

# MEDIA ALLIANCES URGED

**T**RANSFORMING and democratising communication are fundamental principles of community radio. But, radio enthusiasts at AMARC 5 were cautioned against seeing radio in isolation.

Delivering the keynote address, Peruvian Rafael Roncagliolo said the democratisation of communication was the overarching objective and alliances between the various media should be developed in order to achieve this.

The challenge was to build new coalitions and constituencies that could help regain a significant measure of people's participation in cultural policy-making – nationally and internationally.

Even to an non-Spanish speaker, the address of the director of the Institute for Latin American Studies in Peru was music to the ears. In poetic language (which had the translators grasping for equivalently evocative English words) Roncagliolo's examination of "Alternative communication on the threshold of the third millenium" included a history of communication over the past 500 years from the perspective of the peoples of the South.

He said the world was no longer a simple dichotomy between private and public. A non-governmental, non-commerical third sector had emerged both at a national and international level. The large social movements of transition of the 20th century and this millenium belonged to this third sector and included movements for human rights, racial equality, the rights of women, ecology and liberty of sexual preference.

The "alternative" communication media corresponded to this third sector, however, their aim was not simply to be alternative, but to be "alterative" – to change and transform relationships of power within the domain of cultures.

"Without historical memory, utopias cannot be turned into projects," said Roncagliolo.

On the eve of the 21st century, four periods were drawing to a close: a millenium, a quinentennial, a "fast" century of technological development and 50 years of Cold War.

Referring to the quinentennial, Roncagliolo quoted Tomas Borge, saying, "Europe invented the Americas, but has not yet discovered them".

He said the conquest of the Americas was important because it heralded the beginning

AT ANY conference of 350 international delegates there are bound to be interesting exchanges. However, when the gathering involves community radio broadcasters from tiny villages in deep south Argentina or the vastness of the Australian outback, or from behind guerrilla lines

in El Salvador or the urban jungles of Los Angeles and New York, the interaction promises a wealth of diverse, mind-stretching encounters.

This was indeed the case at AMARC 5, the fifth World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters, held in Oaxtepec, Mexico in late August, but, disappointingly, a lack of efficient organisation meant the opportunities for structured exchanges of information did not live up to expectations.

Nevertheless, the long journey to the tropical greenery and incredible beauty of central Mexico, was not in vain. Late into the night – and during daylight hours – the conference was abuzz with delegates exchanging stories of their efforts to develop or maintain participative radio broadcasting.

"All the Voices" was the theme: community radio being seen as "a means of resistance, reinforcement and development of people's cultural identity".

A strong sub-text running through the six-day gathering was the 500 years of resistance by the indigenous people of south and central America to preserve their culture in the face of invasions and conquests that began with the arrival of Columbus in 1492.

Community radio broadcasters in this context saw themselves as serving a dual role: as a voice for the indigenous peoples and as a communicator of their ancient wisdom and traditions to a materialist

## Radio resistance blossoms south

BIENVENIDOS WELCOME BIENVENUE  
AMARC 5 TODAS LAS VOICES. ALL THE VOICES  
DITES LES VOIX. OAXTEPEC MEX. 23 AL 30 AGOSTO



**SUE VALENTINE reports on the fifth World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters in Mexico**

world which was destroying itself through the plunder and pollution of natural resources.

In a series of presentations, indigenous people from Nicaragua, Bolivia, Mexico, USA, Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Australia spoke of their work in community radio stations.

Community radio began in the early 1970s in Australia and, as in many instances around the world, first operated as pirate stations without licences. Since then community radio and television have grown dramatically and Aboriginal radio stations have been established in central, west and northern Australia.

Representatives from the "Voice of the Maya" radio station in south east Mexico on the Yucatan peninsula said their station would celebrate its 10th anniversary this year. The Mayan people number approximately 1.8 million and their culture – which has produced scientists and mathematicians capable of calculations unknown in the West until many centuries later – is still alive.

Peasant women from Peru spoke of their radio station – born from the need for women to express themselves: "Women have been put aside for many years, but the time has now come. We are finding ourselves, we are striving to gain as much as we can for our people."

Another indigenous grouping from Bolivia told of their community radio movement which emerged in the late 1970s. Some people were shoemakers and agricultural workers who produced radio programmes in their spare hours.

"We are poor, but we are not so poor. The native people have not affected the ecology nor the environment. We are struggling to implement our own social media."

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of a unification of the world with three features: a common and transnational economy; the political democratisation of most of the globe; and the emergence of a single hegemonic military power which played the role of international policeman (as witnessed by the invasion of Panama and the Gulf War).

Besides the sword and the cross, language, writing and communication had also been used in the process of conquest and devastation. However, the language of the conquerors had been resisted, incorporated and domesticated by the indigenous peoples so that indigenous cultures had survived and been kept alive during the past 500 years.

The past 1 000 years had seen Western languages, particularly English and the Latin languages (spoken by one sixth of the world) dominate communication. It had also been a millenium of the printing press: the book, daily newspapers, radio and television.

"In one thousand years, the history of the northern hemisphere has travelled from the so-called Middle Ages to the Renaissance, to modernity, passing through three industrial revolutions and now, to post-modernity...

***'We want radio broadcasting to function as a loudspeaker and an echo of our multiple and diverse voices'***

"But in the South, the majorities who were unattached to consular exercises and Herodian consumption moved from the original cultures to the conquest and the resistance. In a time frame of 200 years we moved into political emancipation and in this century that is now drawing to an end, we leaped almost directly from illiteracy to the new communication technologies."

Roncagliolo said despite coming along different paths, people from the South were now also part of the global village and global supermarket. Standing at the dawn of the new millenium they had one "simple and blunt" aspiration:

"We want radio broadcasting to function as a loudspeaker and an echo of our multiple and diverse voices; we want audiovisuals to mirror our own physiognomies in the plurality of our many identities."

It had already been shown that the new electronic technologies could be "expropriated, subverted and tamed" for the benefit of the large minorities of the planet which are



*The 500th anniversary of Columbus's landing is not celebrated by all Mexicans. Here indigenous people protest against the destruction of their culture with traditional dancing in Mexico City.*

not represented by the state nor the large mass media industry. This, said Roncagliolo, was what was known as the democratisation of communication, the protection of cultural environments and the universal right to communication.

Pinpointing developments in communication technology during the 20th century, Roncagliolo noted that the transmission of the human voice through Hertzian waves (the forerunner of radio) had first been done in Brazil, but patented by the British; similarly colour television had been invented in Mexico but patented in the United States.

Developments in audio-visual technology had made the original forms of human communication, sound and image, the means of mass social communication. The giants of industry which controlled communication thus controlled "collective intelligence and civil power".

Unlike previous industrial revolutions, the present technological revolution covered all sectors of socio-economic life including education, health and the use of free time.

"Computers, dish antennas and video recorders have become consumer goods which are preferred to refrigerators or electric stoves."

This sector of information and communication was the only aspect of the world economy characterised by a simultaneous and sustained growth in productivity and employment as well as a constant drop in the sale price of the final products.

At a technological level this provided ideal conditions for the growth of community radio, said Roncagliolo. But, while there was a growing number of infrastructures and means of communication, there was also

an increasing concentration of ownership and control of broadcasting licences. Communication was becoming the "hunting ground" of the transnational conglomerates. The growth of vast transnational organisations during the 1960s had led to the development of corporations which were autonomous of nation states and giants such as General Motors and IBM were more important to the world economy than any of the states of the South.

***'Communication is becoming the hunting ground of the transnational conglomerates'***

For this reason, argued Roncagliolo, transnationalism was more than an economic phenomenon. Politically it entailed a radical analysis of the concept and power of national states. Centralised communication affected all countries.

In response to this "more market, less state" mentality and the counter cry for "more state, less market", Roncagliolo argued that a preferable proposal, was for a "more civilian society".

Roncagliolo said new coalitions and constituencies to promote people's participation in policy-making should include a broad range of public groups, social movements and organisations such as media professionals, citizen activists, consumer groups, women, minorities and religious, labour and environmental organisations.