Editorial

Communication Tensions in Civil Society

One of the conceptual gifts the Scottish Enlightenment brought to social thought was the concept of "civil society" (Ferguson, 1980). This was not a theory of government per se in the sense of the state, but of the non-state portion of social life and action. Civil society was seen as a space for public discourse by associations of citizens, and in particular discourses with the potential for being critical of state actions among other things. A communicative space oriented toward the discussion of public concerns, and the birthplace of journalism not linked to political parties or financial interests. According to Habermas in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), civil society was "refeudalized" by the highly structured corporations that in the course of the nineteenth century came to play an increasingly dominant role in the capitalist economy. Whether Canada ever had much of a civil society is still a moot point, given the country's predominant economic orientation toward staples extraction as well as the dominant role in all aspects of social life by the state, powerfully reinforced by the extreme concentration of power of the executive under the Westminster model.

The current issue looks at recent forms of communicative tensions arising in the context of Canada today. So we open with **Aziz Douai's** article "'The Police and the Populace': Canadian Media's Visual Framing of the 2010 G20 Toronto Summit," a controversial clash between state power and protestors, exposing as well and, shockingly so, the secrecy and brutality of high-level economic gatherings. Douai reminds us that the G20 Summit was the largest security operation in Canadian history, involving the local and provincial police, the RCMP, and the military. He analyzes 852 news images of the protests and in particular how the media "framed" the anti-globalization protestors. He finds that the coverage remained firmly in the "mass communication" realm, concluding with remarks on the myth of "digital democracy."

Some parallel themes are picked up in **Shoshana Magnet** and **Corinne Lysandra Mason's** article "Of Trojan Horses and Terrorist Representations: Mom Bombs, Cross-Dressing Terrorists, and Queer Orientalisms." The authors turn to 2008 fears expressed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security about the risks posed by female suicide bombers, in particular by pregnant or seemingly pregnant ones as well as male terrorists wearing burqas. Although no such cases occurred in the United States, Mason and Magnet argue that these "gendered" depictions themselves provoked a gendered threat. They go on to argue these representations are "new articulations" of classic Orientalist grammars.

Jonathan A. Obar's "Canadian Advocacy 2.0: An Analysis of Social Media Adoption and Perceived Affordances by Advocacy Groups Looking to Advance Activism in Canada" re-situates the problematic firmly in the Canadian context, while

also invoking the latest iterations of the continuity of the dream of civil society, namely in social media.

From his analysis of 157 representative texts of several dozen advocacy groups, he found that quantitatively they tend to use a limited selection of social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter. Qualitatively, he found much enthusiasm about the potential of social media, but considerable caution over using unproven techniques.

Arguably one of the consequences of a shattered civil society is the fact of homelessness; **Barbara Schneider** brings the useful perspective of "emotion discourse" in her analysis titled "Homelessness: Emotion Discourse and the Reproduction of Social Inequality." Because few media audience members actually have direct knowledge of the homeless, their discourses about the homeless tend to fall into emotion discourse. This ironically reproduces the media's own emotion discourse and only reproduces social inequality.

Problems of civic engagement and knowledge creation resurface in **Charlene D. Elliott's** thoughtful article, "Communication and Health: An Interrogation." Canadian state agencies spend many millions in researching the health of the Canadian population. To what end, Elliott asks, and is what passes as "health research" really that at all? What is the relation between Communication and health research, especially when Communication scholars do not often identify as health researchers? The article turns to back issues of the *CJC* in search of answers.

Finally, two Research in Brief articles report upon, in the one case, the continued problem of First Nations communities finding their own voices. **Heather Molyneaux** and her five co-authors report on recent developments in their study "Social Media in Remote First Nations Communities." Looking at Internet use in remote communities in northwestern Ontario, the Research in Brief turns to the notion of collective resiliency as a key concept binding Native communities in the face of distance, isolation, and historical marginalization. Secondly, with a wide-ranging research agenda, **Azra Rashid** maps out the global dimensions of the intersections of gender and genocide in her article "Gender and Genocide: A Research-as-Creation Project." She argues for a new approach to research creation that would make women's experience central to the analysis of genocide.

All of the articles in this issue reveal that whether in Canada or on a more global scale, the question of civil society remains central to many ongoing issues and problems, and in particular the continued struggle for some improvement in social justice. In a context of the ever-widening gap between the governed and the governors, the latter seem ever more successfully able to wall themselves off from public protests—and also to be able to generate "knowledge" that is only another arm of domination. Through articles that speak of a shattered social tissue that callously tosses the unwanted onto the streets, or leaves them abandoned in broken communities far far away**,** and where being female is an incitement to mass rape and murder, this issue of *CJC* addresses some powerful and disturbing questions.

References

Ferguson, Adam. (1980). *An essay on the history of civil society* (Louis Schneider, Ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction. (Originally published in 1767)

Habermas, Jürgen. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Thomas Burger, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (Originally published in 1962)

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