

SESSION V: What we seem to be hearing since yesterday

Chair: Andrea Cornwall, Advisor, CITIGEN and Professor, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

This session was chaired by Andrea Cornwall who opened the floor for reflections about the discussions that had happened so far. Evangelia Berdou began by suggesting a reflection on the missing perspectives in the discussions that had taken place so far, one of which was the political economy approach.

Singh stressed the healthy tension that was taking place in the conference with regard to the technology discourse. Even though, there is sometimes an instinctive resistance to the hegemonic discourse on technology, everybody seems really interested by the emerging practices.

Ramata Molo Thioune shared her concern in face of the artificial dichotomy between the information society and the other society. This tension needs to be addressed as even though not everybody may be working on the information society, everybody is part of it.

Lisa McLaughlin stressed the need to break down the complex situation where people are over-enthusiast or over-critical about the potential of ICTs. Rather than creating polarities, empirical work and reflections can help bring out contradictions.

Idealistic visions of the public sphere need to be troubled.

Andrea Cornwall

Cornwall shared her reflections about the public/private tension that she saw emerging in the information society. She wished to trouble idealistic visions of the public sphere, which follow Habermasian notions of the public sphere understood as a communicative consensus shaped by people meeting and exchanging, and Hannah Arendt's vision of the public sphere as a space where people come, listen and leave something behind them. The Internet is being

idealised in a similar way whereas the Internet provides a series of platforms that are not all deliberative spaces, but sometimes merely spaces where people express an opinion without generating any debate around it (e.g. Youtube). The nature of such views is problematic as there are not easily ascribable to the private or the public realm. Such dichotomies need to be unsettled and re-theorised, especially when most projects look at the theme from contexts that trouble some of the Western theoretical assumptions around citizenship and communication.

Estrada-Claudio shared her thoughts about the way in which poor and marginalised women's participation is often idealised in researches and organising efforts. No matter how empowering the work at the micro-level may be, those women are asked to engage with large structures that are disempowering. Furthermore, becoming computer literate can also lead to a de-solidarisation. Similarly, best practice models tend to be idealised and romanticised. Anita Gurumurthy responded to Sylvia Estrada-Claudio by asking about the alternative to best practices, and ways to structurally respond with a feminist idealism, tactic and imagination to what is essentially a structural phenomenon. Bhattacharya echoed Gurumurthy's reflection by warning against excessive suspicion of technology. Considering oneself as a dinosaur cannot be an excuse for feminists not to engage with the new ecology because it will leave them unprepared to respond to certain violations that are taking place in the information society. Whether they accept it or not, feminists are also part of the information society.

Upendranadh Choragudi shared his reflections about the need to link up the potential of ICTs for both resistance and innovations in order to advance developmental goals. He recalled the need to bring about the broader developmental

paradigm and consider issues of resources such as food, water or energy.

McLaughlin pointed out that in ICTs, it is the information and communication elements that fascinate people but it is technology that is fetishised.

Raihan observed the presence of two tendencies. Some people are trying to break a social and political status quo through ICTs, others, he felt, were trying to save the status quo via market interventions or via development interventions through ICTs. Interventions linking gender and ICTs have to consider this paradox as well.