

Digital Media in Conflict-Prone Societies
With Ivan Sigal, Executive Director of Global Voices
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March 7, 2010

Nina Khrushcheva, the Media and Culture Concentration Chair began the meeting by introducing Ivan Sigal. Ivan Sigal is the Executive Director of Global Voices, which is a citizen's media project. Before joining Global Voices, Ivan was a Fellow at the US Institute of Peace, and before that he worked for Internews, which is an international journal that fosters media independence around the world.

Ivan Sigal began with a quick presentation of his paper Digital Media in Conflict-Prone Societies that can be found here: <http://cima.ned.org/reports/digital-media-in-conflict-prone-societies-2.html>.

Ivan describes this paper as being “specifically about how the effects of digital media, the many-to-many communications systems that we all know so well these days, can be used to create a different frame about how we think about the relationship of media to conflict.” He mentioned this new style of media in contrast to the standard media model, which he called a “one-to-many broadcast model with a largely propagandistic or authoritative voice to a largely passive audience.”

In his presentation, Ivan began by mentioning the changes that have occurred in the media world. In the 1990s, Internews would take large equipment and spend 2 weeks training a crew in a developing country, which would cost around \$15,000. Nowadays all of that can be replaced with a Flip camera.

Next Ivan spoke about the change in warfare that has occurred in the past 50 to 60 years. Prior to this change, war was between states, standing armies, and legal combatants, and most of the casualties were soldiers. “Now 90% of people who die in wars are civilians,” with conflicts occurring in the midst of civilian populations.

Then he spoke about a few different conflict prone zones, namely Pakistan, where media is rapidly changing. Access to cell phones is increasing rapidly, while newspaper subscription is dying out, which is evidence of how people will get their news in 10 years in Pakistan and other developing nations.

Ivan mentioned that “media no longer has a functional relationship to conflict; it doesn't report on conflict anymore, it's actually a part of it.” He went on to discuss that a lot of terrorist acts would not occur without media to broadcast it, since “the point of a terror act is maximum impact for minimum effort.”

At this point of the talk, Ivan began showing slides. The first slide was a Twitter Feed from Madagascar, from during a conflict that occurred in Madagascar in 2009. “A conflict occurred that led to a coup from the mayor of the capital city, and was sparked by

a South Korean company's attempt to – in collusion with the standing government – purchase 1/3 of the arable land in the country. It was a case of massive corruption. Journalists were bought by both sides of the conflict, so getting accurate information was quite difficult.” Ivan's organization Global Voices had been working with a community of local bloggers who “turned out to be the primary source of information for the world for the first two weeks of the conflict because there was only one foreign correspondent there from AFP who showed up after a week. And so by virtue of the fact that they were not affiliated with existing mass media and newspapers and weren't captured by a political system and had access to a set of distribution paths that people in the country weren't initially paying attention to, they were out there filming the conflict on their phones, simple cameras and Twittering about it. Those guys went from doing that to being interviewed by Radio France International, CNN and the BBC.”

The next slide was a screen shot from the Global Voices website. One of the things that Global Voices does is analyze blogospheres from all over the world. They have a group of volunteers that “write about, aggregate, translate, and analyze the best of citizen media from all over the world.”

Next Ivan showed a screen from Al-Jazeera's online laboratory, and an installation of a project called Ushahiri. It's a project that was created to crowd source conflict information by a group of Kenyan bloggers and technologists around the 2008 elections conflict. They built a platform that allowed people to phone in violent incidents and map them. They also created a simple verification system. “They asked where does this information come from, how accurate is it, and what's the story, and then they tracked it over a timeline.” Now this type of installation is being used to track conflict all over the world.

Then Ivan showed a slightly different example of a citizen's media effort to report on violence, through a peace and conflict timeline. It is a project that tracks and creates a living history of the Sri Lankan civil war. It was created by an organization called Humananet that is doing statistical data analysis to compare the official numbers of people disappeared in Sri Lanka to data sets of population size to look for discrepancies and then to try to verify on a data set who is actually disappeared through an extensive reporting of families.

Then Ivan showed an image of the movie *Waltz for Bashir*, as an example of how media used to recount war, through the remembered experiences of those who participated in war, versus streaming images from cell phones held by people currently directly involved in conflict.

The last slide was of Tchin Wong, who is a Chinese artists who was a soldier in the Chinese military during Tiananmen Square, whose art is mostly images remembered from his time as a soldier.

At this point Nina opened the floor for questions from students. These questions with Ivan's answers can be found in the full transcripts of his talk, on <http://www.gpia.info/media-concentration>