms. While the CNN reporter was situated in the same space as the people whose stories were being told in between one-quarter and one-third of the reports, the AJE reporter "visited" in 44 percent of them. In both instances, however, the results are evidence that legacy narrative practices endure, despite the inroads of new technology.

Delanty's (2009: 79) focus – which the study of critical cosmopolitanism explores – is the discursive space of translations, dialogue and exchange. It can thus be said to matter where the journalist is situated in the mediapolis. But what of the discursive space in which the researcher and journalist exchange views about the work involved in furthering and safeguarding communication rights? How does the universal language of global regulation translate into empirical realities on the ground? In what follows, three manifestations of communications rights – 1) access to information; 2) the right to participate in public communication, to be heard and understood; and 3) the right to privacy – are translated into the words and experiences of professionals. The discussion is based on excerpts from interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020 with 31 journalists, audience developers and other newsroom professionals working with technological development at Al Jazeera English, the BBC World Service, Deutsche Welle, Politico, Buzzfeed and the Guardian, and talks given during the same period by 31 tech activists at RightsCon, an annual meeting of practitioners concerned about human rights in the digital age, referred to by participants as a 'summit'. Convened by the Access Now NGO, RightsCon's purpose is to com-

bine technical support with policy engagement to safeguard digital security, privacy and freedom of expression and combat online discrimination. The transcripts of the talks and of the semi-structured interviews were analyzed to identify recurrent narrative themes. Narrative analysis was also used in a parallel study of global news content, which was the third component of a project that had the aim of exploring the communicative dimension of inequality under globalization.

Access

A Portuguese woman, who worked for a Europe-based global broadcaster before moving to a digital newspaper with an international audience, told us: "to me as a journalist, accessibility has always been key… I don't care if I'm writing in Portuguese, in English, in German. Reach is not only just the audience that we're trying to reach but what reaches them in a way that is understandable to them." It also means knowing where they are to be reached.

A digital newsgathering specialist, developing the YouTube strategy of a U.K.-based broadcaster with a global audience, spoke enthusiastically about the "explosion of access" he had witnessed since the introduction of mobile phones and with constant reductions in the cost of connectivity. The arrival of 3G and oral formats in Africa allowed access in a fundamentally new way. People who had been excluded by technical limitations found "the bar lowered" with the advent of Blogspot and Wordpress. It was lowered farther with Flickr and Skype, which revolutionized access during the Arab uprisings. It made it possible "to find out what was happening from [the ordinary person's] perspective on the ground." He explained how this has ushered in a need – or heightened awareness of a pre-existing need – to pay attention to how audiences are connecting, because it matters "in terms of the diversity and plurality of your stories."

It also matters to a journalist and digital outreach editor who contributes to a newspaper with an international readership and is active in a network of global investigative journalists. In her view, however, "there's still a big barrier to access to news… we really have to build a bridge between those who don't necessarily consume a lot of news, or those from low-income backgrounds." The challenge, in her view, is to make news that is trustworthy but that also engages, and which is accessible to people in terms of how they use their phones in their everyday lives; how and on what devices they follow the news.

While people everywhere have access to information via their phones, their everyday lives are lived in places with significantly different media systems, where new technology overlays old power structures. One respondent gave an example that is an empirical illustration of a concern highlighted in the Tashkent Declaration. Telephone connections are owned by Ericom, the state mobile provider in Eritrea, which

means that "what you can access is effectively limited by the government filter, in the same way that the Great Firewall of China means that the audience you can engage with in China is largely non-mainland… Because of the way the package is structured, it matters which platform you're going to get engagement."

The importance of paying attention to platforms – to find where audiences are accessing information and build a relationship with them there – was a red thread running through the interviews. A problem that cropped up continually was not so much control as the lack of it. "To me the scary thing is that there's so many pseudo news places and sources and people are sharing all of this on closed networks", sighed one respondent. Not knowing where to look or where to turn is "harmful to audiences". Rather than going to established and trustworthy news sources, they are on Instagram and WhatsApp and reading what their friends are sharing, "and people are not forwarding news articles, they are sharing disembodied, decontextualized chunks of text and images." The task is thus to "think differently about how we disseminate this news information."

There is a tension between such, admittedly banal, examples of realities on the ground and regulation discourse demands for access to information. What does the right to access mean, in practice? Low-income citizens of rich nations, and ordinary people in poor nations, are limited, for financial reasons, from accessing reliable news that is behind paywalls, but they do have access through sharing and apps that cost nothing to use. They have access to information, but of what sort, and of what quality? Journalists taking pains to find audiences where they are, and where they are consuming information, operationalize the challenge of guaranteeing access in empirical, as opposed to normative, ways. As one put it, there's "loads of opportunity" in platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram, that make the news more interesting. Journalists need to think differently about how to present information and reach audiences.

For several of the respondents, that means digging down into the data they have on audience behaviour. Metrics provide "so much opportunity and potential to really, really understand our audiences and really understand who is missing from our audience", in the words of a journalist and digital outreach director active in the Global Investigative Journalism Network. It is a view expressed in different ways by different respondents. As well as who is missing, there is a keen interest in mapping what people find important. "The vast majority of our content should be stuff that's relevant to our target audience, not to us as journalists" said a man working for AJE. "Otherwise we would be writing for ourselves or producing for ourselves, not for the people we are seeking to inform."

Being Seen and Heard

This dovetails with the right to participate in public communication, to be heard and understood. Several respondents were keen to talk about how new technology is helping them "find people to tell stories in their own way, and then figure out how to allow them to do that, while remaining authentic in a traditional news structure." This means that, in postdigital contexts, "you see a lot more first-person narrative."

An Israeli working for a Europe-based global outlet talked about the advantages of working from a minority position as it creates "a certain sensitivity to human conditions and to human situations, that it's not possible for a local to explore." She pointed out that the majority of journalists at her news organization were not part of the majority in the country, and that this "really helps us know how to speak to, you know, people with similar, in similar situations." User content from social media helped another get in touch with refugees, verify who they were, and let them explain in their own words "what it's like to get on a boat and get here." A Zambian-American found new possibilities for "visiting" had opened up with political, rather than technological change when he talked about how the Black Lives Matter movement suddenly resulted in newsrooms "enabling black voices to speak for themselves about issues, you know, for which they've actually historically been excluded to speak about." What is needed, in his view, is "to make sure that the story is going to give a voice to that community or that group of people." And that means not just giving people a voice as victims, but also as experts. The question thus becomes: "In which role do we put them in? And what does that mean?"

One respondent's experiences were that there might be hundreds of channels on offer, "but they all get stuff from the wires and that stuff will be based in certain spaces and they will have a certain view of the world. So basically, you end up for most of the news, even if you have 500 outlets, you have just two sources. So you are feeling you have diversity, but you are not." The antidote is not to change the perspective from north or west to south, but to adopt "the perspective of the people we are talking about."

The Right to Privacy

One way of finding out what that perspective is has been mentioned above: It is to leave the studio and work in the field, letting the people represented in news reports tell their own stories in their own words. Another is to use new technology to compile data. One respondent gave an example of how the ambition of building a relationship with the audience can intersect with incursions into the private realm. The analytical tools at her disposal meant that she could

> "see exactly which country they come from, until which point in the article they scrolled, where they read it slower, where they read it faster… I know everything apart from their actual personality. I know if they're male or female, I can also know their political tendencies many times. I see what they comment and how. And sometimes I got into their profiles because I want to know if I see swastikas."

Another pointed to the same complicated intersection, illustrating how the right to information can be more complicated than the regulatory discourse suggests. While many news providers continue to be "wire-centric" in the way problematized in the MacBride Report, taking their cue from Reuters, AP and other agencies, his organization resists by turning to Twitter (as it was then), Facebook and Instagram to look for the people they are targeting and gather data on what they want access to. "There are certain ages and there are certain psychographics", he explained. "We have documents that describe this. We have audience personas that describe this and every person who joins gets training on that… They learn about our audiences, our audience personas and all of that… We start our morning with these people that my news department is supposed to cater for. What are they interested in today and what are going to be the important things for them to do today, so we can prepare that content?"

As well as resisting agendas set by news agencies that have decided what audiences should be informed about for decades, journalists are looking for ways to resist agendas set by algorithms. One spoke about an audience development community of professionals that "are using newsletters as a way to speak to audiences without fighting algorithms and trying to break away into people's news feeds – actually having that direct communication." While newsletters might seem an antiquated form of communication, this digital editor insists they represent "a big shift" – an instance of the hybrid logic of postdigital media systems, in Chadwick's parlance. One empirical reality on the ground is, consequently, that journalists see new technologies as resources for building relationships with their audiences, while at the same time expressing a need to escape from them – for example by "fighting algorithms" with direct e-mail contact and WhatsApp. "I think there are really positive signs that there are new platforms and new ways to build relationships with audiences that don't rely on algorithms…. But it's not an easy task. There are so many challenges." It's not a matter of "thinking about digital first" but thinking creatively, and using digital technology to find an answer to questions like "how do you report, and what are the voices that aren't being heard from"?

While laudable, and arguably in keeping with respect for communication rights, tech activists know that there are problems with this, as well as the challenges to which that journalist is referring. Several emphasized that the problem of non-democratic control experienced by mobile-phone users in Eritrea and China (to cite the example given above) exists everywhere, and that private actors are complicit as

well as states. This is because the right to information is at the heart of "Big Tech's business model" and it involves the right to information about us. "When you carry a phone around with you, or experience life on the internet, [it] is feeding data into the hands of private companies where they have complete control and very little restriction…on what they can and can't do with this data." Companies like Google and Facebook commodified something that was not previously a commodity, and acquired the legal right to "our information". Historically marginalized groups are compelled to provide their personal information without the opportunity to give meaningful consent. This is used to train algorithms for global tech companies that will profit from them. As set out more fully elsewhere (Robertson & Maccarone, 2022), these tech activists warn that digital technologies such as biometric data systems and predictive analytics tend to exacerbate and compound existing inequities.

People's right to privacy is not just violated by global capital and authoritarian states. It is violated by democratically elected governments in places like India, which have nation-building narratives and "a very deliberate strategy to see the data of its citizens as national resources…saying all this is owned by the state". People are expected to sacrifice their privacy for the collective good.

Experts speaking at RightsCon explain that it is a first-world "privilege and luxury" to use terms such as the right to privacy. "Rather than look at the brutal ways in which automation can render you illegible, invisible, you're optimizing for the privacy thing?" asked one. Surely this is less important than gaining visibility so you can finally be included "in a system that is otherwise excluding you and preventing you from getting the benefits you deserve?" It is a matter of unequal conditions within state boundaries, and it is a matter of unequal conditions in a global context. That entails recognizing that "discussions around the right to privacy in the digital age are based on an individual perspective" and that this is a perspective that applies only in some cultural contexts. Be it the universal rights referred to in abstract policy declarations, or the radical proposals made by tech activists from the Global North in general and Silicon Valley in particular, that individuals should own their own information and be able to sell or not sell data about themselves as they choose: such discourse is out of sync with the empirical realities of really marginalized groups.

And yet it is marginalized groups that journalists we spoke to sought to form relationships with, and give a voice to, so they can be understood and share their experiences. They emphasized that good storytelling remains as important as computation and AI, and that representation not only matters as much as metrics, but that the two are intrinsically linked. There are power asymmetries that are reinforced through platforms, and platforms shape the journalist-audience relationship in postdigital societies. These asymmetries have consequences for communication rights.

Concluding Thoughts

What do universal communication rights mean in a world where millions are displaced and thus lack what Arendt called "the right to have rights"? The Tashkent Declaration expresses concern about the "persistent divides in society in terms of exercising the right of access to information, to the detriment of women and youth as well as indigenous people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups", and promises to do something about this by empowering "key actors with a view to ensuring that fundamental freedoms are guaranteed online and offline", and by empowering citizens and their fundamental freedoms through the development of skills and environments for media pluralism and diversity (UNESCO, 2022). It is easy to agree with UNESCO that the cosmopolitan ideal of communication rights has been challenged by technological developments, and to like its promises and ambitions. The generalizing, universalizing nature of the philosophical-regulatory discourse on these rights is nevertheless problematic.

The sort of journalism that might be thought to contribute to a cosmopolitan outlook has to do with understanding – with narrative knowledge – as opposed to information. Akin to understanding is engagement, "our key metric", as one of the journalists from the preceding section told us. But even if it is information that is privileged, the question then becomes: what is that, today? How is information to be distinguished from data? And is its free flow always something to be safeguarded? As one tech activist put it:

> "We keep coming back to this idea that if we have more data, we can have more knowledge. But actually what we're seeing is the ways in which data are used to pervert our broader understanding. The idea that instead of data giving us a sense of cumulative knowledge – because we have so much information, we can seed doubt, and we can undermine confidence in the information that we have."

Information, viewed from this perspective, results in the "undoing" of knowledge.

The empirical realities of journalists on the ground indicate that the right to information and the right to privacy are entangled, and tech activists warn that the question of which of those rights prevail is a contested one. The tension between them makes it difficult to maintain Arendt's proper distance. It can, however, be maintained, and the right to communicate, to be heard and understood, to learn, to respond and share can be safeguarded, if data does not become a synonym for information, and information does not become a synonym for communication. The gaze through the space in the wall is communication, not information, and the open question posed by that image (are we on the inside looking out, or the outside looking in?) has to do with understanding. Through global media, a cosmopolitan space

opens up where we can see into the world of the other, meet their gaze, and are invited to respond.

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