

MOVING FROM *CANTALETA* TO *ENCANTO* OR CHALLENGING THE
MODERNIZATION POSTURE IN COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND
SOCIAL CHANGE: A COLOMBIAN CASE STUDY OF THE EVERYDAY WORK
OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATORS

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the School Journalism and Communication
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

September 2008

University of Oregon Graduate School

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Title:

"Everyday Life in the Work of Development Communicators: A Colombian Case Study"

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An Abstract of the Dissertation of
Estella Porras for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy
in the School of Journalism and Communication
to be taken September 2008

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The field of international development communication has given scant attention to the role of communication practitioners who are critical players in facilitating participation and community engagement in development. Despite growing demand for the training of these practitioners internationally, most of them work informally at the grassroots in ways that are poorly understood. This study aims to illuminate development communication practice by examining the everyday work of a freelance team of practitioners in Colombia. The study uses feminist ethnographic methods to describe and analyze the ways practitioners deal with professional dilemmas and power dynamics

intrinsically present in development interventions. It focuses on the interactions and the narratives of these practitioners, and contrasts them against the major conceptual traditions of the field: modernization-related perspectives and critical/participatory views of social change. The analysis shows that the study's participants engage in self-reflection of their professional dilemmas, choices and understandings of communication. This self-reflection recognizes the opportunities, limitations, and failures of both alternative and protest-oriented media in the Latin American contexts, as well as the shortcomings of social marketing/behavior change models. The ethnography of this team's experience in the making of communication projects provides insight into their work conditions, the reasons for their "impure" mixing of theories and models, and their struggle to advance their long-term agendas of social change, even within short-term modernization-oriented programs. The main findings of the study are the principles used by these Colombian communicators: the aesthetic principle they call *encanto* (a sensuous, body-connected and poetic component that permeates language and communication encounters); and an ethical principle of trust-building, called *confianza*. Both principles represent an alternative to counterbalance the power asymmetries characterizing the development-as-modernization logic and particularly the modernization *posture* (called *cantaleta*) that permeates and hinders communication encounters.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor H. Leslie Steeves for her encouragement and assistance in the process of research and preparation of this manuscript. Especial thanks to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Julianne Newton, Dr. Al Stavitsky and Dr. Denis Galvan for their invaluable insights. Also I want to express my deep gratitude to Pedro Pablo Rincón, Darío Moreno, Jesus Abad Colorado for their time and openness participating in this study. And very especial thanks to my friends Gladys Herrera and Iván Darío Chain, the leaders of the Charrera group in Colombia, who inspired me to research their practice, and generously shared with me their knowledge and passion for their work. Iván and Gladys, *mil and mil gracias!*

For my daughter Lucía, my husband Blake and my parents Paula and Jorge.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this study emerged when I visited Colombia in the summer of 2003. Overwhelming stories of despair and hopeless violence circulated everywhere. One day I had the chance to reconnect with a group of old colleagues (communicators like me) and friends who work full time on development communication projects. Seated around the coffee table at the Chahín–Herrera’s home I listened to their “behind-the-scenes” stories of working on a health communication campaign; I laughed out loud learning about their adventures in the making of a particular radio series, about their vicissitudes, their negotiations with incredulous aid agencies, and their ‘a-ha!’ moments. I learned that they convinced aid agencies to change the reference terms for some proposals; they created partnerships with unexpected actors, like the famous radio announcer who yells “goaaaaal” broadcasting *fútbol* matches; they included innovative games, creative writing and even olfactory exercises in their workshops; and they mixed theories from health communication with home-made recipes of story telling. Hearing them speak I noticed their passionate commitment to connect to the other (the community members, their audiences); I noticed their interest in making real the rhetoric of participation in places where most people have been historically silenced. I saw them interpreting in their own terms the meanings of “development”, “change”, and “communication”. I was moved by

their stories of resourcefulness and hope, and deeply intrigued by their construction of the communicator's role. Suddenly I realized: I want to do research on *this*.

These tales from the communication practitioner's view suggested, to me, valuable knowledge and experience that needed to be gathered, systematized, put in conceptual perspective, and shared with those interested in this field.

1.1. Communicator's Invisible Practice

As a development communicator myself, the status of the professionals in this field interests me. There is a vast body of literature on development communication and social change discussing a broad range of theoretical options, from the behavior change, diffusionist, development-as-modernization approach, all the way to the other side of the spectrum, the critical perspectives and participatory approaches to development. However, specific research and scholarly references to the communication practitioner are almost non-existent. The experience of the individuals in charge of actually carrying out development communication projects remains invisible.

It is not surprising then, that Gumucio-Dagrón (2002) recalls a UNICEF report that mentions 50 different names related to the job of the development communicator. This demonstrates not only little agreement on the definition of the type of work this professional does, but also the lack of understanding of the communicator's critical role.

Unlike journalists, advertisers or public relation agents who are professionally visible, trained in their specialties, and organized in associations, development communication practitioners located mostly in Third World regions, continue

unrecognized in a low-status, low-formalized, and unstudied occupation. Few universities include development communication as an area of professional training in the U.S., and in Latin America, the examination of the curricula shows that most of the so-called “Social Communication” programs lack core academic content in this particular field (Irigoin et al. 2002).

Paradoxically, international development organizations are seeking trained communicators in development work. In 2002 and 2004 at least two studies¹, one sponsored by The CHANGE project, Ford Foundation, The Communication Consortium, Pan-American Health Association (PAHO) and the other by Ohio University, surveyed hundreds of global aid agencies and specialists in order to characterize the skills and profile of the communication practitioner, who is now in high demand for development programs. As a result of these surveys these institutions are now designing curricula and creating on-line training programs to fill the demand.

Gumucio-Dagrón (2002), Latin American communication researcher, pointed out that the role of the communication practitioners is crucial for two reasons: First, participation is the critical element in the success of development projects but it had become the “bottle neck” of interventions; second, communicators are the ones in charge of the participation component of the projects but they usually do not have the

¹ The Ford Foundation, the Pan American Health Organization and the USAID-funded CHANGE Project started in 2003 the research called “Competencies: Communication for development/social change”. The goal of this study is to define training/education needs for communicators for social change and social change agents who use communication to further development and social change. In a similar direction, the Development Communication Program at Ohio University did an international survey to explore the skills and demand of the communicators in order to design and offer on-line courses and training. See: Communication Initiative website. <http://comminit.com>

professional training needed for this particular field. Therefore, Gumucio-Dagrón and the agencies suggest that there is need to research and formalize knowledge in this area of professional expertise in order to train the “new communicator”.

Professionalization of practitioners represents, undoubtedly, an important step toward successful participatory development programs. However, this requires taking into account a broader critical view of development anchored in the discourse of modernization. The present study recognizes that the practice of the communicators is constituted by powerful discourses that define the power relationships in the field. From a poststructuralist view point, development is neither seen as neutral nor natural process but a complicated set of notions, formulations, languages and procedures performed by individuals located in different positions of power. The Colombian communicators of this story deal with institutions, agencies and with community members in diverse cultural contexts and power locations; they juggle with definitions of what “progress”, and “social change” mean, and perform their tasks under the expectations and dynamics of the development discourse.

They are also subjects with agency, with political backgrounds, with poetic views and sensibilities who explore ways of creating new versions of working in development communication.

This study joins the on-going discussion of the role of development communication practitioners and aims to fill the theory gap in terms of providing specific description of their work, collected from the experience of the communicators themselves. Besides it seek to critically examine the practice and identify the sources and

contributions for the field. The research questions that this study raises are: a) who are the communicators and how do they envision their profession? b) How do they work? How do they deal with the communication craft, the communication strategies, the dilemmas, and decision-making process in the field? And, c) What are the principles/sources that inform their actions? What lessons can we learn from their practice?

The descriptive nature of these questions speaks of the choice to follow an inductive path of knowledge creation supported by qualitative research methods. This path starts from attentively observing the practice, listening to the communicators, and eventually connecting my recorded observations to theoretical trends. Besides, the study works within an ethnographic tradition and a feminist orientation. The ethnographic orientation is relevant here due to the centrality of meaning making and narrating stories of the communicator's everyday life, and crucial for the observation of routines, artifacts, spatial arrangements, and other ways of interacting.

I also chose a feminist research orientation in order to account for the social locations of the researcher and the participants. I find it useful to inform the study with observation of the gender, race and class disparities, and other power differences and privileges that are engrained within development projects, and within the research situation itself.

The qualitative character of the research indicates that instead of looking for commonalities among a large number of respondents, the study focuses on recreating the everyday practice of a small sample of communicators, who, by reflecting on their experiences of being-in-the-field, construct narratives about their practice, and the roles

they play in the process of development and social change. These narrated reconstructions are necessarily contextual. In my exploration of the professional routines of the Colombian participants, I do not presume to draw universal definitions or a normative know-how for development communicators, but rather to bring to light the *micro level* of their everyday practice, where theories, methods, and communication paradigms take place and materialize in concrete communication encounters.

1.2. Significance

This study contributes to fill the conceptual gap on the professional field of development communicators, which in turn may help to formalize and recognize the needs and the value of this area of expertise. Perhaps a more fundamental contribution to the academic field of development communication is the identification of alternatives that counterbalance the problematic dynamics of development-as-modernization discourse.

From a critical perspective, a central problem of development is the modernization *posture*, a notion that relates to the conceptualization of *discourse regime* coined by Escobar (1995). The modernization posture, as considered in this study, is not only a set of concepts, procedures, language, limits and institutional ways of acting, but also an embodied posture of power that pervades the interactions and the messages of all participants, community members, agencies representatives, local leaders, stake holders, etc. In spite of the good will of a given project, or in spite of its progressive ideology, the posture of modernization slips in, reproducing gestures of exclusion and control.

This research focuses on the experience of a team of Colombian communicators who pushes the limits of what constitute “the norm” of working on development projects, and reflects on the paradoxes and power structures that need to be challenged on the ground. The stories and the events that I observed and the protagonists of the narrative take issue with this posture and develop alternatives to it. These alternatives, which I describe in detail in chapters VI and VII with a variety of examples, depart from the traditional sources of knowledge in the development communication field. The practitioners that propose them adventure into aesthetics, the presence of body and the construction of trust in communication encounters. What the group of participants say and do represents an original addition to the academic and professional field that has been asking for ideas about engagement and participation, and about ways to resist the hegemonic ways to do development communication.

Another element of significance of this study has to do with its context. It happens to be in Colombia, a so-called Third World country that has been seen countless development programs, many of which ended in failure. In this place of great social disparity and 40-year-old armed conflict, the weak state struggles to gain legitimacy, vast segments of the population are silenced, and the space for democratic conversation is small.

In this context, the participants, a local team of free-lance communicators with more than 14 years of fieldwork experience narrate their everyday effort to promote conditions for social change. The development communicators’ invitation to engage in collective issues of social transformation can be particularly challenging, and perhaps

daunting. It is within this context of challenge that I found the work of the communication practitioners to be of such crucial value.

1.3. The Next Chapters

Chapter II reviews the main traditions in the study of development communication, starting by contextualizing the notion of development, modernization, the several versions of development used by global players, and its limitations to bring about positive social change. In the field of communication, it compares the modernization-related theories and models such as diffusionism, social marketing, entertainment for education and other behavior-change models. This modernization perspective contrasts with the conceptual lineage that comes mainly from the South: The participatory and critical approaches that see communication as linked to empowerment practices, dialogue and social mobilization. Connected to this line I include a brief review of the alternative media, *communication popular*, and citizen's media; in addition, I discuss how Latin American cultural studies offers the perspective of communication as *cultural mediation*.

The context chapter, chapter III, offers a portrait of Colombia and its contemporary history of development efforts and news media landscape. I chose to include a variety of forces and versions of social change from the perspective of diverse actors: guerrillas, mafia, government, social movements, and international interventions, in order to illustrate how challenging, and necessary, communication work is in this country.

Chapter IV describes the methodology orientations, the particular stages, tools and ethical dilemmas of the research. Chapter V discusses the first research question by drawing a portrait of the participants, their locations, and their method of development communication. Chapter VI is a reconstruction of a communication campaign related to soil conservation agriculture. But it is more than that. It exemplifies the type of decisions, tensions, power dilemmas, and creativity that occur during the process. In a critical way, it shows how each stage involves negotiation and agency, and it responds to the second question about how the communicators work. Chapter VII discusses the third question on the principles that inform the practice of communication and introduces the central concepts of *cantaleta* (the modernization posture) and its alternatives, the aesthetic principles of *encanto* (enchantment) and *confianza* (trust) which are central contributions of this study. Finally, Chapter VIII draws five main conclusions and recommendations for future research and for education of development communicators.

In sum, this ethnographic oriented study that started with my excitement upon hearing the stories of a local group of communicators in Colombia, became an inquiry into the professional definitions, practices, methods, dilemmas and sources of a critical occupation in the area of development and social change. The study privileges stories and theories that emerged from the conversation with the practitioners, and organizes them in a narrative form that articulates examples, testimonies and conceptual discussion. This process allowed me to identify a central pervasive aspect that hinders positive social change in many communication encounters (the modernization *posture*), but most

important, to examine and describe key aesthetic sources to undermine oppressive modes of development practices, in other words, to move from *cantaleta* to a more inclusive and inviting mode of human communication called *encanto*.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notions of “development” and “communication” carry an ample range of meanings and connotations. Development can be understood as policy, as practice, as a desirable goal, as a process of material growth, as a set of coordinated actions, or as an image of progress, or wellbeing. Some people prefer the term “social change” instead of “development”. Any choice of language is problematic. “Social change” can be defined as positive or negative or it can imply moving toward any direction. “Social change” has been used as buzz word in many political campaigns, in failed revolutionary attempts, but also it connotes a close connection to grass-roots work. The term “development” has been widely adopted not only by agencies but also by scholars and included in curricula implying a directive top-down process, however it needs to be defined beyond that assumption and its simplistic connotations of economic growth. A critical take on development asks questions such: What does growth means? What does progress mean? Progress in which direction? Who is in charge to decide/define progress? Who decides who develops where and how?

In spite of the problematic language I use here the term “development” instead of “social change” because it expresses aspirations for a better life. It does not exclude notions of “social change” or grassroots-related projects, while refers to the efforts made by a large numbers of NGOs, agencies, institutions and practitioners.

In turn, the term “communication” implies uncountable meanings from the mass mediated communication to the interpersonal interaction, from the digital and telecommunication experience to the subtle meaning of a whisper or a gesture. In this study I use the pair “development communication” because it connects to an ample path of international practice and scholarly tradition. In order to conceptually precise the terms, this chapter draws a map of the more salient views on international development and development communication. I review the roots and the connections between development and communication studies emphasizing the dominant practices informed by the modernization perspective, and describe its counterpart: the critical and participatory communication or communication for social change approach. Then I discuss the contributions and limitations of these approaches as well as their points of convergence. Additionally, I introduce other sources of scholarship that also contribute to the understanding of the cultural dimension of development communication, particularly in Latin America.

Finally, I identify the gaps in the scholarship related to the grounded practice of development communication and describe the rationality of my research questions.

2. 1. Approaches to Development

2.1.1. Roots: Development as Modernization

The international development theory born in the post-war era embodied the hope that the poor regions of the world would “catch up” with the industrial ones, following mainly economic reforms and engaging in Western-like political systems (Isbister, 2001).

In the 1950s, the newly created international agencies, programs, and governments enthusiastically embraced the discourse of development and exported it to the developing world, expecting to see progress mainly in terms of economic growth (Rogers, 69)

The core idea attached to theories and practice of development is *modernization*. Since the middle of the last century, modernization became the mainstream language and framework to think of development. According to scholars like Rogers (1969) and Lerner (1958), modernizing the newly independent lands of Asia and Africa and the impoverished Latin American nations required overcoming what were perceived as obstacles to development: the traits of traditional, rural, collective-oriented, hierarchical societies in order to transform them into efficient, secular, urban, individualistic, competitive, technological-oriented and, therefore, modern societies. Thus, being modern meant being open to change and embracing Western ideas and values associated with global capitalism.

The idea of modernizing life seems to go beyond the macro levels of agencies, models, plans and institutions. It also permeates the micro level of everyday life. When a mother in a Colombian slum expressed to me her dream to buy formula milk instead of breastfeeding her children because she would like to offer them a modern product that should be *the best* for them, the issue here is not only misinformation but also the embodiment of modernization. For the mother, embracing modern practices means to distrust her body, have faith in factory-made solutions, and conform to the advertised images of urban motherhood and other expectations of modernity.

Let us go further back. Modernization theory has its roots in the European tradition of the Enlightenment; the supremacy of reason and a positivist epistemology that assumes the existence of an objective measurable world in which similar universal laws of science would apply to social life which was seen as a social organism (Mattelart and Mattleart, 1998). We could list countless scientific advances and beneficial outcomes of modern practices, such as vaccination and sanitation that have saved millions of lives. Also, modernization plays a central role in the liberal thought that celebrates individual rights, free market societies, and capitalism as the triumph of private initiative and the reward of personal risk and enterprise over the socialist and state-oriented views (Petras, 2003).

Development as modernization is about change, but its premises and foundations define change as continuation and adjustment in social life, rather than conflict and challenge of power structures. Change, then, is procured as controlled reforms in a top-down fashion.

In the process of modernizing societies, external experts in charge of planning development interventions tend to consider that there is something intrinsically wrong in the traditional social structures of the developing regions, which are seen as obstacles for change (Isbister, 2001). Modernists like Rogers (1969) and Lerner (1958) have proposed to transfer techniques, offer training, and diffuse or extend information, content and values that support the transformation from traditional to modern societies. This hope in transmission of values, know-how, and information is the place in which development first meets communication theory as I explain later.

2.1.2. *Development as a Discourse and Post-development*

In his piece “Encountering Development” (1995), Arturo Escobar focuses on the issue of development from a post-structuralist perspective: as a *discourse* that constructs reality. Development as *discourse* consists of a set of assumptions that shape the social imaginary. It makes “natural”, “neutral”, and “logical” some particular, dominant approaches. It works as a regime that informs policies, programs, and methods and produces knowledge that legitimizes the practice of development itself. The discourse contains resources that validate its premises (i.e., technical knowledge, value-free science, efficiency, invention of The Other as category of intervention). But there are other issues out of the domain of the development discourse that remain unseen or non-existent under its logic: power inequalities, politics of intervention, complexity of local needs, failure and discontent of particular social actors, cultural and environmentally negative consequences.

The development discourse has created an international bureaucratic machine with methods and tools that legitimize themselves while rejecting political debates on poverty and the shortcomings of capitalism. An example of the discourse-in-action is the much publicized poverty reduction program called the Millennium Development Goals, (MDGs) promoted by the international economist Jeff Sach in the last five years. Wendy Harcourt (2007) comments that in spite of the benevolent intentions of the MDGs agenda, its logic falls into the mainstream discourse of development: “The MDG process leaves untouched the systemic causes of poverty while relying on ‘campaigns’ and ‘experts’ to calculate the figures and then sell the strategies to governments and civil society. [...]”

The MDGs remain solidly in the tradition that the rich countries should do something for the poor countries by sending money, technical and medical knowledge, and writing off debts. They endorse rather than challenge international trade. They uphold the uneven development and the increase in global inequality fostered by global capitalism.” (p.2)

This line of criticism offered by Harcourt exemplifies the work of Post-Development thought. For post-developmentalists, who draw from post-structuralism, the central question is not about how to make development possible or more efficient, but how the powerful discourse of development materializes in institutions and practice, and creates certain type of knowledge and objects of knowledge that reproduces power dynamics and actualizes new forms of global oppression (Escobar, 1995).

Post-development theorists emphasize the importance of language and meaning in the creation of social realities. They discuss the representation of “natural”, “obvious” ways of being or expectation of wellbeing. Therefore the post-development approach unpacks the discourse of development-as-modernization formed by dominant sets of knowledge and Western lenses and their bias in language, thought and practice. It also criticizes the centrality of the expert’s knowledge and advocates for a change in the discursive sources that are at the root of knowledge-production (Escobar, 1995). Consequently, post-development tends to focus the attention on the local places of resistance and on the new social movements in which other alternatives to modernity can be imagined.

This theoretical approach doesn’t come without criticisms for what it seems romanticization of the local movements which are in themselves problematic, and also by

placing excessive value to the discursive/subjective experiences leaving aside the examination of concrete realities faced by the poor (Lazreg, 2002). However, Post-development's main contribution, in mi view, is its self-questioning of what "working for the poor" means and what assumptions come with it. For development workers and development communicators that is a critical question. Besides, as Lind (2003) says, post-development's value due in the fact that it suggests imagining a different era, a place in which progress is not measured just by the same standards of Wal-Mart and Mac Donald's and material prosperity but by other orders, by social justice, practice of freedom.

2.1.3. Development as a Way of Seeing

Following similar lines of post-structuralism and post-development thought, development as discourse also carries aesthetic ways of seeing and organizing life. Development projects embody a certain rationality, consistent with the mainstream discourse of modernization, and also a certain *sensibility*; a particular way of seeing. In an ethical and aesthetic attempt to control the messiness of life, Scott's (1998) classic exploration of the failures of what he calls the "High Modernism" paradigm describes the sensibility of modern projects that reflect a strong faith in administration and efficiency. For example, a forest project managed as files in a cabinet, or the promotion of the functional village-centered life in Tanzania, although well intentioned, these cases result from an epistemology rooted in administrative and engineering rationality and a sense of aesthetics that is applied to social life and nature. They are designed from the viewpoint of the administrator but not from the view of the users and leave no room for the

spontaneity and creativity of human actions, or for the complexity of social life. This way of seeing is one of the causes of failure of development projects.

In Colombia, the modern design of the highways that connect the main Caribbean cities while destroying the unique ecosystem of Magdalena Ciénaga, or the DRI (Integral Rural Development) programs that aim to achieve uniform agricultural practices, as documented by Escobar (1995), are examples of High Modernism. One could identify traces of the aesthetic of High Modernism in the micro level of everyday projects: programs and officials obsessed with controlling data in charts and deadlines rather than understanding the diverse and complex routes for change.

2.1.4. Development as Dependency

As noticed above, the enterprise of international development has been target of diverse criticism not only because of its unfulfilled promise of defeating poverty but also because its very economic premise has been a matter of critical scrutiny. A group of Latin American economists in the 60s and 70s contributed to the debate on development by observing that poor nations that follow the Breton Woods prescriptions and engage in imbalanced terms of international trade have no chance to improve their living conditions but to exploit their labor and resources while reproducing unequal power structures within themselves and in the international scope. One core point made by this perspective called Dependency Theory is that the comparative advantage of one primary export is a trap that benefits the countries of the core (industrial ones), not the periphery (Isbister, 2001). This notion of interdependency between core and periphery implies that the failure of development is due to the very model of capitalism that requires peripheral countries

to supply the needs of the center. Dependency Theory does not offer clear alternatives for change besides what some can read as social revolution, but it provides a valid moral and critical insight of the international connections between poor and rich regions (Leys, 1996).

2.1.5. Development's Language, Failures and Frameworks

The dominant approach to international development efforts is mostly a history of failures (Leys, 1996, Isbister, 2001). In spite of the modification of the language and policies, poverty is still with us. During the 50s, the Breton Woods agencies (World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) have promoted their packages for the so-called “underdeveloped countries” under a framework of hope in economic growth. Later, they introduce other plans using the language of “change with equity.” Further, agencies spoke of “redistribution of resources”. Later, in the 70s, agencies seemed to lose hope in the “catching- up” initial version of development and decided to focus on assisting the “basic needs” of the poor (Melkote and Steeves, 2001, p.166). Lately, the shift in the official language of development seems to be toward the alleviation of the collateral consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) implemented during the 80s and 90s. SAPs consisted of sets of measures aimed to privatize the national economies, open markets, promote outward productivity, and improve governance by reducing government size and social expenditure (Chossudovsky, 2003). SAPs were adopted by many Latin American and African countries as conditions for receiving loans, or in order to redefine the terms of the external debt (Sachs, 1993, Leys 1996).

Today, the emphasis in international development is moving toward embracing the goals of the Millennium Project, which proposes to cut world poverty by half in the next decade by applying technical solutions that already exist (UN, 2005). This seems to be an urgent call to governments and organizations. Yet this new “formula” falls into the framework promoted by the Breton Woods Agencies, which have not proven much success.

In spite of the criticism, the dominant development discourse pushes for explanations of poverty caused by the inefficiency of certain countries to participate in free trade practices, or by their low performance in their inward economy, and mainly by their local corruption and poor administration (Sachs, 1993). Consistent to this view, the former president of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz, stated that the main concern of his organization is to fight corruption, even by cutting aid programs. This view assumes that poverty’s main cause is corruption, and this implies that recipient countries are solely responsible for a problem that does not allow them to develop as expected. European leaders criticized Wolfowitz’s hard line mono-focus on corruption as leading issue of poverty (NPR, 2007). Through these lenses, the WB and other multilateral agencies design policies, poverty alleviation plans, and development interventions while overlooking local complexities and global responsibilities as they perpetuate inequality.

One salient improvement though, has been the introduction of a more human-oriented and sensitive tool to measure and compare quality of life: the Human Development Index (HDI), which includes education and life expectancy as indicators other than the GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize of Economics,

one of the creators of the HDI, is also the proponent of an alternative approach in which development has to do with expanding the capabilities of people to be able to do and be what they value. The capabilities approach states that people should have real choices in order to engage in concrete practices that make them fully human. It is not about what the poor lack and need, but about the freedom to actually produce change (Sen, 1994).

Martha Nussbaum (2000), using the same framework, discusses women and development issues describing, besides the basic capabilities to survive, another set of capabilities that she calls “internal” such as the ability to “imagine, think, and reason (...) to sustain emotional bonds (...) to affiliate with and show compassion for others (...) to laugh and play” (p. 78 -80).

Sen enriches the discussion of development including culture as one of the capabilities. For him, culture is not just aesthetic expressions but also attitudes and practices related to work and social organization; ways to exchange goods or ideas and to participate in public; sites of celebration, memory and traditional heritage, and means to generate social support and solidarity (Vincent, 2004).

Since the 90s, there has been more recognition among the international community that development means human development, people at the center of change, people as agents of change. Development efforts, therefore, require much more than economic growth; they encompasses the expansion of capabilities and inclusion of issues such us gender equality, inclusive health systems, environmental justice, human rights, and corporate responsibility.

The acknowledgement of people as agents of development implies the need to include their knowledge, experience and expectations as part of the decision-making processes. Thus, the notion of community participation has become a must in development programs. In this regard, Robert Chambers (2005), a researcher of the development field who advocates for knowledge-sharing and participatory research, expresses the challenge: “Poverty may never be made history. But we can ask whether a precondition for its sharp reduction is that powerful professionals become more participatory and get closer to and learn more from those who live their lives in poverty; and then act on what they experience, learn and feel” (p.29).

This participatory dimension of development efforts finds strong connections to the communication field and to the work of development communication practitioners.

2.2. Development Communication

There are several approaches in theory and practice of development communication and social change. On one side of the spectrum, there is a top-down approach aligned with the assumptions of modernization. On the opposite side, there is a perspective that considers development as a bottom-up process of social change that should be determined by local communities according to their cultural and political needs and interests (Servaes, 1996; Melkote & Steeves 2001). From either approach, communication is a key dimension: as transmission of information, diffusion, or social marketing campaigns on one the hand, or on the other hand, as a tool for community dialogue, identity construction and emancipatory self-determination.

2.2.1. Communication and Development from a Modernization Perspective

a. Exporting Media and Western Values

I mentioned before that development theory first meets communication in the attempt to facilitate the passing from a traditional to a modern society. Lerner (1958) made a pioneer work in this regard. His research attempts to show that change most likely happens when populations in the developing regions have been exposed to the values and psychological mindset of Western cultures. Withdrawing from mass communication research theories, Lerner considered that media are the tools for traditional societies to overcome their lack of modern traits. After interviewing thousands of subjects in the Middle East, he points out that they lack what he calls “empathy,” meaning that they do not see themselves behaving as individuals of Western society, lacking interest in valuing private, urban, capitalistic ideals. Therefore, a remedy for this problem was to promote modern Western values by exporting mass media content.

Samarajiwa (1987) reports that Lerner’s project, sponsored by the U.S. government during the Cold War years, helped birth initiatives like the radio service Voice of America and other mass media interventions that offered international news and information from the so-called free societies and promoted U.S. ideologies over the air of developing regions.

It is not surprising that the U.S. mass communication research founded on the transmission of information models (sender-message-channel-receiver) of Laswell, Lazarsfeld (McQuail, 2000), permeated the development communication research and tools for decades. Transference of technology, extension programs, diffusion, etc. work

here as synonyms of the sender and receiver model, in which the sender, with the intention to “enlighten” the receiver, decides and prescribes what messages the receiver needs.

b. Communication as Diffusion

Along similar lines, we find the influential work of Everett M. Rogers, who died in 2004. In tribute to his life, Melkote reminds the central role of Diffusion of Innovations theory (DI) in establishing the importance of communication in the modernization process in developing regions (Melkote, 2006, p. 114). Rogers surveyed, compiled and actually diffused around the world the DI strategy. His theory, or combination of theories, have been used in hundreds of projects, globally, to promote agricultural techniques, literacy, family planning, AIDS prevention projects, among other issues. The point of DI is to find the ways in which a new idea, new technology, new objects, or a new use of old ones, is communicated over time through particular channels, among the members of a social system (Rogers, 1995).

DI examines change as a process that takes several stages; it looks at what happens in each stage of the adoption process (knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation), what the barriers are, what type of channels may work better, what different categories of people are out there, and what they need in terms of communication to decide about adopting the innovation. One of the core contributions of DI is the use of both mass media and interpersonal channels in a two-step-flow of communication; it recognizes that media are effective when combined with the active

role of opinion leaders who share local cultural values – who spread information and facilitate to overcome the barriers of the diffusion process.

c. Social Marketing, Public Health Promotion and Edutainment tools

The idea of diffusion became inefficient after years of interventions and evaluations and it was updated with Social Marketing. Social Marketing (SM) is an adaptation of commercial marketing techniques applied to social programs, designed to influence certain pro-social behavior toward target audiences to improve their individual wellbeing (Kotler, et al., 2002). SM works under the same principles of any other marketing campaign: identifying and segmenting audiences, planning the steps to promote certain behaviors or products, and defining the “Four Ps” of the process: product, place, price, and promotion, which include making decisions about communication channels.

Adding, adapting and building on the experience of Diffusion Theories and Social Marketing, a new set of tools emerge particularly in the context of public health promotion. Health communication models were created from a pool of strategies that utilize mostly psychological approaches to examine the process of behavior change. Some of the most well-known are the Theory of Reasoned Action², The Stages of Change Model.³ Social Learning Theory and Self-efficacy⁴, among others. These models and theories have been adopted in hundreds of campaigns by a variety of public health

² The theory states that attitudes and subjective norms of an individual are predictors of behavior.

³ The model states that change is a process and people are situated in different stages of its continuum.

⁴ Bandura’s classic theories on social influences of individual behavior.

agencies, and promoted globally by organizations like the WHO (World Health Organization) (NCI, 2005).

One particular strategy, used mostly in the field of Health Communication, is Entertainment Education (EE). It came along in the 90s as a powerful model to improve the reach and effectiveness of programs that promote behavior change. My first encounter with this strategy was at the II International EE conference in 1997. One of the exhibits showed a music video featuring a young Ricky Martin and a group of teenage Latino pop-stars. He danced in a sexy manner and singed with his young female counterpart a song that promoted the idea of delaying sex. “Not yet” was the message. The charts and the data of this exhibit explained the positive impact of the music video strategy among the intended population about their perception on delaying sex.

In general, the appealing aspect of EE is the creativity of strategically utilizing entertaining sources such as music, drama genres in radio or TV, puppet-theater, comics books, games, storytelling, and participation of celebrities.

Using entertainment to educate people is nothing new, but in these projects “the strategy is supported by systematic research to reach the goals of disseminating educational, pro-social messages media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior” (Singhal and Rogers 1999, xii). For instance, soap operas have been used to promote family planning or HIV-AIDS prevention goals in several regions. Consistent with the concepts of Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, the objective is to provoke role modeling though storytelling. Typically, the scriptwriters of these programs

construct stories in such a way that the good and bad characters act as role models, that according to the plot, overcome barriers of change and get punishments or rewards for their behaviors. This way, the designers emphasize the benefits of healthy choices.

2.2.2. Criticism of Communication Approaches Rooted in Modernization Thought

Diffusion theories, social marketing tools, or health communication initiatives, have been used in the developing regions and generated mixed results. In many cases, they have been successful for promotion and prevention of health practices. Millions of people have benefited from vaccination campaigns, literacy, family planning programs, etc. and have learned about civic engagement, gender issues and Human Rights from media and other communication initiatives that fall under these models. However, these programs are still limited in their goals for change and have been the objects of many criticisms.

a. Literacy Bias, Urban and Income Bias

One of the shortcomings of the DI model is the assumption that the failure to adopt an innovation is an intrinsic problem of the social groups. Rogers (1995), for instance, uses the term “laggards” to name the category that describes people who were the slowest to adopt the innovation, which happens to be the majority of the population in the so-called Third World. This category, besides being pejorative, shows strong literacy and income related bias in the DI theory.

Rogers revisited his work in the last decades and softened its terms. He started to acknowledge the unwanted consequences of some diffusion projects, the relevance of network communities (1995), and the key role of community participation (1976).

However, the critics Beltrán (1976), Servaes and Jacobson, (1996) and Melkote and Steeves (2001) among others, have pointed out that this kind of participation is constrained by the model and limited to the goals prescribed by agencies and outside planners.

b. Advertising Derived Tools

The main criticism, particularly to Social Marketing, has to do with its premises and roots in advertising techniques. Advertising is one-issue-oriented. It works by targeting certain segments of a population, offering particular products to this target segments products. Melkote and Steeves (2001) question the individualistic approach of SM derived from its cousin, advertising. SM offers a product as a solution to a social problem and by doing so, it overlooks the contextual roots of the issues, the economic and social structures in which people experience their lives, and the collective and political organizations and efforts to challenge unjust conditions. Gumucio-Dagrón (1991) critically points out the problematic equation of people as consumers, rather than protagonists of change. This technique is concerned with individuals, not with groups or organizations and expects individual responses that often contribute to the division of communities rather than strength collective initiatives to improve community life. Also, its messages are directed to promote certain prescribed behaviors as products for sale and limit the options and complexity of life reducing choices while constraining participation. As Gumucio-Dagrón says, SM “dictates obedience”.

c. Extension Versus Participation

The notion of participation in this context of modernization embodied models is limited. It implies that the target audience generates feedback in certain steps of the campaign. This approach contrasts against a more comprehensive notion of participation that includes as its core community empowerment through liberatory dialogue. Freire's (1969) piece on *extension* versus *communication* highlights this issue. For him, communication involves mutual dialogue that facilitates the enrichment of subjectivities, whereas extension (diffusion) implies ways to objectify people; it is a "direct contradiction to a truly humanist outlook" (p. 94).

d. Value-free Tools for a Highly Value-laden Context of Development

Under the modernization frame communication is assumed in an instrumental way therefore it is seen as unbiased and objective. Jacobson questions the positivistic tools applied to evaluate and research media or communication process because they hinder the possibility to reflect on the process, on the meanings, on the gains, on the power issues. Jacobson warns against the tendency for what he calls "untheoretical method-ism" (p. 69) or positivistic tools in communication studies that make claims of being value-free and define problems as "natural" or technical, and disconnected from political and historical conditions of underdevelopment.

I have mentioned a set of overlapping criticisms to modernization-related communication efforts. However, a central one remains: If one wonders who decides what innovation, content, or change is desirable to whom, why, and how, what set of values are introduced, and what the consequences are in a large picture for the local

communities, one may find that they refer to an overarching issue of power, which tends to keep unnoticed and unchallenged under the modernization approach.

2.3. Critical Participatory Perspectives

There are a variety of experiences and reflections on development communication that come from views that distance themselves from the central premises of modernization. Some authors call them “participatory,” “popular,” (from the people, as in the Spanish *comunicación popular*), “grassroots communication,” “bottom-up,” “horizontal,” in some cases “revolutionary,” or just “communication for social change.” There is not a unified trend, but a range of experiences influenced mostly by Marxists, and particularly by theories such as the Dependency Theory, Cultural Imperialism, and Political Economy of media.⁵

Critical approaches to development communication don’t see society in terms of adaptation and equilibrium as in the modernization rationale, but in terms of conflict and permanent power struggle for social change. Therefore, the communication experiences born under their influence tend to consider people as center of development, subjects of history, and immersed in diverse levels of power relationships that need to be challenged. Thus, this view values the notions of social and economic justice while understanding the failure to develop as consequence of historical reasons such as colonialism and as a condition of global capitalism.

⁵ The Political Economy perspective offered a framework to identify the connections between capital forces, media ownership, corporate structures and their impacts in development of technology, politics, culture and information.

As an example of this view, Beltrán recalls his own experience as a Latin American communication expert trained in a U.S. university under the wings of modernization scholars. He, like others, upon returning to his country, questioned the models he learned. For Beltrán and his contemporaries, the technical question about how to better communicate with and educate farmers, needed to switch to the question *why?* Is this further exploitation? While structural problems like land concentration and exclusion of the poor continue, development communication efforts will only perpetuate an unjust system that favors national elites and international interests (CI, 2006).

Melkote and Steeves (2001), Waisbord (2001), Servaes (1999), Huesca (1995) among others, have critically noticed the limitations of modernization-based models and identified the necessity of the participatory perspective. This perspective, instead of conceiving development projects as a matter of transferring technical expertise, emphasizes local agency, community organization, and empowerment of the marginalized groups. It is not an enterprise to move from traditional cultures to modern ones, because culture under this view is not conceived as an obstacle to remove but as ever-changing process of making meanings that symbolize one's collective experience. Therefore, social change is not defined as a new technological product, a new adopted behavior or an innovation prescribed from a distant aid agency. Change, instead, is defined by local communities from their own culture and needs. In this perspective, communication, instead of being understood as a mechanism for delivering standardized messages, it is seen as the very process that enables engagement, that facilitates the

sharing of contextual knowledge, and that creates the conditions for networking, organization and action toward positive social change

2.3.1. *Comunicación Alternativa y Popular*

At the times of militaristic repression in Latin America, for many communicators and activists there, communication for development really meant communication for political struggle. A rich tradition of media projects that became apparent in the 1960s opposing local bourgeoisie's media and the transnational media markets were called "alternative media" or *comunicación popular*. Mario Kaplún one of the leaders of this movement writes about experiences that involve low technologically mediated communication, like the cassette- forum in which grassroots groups would exchange cassettes with their stories, debates and open-ended questions that would circulate among other local groups, which in turn would record contributions and keep circulating them. The communicator in this case is an enabler of this type of exchanges that would educate, inform and network communities (1985).

Besides cassette-forums, many other media made by local no-commercial, grassroots producers, flourished in Latin America. These experiences were associated with left-wing politics and attempted to represent *el pueblo* (the people) and to counterbalance the dominant ideological messages diffused by commercial and official media. At this time, the debates for a NWICO (New World Communication and Information Order) and the conversations preceding the MacBride Report (1970s and 1980s) stimulated the need for alternatives and offered a framework for local communication projects born during these times.

However, as Waisbord (1998) suggests, these initiatives cannot be easily put in the same bag; they are diverse and not necessarily connected. They ranged from local and low-budget print media, film, video and radio products, to large international projects like the news agency Prensa Latina, founded by the Nobel Laureate Gabriel García Márquez and other journalists to confront the flow of official news and the misinformation about political movements in the continent.

Beyond distributing alternative news, these initiatives included education and community organization. For instance, the pioneer Sutatenza *radio-escuelas* aimed to educate peasants in Colombia, the audio cassette-forums helped to mobilize marginalized workers in Venezuela, the legendary *radio mineras* in the highlands of Bolivia supported the mine workers' movement (Beltrán, 1980, Gumucio-Dagrón 2001), the Catholic church-led radio networks strengthened the landless peasants movement in Brazil, the bilingual radio Latacunga promoted literacy and organization of native peoples in Ecuador, and so on. No doubt alternative media, particularly radio, were central for counter-hegemonic movements as seen in the case of radio networks during the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and also in the case of *Radio Venceremos* during the civil war in El Salvador (López Vigil, 1994)⁶.

⁶ Besides the grassroots groups, also NGOs joined efforts to document and promote these media for social change. For instance the CINEP's works (CINEP is a Spanish acronym for Popular Research and Education Centre) in the poor districts of Bogotá, or the CORADEP (Radio Co-op of People's Education in Nicaragua) crafted manuals and training programs that inspired the job of radio networks during the Sandinista Revolution. Then ALER (Latin American Association of Radio Education), AMARC, (World Association of Community Broadcasting) and CIESPAL (International Center for the High Studies of Communication in Latin America), became our sources of information and training.

Since the 1990s, communication projects were not just limited to traditional left-wing and Catholic pro-poor organizations, but included a vast array of organizations such as women's, indigenous, ethnic, youth, human rights, and gay and lesbian groups (Wasisbord, 1998). Very often, the label “alternative media” switched to “community media” or “*comunicación comunitaria*.” Many projects that started as illegal adventures or underground radio, with the evolution of the political environment due to transitions to democracy in some countries, or due to pressure by social movements, gained legalization and official recognition.

The legalization of community radios and TV in several Latin American countries has opened up the possibility of expressing local voices and counterbalancing centralized commercial media programming. The political tint also expanded in many shades. Some radios serve as outlets for evangelical prayers, for co-op associations, students, artists, women groups, etc. In Colombia, since 1995 community radios had been legalized and it is documented that they not only offer “other contents,” but attempt to compete with commercial radios by offering live programming, local presence, and diverse aesthetic expressions neglected by traditional mass media (WBIST, 2007). Radios are maturing as citizens’ media; they are not just labeled as marginal, “alternative to,” but also as central places for civic conversation⁷. Richer in goals and responding to more diverse audiences,

⁷ See for instance the experience of “*A Gatas, Chats at the park in Colombia*” in which 19 community radio stations participated in research and animated public conversations on issues of childhood development. The “chats” took place at the plazas or parks of 19 towns and had follow-ups in the community radio stations during 2002.

community media and particularly radio, represent a serious hope for democratic communication in the continent⁸.

There are overlapping aspects between all these types of communication experiences, alternative, popular, participatory, and community media. For the sake of emphasizing some their particularities, I make the following section for participatory communication.

2.3.2. Participatory Communication and Citizenship

In the 1970s and 1980s, enriched by the contributions of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, communication experiences at the grassroots introduced elements of liberatory education and community participation. Freire (1975) understood participation not just as a tool for reaching certain ends, but also as an end in itself. The core of liberatory educational encounters involves action and personal/collective transformation. For Freire, overcoming oppression requires a pedagogical experience in which people learn not from contents and information that merely make them reproduce the conditions of their oppression but from each other contextual experience. This pedagogy he envisions is not *for* the oppressed but *of* the people who live under oppression. The goal of education proposed by Freire is to engage in dialogue in order to gain critical awareness of the conditions of oppression. This process of collective awakening that he calls *concientizacion*, means to understand one's position in life and with others, and with the oppressor. The liberatory experience of being fully human happens when people gain

⁸ Radios are getting stronger while engaging in networking process with associations such AMARC or ALER. They exchange knowledge, products, news services, training, legal, financial and technical advice.

their voices, to express *the word (la palabra)*. The reflection that is generated by the act of gaining voice is action itself, or *praxis*, (word/reflection/action). Through this pedagogy, the learner transitions from being a passive receiver of information and becomes a subject able to overcome the Culture of Silence and conformity cultivated through centuries of oppression.

Martín Barbero (2001) follows Freire's reasoning on the Culture of Silence instituted in Latin America since the colonial times explaining that "the essence of the alienation (from speaking *la palabra*) is not only imposition of the values and ideas but the radical devaluation of one's own existence. The colonized people, dispossessed of their land and traditions (...) learn to devalue their own language and culture (p.25).

Freire's proposition of emancipatory education inspired hundreds of adult educators and communicators in Latin America and also in some African regions. His pedagogy was originally meant to take place in interpersonal settings; however, its ideas spread to mediated communication.

Mass media (even alternative media) in contrast to interpersonal communication are considered non-participatory and unidirectional in nature. However, as Jacobson (2004) suggests when trying to analyze a community development experience in Nepal by employing elements of Habermas's communicative action theory, media can and do play multiple roles within the context of democratic participation. Media can become a forum for thematizing and debating validity claims of development plans; can help opening up a discursive space for public debate and action; can raise questions,

encouraging people to talk about their needs, and can provide information that help people to make decisions about processes of change.

Obviously there are overlapping themes between alternative media, popular, and other sort of community education projects. I want to emphasize here the participatory dimension that sees communication closer to education and empowerment. A classic example in Latin America of participatory mediated communication and community organizing happened in Lima during 1980s and 1990s. It was the case of *Calandria*, a combination of interpersonal and media communication processes that facilitated democratic and cultural change. The Peruvian organization called *Calandria* combined group communication, networking and media efforts to gain voice in the *pueblos nuevos*, or Lima's slums. Rosa María Alfaro, (1984) researcher and activist for this particular work, writes about the power of migrant women of indigenous and peasant backgrounds, newcomers to the city who barely spoke Spanish, and their exploration of ways to learn to communicate *by talking*: by using the microphone in the markets, by comparing the price of groceries, and by exploring local sources for providing food, care and well-being to their families. Besides, they organized their community work and *El vaso de Leche* (the glass of milk) co-ops around the local radio shows while telling stories of the families' migration. They shared stories about their adjustment to the city and their understanding of politics, which there meant a sort of "extended" motherhood, a female way to sustain life, to "raise the barrio", in the words of the Cecilia Blondet, (1987). These women, known as *las mujeres del vaso de leche*, created an experience that burst

outside the radio station and produced the seeds for personal and political transformations that affected the political life with the emergence of new urban citizens (Alfaro, 1992).

Examples like these of media and social mobilization for social change emerged in the landscape of Latin America in times of military dictators. They continued to do so afterward, in times of transition to democracy, and under other sort of oppressions, like the presence of mafias in the Colombian case. The very act of finding ways of public expression, the collective encounter for learning to talk and deliberate, and the possibility of gaining presence in the public space as citizens with power, became a central preoccupation for Latin American activists and scholars. Clemencia Rodríguez (2001) interested in exploring these experiences, coined the term “citizens’ media” to cover hundreds of democratic media projects around the world. This more inclusive concept expresses a non- binary way to understand communication experiences that:

“...account for the processes of empowerment, conscientisation, and fragmentation of power that result when men, women, and youth gain access to and re-claim their own media. As they use media to re-constitute their own cultural codes to name the world in their own terms, citizens’ media participants disrupt power relationships, exercise their own agency and re-constitute their own lives, futures, and cultures” (p.2).

2.3.3. Limits and Criticism of Citizen’s Media and Critical Participatory Approaches

The experiences of the pioneer *comunicación alternativa y popular*, although politically charged and passionate for social transformation, generated questions about their limitations. Some started asking about their paternalistic style, their political indoctrination, and the unidirectionality of their messages (Waisbord, 1998).

“Why they don’t read us?” asked the union workers alternative press in Colombia in the 1980s. A content analysis study of their print media made by CINEP, a national research institute (Herrán, 1989) identifies a number of limitations of the alternative print media to engage with the people they claimed to represent. This problem coincides with the results of another study on the role of “popular” press in Chile during the socialist Salvador Allende’s road to presidency (Sunkel, 1985). Both studies point out that the “workers’ media” encapsulated the notions of “popular” only in leftist politicizable terms, equating “people” to workers and peasants, and reducing stories and themes to issues of class struggle. Other places different from the plaza, the factory, or the marches on the streets, were absent in their pages. Images and stories that failed to politically educate (indoctrinate) the masses were dismissed or used as “fillings.” Herrán (1989) notices that the political rhetoric and rigid genres of these type of alternative media seemed to shape the same news repeated infinite times, dismissing diverse and complex experiences that people deal with in their everyday life.

A similar limitation of communication efforts, even of those who work hard to include participatory elements, is the assumption of change as a lineal way, or as series of steps of evolutionary consciousness. Huesca (1996) notices that “for some (community radio) practitioners, raising consciousness was the only appropriate way of changing society” (p.29). This focus on “first let’s raise conciseness” seems paradoxically vertical and leaves little room for the inclusion of emerging themes in communication messages and for flexible communication responses in the shifting conditions of social life.

In the 1990s, with the inclusion of new media technologies, more diverse actors, genres, aesthetics, and contexts of struggle make their presence in the so-called alternative or counter-media. However Waisbord (1998) explains that these media tend to “exist in political-cultural pockets without having any significant impact on mainstream media” (p. 1). While many self-declared alternative media suffer the problem of talking mostly to themselves, community media or citizens’ media face limitations and contradictions: issues of financial survival, poor quality of their radio/TV signal, low technical training, etc. One central challenge of alternative and citizen’s media has to do with defining their identity in relationship to the plurality of the communities that they represent. They would need to put in practice the suggestion of “using their two ears instead of one big mouth” and daring to listening to their audiences⁹.

Gómez from AMARC, quoted by Rodriguez (2004), says that community radio suffers “the fate of the three Ps: *pequeñas* (small), *pobres* (poor), *pocas* (few)”. This perception is shared mostly by telecommunication policy makers that tend to diminish the power and possibilities of these media (Rodriguez, 2004). The groups leading alternative and citizen’s media have the challenge to demonstrate that they are not just marginal, ghetto-like, low-quality projects and dependant upon volunteer work, donations, and experiments. They need to define themselves not only as a counter-content-protest formula, but as active citizens engaging the communication needs of diverse communities

⁹ Interview to the Gladys Herrera in August 22, 2004.

and participating in the formation of conversations that include new actors, places, needs, and themes related to social change.

Another challenge to the participatory perspective, particularly in the context of interpersonal experience and development interventions, is its elusive definition. It is difficult to assess the impact and significance of these media by using traditional indicators that usually focus on evaluating visible outcomes measured through observation and use of statistics, which seem inadequate to account for the complexity of community engagement and empowering.

2.4. The Latin Twist: Communication and Cultural Studies from Latin America

In the 1980s, at the peak of the political discussion on media ownership, a refreshing view of communication linked to culture emerged in our Latin American academia. Jesús Martín Barbero (1995), a Colombian communication scholar dared to question the salient communication theory models. In his view the political economy of media as much as the functionalist American models represent two sides of the same coin. Both assume no agency on the side of the audience. Introducing culture implies that the receiver's site is not just an ending point; nor a site of passive reproduction of ideologies, but a site of sense-making.

Martín Barbero, García Canclini, Guillermo Orozco, Marita Matta, and other Latin American scholars saw media audiences not just as manipulated masses, but as subjects, interacting from their own history and hybrid cultural sensitivities with the industrial logic of media. This perspective pushed for recognizing what Martín Barbero

calls *mediations* or located cultural practices of media use, people's particular modes of reading, re-appropriation of the symbols of massive culture, and the recreation of new meanings.

The implication of this view is that it is not possible to see "pure" Latin American communities acting and organizing for social change outside the noisy, powerful presence of mass media. Martín Barbero talks about vast counter-hegemonic experiences inserted in the everyday life of the urban popular experience. Mass cultural seductions, complicities, resistance, divisions, and transgressions need to be taken into account to understand the ways in which people are connecting to each other and to the larger social organization in today's mediated environment.

I highlight here one of Martín Barbero's contributions to analyze communication for social change. He compares the failures of the socialist press during the Allende's socialist experiment in Chile versus the popular acceptance and the role of the sensationalist media in those critical political times. He argues, by using Guillermo Sunkel's studies (1985), that the socialist press, in spite of its effort of being equalitarian, fell into the a similar logic of the modernization paradigm rooted in the Enlightenment project; it separated reason from emotion and created in its language, story telling style, imagery and themes distance with people's everyday lives. The socialist press tried to educate the masses by using a lecturing format. It failed to grasp the cultural meanings expressed by the people on the streets. Its language and logic were disconnected from what Sunkel called a "cultural narrative matrix" that allows audiences to engage and find emotions and cultural connections. While the socialist party press didn't seem to find

their reader's soul, the sensationalist press during the difficult days became the most popular and appealing media. How was this possible?

“...the melodramatic aesthetic [of sensationalist press] dared to violate the rationalistic division between serious and frivolous themes, to treat political events as dramatic events, and break with ‘objectivity’ by observing the situation that appeals the subjectivity of the readers (...) this [cultural] matrix does not operate on the basis of concepts and generalizations but expresses itself in images and concrete situations. Rejected by the world of official education and serious politics, it survives in the world of culture industry, and from this base it continues to exercise a powerful appeal to the popular” (Barbero, 1993, p. 178).

Martín Barbero's insights on the modes of using media, on the messy and complicated engagements that include passion, emotion and connectedness to local and personal meanings, marked the beginning of Latin American Cultural Studies. This emerging perspective moves the focus from media to cultural practices in the new territories that the Latin American version of modernity produces. In his view the new process of production and circulation of culture is not totally determined by technology, by commercial plots, or by the sender's intentions, but by the new sensibilities and ways of socialization that people use to face the heterogeneity of symbols and the overwhelming experience of urban life.

Culture in Latin America, as Garcia Canclini (1989), Martín Barbero (1993) and other scholars suggest¹⁰, is predominantly recreated by the tensions between popular

¹⁰ A boom of scholarship started to grow and rewrite the map of communication studies in Latin America during the 1990s exploring new sites of inquiries. Besides Martín Barbero, Valerio Fuenzalida's studies on critical reception of TV in Chile implies the empowering the viewers; Guillermo Orozco's interest on connecting “active media reception” and education in Mexico also underlines the power asymmetry and the need for changes in both, media and education systems; Beatriz Sarlo's research on use of technology, aesthetics and the city, and Carlos Monsivais' exploration of the identity in the chaotic Mexico City represent political questions about new ways of social and political mobilization and resistance in the

culture(s) traditional, anachronistic memories and practices, and experiences of migration, re-localization and fragmentation of living in the city in times of mass media omnipresence and global capitalism.

This academic approach does not mean to remain uncritical of media industries, or to overemphasize audiences' agency, neither to minimize issues of power. This interest in privileging cultural practices, rather than media effects, represent an epistemological and methodological twist – a way to inscribe the question of culture into larger ones: how to generate strategies that acknowledge the complexity of cultural identities, how to create communication practices that understand and connect to local hybrid sensibilities, how to imagine new ways to challenge excluding communication structures, how to finally resist them, how to reflect on the communicator or agent's own cultural biographies, and how to offer voice to the subjects recognizing that they are immersed in webs of exchange beyond physical territories in their ever changing cultures.

2.5. Convergences in Development Communication

In spite of the different epistemologies of the above-described approaches, in the practice there is blending between critical participatory and modernization-informed works. Morris (2003) reviews 44 international communication experiences and concludes that diffusion-informed models have evolved in a direction that includes participatory elements. Diffusion of innovations is necessary to achieve development's short term

modern urban life; while Garcia Canclini's examination of cultural consumption and hybridization of traditions and modernity points out that consumption is a new place for political struggle to define hegemonic views in Latin America.

goals and may be a helpful reactive tool to deal with, for instance, health issues, whereas participatory communication supports engagement of local communities in discussions about health and may encourage their participation into decision-making to improve the situation. In this regard, Petersen (2007) proposes a model that integrates these theories under a new framework of Public Relations for social change. She suggests that certain PR models will counterbalance the problems of asymmetry ingrained in diffusion models and also, would fill the gap of participatory models that lack measuring tools to evaluate project's effectiveness.

Health education and health communication fields have been traditionally associated to models of behavior change, however, recently some scholars and activists have started to use critical perspectives and recognized the relevance of environmental changes as they combine social marketing and empowerment actions (Steston & Davis 1999). More recently, Zoller (2007) and Brown et al. (2004) discuss the concept of "health activism" which describes a trend of practices in health communication that link it with health citizenship and community organizing. In another case of merging paradigms, Singhal (2002) reports the use of Entertainment and Education strategies (diffusion-based) in AIDS prevention campaigns under a Freire's dialogical umbrella and the use Augusto Boal's empowering tool called Theater of the Oppressed.

Participation seems to become a buzz word in any development project. While development communication, from a participatory and critical view, conceives participation less as means to an end, and values it as a process where people are regarded as agents of change, the diffusion models employ interpersonal communication

channels and promote community involvement as means to reach particular development outcomes (Morris 2003, p. 227). She notices that, although some projects “are perceived to give lip services to the holy grail of participation, there are still far from genuine participatory projects in which citizens work in the process of determining their needs, designing and implementing programs to address these needs” (p. 226).

A critical thread of thought in the analysis of communication for development that falls into a non-material framework is spirituality. Steeves (2001) discusses how spirituality motivates resistance and empowerment. In other contribution, Steeves calls attention to the need of feminist approaches to investigate the ways in which women face contextual and particular forms of exclusion within the gendered structures of communication and development processes.

In sum, most international agencies, NGOs, and scholars agree that communication for development entails a diverse “process of public and private dialogue through which people in marginalized social groups define what type of social change they need and what, and how they can get it” (CI, 2001). Melkote & Steeves agree that it is “a process of consensus building and resistance [...] historically grounded, cultural sensitive and multifaceted” (2001, p. 38).

In this study I utilize the above mentioned definition of development communication emphasizing the notions of communities’ self-determination and exploring how communication practitioners promote “public and private dialogues” in “cultural sensitive and multifaceted” processes.

2.6. Who Is in Charge of the Development Communication Job?

“Although theories, or models of practice constitute basic components of the conditions for action, without individual actors, there can not be action (Colier 1994) “ p. 171

The dominant literature of development communication focuses on models, theories, criticisms, techniques, and hundreds of reports showing lessons learned, summaries of experiences, and recommendations. I find problematic in the discourse of the agencies and in the scholarly discourse the use of the passive voice “communication programs *are implemented*”, “ *will be implemented*”, or the normative voice “*should be implemented*” in this or that way. What remains invisible is the fact that this complex job is done by certain types of communication practitioners, not by abstract agents following predefined steps, applying models and methods in the vacuum.

Communication and development are hard to grasp concepts, let alone the profile of the development communicator. During the first decades of international development interventions, even before calling this person a communicator, the label used was “traditional change agent,” the one in charge of “educating” peasants about the benefits of western innovations and of changing their traditional mindsets (Melkotes & Steeves 2001, p 60). Rural development programs used the term *extensionist* to name the person responsible for disseminating information doing interpersonal demonstrations of certain products or techniques, and training and visiting rural “clients” (Leeuwis, C. & van den Ban, 2004). Ascroft and Agunda (1994) introduce the role of *trained* communicators working within what they called a *triadic model for participatory decision making*. Unlike the traditional change agent, whose task is to influence receiver’s behavior, the

professional communicator should serve as neutral communication channel between citizens and government or funding agencies. This trained communicator transmits information back and forth from government or agencies to communities without acting as a partisan for the government or for the funding agency (1994, p. 310).

Normative descriptions of this sort and assumptions of “neutrality” fail to recognize the social actor, and insist in a mechanical view of the communicator as intermediary between agencies and community. Therefore, there is little room for reflection or problematization of this emerging professional field.

2.6.1. Undefined Occupation

The job of development communicators remains not only taken for granted, but also undefined and somehow mysterious. Gumucio Dagron (2002) reports,

[I]n the early nineties, UNICEF realized that its information and communications officers at the field level were appointed under about 50 different names. From the straight forward "communication or information officer", to "social mobilization", "advocacy", "development support communication", "community mobilization", "social marketing", "development communication", "media", "external relations", "public relations officers (n.p.).

Besides the blurry labels and the confusing expectations, there is also a problem of undervaluing communication. Cliff, a health communicator based in Washington, writes “I find such exclusion and lack of understanding about who we are and what we do as partners in the business of social progress” (1997, p.66). This complaint is an example of how, in the circles of international development, the debates have tended to marginalize the area of communication either as a technical field, or as a means of “delivering messages” and promoting “behavior change.” Along similar lines, Silvio

Waisbord (2005) points out that the communicators are placed in low-status positions in the institutional context of social development due to the misconception of communication as a non-rigorous field – just words and images, plus the persistent assumption that communication itself is an optional component of projects. When the budget runs out, communication can be cut off.

In the development field, the idea that communication is synonymous of information (Gumucio-Dagrón, 2002) fits into the modernization perspective, reinforcing the assumption that communication equates neutral spread from top-down, from more powerful to less powerful actors. However, this limited notion of communication is not exclusive of diffusion or marketing oriented practices; it also permeates the so-called participatory projects or community-centered projects. As mentioned above in the case of the union worker's press in Colombia, the press in Chile, some community radio programs and some alternative media, the modernizing temptation permeates all sorts of communication practices.

It is not surprising then, that Gumucio-Dagrón (2002), after analyzing development projects, and so-called participatory communication projects in more than 30 countries claims that the bottleneck in most of them is the absence of community participation and the lack of efficient communication practices. Who is in charge of engaging community, generating participation? “Communicators” he answers. However, he points out that the individuals in charge of the communication component usually do not have the professional training needed for this particular field, nor the experience to connect technical skills with concepts, projects design, and local, cultural sensibility.

Gumucio-Dagrón (2001) quotes Manuel Calvelo, director of CESPAC, a center for media training in Peru, commenting on the need for formation of this type of practitioners:

It seems there are more than 300 communication schools in Latin America, training over 120,000 students. Most of these training centres (*sic*) aim to prepare communication professionals for the mass media, the advertising industry, the so-called business communications and public relations. There is not one single school of communications really training communicators for development. In part, that is the very reason why we find such a distressing situation in the field [...] Our society needs schools that form another kind of communicator, those that do not exist right now, at least not in the quantities that are needed (n.p.).

If there are few university-certified communicators, who is doing the job?

Gumucio-Dagrón (2002) reports that agronomists, sociologists, rural extension workers, and social workers have turned into development communicators. He warns that journalists are often too biased towards mass media and vertical practices, while public relations professionals, according to him, often hold expectations that the communicator's job is oriented to maintain institutional image, press relations, and "outward communication" (n.p.).

2.6.2. *In Search of the Profession's Core*

The problem seems to be identifying the particular scope and characteristics of the profession. But is this a profession? The term *profession* comes from the Latin "to profess" (Etymo on-line, 2007), and it stands for "paid occupation one professes to be skilled in." Being professional implies systematization of knowledge, association, codes,

particular training, and quality of standards shared by the body of people who are part of that occupation (OED, 2005).

Gumucio-Dagrón (2002) asserts that a new communicator for social change should be a professional “equipped with a strategic perspective of communication for development and the conviction that communication is not about messages but rather about processes of transformation and social change” (n.p.). Waisbord (2005) participating a on-line forum of the matter offers that the professional should focus on understanding networking and community meaning-making. A “comprehensive understanding of communication [...] focuses on how people develop social connections to build and maintain individual and communal identities and to make sense of the world” (n.p.).

Along similar lines, Melkote & Steeves (2001) suggest that development communicators have a new role in assisting the process of empowerment of individuals, groups, and organizations. “This calls for grassroots organizing and communicative social action on the part of the women, the poor, minorities, and others who have been consistently and increasingly marginalized in the process of social change” (p. 38). More than intermediaries, these authors state that “greater importance will be given to the organisational value of communication and the role of participative social action in empowering citizens” (p.39).

The switch of attention from media making to meaning-making, and empowering processes, implies a sophisticated professional field that requires contributions from several streams of knowledge. Therefore, with the interest in exploring the increasingly

complex role of development communicators in the processes of social change, the Ford Foundation, the USAID-funded CHANGE Project, and other organizations that formed the Communication for Change Consortium organized an international conference where a group of scholars, aid agencies' representatives, and some practitioners shared their views. Their meeting in Bellagio, Italy, 2002, and in 2004, produced a set of guidelines on competences, attitudes and skills of the practitioner, and a map that describes the functions of communication for development. This map and other sources aim to help agencies, curriculum developers, and development planners to approach training/education needs of the communication practitioners in their way to professionalization. (Appendix A).

The central function of the communicator described in the map is "to facilitate efforts by people to achieve sustainable improvements in individual and collective well-being". It shows the diverse complexity of expectations for this profession. The communicator would need to know ways of enabling dialogue and recognizing cultural differences, facilitating ways in which local community members decide about their own process of change, and also, on the other side of the spectrum, the communicator would be in charge of design programs that articulate with larger development goals, implement them, engage in participatory evaluation, and make reports that would close the cycle promoting community dialogue about the outcome of the processes (Irigoin, et al. 2002).

Some of the core ideas derived from the Bellagio meeting are summarized in at least three reports by Irigoin, et al. (2002), Heimann (2004), and Huarcaya (2006). All of them show a demanding professional activity that requires, not only communication

skills, but understanding of development trends, policy making, cultural competences, research skills, and even adult education tools informed by Freirean thought (Huarcaya, 2006).

In 2004, in a similar direction, the Development Communication Program at Ohio University hosted an online survey to explore the skills and profile of the communication practitioner who now is in demand by aid organizations internationally¹¹. The intention was to design an online training package that matches the interests of the agencies and practitioners. This Ohio University survey asked what they needed to learn, not what they actually knew and did. These efforts to establish competences, skills, and lists of characteristics of what was needed for training and professionalization of development communicators, still did not include the grounded experience and the tale of the subjects, and their own voices and reflections.

2.6.3. Practitioners Talking about Their Job

I am interested in exploring the nuances of everyday life and hearing the reflections and voices of practitioners instead of a list of standardized skills. In the field of development communication there is lack of professional narratives with, perhaps, the exception of one piece: Huesca's work in which Bolivian community radio producers conceptualize their practice (1995). Interested in finding more personal accounts I searched the internet for informal testimonies, entries, stories that show how

¹¹ According to David Mould, director of the Development Communication Program at Ohio University, from January to March 2004, more than 400 people from over 30 countries responded to the 17-question survey. The top three-favored needs for training were: program evaluation, participatory communication, and campaign planning.

communicators discuss their practice. By using the keywords “*development communicator*” and “*communicator for social change*” on the largest web source in the field, Communication Initiative (CI)¹² and also on its Spanish language version *La Iniciativa de la Comunicación*, I found 481 matches, 339 matches in CI and 142 in the Spanish site (March, 2006). I took a random sample of 30 documents, (one every other page) in both languages.

I briefly skimmed the pages (articles, reports, news and opinion pieces) and found a variety of documents, mostly posted by NGOs, and seemingly written by agency officials announcing materials and events for training communicators. Other entries seem to be posted by communicators themselves, talking about their needs for training and also inviting others to conferences or to be part of associations. I categorized the themes: (1) Need for Training (2) Call for Participation to conferences / workshops (3) Criticism (4) Associations’ news.¹³

Besides an entry under the category of criticism that dealt with practitioner’s reflections about irresponsible practices in health prevention, that include few paragraphs

¹² CI includes 17,000-plus pages of base line data from development and communication sectors. It includes descriptions of cases, articles, reports and documents that describe methodologies and theories. In 2004 it had 57,324 subscribers.

¹³ (1) *Need for Training*: Need to learn new technologies, need to show the value of communication; need to know how to incorporate local knowledge; need to learn local languages; need to improve evaluation methods. (2) *Calls for conferences / workshops*: Invitation to practitioners to participate in social, celebratory or academic events. (3) *Criticism*: Articles or commentaries criticizing the practice. For instance: Lack of knowledge of communication beyond journalism; practitioners too close to government officials; propagandistic tone; plus reflections on how to deal with specific issues: i.e. the limited information on Avian flu and how to communicate about it. (4) *Associations*: Announcements made by groups of communicators. i.e. Calandria; Christian communicators; Global communicators Association; Communicator For the environment, Native people’s communication association (Peru).

of practitioners' voices and reflections, none of the remaining samples describe the everyday practice of communicators.

The preceding pages have described the paradox between the blurry status of the communicators' occupation and the vast expectations upon them. It's also paradoxical the highly demanding complexities of the development field in the macro levels and the almost invisible space for the local practitioners in the micro level to share knowledge, tools and dilemmas of their work. In spite of the recent normative definitions of the profession outlined by the international community of development experts, the voice of the local communication practitioner from the ground is still missing. This situation led me to formulate the research questions of this study.

2.6.4. Research Questions

As previously discussed, communicators for development are subjects situated in particular locations, coming from complex backgrounds, deciding about ways in which the "implementation" of development communication plans takes place. They are in charge of the materialization of notions of development or social change when they negotiate, design, and "translate" – in images, sounds, stories, music, public encounters, and group conversations, or when they subvert the proposals or the methods that are prescribed from the desks of government institutions or of foreign aid organizations.

The main gap I found in the reviewed scholarship is the invisibility of communicators as agents of social change and their "being-in-the-field" experience. There is no recognition of their interpretation and versions of development, and their situated experiences and resources that allow them to use certain strategies, to materialize

ideas in concrete messages, or media products, and to engage productively – or not – in particular encounters and projects. Given the limited scholarship on the role of development communicators, the overemphasis on universalistic and normative sets of skills and expectations, and the lack of situated personal narratives that make visible meanings of communication for social change, I propose the following question:

RQ1: Who are these professionals called development communicators?

What do they do? What are the assumptions of development / social change that inform the communicator's practice? How are everyday decisions influenced by and intertwined with personal/professional expectations, institutional discourses of development, and community's demands?

The current literature also lacks a critical examination of the dilemmas and tensions in the communicator's field, their negotiations with other players such as agencies, community, and media. Communicators' positions of power remain unnoticed due to the assumptions of neutrality of this job (seen as delivering messages). Here what are missing are not only the professional challenges, but a reflection on the communicator's location in the overall discourse of development as modernization that represents power. Additionally absent are her or his particular locations (gender, education privilege, race, sources of information, imagination and political views) that affect communication encounters. Given these gaps, this is the second research question:

RQ2: How do they work? What are the dilemmas and challenges that development communicators deal with in their work? What are the power asymmetries present and reproduced in the communication encounters and in the

language of the development projects? How do dominant values coming from the modernization paradigm of development permeate concrete communication projects, materials and encounters?

Development interventions tend to be seen as abstract implementations of already made knowledge. Studies in development communication tend to focus on macro strategies but have paid little attention to the situated craft of the projects and to practitioners' agency in making fieldwork decisions. There is lack of reflection on the materialization of the communication encounter: the workshop, the copy writing, the process of making a campaign, the aesthetic and ethical decisions, and other sources that aim to generate participatory engagements. Given this situation, I post this third question:

RQ3 : What are the sources, principles, or creative tools that communicators for development use in their practice to facilitate participatory encounters and to resist or reduce power asymmetries? How do they reflect on particular practices that may challenge, question and subvert existing ways of doing communication for development?

In sum, this study is asking three questions: 1) who are these professionals, 2) what do they do and what power-related challenges they face, and 3) what are their principles and strategies to promote social change. I will approach the questions by focusing on the micro level of the development communication practice, exploring day-to-day events, artifacts, discussions, and decisions that a team of communication practitioners deal with when in charge of projects of social change in Colombia.

CHAPTER III

CONTEXT: COLOMBIA'S VERSIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Colombia, located on the North-western corner of South America, is the third-most populous country in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico, with a population of 45 million people. It is diverse in natural resources, geographical climates, and cultures. The literacy rate was 92.5% in 2006 (WB, 2007), around 77% of the population lives in urban areas; the life expectancy is 73 years and the *per capita* GDP (PPP) was \$8,400 in 2006. Colombia also is with Brazil one of the countries of the region that shows the highest income gap between rich and poor with a Gini index of 5.2 (WB, 2007). According to national statistics, the economy grew by 7.62% during 2007 (DANE,2007). Similarly, the national employment rate increased in a 3% rate in the last year and extreme poverty was reduced from 15% to 12% in the same period. The Colombian government brags about these indicators of economic improvement and expects to attract international investment now that the country is assumed to be accelerating its economic growth.

However, the social panorama is not that optimistic. Half of the population still lives under the poverty line; more than 3.5 million Colombians are internally displaced

due to political violence¹⁴, and in 2003 around 4 million had migrated abroad due to financial pressures or violence (Berube, 2005). Violence and insecurity still affect the country although the index of kidnapping has decreased. Human Rights groups reported that more than 70 trade union members were killed in 2006, more than 45 members of indigenous communities were murdered in the first half of 2006, more than 770 civilians were killed or forcibly disappeared during the first half of the year, and approximately 219,000 people were forcibly displaced in 2006 (AI, 2007).

This chapter briefly describes seven forces/versions of social change and transformation that the country has experienced during the recent history of the last 60 years and it closes with an overview on the journalist and media environment of the country. I came up with this number of forces/versions while trying to understand what the different actors see as “moving forward,” “utopia,” “development,” “transformation,” and also what concrete consequences these changes actually generated. These descriptions are not exhaustive and are not necessarily related to “development” in the strict sense, and are not necessarily positive. I chose to start this description in 1948 because that year marks a turning point in Colombia’s history with the beginning of the civil war called *La Violencia* which encapsulates the tensions and disparities that had marked the country until today.

¹⁴ Over the 1985-2005 period 3.5 million people were displaced according to CODHES a national Human Rights NOG, but numbers can be larger since many cases are underreported.

3.1. *La Violencia*, War and Migration

In 1948 Colombia was polarized between the two main political parties: the conservative and the liberal party. The popular caudillo Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, leader of the liberal party, the *rojos*, pejoratively called *cachiporros*, had the majority's support to become president but he was killed in the streets of Bogotá few weeks before the elections. As a response to his assassination the newly formed urban masses devastated the city, burning buildings, looting, and killing hundreds of people. The official response of the conservative government was bloody repression, militarization of the streets and control of the media.

This episode of violence called *El Bogotazo* changed the history of the country, initiating eight years of civil war (1948-1956). Gaitan's assassination and its subsequent violent events became a landmark in the collective memory of the nation similar perhaps to the assassination of John F. Kennedy in the mind of Americans. The war between followers of the liberal and conservative parties, called *La Violencia*, spread through the whole nation, particularly desolating the rural areas and small towns. *La Violencia*, or civil war, of the 1950s was characterized by the reinforcement of the traditional power structure of the country and the expropriation of land from the peasantry; it forced waves of migration to the urban areas, helped to concentrate land ownership and maintain and prepared the soil for the birth of the guerrilla movements that until today operate in Colombia, (Sánchez & Meertens 2001).

La Violencia ended but violence continued. Leaders of both enemy parties stopped the hostilities by agreeing to share political power for almost 30 years, until the 80s, in a sort of civil dictatorship called *El Frente Nacional* (National Front) (Sánchez and Meertens, 1984) in which the two reconciled parties alternated power every four years distributing their privileged positions in the government and closing any space for real opposition or for alternative political agendas, in a political style that was seen as a “civil dictatorship”.

3.2. *Desarrollismo* or Developmentalism

The times of post-civil war saw the experimentation of *desarrollismo* or *developmentalism*. A series of institutions, plans and infrastructure was created by the government in consonance with large-scale development interventions. Escobar (1995) provides a detailed critique of the birth of development and the faith in *desarrollismo* in Colombia, exposing the relations between discourse and practice. The state-led programs of developmentalism were supported by the U.S. aid agencies and the multilateral Breton Woods institutions that created the language, institutions, expertise and objects of development-as-modernization. The developmentalist model in Latin America was centered on an inward development strategy of import substitution (Kay 1989). This model assumed the modernization of country by promoting industries, urbanization and inner consumption. However, the problems of poverty and exclusion remained intact and the modern technologies of development, combined with traditional structures of the land, didn't affect change as expected. Thus although Colombia stepped into the

modernization mode, it became more indebted and dependent of the international development players.

3.3. Insurgency's Version of Change

The left wing armed insurgency was born right after the civil war and strengthened under the *Frente Nacional* when the local democratic space for dissent was closed, and during the times of the Cold War when the Soviet Union supported revolutionary projects in Latin America. The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, (FARC-EP), *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL) and *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (M-19) and other guerrilla organizations attracted fractions of liberal ex-combatants, newly dispossessed peasants, indigenous peoples, university students, intellectuals, barrios' community leaders and even dissident priests. These movements initially gained popular support mostly in the regions where the state services were absent. Guerrillas ruled vast rural regions and became one of the few employment organizations for hundreds of Colombians in the rural areas. According to their philosophy, they represented the communist revolutionary force for social justice; the army of the poor; the Marxist alternative to contest the power structure that remained unchallenged by the civil war. For the rural young men and women that joined these movements, guerrillas meant a way out of the impoverished countryside; they meant a job, a gun, a uniform and for some, a legitimate cause.

The background of the insurgency was a political atmosphere of exclusion of democratic debate and the permanent military presence to repress civil unrest, part of a

National Security Policy consistent with the larger political doctrine of anticommunism supported and exported by the U.S during the years of the Cold War (Molano, 2001).

Although Colombia remained a formal democracy, the longest of the continent, in practice the country experienced a similar situation of Human Rights abuses as other Latin American countries that suffered the rule of dictatorships during the 1970s and 1980s. Meanwhile the Armed conflict didn't fulfill a promise of positive social change but exacerbated the precarious conditions of the civilian population —particularly *campesinos*— who had to flee combat zones and seek refuge in urban areas where they join the poverty belts. Since the 1980s, guerrillas entered into the lucrative enterprise by “taxing” drug traffickers, practicing extortion and kidnapping wealthy people; as a response, the mafia cartels declared war against guerrilla and formed the first paramilitary armies that operated under the blind eye of the Colombian official forces (Molano, 2001).

Several attempts of peace dialogue between successive governments and guerillas have failed and the few experiments of reinsertion to the civil life ended up in tragic episodes that had intensified the distrust between insurgency and government.¹⁵ While in other Latin American countries most of the insurgent groups have disappeared in the 1980s and 1890s, the particular conditions of Colombia and the presence of drug trafficking have kept these organizations alive.

¹⁵ For instance, the UP (Union Patriotica) formed by democratic dissidence of the largest guerilla group, FARC, was exterminated.

As a consequence of the 9/11 attacks on the U.S. the local guerrillas of Colombia joined the list of international terrorist organizations. This new label generated an alliance between the two countries to fight the war against terror. Several NGOs (AI 2007, Human Rights Watch 2005, MADRE 2006) suggests that the armed conflict is being aggravated with the presence of military bases and aid from the United States.

The insurgents' discourse of change ended up hindering the actions of social movements, for it co-opted the language of change and made blurry distinctions between citizen's mobilization and radical guerrilla strategy.

3.4. Mafia-led Change

In the middle 80s, besides the guerrillas, the drug mafias entered the scene permeating the political and economical life of the country. The main cities transformed to scenarios of vendettas among mafia cartels, sites of bombings and kidnappings. Private armies of bodyguards, electric fences, and private surveillance tried to compensate the timid response of a weak state in terms of security. The mafia lords infiltrated and tried to manipulate the congress, bribe judges, intimidate the press, extort politicians, and gain popular support in the poor barrios in places like Medellín --by paying for funerals, constructing houses and buying soccer teams (Guillermoprieto, 1994).

The countryside once again suffered the armed conflict that this time became more complex and bloodier once the guerrillas started to participate in the illegal drug business and to fight over profits and territories. The newborn paramilitary armies had exacerbated the violence, fighting not only guerrillas but also "guerrilla sympathizers."

These included union workers, political leaders from the left, students, journalists and artists. The result of this war is hundred of massacres, displacement of civil population and endless Human Rights violations.

Today mafias don't operate in the unashamedly visible style of Pablo Escobar, but they had established many linkages within government spheres, corporations, wealthy ranchers, land owners and other elite classes. In 2003 a state-led process to reinsert paramilitary armies to the civil life raised concern that the new laws would exacerbate impunity and deny victims their right to truth, justice and reparation. Today, president Uribe's administration is been amply criticized because of the scandals involving links between paramilitaries and high-ranking members of state institutions, and the signals of giving favorable treatment to these right wing armed groups (AI, 2007).

The presence of mafia in Colombia and its perverse coexistence with government and economic powerful elites had provoked profound changes in the society values and had created a tense and radical polarization of the political discourse.

The mafia's version of "development" means to secure their private gains, to maintain the status quo of weak state institutions that had allowed them to operate covered by impunity.

3.5. U.S. Intervention and Aid

Colombia has been an international aid recipient since the middle of past century, and had played the rules of the Breton Woods institutions. In the late 90s, with the creation of the so-called Plan Colombia to fight the "war on drugs," the U.S. has played a

crucial role in Colombia's conflict. The U.S. congress agreed in 1999 to allocate US \$1.3-billion aid package, which has been renewed every year since then. In 2006, US assistance to Colombia amounted to an estimated US\$728 million, approximately 80 per cent of which was military and police assistance (AI, 2007). This aid package makes Colombia the largest recipient of U.S. aid in the Western hemisphere. This Plan, which includes social development related components, has been amply criticized locally and internationally because according to international Human Rights organizations "Colombia is both, the leading recipient of U.S. military aid in the hemisphere and the worst violator of human rights" MADRE org. states (2005).

Nowadays, the Colombian political conflict "enjoys" international status. It was labeled by the Bush administration as war-on-drugs slash war-on-terror. Observers consider that under this framework there is little or no opportunity for regional dialogues and political negotiations that may lead to peace and reconciliation. To defeat the insurgency (labeled as international terrorists and drug traffickers by the administrations in Washington and Bogotá) it is necessary to increase the use of force and military intelligence. Therefore, the investment of resources and imagination on security and drug trafficking overcomes issues of social development and social equity.

3.6. Decentralization of Political Power

Colombia was a highly centralized state since its independence in 1819. All administrative decisions were decided from the central authorities in Bogotá. During the late 1980s, social organizations pressured the weak government, discredited by the peak

of the mafia cartels' war, to form a pluralistic Constitutional Assembly to write a new constitution. The process that brought about the 1991 Constitution mobilized diverse sectors of civil society and offered hopes for positive change. The constitution gave regions and towns autonomy in the administration and the planning and promotion of economic and social development programs, and gave the citizens the opportunity to vote for their local authorities.

The language of participation, civic involvement, local organization, community participatory media, and other terms of that sort, became part of the language that institutions and communities started to use and assimilate. Communities started to gain presence and decision in the local state organism, and the need to communicate between organizations and communities became increasingly important. This legal framework represents an instrument for strategic development that includes voices and needs of local groups (Velásquez & Gonzalez, 2003).

However, Sánchez and Palau (2006) warn about a paradox with this process of decentralization. According to them, it has given incentives to the armed illegal groups to control the local governments by violence or threat of violence. In their view, there is a significant relationship between the intensification of the armed conflict and the greater political, budgetary and fiscal autonomy of local governments. The presence of local resources such as royalties and taxes triggered violence and a desire to control and penetrate local governments.

In general, the decentralization process and the “decentralization mood” became a force of social change with important implications until today.

3.7. Free Trade as Development

The reelected president of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe is a defender of the “Area de Libre Comercio de las Américas” (ALCA), the free trade preferential agreement between the U.S. and the Latin American countries. “Free trade or die”, reads the headline of *El Tiempo*, one of national newspapers. Local politicians and economists are eager to engage in deals with Washington and see free market policies as the most important path for economic growth. However, as some local observers (Semana, 09/18/2007) had pointed out, that although some sectors will benefit from the agreement, there is not conclusive proof that it will raise the standard of living of the poor; besides, the promise of economic growth is different from social development. Other international critics, like Vandana Shiva (1999), are concerned with the destructions of local food security systems and with environmental damage caused by agribusiness and lax regulation laws.

3.8. Journalism and Media Environment

Colombian media landscape is known for its technological advances particularly in radio and TV networks. Its popular and social issues-oriented *telenovelas* are also internationally famous; as much as its creative film productions, the growing tropical music industry and, recently, the strong publisher houses. In addition Colombia has gained recognition for its flourishing of community radio networks. However, in general terms, the media and journalistic environment of Colombia is affected by processes of economic consolidation, concentration and control by political elites. Media have failed

the country in offering space for democratic debate and for generating space for pluralistic voices and versions of social change.

The independent organization of communicators called *Medios para la Paz* (MPP) or Media for Peace (2003), points out in their website the paradox between the Colombian media's increasing display of technological resources and the lack of analysis of current events. TV and national radio news networks had gained sophistication in coverage of breaking news while they keep competing for ratings by bringing to their listeners "*la chiva*" or the "last minute story". However, national media with traditionally have been centralized in the capital city, tell stories from the center to the periphery, from the geographic and bureaucratic center of Bogotá, which is also the symbolic center of elitism and power.

The preeminent view that the news reproduce comes from official sources. Martin Barbero calls media "ventriloquists' puppets" of the political powers and the state. He also criticizes the absence of *relato* (tale) or the lack of a journalistic narrative able to articulate a sense of nation and its diverse stories. Warriors are dying in Colombian wars, he argues, but the media, as cultural apparatuses are not creating a narrative to make sense of the complexity of the conflict (2001). Similarly, MPP (2003) argues that news media have framed the country's life as an inevitable chain of violent events that repeat themselves in a fatalistic way. This limitation to promote analysis and critical examination limits the path for a contextual and historical understanding of the Colombian conflict.

A panel of journalism professors in a conference in Bogotá organized by MPP in 2003 suggests that reporters need to 1) change their professional routines, 2) participate in trainings to report news in ways that challenge the traditional frames of violence, 3) to include the voices of diverse actors of the conflict and 4) to include peaceful alternatives from the regions. Velasquez, the dean of the Sabana University, believes that these suggestions are well-intended but limited and idealistic until the underline problem remains unchallenged: media ownership. “Our informative categories are shaped by ownership”, he says. “Reporters have to please the private interests of the directors and stakeholders; they are pushed to practice self-censorship; this is a recurrent tool to manipulate public opinion and favor private, ideological and corporative interests” (MPP, n.p.). Along the same lines, the international NGO Committee to Protect Journalists, CPJ (2003), considers that the main limitation for democratic media in Colombia is “a handful of large groups [which] is eroding media diversity and limiting political debate [...] Three powerful corporations with close ties to the political establishment own broadcasters that claim more than 80 percent of the country’s radio and television audience” (n.p.).

In addition to these structural limitations, journalists feel the pressure of working in a hostile environment. Many of them have received dead threats, forced to exile, kidnapped or killed. In 2003 the CPJ ranked Colombia first in the list of “Worst places in the world to be a reporter” with four journalists assassinated and 80 working under dead threats (CPJ, 2003). That first place recently is taken either by Iraq or by Afghanistan.

What is the relation between violence and media? Martin Barbero is asked in an interview (1995). Media contributes to the environment of violence, he says:

“by reinforcing the elitist political culture, the one that understands *mestizaje* as cleaning of the ‘inferior races’, and that legitimates only two exclusive political groups [...] Violence is not only what is presented in the content of media and you can measure. How can one measure the presence and the effects of the valorization of the war ideologies in media, the authoritarianism justified in the media? How do you measure the de-valorization of ethnic groups, the humiliation of women, and the laugh to the homosexuals, the commercial use of children, the discrimination of labor for “servants”, the dismissing and disqualification of whatever is different, the ridiculing of the poor, the working class. All these are non measurable violence acts. The problem is not only *in* the stories depicted by the media; the problem is the media themselves as central storytellers of society (p.38).

It is paradoxical that during times when the free market ideology strengthen, the political context of decentralization favored the emergency of radio and community TV media. In 1995 a new legislation gave license to hundreds of community radio stations. In 2007, 850 of them not only survived economically, but also have formed regional networks to strengthen their technological and operative challenges (WBIST, 2007). These stations have invigorated the local and regional communities, their social protest and social movements, and according to Murillo (2003), are redefining the public sphere of the country.

In this chapter I discussed seven forces/versions of development and change in Colombia that had actually affected the life of the country but have failed to raise the standards of well-being for all the citizens. From the *La Violencia* war times, to the insurgent activities, the mafia operations, and the paramilitary responses, the country had been marked by divisive and violent forces of change. These have led to several waves of

migration and polarized the civic discourse, making it more difficult for the citizens to safely participate in collective initiatives for social change. The version of change embedded in *desarrollismo* produced modernizing infrastructure, but it failed to break the unequal structure of land ownership, and kept using imported language, expertise and methods that didn't allow actual engagement with local sources of development.

In the last two decades decentralization processes opened up spaces for participation and supported the emergence of civic conversations. For instance the legalization of community radio is a fruit of that time. The alternatives of international aid and trade liberalization are tied to global international agendas that in the long term will not secure local economic sustainability for most citizens. They may generate economic growth, but as said before, that is only one part of the story.

This chapter does not exhaust the vast and complex economic and historical contradictions of the region; neither examines in detail the media environment. The goal here is to illustrate how challenging, and necessary, communication work is in this country. The diverse tensions make it difficult for communicators to embark upon conversations about social change. There is a need to explore language and paths of civic engagement disassociated from the rhetoric of fear, war and cynicism that affect the country.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

Methods are shaped and molded according to the objects of research and the intentions of the researcher. In this case, the choice of methods is related to my expectations when proposing this dissertation topic: first, to grasp the vividness of the stories, the grace and creativity present in these experiences of the participants in the study, and to learn some key lessons about the craft of communication in development projects; second, to switch the center of gravity from pessimistic Colombian's stories, towards accounts of concrete contributions for social change; third, to offer visibility and recognition to those local communicators who design and develop projects intended to impact a considerable number of people in Colombia and other Latin American countries, and whose resources and expertise remain unknown, not systematized and taken for granted.

The challenge in the research design includes problems such as, how to reinterpret these experiences in theoretical eyes? What is my place as researcher in connection to the participants or subjects? What is the best way to collect these stories and analyze them? What is the validity of the "sample"? How am I to go about selecting, organizing and writing from contingent events and claiming that new knowledge is produced? And how do all of these represent a contribution to the field of communication?

This research entails several methodological problems that I will discuss in the rest of this chapter under the following subheadings: Qualitative Approach; Methodological Orientations (feminism and ethnography); Participants; Data Collection; Analysis, Writing, and Risks and Ethical Issues.

4.1. Qualitative Approach

Qualitative or quantitative? Certainly there is no need for an either-or answer in today's communication research since scholars commonly combine both types of methods (Mac Quail, 2000). However, as Jacobson (1996) has observed, mass communication research during the 1950s and 1960s, and development communication still do often employ predominately quantitative research. Development communication, seen as instrumental in nature, tends to use and to be studied under positivistic epistemologies. The persistence of positivism is likely to ignore the discussion on the political problems of modernization theory, assuming it to be an objective, value-free process without acknowledging dependency relations (p.69).

Traditionally, funding agencies prefer to support studies framed in a quantitative fashion that offer a sense of neutrality and produce empirical numerical evidence. Jacobson (1996) notes that the obsession with empirical methodological rigor tends to replace conceptualization, critical reflection and accounting for power. Therefore, he and others (Huesca, 2001) suggest that the field of communication for social change requires other kinds of theoretical frameworks rather than only those pursued in the hypothetical-deductive traditions. "Methodologies previously confined to history, ethnography and

literary analysis should become more common in these [development communication] studies” (Jacobson, p.79).

The present research focuses on the stories and the practices of a small group of communicators, valuing subjective, personal meanings, and commonalities and giving them voice in concrete historical settings. Instead of measuring and comparing random samples of data and striving for generalizations, this study values rich description and deep understanding of contingent experience.

A central preoccupation for social science research is for the data to be accurate and representative. While most quantitative research, rooted in positivism, assumes objectivity as separation between the knower and the subject as condition for accuracy, qualitative research, on the other hand, defines objectivity as the recognition of specific circumstances, values and conditions that are present in the act of knowing. Hesse-Biber (2007) drawing on Sandra Harding, defines objectivity from a feminist perspective asserting that “*knowledge and truth are partial, situated, subjective, power imbued, and relational*” (emphasis in original p.9). The researcher is immersed into the social reality she seeks to describe and is influenced by culture, politics, personal biographies and social locations. Thus, the researcher should ensure that biases she brings into the study are acknowledged (Hesse-Biber, 2007, Wolf, 1996, Lindfol, 2002). In similar terms, Charmaz (2007) states that personal experience, when it is recognized, does not minimize the value of the research process and its results, but rather does the opposite: it gives it authenticity.

And since the researcher's observations and depictions of reality are partial, another route to accuracy is to engage with the participants in the process of knowledge construction. This implies seeing participants not just as detached informants but as engaged actors, expected to reflect on their depiction of their experience. This emphasis on combining research and people's knowledge has been lead by Fals Borda, a Colombian social scientist who coined the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, which combines theory, action and participation committed to further the interests of exploited groups and classes (1982). This present study does not pretend to follow the full expectations of PAR (participation in formulation, planning, conducting, analyzing), but it recognizes, as feminist scholars do, the need to engage in dialogue with new conversation partners (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p 147), use research strategies that cultivate collaboration between participants reflecting upon their own process, emphasize reflexivity, and challenge the extractive nature of most research enterprises.

For this study, I asked a group of communicators if they would be interested in participating in the research. We had a conversation about what this involvement would imply for each of us, and what would be useful for them. They agreed to participate and were willing to share with me some space and time to revisit their journey because, as they said, in their daily routine they miss the chance to pause and reflect on their work. Also they expressed their desire to talk with an external interlocutor who could offer them some reference points and help them to summarize some lessons from their practice. They also wanted this interlocutor not to be totally an outsider, but a member of

the culture and the communication field: A person who, in their terms, could “get it”. That was our deal. Consequently, the insights from this research are not a result of an isolated exercise done by the researcher but a product of active conversations with the participants, in which they asserted not only their stories, but their resources, methods, speculations and theories about what might be working out –or not in their professional decisions.

However, as observed by several authors (Stacey, 1988, Lindlof, 2002), the desire to engage with participants even in some stages of the study can be highly problematic given the different needs, expectations and the power relations in which the research practice takes place. Stacey (1988) criticizes some feminist ethnographic inquiries, pointing out issues of betrayal, exploitation and oppression, hard to overcome even under claims of participation and collaboration (p.23). I, in spite of the steps, I took to make the relationship more horizontal, am still the one who has control over choices, time, duration, organization, and writing; the researcher has “the last word”, the power of authorship, the choice to leave the site. Besides, she is the one who needs to respond to academic formats, pressures, and external requirements different from interests of the participants of the study.

Being aware of these difficulties, the participants in this study and I had the chance to talk about the different agendas we have and the ways to make the process and the results less harmless and somehow beneficial for everyone. Hence, I shared with them my initial goals. After the data collection, we discussed the overall direction of the

study and I listened to their comments, methods and conceptualizations. Also, we decided to use the term "participant" instead of "subject" or "researched" in order to emphasize the intention of inclusion and that knowledge is a result of a participatory practice.

4.2. Methodological Orientations

This particular study is mostly informed by two methodological guidelines, which are not straightjackets but perspectives or orientations that helped me to make choices on research techniques and to approach data, actors and places. They are: feminist research and ethnography.

4.2.1 Feminist Research

Even though this study does not take women's issues or women's voices as a central or exclusive focus, it is influenced by the overall claims of feminist research. In very general terms, feminism makes visible oppression against women, cares about gender inequality, struggles for social transformations, and promotes practices of empowerment of women and other disadvantaged groups. Feminist research, accordingly, is politically motivated, interested in ways to denounce and reduce power inequality and aims to produce knowledge connected to the welfare of women and other marginalized populations (Hesse-Biber, 2007). My motivation and topic of study, which is related to the understanding of processes of social change in developing regions, fits into this description.

Feminist research offers help to identify the presence of power imbalances related to the practice of doing research, particularly useful in this case, when the inquiry is done

in international settings involving issues of reducing inequality and interacting with diverse groups of people, some of them, in vulnerable positions. Also as Pettigrew (1981) notices, there are societal expectations based on gender that play a role in the research process. As a female doing research in Colombia I encountered situations in which negotiating entrance, interacting with certain participants and gaining credibility was at times difficult given gender expectations and perceptions of class. For instance, while attempting to interview a high Department Health Board official, I noticed dismissing attitudes towards me. Yet, once I introduced myself as a graduate student coming from a U.S. university, and showed my accreditation (Human Subjects consent form), the situation changed immediately with the respondent becoming not only very cooperative but also interested in keeping the conversation going and asking about fly-fishing for salmon in Oregon! On that occasion, the higher education card granted me access and compensated for the perceptions of my gender /class position. In other cases, the perception of “a doctoral student from the U.S. among us” exacerbated the assumption of the researcher as an evaluator of the locals, and made it harder to engage with people and to have uninhibited conversations. Feminist research has been a useful tool for taking into consideration the ways in which our social locations play a role in the process of navigating sites of inquiry.

As a female researcher, and in regards to knowledge creation, I am aware of my gendered lens influencing my interests, placing weight on some dimensions of the observed reality, and connecting what I learn with particular thoughts, feelings, sets of

interpretations, and emotions. Although an essentialist notion of “women’s ways of knowing” is contested by contemporary scholars (Harding, 2007, p.60), feminist researchers acknowledge the impact of particular biographies, cultural influences and interlaced social locations (one’s nation, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, etc.), and embodied experiences that shape our ways to enter into the fieldwork, make inquiries and produce knowledge.

Most feminist researchers also value the inclusion of the situated experience of the participants into the process. This exercise of reflection and acknowledgement of where each person is coming from (researcher and practitioners) and their social locations affecting knowledge, is part of what Harding calls *strong objectivity*. (2007 p.55)

Besides the located experience of the researcher, and because of it, the feminist researcher observes attentively the gender relations of the participants, and tries to notice differences not only across genders but among women’s experiences.

As stated above, I responded to a particular emotion in my decision to embark in this research. Some feminist theorists (Jaggard, 1997) and writers (Behar, 1996) have pointed out the fruitfulness of emotional engagement with the object of study. Contrary to positivistic oriented research agendas, validating emotions and values are central aspects of knowledge building.

And finally, although not all feminist research is necessarily participatory, or even qualitative, there is a strong feminist tradition that considers production of knowledge as

a social enterprise that supposes cooperative interactions of inquirers, and that is linked to a process of awareness raising, and social mobilization (Lykes & Coquillon, 2007). In this case, the goals of the study are much more humble, but still the participatory conversation with local communicators on the theories, practices, dilemmas and challenges of their everyday life, represents an opportunity for addressing issues that may limit or promote desirable social change.

4.2.2. Ethnographic Orientation

What is characteristic of ethnography as a method is its “thick description” (term coined by Geertz) or a rich exploration of connections, attention to gestures, words, worlds views, places, arrangement of places, routines, ways of saying and seeing, and remembering, explaining and organizing life (Deacon, 1999). It is about figuring out what these practices, stories and artifacts mean to a group of people and what they say about their culture.

However, I recognize that this study *is not* ethnography in a strict sense. Professional ethnographers experience a *prolonged engagement* that may take several years within a given culture unfamiliar to them in order to document the group’s social life (Lindlof, 2002, p 20). In the present case, my involvement was not long or deep enough to explore and make claims about a “culture”. I only spent few months traveling with and interviewing members of a team of communicators and other subjects. All of them were not always in the same place, so my stays with some members and

conversations had different lengths and levels of engagement. The group was not unfamiliar to me, or part of a different culture, and my interest was not to document their culture per se, but to understand (through a partial account of their practices and decisions) some key contributions for the field of development communication. Other distinction is that, traditionally, ethnographers take holistic accounts of all relevant aspects of a culture's material existence, beliefs, and experiences (Stone Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2002, Lindlof, T. 2002), while in this case, the focus is only on some aspects of the group's life related to the practice of communication.

In sum, this is a qualitative study with a feminist ethnographic orientation. And this orientation was developed due to the following two reasons: *First*, as mentioned in the literature review, Latin American Communication and Cultural Studies suggests that there is a need to explore the everyday life scenarios in which communication as cultural mediation happens, in which people engage in modernization processes, or resist them. Such a focus requires adopting an ethnographic posture.

Second, ethnography seems to be useful when one does not know exactly what one needs to know. I didn't have a specific hypothesis to test in this study, but several open questions to explore that will become clearer with the information collected. The method then, involves casting a net wide and asking many questions. This implies identifying recurrent ideas and themes, emerging categories, connections and possible routes of interpretations (Stone Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2002). I attempted, as much as I could, to be aware of my own frames of reference and, by adopting a flexible and

low-structured research design, remain open to be led by what was happening in the social settings and therefore identify unexpected ideas and insights.

4.3. Participants

Colombia is the site of this inquiry, given my connections and personal interest and ties with the country. The participants are part of a small group of communicators for development or social change that I met in Bucaramanga in 2003. They are appropriate for the study for a number of reasons that fit into these criteria: have a long standing experience working in diverse kinds of development and social change projects, have negotiated extensively with agencies, interacted with urban and rural community members and networks of social movements, and have their work evaluated in positive terms by local groups, national and international agencies. And finally, the group is willing to participate in a research of this kind.

I contacted my Chahín–Herrera colleagues in Bucaramanga with whom I had a long relationship and from whom I got interested in this topic. They are the leaders of a team of communicators (five people, four males, one female) and work independently as freelancers in three or four projects simultaneously, hired by several local NGOs, governmental institutions and international development agencies. They are known as the “Charreras” team and have been working for about than 14 years organizing and training community radio networks, also producing educational radio educational series and video productions, dozens of manuals and other media related materials, plus hundreds of workshops and group communication strategies. They have participated in at least 100

development projects. Some of their contractors are national and international agencies like the Ministry of Education, the Women and Children's Communication and Information Program, the Board of Public Health, The First Lady's Office for Social Projects, and internationally, the Organization of American States (OAS), AMARC (World Association of Community Broadcasters), Pan-American Health Association (PAHO), GTZ (German Technical Cooperation Agency) among others.¹⁶

Gladys Herrera, Iván Chahín, Pedro Pablo Rincón, Darío Moreno Suarez and Jesús Abad Coronado are the members of the team. Their ages range from 32 to 47 year-old. They belong to the middle-low class bracket with an annual income that range between U.S. \$9,000 to \$18,00 (the nation's GDP per capita is US 6,600 (CIA, 2005)). All of the members of the Charreras team rent apartments, as none of them own propriety, and Jesús Abad Coronado is the only one who owns a car. In terms of ethnicity, Jesús Abad and Gladys are considered white due to their lighter skin color, while the rest are identified as *mestizo*, although Iván is called *turco* in Colombian slang, because his ascendants are immigrants from the Middle East. Three of them hold a bachelor degree. Gladys Herrera and Iván Chahín studied journalism and communication, while Pedro Pablo self trained in arts and graphic design. Darío is an amateur musician,

¹⁶ There was another group I wanted to include in my research: the Communication Unit of SEPAS, (Secretariado de Pastoral Social), a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) located in the city of San Gil, sponsored by the Catholic Church and dedicated to promote community organization, particularly among non-profit peasant cooperatives in the Santander region. Once I talked to the coordinator of the SEPAS' Communication Unit, Beatriz Toloza, she explained to me that their team is working full time in radio and that they had received training from a group of external communication experts who had been supporting the process of redesign their community radio project. These consultants happen to be the Charreras team! This news made me clear that the research would focus on the Charreras team only. And visit San Gil, and interview some SEPAS' members as part of the secondary sources.

and Jesús Abad is a freelance photojournalist. All are or have been active participants in grassroots organizations, had links or joined the progressive wing of the Catholic Church in community organizing projects, and their political stands lean to the left.

This study departs from the premise that the Charreras's job work, for the most part, aims to meet development and social change objectives, according to the evaluations done by national and international agencies, and local NGOs¹⁷. The goal of this study is not assessing the effectiveness of their work and their impact in community settings, but to explore the professional practice of the communicators, based on the premise that their designs and interventions are promoting social change.

4.4. Data Collection

The main methods used during the data collection (during three summer months: two months in 2004, one in 2005, and ten days in December 2005) were participant observation, in-depth interviews in a range of locations (including households, radio stations, and local community centers, hotel meeting rooms, buses, offices and the streets of Medellín), and phone interviews. I treated all encounters, formal and informal, as part of the research. This included engaging in social activities, spending time simply hanging out at the Charreras' office, which is in their apartment, and in the hallways and/or

¹⁷ Some examples of international recognition of their work are: a) the Pan American Health Association (PAHO) evaluated the Dengue Prevention Campaign considering it a success and proposed the same design through Latin America (http://www.who.int/tdr/cd_publications/pdf/planning_dengue.pdf). b) The UNESCO supported the *A Gatas* Project after evaluating successful campaigns on Early Childhood Development Education c) the Colombian national network of community radio adopted and replicated the project <http://www.rgs.gov.co/experiencias.shtml?x=9468> . c) The GTZ, a German Government Aid Agency selected the *Charreras* team after evaluating several proposals on communication for sustainable development.

cafeterias of small hotels in villages and towns. I did not employ any local research assistants.

I interviewed each of the Charreras' members, taking breaks, starting one day continuing the next day, next week or even the following year. Also, some interviews / conversations continued by email and I clarified some ideas and examples by phone. There were only two chances of meeting the team as a whole. They were always busy with their projects, so rather than interviewing them collectively I would observe and participate in their meetings asking questions about their current activities. Most of the interviews were audio recorded after asking for permission. The participants seemed very comfortable and didn't change their tone or attitude when the record button was on. The in-depth interviews responded to a flexible structure. The guideline covered three levels of exploration: (a) personal backgrounds, personal learning of communication, notions of change, development; (b) description of everyday practice: decision making, negotiations, dilemmas, struggles, the craft of communication (content, images, music making, writing, etc.); and (c) reflection on methods and theories that come from years of practice (See Appendix # 2). The interviews didn't necessarily follow a certain order of questions, or even a question-answer exchange, but constituted fluid conversations around particular projects or materials.

I interviewed Gladys Herrera several times in her home / office in Bucaramanga and then in Bogotá, during more than four weeks. Iván Chahín spoke with me during dinner times, in our bus trip to Zipaquirá, in Medellín's airport, and in his home in Bucaramanga and then when he and Gladys moved to Bogotá, in their new home/office.

Darío Moreno Suarez talked to me in Zipaquirá and in two visits to his apartment in Bogotá. He interrupted the interview with his musical contributions. “I’ll give you an example with a song”, he would say, and would grab his guitar and play. Pedro Pablo Rincón received me in his studio in Bucaramanga, surrounded by his posters, gigantic puppets, and other colorful art work of his family visual communication business, *Molino de Tinta*, (Mill of Ink). Jesús Abad Coronado was the hardest person to interview. I followed him for a weekend in Medellín and saw his work in action with his camera. That was his way to communicate.

In addition to in-depth interviews with the core members of Charreras, I also interviewed, for shorter periods of time, 16 people who were members of international and national development agencies and NGOs like: GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit- German Technical Co-operation), United Nations Program – Bogotá, Bogotá Communication Division, Corporacion Region (Corporation for Regional Development), Medellín; Comité de Rehabilitacion de Antioquia (Association for People with Disabilities in Antioquia), PAHO, Pan American Health Organization - PROINAPSA UIS, Municipality of Floridablanca; Director Health Board of Santander, Colombian Government First Lady Office’s Programs Coordinator; SEPAS, *Secretariado de Pastoral Social*; REDESANDER (Network of Community Radios of Santander); CORPONOR, Corporation for the Autonomous Development of the Norte de Santander); and EDEX a Spain-based organization for public health and prevention of drug and alcohol addition.

From a long list of possible informants, mostly from development agencies and governmental institutions, I called and arranged meetings, introduced myself and the goals of the project and showed the Human Subjects consent form as part of my credential. Most interviews with community members, however, were more spontaneous, after a workshop, or in a visit to a community setting in which a project was in place. I used a shorter and flexible questionnaire that I updated and adapted from observations. (Appendix # 3).

Another tool used for data collection was observation. Observing can be easily taken for granted. The first few days of my immersion with the Charreras team, I took almost no notes on settings and interactions. Most entries in my journal were comments about what people said. Then, I forced myself to pay attention to what I could observe, such as, space, objects, interactions and quality of the environment. I even made little drawings of the sites and noted small details like clothing and colors and people's expressions. But that detailed note taking didn't last long. It was hard to decide where to look, what could be meaningful and not to be lost in a sea of information and images. After few days, I noted certain salient or recurrent interactions and arrangements of places that might be connected to comments, or that appeared to contradict what was said in words.

Conquergood, a leading scholar in Performance Studies, argues that ethnography is an embodied practice and suggests moving from being an observer towards being a co-performer in the fieldwork (Madison, 2006). In this research, the line between observation and participation is tenuous. I was not only observing, silently taking notes

from a corner, but also engaged in the workshops and other community setting activities. This situation of being involved in certain actions requires an ability to take mental notes and enter them after the observation/ participation experience is over.

The main places of observation were: four workshops with rural extensionists, radio members, community leaders, health care agents (Medellín, Zipaquirá, San Gil, Floridablanca and Bogotá); meetings with agencies in Bogotá and Medellín; planning and brainstorming meetings at the Charreras apartment in Bucaramanga in 2004 and in Bogotá in 2005 (they moved to Bogotá that year); and audio studio recording in Bucaramanga.

Besides observing social settings, other sets of data came out from the observation of “cultural artifacts,” in this case, media materials produced by the Charreras. Here, more than just observing the objects, the Charreras team and I engaged in the reconstruction of the production process; exploring the story behind the object and focusing on the materiality and reasons for particular designs, titles, etc.

4.5. Data Analysis

Once 18 audio tapes were transcribed in full, and 20 additional tapes selectively transcribed and translated, the analysis required several readings of field notes and transcripts in order to categorize events and to identify emerging themes.

One of the problems here was the diverse layers or data and sources of information: the interviewee’s plain anecdotal tales; their reflections during meetings and

interviews; field notes from workshop observations; field notes on reflections on the interviews; data from supporting documents; and notes from analyzing media materials. Additionally I was faced with the task of synthesizing these complex data in view of theory and prior research.

This meticulous process required organization skills, a clear mind and patience. It required carefully selecting and sorting data by employing visual codes or highlighters in several colors, then cutting pieces of paper apart and reassembling them in piles that responded to patterns. This step is like working on a huge puzzle that one extends on a large table and needs a long period of quiet time, and an uncluttered room to figure out how the pieces come together.

Despite the challenges of the process, I was finally able to dissect the data according to tentative themes. Given the vast amount of data I needed to accept that *not all data* have to be included as part of a theme, or as part of the research. This realization finally enabled me to construct manageable categories.

In general, instead of contrasting theories against practices and seeing how the latter fit into the former, the process took the opposite approach: a long inductive road. Still, prior theory remained useful to inform the process of identification of themes or categories as well as analysis and interpretation.

4.6. Writing

As discussed above, this research is influenced by ethnography. And ethnography is not only about exploring cultural sites but about telling a tale. The act of writing is part of the method; it's a meaning-making process in which the researcher interlaces her interpretations, her conceptual frames, and the categories shaped by her views, with stories and voices of the participants (Van Maanen, 1988, Charmaz, 2007). Since the classic book of Clifford and Marcus "Writing Culture" (1986) ethnographers agree that the tale written is another construction, another layer of signification, a sort of invention, not mere "mirroring" of a reality-out-there. The researcher's challenge is to portray in words the finely textured observations and interactions of the participants and also, as feminist researchers would argue, to account for social locations, for the presence of the researcher and her choices (Stone, Chiseri-Strater, 2002). Ideally the writing will provoke in readers empathetic resonance of the meaning of that experience (Charmaz, 2007).

This present case represents an additional challenge: making the written word consistent with the power of the images and stories that moved me to work on this topic in the first place. One of the participant's mantra is her commitment to communicate in a clear, provoking and seductive way. Charmaz (2007) agrees that good writing in feminist research requires clarity, insight and usefulness (p. 444). Achieving this is difficult, especially for the novice researcher, who is struggling to find an authorial voice and compelling tone, while also responding to the expectations of academic writing. The

tension is evident between chapters, from those that require an impersonal voice, to the ones that permit description, narrative and more researcher interpretation.

Beyond these challenges, this study has the characteristics of all data that come from a different culture, and language. Unfortunately, the translation sacrifices a lot of the nuances of the Colombian Spanish and its cultural context. The juicy jokes, the puns, the songs, the sayings, the images that are very central to this research lose part of their strength, or require too much explanation to actually resonate in a meaningful way to the reader in the U.S. It has been a permanent struggle for me, already struggling to write in a second language, to attempt to translate the untranslatable and to be aware that in spite of the help of editors there will unsolvable gaps of meaning and beauty.

Writing includes decisions on how to portray the different layers of information. Here the use vignettes as rhetorical devices separate depiction of some events or examples from the flow of the narrative. The vignettes function as snap shots that visualize a situation and contain elements for interpretation.

4.7. Risks and Ethical Dilemmas

The main risk of this study is romanticizing the subjects due to my familiarity with them and my own personal involvement with the issues and the context. Some of the participants are people I have known for 15 years. Can one study about people who are close to one's heart? There are scholars who do research about their own mothers (Brown, 1991) and interrogate their own family, culture and workplaces. Researchers study what they care about. I cannot deny my affection for this group of people; they

inspired this research, they inspired me, and I want to write out of respect and consideration for them. However, I am not their cheerleader. The process of research implies exploring their work in a critical way and needs to be done exerting self-scrutiny.

Closeness or sense of membership sounds like an advantage but it implies risks. Being a member of the culture, being familiar with and having previous knowledge of the participants' work puts the researcher in risk of taking information for granted. During the process of interviewing I realized the need to make an extra effort to double-check my assumptions. I caught myself "*getting it*" too soon without asking enough "whys", or asking for elaboration on some topics. For instance, during an interview with Gladys Herrera, she said she disagrees with "the barking style of some sort of alternative media like the radio show *Uno y Medio Ambiente*". Only a few days later I went back to her and asked what she meant by "that barking style..." She looked a bit surprised for a second while saying "you know what I mean!" but she offered a more detailed elaboration. This asking for clarification at first sounded a bit artificial, or like a reposition of our roles as interviewer – interviewee and a reminder that this conversation is actually data gathering. However, most of the time when I had to dig for unspoken meanings the participants had the chance to examine reasons and motives, and to take some steps towards self-reflection. One source that helped me to deal with this "you-know-what-I mean" situation was the classic Miner's piece "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema" (Stone Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2002). It represents an exercise of questioning the familiar culture, the too-well-known behaviors and practices, and suspending judgments, as if the researcher were coming from Mars.

Another set of ethical issues and limitations comes from what Servaes (1999) denounces in traditional communication for development research as the interventionist nature of the field. He notices that the subjects usually do not see benefits from the results except occasionally after a long cycle of detached data analysis and top-down social intervention (p.3). In this study, I am very aware of my responsibility towards the participants. I chose a path different from isolated extraction of data, that involves conversations, sharing meanings, and learning with the participants. Reflexivity with the participants is a tool to overcome or minimize the problem of power over the stories, knowledge and results. And that is what the practitioners expressed as their expectation; rather than flattering reports, they wanted to have the opportunity to reflect about their profession. Since they don't have the luxury of time or space for systematizing the lessons from their practice, that task during the fieldwork in Colombia and a written report in Spanish summarizing their stories and theories will be my obligation. Nevertheless this process is not exempt of difficulties due to tensions between the written word and multiple meanings, or the "that wasn't exactly what I meant" issue, which is always present in any research of this nature.

In this chapter I have outlined the motivations for this research topic; the methodological orientations (ethnography and feminism research) that support this type of qualitative inquiry; the inductive process I privilege in the journey of knowledge creation; and other considerations about the instruments of each step of the research process, data collection, interviews, observation, analysis, and writing. I also introduced the participants and the sites of data gathering and briefly discussed ethical issues that

may become apparent here. In each of these areas I have attempted to describe not only the methodological choices but my personal reasoning for them and how they affect the relationship with the participants and with the subject matter.

CHAPTER V

THE *CHARRERAS*: FREELANCERS OF A LITTLE KNOWN PROFESSION

This chapter introduces the communication team and their reflections on their professional life. Contrasting testimony against personal backgrounds and literature, I discuss the first research question: Who are the development communicators? What are their assumptions of communication, development / social change that inform the communicators' practice?

The chapter includes two parts. *First*, I describe the participants' profiles and the place in which they work. These profiles serve as an initial reference point to connect the grounded experiences, tales and reflections of particular, localized individuals.

And *second*, the chapter presents the participant's self-reflection on their experience, the models or frameworks that are integrated in their practice and ties them to normative definitions of development and communication.

5.1. Participants' Profiles

5.1.1. The Charrera Team

The group lead by Iván Chahin and Gladys Herrera, which is informally known as "*Charreras or Los Charreras*," consists of five people, three communicators with university degrees in journalism, an empirical musician and a plastic artist/graphic

designer. There are other practitioners who sporadically join them depending on the needs of a given project, but these five people form the basic team.

Gladys Herrera Patiño was raised in a working class family in Bucaramanga and studied communication and journalism during the late 80s. She dislikes being called a journalist because for her, that profession has a negative association: a frantic reporter chasing news with no time to actually communicate with people. “I’m a social communicator”, she often rectifies in her introductions. Gladys started her career as a rural communicator at a Catholic radio station in the small town of Málaga, in the middle of Santander’s Andes from where her family is native. At age 19, her pregnancy coincided with her work interviewing peasant women. These encounters of exchanging stories and advice on motherhood and childbirth become an eye-opening experience for her. Gladys became interested in women’s stories and struggles, and in the power of story-telling and finding connections to people by paying attention to personal, embodied experiences. After working for the SENA (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje – Learning National Service) for four years making radio shows for rural development, she grew tired of the bureaucratic atmosphere of that institution and quit her job to create her own project: the first children-oriented radio show in the Colombian North East “*La Espumita*” (“The Little Bubble”). *La Espumita*, marketed, written and produced almost solely by Gladys, grew along with her daughter Dana, one of the voices of the show, and became an emblematic program of the public radio in Santander for almost 5 years. In spite of its success, those were years of financial stress with Gladys making less than minimum wages. Because of her show Gladys received a CIESPAL three-month training

grant that took her to Quito, Ecuador in 1992. There she strengthened her confidence in her script writing skills and learned new formats and ideas for radio education. Back in Colombia, she and Iván Chain, her partner, decided to become a team and create their own communication company dedicated to producing educational media projects and campaigns in the field of health promotion and social development. Since then she has had produced dozens of projects and materials. Now she is 43 years-old, lives in Bogotá with Iván and Dana, and travels around Colombia, elsewhere in Latin American and Spain working mainly as researcher and writer for the *Charrera* team.

Iván Darío Chaín Pinzón belongs, from his father's side, to a family of immigrants from Palestine, people who hold the stereotypical reputation of sly but good negotiators. Iván was also influenced by his school's Jesuit tradition and its message of social justice. In his younger years Iván was mostly enamored of *radio*, everything from news to futbol (soccer) and Radio Theater. He used to tune the dial searching for international stations and followed news from the Sandinist revolution to the Olympic Games. He also listened to late night talk-shows and dreamed about becoming a radio personality. He met Gladys, his partner when he studied social communication in a private, but politically charged university in which he witnessed political persecution and repression of student activists. He joined few alternative communication programs in the slums of Bucarmanga during the 80s while he was still a student. I met him at that time and participated in a few projects with him. These years marked Iván's ideals and commitment to social change. His first job for a local inter- institutional development

program (PSSB¹⁸) sponsored by UNICEF making radio shows and PSAs allowed him to get involved in the on-going conversation about social development: what type of development, for whom, from where. At that time his office subscribed to the *basic social needs* approach. The climate of dialogue and openness of his workplace helped Iván to channel his political ideals into concrete communication initiatives with institutional support. He prompted his office and allies to support the efforts of local grassroots organizations that pursued the legalization of community media. He got involved in the *mesas de trabajo* or public forums on the role of communication and media. These forums were tied to the process of decentralization promoted by the National Constitutional Assembly in 1991. After years of activism and radio production, networking and training of community groups, Iván ended up leading the national movement for legalization of community radios in Colombia and becoming elected national coordinator of AMARC¹⁹. At the end of his contract with the UNICEF-sponsored institutions, he realized his activism wouldn't pay the rent. After several difficult attempts to work independently offering communication services, he decided to join Gladys as a business partner, and with her they got a few contracts in Bucaramanga related to health communication. In 1995 a training workshop by the PAHO, Pan-American Health Association in Venezuela offered him the perspective of behaviorist-oriented health communication campaigns. Iván, resistant at first, absorbed the newly discovered tools of social marketing, and adapted them to social activism. With Gladys

¹⁸ *Programa de Servicios Sociales Basicos de Bucaramanga* PSSB, Basic Social Services Program of Bucaramanga, sponsored by UNICEF and the local city government.

¹⁹ AMARC: Asociación Mundial de radio Comunitaria. World Association of Community Broadcasters

and a few others he founded the *Charrera* team that for the last 13 years has gained national and international recognition. Iván, 44, lives in Bogotá with Dana and Gladys.

Pedro Pablo Rincón grew up with his family in Contratación, a small town that used to be the base of a leper colony. In his childhood Pedro Pablo had little contact with the outside world and interacted only with the family/patients of the colony who struggled to survive from few crops and charity. Cut-off from visitors and outside media, his source of play and imagination were the ads, posters and seals of products that arrived to the local store. Colorful coca-cola ads, cigarette ads, and clothing ads showed him a glimpse of a fascinating life outside the colony. He became especially interested in print images. When he was 17 he left Contratación to go to San Gil, another provincial town where he joined the local weekly "*El Campesino*" and contribute there with his drawings. Then he empirically learned the basics of graphic design. His mentor, the painter and cartoonist Luis Domingo Rincón, a.k.a. Domingó, introduced him to plastic arts and community education, and they worked together making print materials to support peasant organizations of the region. Pedro Pablo moved to Bucarmanga in 1993. He met Iván and Gladys, and immediately joined their team not only as graphic designer but also as creative asset for brainstorming strategies, scripts, and interactive/playful exercises. His graphic style resembles the Spaniard painter Miró, and by the unique freshness of his comments and expressions he comes across as an innocent dreamer, a sensitive person in the best sense of the term.

In the late 90s he switched to computer graphic design and kept exploring other expressive material besides print. His sculptures, containers, bags, T-shirts, masks, and

other colorful objects support educational projects. Besides working with the *Charreras*, Pedro Pablo founded his own art workshop called *Molino de Tinta* (Ink Mill). He is 33 and lives with his partner in Bucaramanga.

Darío Moreno Suárez is a musician from Málaga. He laughs saying that he is the “black sheep” of his large conservative family. Darío didn’t follow one particular career different than being a musician, which was not a respectable one in traditional Colombia. In his 20s Darío had several short-term jobs in the rural area of Málaga. During the day he would work as teacher’s substitute, or in a cafeteria, and mostly he would meet with his left-leaning comrades making Chasqui, a sort of alternative/underground media. Gladys met him in the early 90s and she remembers he wasn’t a furious political agitator; he was for the most part, a musician, a fun easy-going bohemian character involved in his community, working in cultural venues and events. Today he doesn’t really know how he has been able to make a living for many years, but lately he is more consistently supporting himself with his music and creative talent. Since 1995 Darío has joined the *Charrera* team and made all the original soundtracks and songs for each radio production. Darío comes to the meetings with his keyboard, his *tiple*²⁰ and his guitar; sits distractedly with an instrument at hand and in the spot he comes out with a song. He loves to provide entertainment for meetings and workshops teasing people, making impersonations and jokes. He also acts for radio dramas, adapts lyrics of popular songs, supports the work at the recording studio and makes musical arrangements for the

²⁰ A Colombian traditional instrument. It resembles a small guitar of 12 strings

productions. Today, in his late 40s, he works making his own digital music and mentoring young artists in his Bogotá's home.

Jesús Abad Colorado's parents left their land escaping from political violence and migrated to Medellín in the 60s, where he was born. His father became a guard at the university where years later Jesús Abad would study journalism. He has worked for several local newspapers as photojournalist and contributed to national and international magazines. His assignments relate mostly with the pervasive presence of violence: the aftermath of massacres, the destruction of villages, and the displaced population fleeing their homes. In his works he glimpses complexity: a funeral procession in a dusty village passes by a couple playing dominoes; the toddler girl hugging tenderly her pet hen while the background shows desolation and destruction. The silent dignity of survivors, the ambiguity of gestures and textures of everyday life that continue in spite of violence is what Jesús Abad offers in his pictures.

I met him in Medellín for an interview and I couldn't sit with him and conduct a sit down interview. He didn't want to stay in one place and didn't care much about answering my pre-formulated questions. Instead, he took me with him to walk all over Medellín with his camera. On the walk he pointed out overlooked details of the city and struck up conversation with random people, such as street vendors, homeless people, street children, lottery vendors. He told me the stories that happened in a particular corner of the city; he took me to the tougher slums and pointed out the tiny marks on the walks that represent warning signs or deadly codes made by the paramilitaries to their perceived enemies. He sees and reads the signals of the town that pass unnoticed for most people.

He has seen too much and now he wants to keep a low profile to be safe. In 2005 his news account and photographs published in the national daily *El Tiempo* pointed to military involvement in a massacre in the Uraba region, and denounced a pattern of military-paramilitary cooperation. The report prompted the human rights office to investigate the killings. After surviving one kidnapping and receiving death threats, he decided to quit newspapers and work as freelancer in order to become involved in safer assignments that inspired hope. This was the time when he joined the *Charrera* team to work in a few projects related to education and violence prevention. He is 41 years-old, lives between Medellín and Bogotá, received the Simón Bolívar National Journalist Award for the third time, and in 2006 was the first photographer ever to receive an International Press Freedom Award in the United States.

None of the practitioners here have had formal training in the specific field called “development or social change communication,” but they have found sources on the road that inform and shape their work practices. Their personal backgrounds, social locations, and their political views have shaped their decisions and interests. Some of them have experienced social exclusion (Pedro Pablo Rincón), violence (Jesús Abad Colorado), lived in the margins of daily surviving (Darío Moreno Suárez), have found common ground in experiences of gender and motherhood (Gladys Herrera), or have encountered room, and perhaps hope, (Iván Chahín) within the institutional system to deal with political frustration, and work for positive social change.

These Colombians, all of them resourceful and imaginative in inventing and reinventing their living in non-traditional professional fields, are socially located

individuals, affected by their thick of their biographies which are, in turn, intertwined with the history of the country. They hold agendas and agency that give sense and direction to dozens of development communication programs.

5.1.2. Workplace: A Family Environment

Much of the production process for the *Charreras* team takes place at Iván and Gladys' home. The house I visited in Bucaramanga in 2004 and 2005 was a three-room, lively, neat place, full of light, decorated with art crafts, a hammock hanging in the living room, a guitar on the wall, and Latin American folk music in the background. The house was located in a middle-lower class district. It was rented; Gladys and Iván paid around \$200 (\$500.000 pesos) per month. In 2006 their daughter Dana started college in Bogotá, so Gladys and Iván decided to move there and rented a much smaller two-room apartment. During my 2006 visit I saw the changes: they set up one computer in a little corner by the entrance, reduced their crafts and posters to the minimum and used the tiny living/dining as an office room to host meetings. Gladys misses her patio, an impossible luxury in the cold Bogotá weather. Moving was a big change. It was hard to learn to deal with the chaotic traffic and more expensive prices, but the family now sees the convenience of staying together, joining Dana in her University studies and being closer to people, agencies and institutions that are their clients and work partners.

Iván and Gladys meet frequently with Darío who had moved to Bogotá before them. Pedro Pablo has come to the capital a few times to visit from Bucaramanga, and they routinely use skype (the on-line telecom system) to discuss their projects. Jesús Abad mostly lives in Medellín and stays at the *Charreras*' place when he travels. He

joins the team in specific sites when the projects involve photography. Distance hasn't affected their work so far. Plus they are finding more people in Bogotá to support their work, especially for production of multimedia and digital materials.

Extended family members and friends stop by the *Charreras'* place daily: Gladys' brother and Dana's cousins and boyfriend hang out there. All seem to be aware of the projects the parents are working on. At supper time Gladys keeps talking from the kitchen while Iván removes papers from the dining table and Dana helps placing plates and cutlery. Gladys serves supper, and the family's guests and I sit at the table continuing the chat. I saw this ritual every time in Bogotá as well as in Bucaramanga. Meals, cooking, visits, meetings, writing, entertainment and family issues and stories easily converge in the same time and space (Figure 1).



Figure 1
The Charreras' Household - office Space
Jesús Abad Colorado (left), Gladys Herrera (standing) and Pedro Pablo Rincón (right)
choosing pictures for the evaluation packet of the Like Skill projects *La Aventura de la Vida*

The place matters in this story because it tells about the capacity of this group to formalize an informal environment for living and working; to transform, for instance, the dining table into a desk for the daughter's homework, into office space, into a writing desk for communication projects, and into a dining place again. There is no clear cut separation between work and everyday family life. Gladys mentions several times that "we try to be consistent between work and family life; we try to do what we preach." She means that they try to integrate ideas and concrete practices of gender equality, democratic decisions at home, and even keeping healthy habits and cooking hearty meals. But also their family life informs their work. Parenting Dana "is our permanent communication workshop", Iván exclaims with pride. The close and permanent presence of family member and friends counts as a source of connections to the grounded world. I saw how their cousin's son's anecdote on the "Impossible Geography of Rafael Pombo" became an idea for a script, how the conversation at the table jumped from family issues to politics and work in an organic form, as if the same conversation operated in several levels and scenarios. This particular workplace implies a non-separated way to interplay family and professional life, and keep communication design grounded and approachable.

5.2. Practitioners' Reflection on their Professional Role

During one of my visits to the *Charrerías* the phone rings and Gladys picks up. When she comes back, she confesses to me with a tired expression.

"That was the woman from the bank. We asked the bank to extend the credit line because some times we don't have cash but we know money is coming. You know how it is here. Most of the time payments have delays. So I had to explain

to her this again, and then she wants to know exactly what we do. And I say it ‘look, we are communicators who participate in the production of materials for social development’, something like that I said to her. And the woman asks again. She didn’t get it, I don’t blame her. It’s hard to explain. I wish I can say: look, go to www.cuentosparaconversar.com and you’ll see a bit of what we do!” (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

This low recognition and difficulty to define the professional field seems to be a problem even for communicators located in Washington D.C. (Cliff, 1996) In the literature of the field the one strong call to examine the role of the communicators and to train them came from Gumucio-Dagrón (2002) when pointing out that communication is the *bottle neck* of the participation component of many development projects he had reviewed, which indicates a failure of the people in charge, the practitioners.

The Charreras case talks about a different experience, in which they as freelancers in development projects are the gears to help mobilize participatory efforts.

Here the members of the *Charreras* talk about their journey and reflect on the ways they understand communication and development, their initial assumptions, disappointments, personal and professional interests, the key concepts that differentiate them from other professionals and the key definitions of their practice.

5.2.1. *Finding the Paths and Meaning of Communication*

Iván recalls this anecdote from his college days,

I remember thinking a lot about communication after one day when we were in the middle of a class and our professor (of media studies) talked about persuasion, and insisted that all communication is somehow persuasion. Right then, Ricardo, a very controversial classmate said, “If that is true, I better jump out of the window,” and he did just that. He jumped! Fortunately, we were at the second floor and he didn’t get hurt. But that tells you that at that time, in the 80s, for us

just thinking of persuasion sounded very bad. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

Those were the times when the Mac Bride Report circulated amply in Latin American communication schools; the peak years of experimenting with *comunicación alternativa y popular*; and the times in which many Colombians marched on the streets asking for local autonomy of towns and regions, a process called *la descentralización*, that required civic participation and local and independent media. According to Iván,

It marked me the video we saw of Calandria, the women in Lima (Peru) organizing a large social movement around *El vaso de Leche*, “A Glass of milk” food project for their children. It was amazing to see how they used radio to mobilize people, to talk about rights, about food, about basic things. And it was a totally new experience of radio; it was neither news nor music, it was women chatting, telling stories of basic stuff like how to get milk. That totally inspired me. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

The Peruvian scholar Rosa Maria Alrafo (1984) documents how the process of *Calandria* connects it to the construction of citizenship and with non traditional ways of doing politics in Latin America. That was a lesson that Iván would keep with him and struggle with in his future projects.

The option of journalism was still there for Jesus Abad, who decided to quit words and focus on photography. For Pedro Pablo graphic illustrations, cartoons and watercolors paintings were his media. But once he joined the *Charrerías* his images found diverse scenarios and uses and he saw himself finding his professional niche. For Gladys, her departure from journalism was a painful realization:

I thought I wanted to be a journalist, but when I was working as a radio reporter in Malaga I got disappointed. Broadcasting news on the life of those poor peasants didn't really help do anything. One day I started questioning myself: "What am I doing here? Being a reporter is not enough, this is not the communicator I wanted to be; I should be doing something else." (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

Meanwhile, Darío worked informally in his underground weekly called *Chasqui*.

He did it for a few years with no monetary retribution, so communication and media were not central in his life and he never thought that it could be a way to make a living, until he met Gladys.

When I started working with Gladys in *La Rana*, *Historias con Sabor a Leche*, and other radio projects singing and making music, it was like a revelation. I was able to work on something creative and fun, making music with a purpose. Different from the weekly I was part of. But still it was consistent to some ideals that one has. That was another stage in my life, but then meeting the *Charrerías* helped me to find my own idea of working in communication without being a communicator, but putting my music there, with a direction, a purpose. (Moreno, D., personal communication, August 20, 2004)

Pedro Pablo understands the trajectory of his work leading up to the *Charrerías* as a mission, in an ethical sense. He sees the communication work as "a call, in Salesians terms" that requires vocation, desire to serve others. (Rincón, September 15, 2004).

While working for the Program of Basic Social Services of Bucaramanga (PSSB), sponsored by UNICEF, and making radio educational programs, Iván became entangled in the web of community radio. He met Mario Ronchetti, the Italian priest of Santa Ines parish in the slums of the city called Ciudad Norte. Ronchetti and other young and idealist priests informed by the Theology of Liberation, were at that time organizing the local community media: getting equipment, training local young leaders to use *betamax* video cameras and audio recording equipment and inviting university students to support

the project. I was one of those university students, learning and helping in that process. Iván joined the team to partner on the PSSB radio show called *La Voz del Barrio*, in which barrio young reporters broadcast to the whole city. That tiny cell of radio producers, organically involved in other barrio programs and collective issues, grew and multiplied, and in the next years, from 1989 to 1995, they would create a regional, then national community radio network that would eventually join with the international network of community radio producers. Iván remembers,

For years I was looking for a way to work in communication without having to jump out of the window! (laughs) It went round and round in my head the idea of being a communicator for this type of society, thinking what we need here [...] For me community radio was a turning point. I found what I wanted to do personally. It became my passion, as a person, as professional, as Colombian, that was a vital road for me. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

The years of working in radio preceded the formation of the *Charrera* team as such. When Gladys and Iván decided to work together, they didn't quit their passion for radio, for they kept reconnecting their projects to the radio networks they had worked with. Still to this day, almost every audio series they produce is broadcasted through regional radio networks, or some audio clips are shared in the commons for community stations through the on-line service of *Servicios de Comunicación e Información para la Paz* (SIPAZ).

5.2.2. *Talking Politics: Anger versus Grace*

When working in radio and training community radio producers, Iván and Gladys reflected on the type of language and the type of communication that would promote

engagement and steps towards social change. They realized that the tendency of most political oriented radios was to focus almost exclusively on denouncing injustices. They believed this to be absolutely necessary; however, they knew that the exclusive attitude of criticism and political complaint didn't work for them. Gladys told me she felt turn-off from that type of speech. "I don't feel comfortable with the political language and political topics. It actually sort of scares me a bit" (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005). Iván believes that the enraged language of radio does not invite people to listen but divides people. There are other ways to engage in politics without resorting to the use of contaminated and politically charged language.

Iván and Gladys draw on the teachings from their *maestro* José Ignacio Lopez Vigil at the *Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina*, International Center for the Superior Studies of Communication in Latin America (CIESPAL) in Ecuador. Lopez Vigil, radio educator and president of AMARC in Latin America, inspired communicators to produce *sensuous* radio; radio that cares about the audience; that produces a full range of engaging formats; that explores and respects the quality of sonic language; and that without relinquishing its political ideals is pluralistic, inviting and seductive. Besides, Vigil insisted that all topics can be political, even the mundane ones.

Iván and Gladys coined a few maxims during their years supporting *La Voz del Barrio* and other radio teams, one was: "*La propuesta si, pero con la propuesta, y si la propuesta es bella, mucho mejor*" (Chahin, 1996), which translates, "Protest is OK, but protest with proposition is better. And proposition with grace, even better."

Asking for obedience, as they put it, wasn't the only model of persuasion present in commercial media, propaganda, advertisement, or social marketing. Activists and leaders working for progressive causes or social movements also used a model that the *Charreras* saw with suspicion. They remember that the union workers' radio of Santa Marta, as much as the environmental radio program "*Uno y Medio Ambiente*", not only lacked sensuality, and relied mostly on protest, but they also imposed one political discourse on the audience. Gladys says,

Do you remember that *Uno y Medio Ambiente* (One and the Environment) show? That was an example of treating the audiences like children, commanding them or scolding them. The show would go: The trees! The water! don't do this, don't do that, denounce this or that. The tone wasn't inviting, it was like barking style, you now. Although the content is important and true. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

For the *Charreras* the radio that broadcast exclusively angry complaints wouldn't survive in the context of a free market media environment in which community radios need to compete for audiences. The radio that promotes social change would facilitate the expression of diverse voices and invite people to engage with them. As discussed in Chapter II, the case of union worker's media and the Chilean socialist media during Allende's times (Martín Barbero, 1993 and Sunkel, 1985 and Herrán, 1987) that oriented their discourse to "political education" and represented only "politically worthy" actors/themes, failed to engage with their audiences because they neglected the vast cultural demands and everyday life events that were meaningful for the audiences.

5.2.3. *Two Ears, One Mouth*

Perhaps the failure of these alternative radios has to do with their interest in delivering contents and paying little attention to listening to their audiences. According to Gladys,

In community radio we started using the image of ears, a radio with ears. These we saw in radio, but also in other projects that some NGOs and institutions promote. The institutions were pretty much interested in making sure that people would listen to what they wanted to say but not really to listen to people, because all that messiness of what people would say would be labeled as noise, as an obstacle for their (institution's) idea of communication. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

This ear-less model of communication resembles the classic piece of criticism on communication as extension made by Freire (1973). Education for communities was seen as ways to extend one's contents to others that were assumed to be empty vessels or have the incorrect knowledge. To counterbalance that model, the radio people in the Santander networks working with the Charrera came out with the image: *dos orejas y una boca*. Two ears and one mouth, which means that community radio needs to listen more than talk. Lilia Espinoza, a young community reporter from *La Cometa*, community radio station, who was trained by the Charreras, explained to me that two ears and one mouth meant for her.

It isn't only about listening skills but about research, a permanent involvement in the life of the communities, a connection to local organizations; simply to be in tune to what people are talking in the streets, the music they like, the stories of the town, their diverse interests, their likes and dislikes. And to let more stories to be on air (Espinoza, Lilia, personal communication, August 10, 2005).

5.2.4. Using “Gringo Models” for Other Ends

Iván and Gladys decided to form the *Charreras* team and embarked with Pedro Pablo and Darío, (and later with Jesus Abad) in the business of designing and implementing communication projects and campaigns. They didn’t have training in this field and worked out of intuition, until Iván encountered some guidance in the health communication literature.

Our work for years was more speculative. Something that marked me a lot was the encounter with the behaviorist line of thinking that the PAHO people in Venezuela follows. It’s all about behavior change. And I enjoyed that a lot in spite of my allergy against behaviorism; the thing was that I didn’t understand the foundations before, but the guy in Venezuela explained it clearly to us and I liked it a lot, and came back and told the story to everyone. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

I asked what happens with his distrust on persuasion projects. How does he see these behavior- oriented methods useful now? Iván responds,

What I like was the precision of those theories. While other theories of communication and culture, what Barbero (Jesus Martín Barbero) says, or the Chilean Madniff says, gives you panorama, you don’t know how to land them on something concrete, you break your head, you say ‘what the heck!’ While other theories (marketing-related models) say do this, then this, then that and you get it. I say, OK. But I don’t want the result of the model, what the model wants (to sell), for I have another idea in mind. I like that it reminds me that in communication there are some concrete steps. Now my intention is not to make you to think like me, but for you and me talk about what we think. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

Gladys also had learned to use concrete tools like the ABC (define Audiences, Benefits and Behaviors) for order and clarity. She believes that in many cases discourses for development and social change don’t have real concrete referents in everyday life and get lost in an abstract jargon that few people understand.

People tend to give too much content and little meaning, we need less content and more meaning and more clarity and more opportunities for connecting to people. That is what these methods that may come from advertising offer us. But we don't marry them; we just play with them and make something else. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

Pedro Pablo praises the profession of advertising for its capacity to express creatively. Since his childhood he remembers the impact of the ads' seductive images and he believes there is much to learn from a field that knows about generating emotions. Although as the other Charreras members say, with different goals in mind. (Rincón, Pedro Pablo, personal conversation, September 15, 2004).

In turn, Iván praises the "gringo models" of advertising and social marketing,

For instance, in the dengue project (Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever prevention project) that (social marketing model) helped us lot. I liked the gringo models that say: "propose only one behavior". That's good, because we Colombians would end up proposing 32 behaviors at once! So, I say OK, I'll follow the model, but with other intentions! My ultimate goal is not to make people to brush the walls of the tank, (brush the water tank to remove mosquito eggs) but to form citizens. The behavior is just one stop in that journey but my destination is citizenship. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

That mix of social marketing/behavior change models with other ideas more connected to a larger project of construction of citizenship requires more elaboration. Iván offered two examples to clarify: one on gender representation in the campaign messages, and a second example on opening up sources for understanding health issues beyond the particular behavior to change or adopt.

In the first example the public health officials pushed for targeting only women, who were seen as the ones in charge of brushing the walls of water containers where

mosquitos breed. The Charreras agreed that women were the main audience. But they wanted to include men too in the posters, stickers and radio clips. Even though more women than men are in charge of the household chores, the campaign promoters can change the representation. Iván says,

Why (to target) only women? When we decided to include men that decision made this project a tool for having new referents of the world. We are creating an opportunity for the kids to say, “Mmmm, papa does not do that, why? Why does Mama have to do this work?” And that little space for making these questions is part of what we need to do in order to go where we want to go. Besides killing mosquitoes, of course! (laughs) Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

The Charreras see that thinking in media representation and in inclusive language as part of their communication strategies are elements for building a path for citizenship. Yet in order to do so, communicators have to be open to mix perspectives and move beyond the marketing model of behavior change. Iván explains,

If we spend our energy saying to people clean this, clean that, the walls of the container have eggs, well, eventually some people would do that. But there is no connection to understanding the health problem. We are doing nothing for citizenship. But in this project we are trying to add a component for understanding health, to create a new relationship for people with their environment, their neighborhoods, people that care for others, and prevent and act and look for information. So we (communicators) are trying to open up the capacity to comprehend, get informed. Look, here is an example that happened months after the dengue fever (project). The yellow fever came to Bucaramanga, so the health authorities changed the order. “Don’t brush the containers” a totally opposite order, because they poured some biological control there in the water... Then, how are we going to communicate to people? Give them another order? Where I am going with this is that treating people as citizens is different than giving them a particular instruction. So, all the other resources for conversation that we added in the strategy go into that direction. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

This view directly stresses the idea that citizens can learn citizenship. This learning may take place in informal everyday contexts and it is influenced by critical and formative events promoted by the communication work. The *encuentros* or gatherings in public sites, like the park, the community center with school teachers and parents, to talk, not only about the dengue, but also about related themes like quality of water, public services, health services available in the town, and so on, represent opportunities for the audiences to connect to collective issues and to gain practice to discuss them.

5.2.5. *Communication Strategies and the Need of “Impure” Mixtures*

This option of mixing tools is strategic, according to Iván, at least for the Colombian reality where people are forced to use what they have at hand and adopt it, adapt it or transform it.

People may say “how do you dare to mix these things, how do you dare to put this Marxist thing next to this gringo model?” I know what we do doesn’t look nice on paper, it may be philosophically incorrect or methodologically incoherent; I don’t know. But in the real concrete life what is needed is more crazy mixes, more impurities than purities, more mixing of thought. [...] We can put a bit of Kaplun, and Alves from CIESPAL, and Herman, the guy from the slums of Ciudad Norte, and if that works for what I want to say, well, good! Look, this is a silly example, but here on the table we had this basket as center piece. We don’t buy flowers anymore since Dana and Gladys started putting cute red peppers there with and avocado, and with some cucumbers. It looks nice, and it is alive, and we eat one thing and put something else there, and it always changes. So who cares if doesn’t look like flowers if it works (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

In the literature of the field, as some scholars have pointed out (Morris, 2003, Rogers 1976, Waisbord, 2001), there is a continuum of practices that use elements of the main two paradigms. The Bellagio’s report of recommendations for curriculum training of development communicators also acknowledges this continuum (Irigoin et al. 2002).

The Bellagio map of competences describes as the key function of development communicators to “use communication to facilitate efforts by people to achieve sustainable improvements in individual and collective wellbeing” (p.13). The key words in this definition are “efforts by people.”

Iván’s explanation of the Charreras inclusion of conversation components to promote citizenship, is congruent to this definition because by creating the conditions and the excuse for people to look at the sanitation and environmental conditions of their neighborhood, not only at clean containers, they engage to what is collective and public, the place for the exercise of citizenship.

In sum, the Charreras see communication for development as an integral part of their identities. For Pedro Pablo communication represents a *mission*, almost like a vocational call to a sort of ministry. In turn, Darío thinks that everyone of the Charreras could be making much more money doing something else, but they chose to work in this job to follow their passions and ethical views of society. For all of them it represents self-actualization, a meaningful job of serving life that doesn’t allow them to jump out of the window out of cynicism or despair.

For the team, communication is a contribution to peace and reconciliation in the country. Although the issues and topics they deal with are not necessarily related to violence, war or post-conflict initiatives, and although Gladys doesn’t feel comfortable talking about politics, the Charreras conceive their projects as contributions to create an environment of peace in Colombia by the training in conversation, by avoiding framing problems in fatalistic, enraged ways and by inclusion of diversity in representation and in

actual voices. I see their choice of communication, not as much as information-delivery, neither as extension of an expert's knowledge but as a possibility of having meaningful conversations in the public place. That understanding of communication is their contribution to build peace in the region.

In their professional life, they borrow from advertising the precision of designing messages for particular targets, plus its seductive aesthetic tools. And from journalism, they borrow techniques of reporting tools. However Gladys is suspicious of the label "journalist" and prefers to be called communicator. Why? Their perception of news media that talks from a distant center and assumes one-way posture of modernization is what bothers her. Thus the Charreras insist in the saying that they apply to the work in community radio: communication requires "two ears and one mouth", and with it they indicate the difference between their efforts in participatory encounters and conversation in which listening is key versus journalistic modes of communication.

Communication also means for this team exploration of the sensuous use of message making and the challenge to avoid the polluted language of rage and protest. Their unconventional combinations of methods to create communication strategies indicate agency. Although their training on development communication and public health communication is mostly empirical, they are open to use and adapt what seems convenient for them from "the gringo models" to the creative, poetic, sources of imagination.

And finally, the example of citizenship as an ultimate goal of their work, makes evident the practitioners have not relinquished their agendas of communication associated with community engagement and civic participation, even if they are embarked in a campaign to exterminate mosquitoes.

CHAPTER VI

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATORS AT WORK

What do development communicators do? How do they do it? In this chapter I address the second research questions and its related sub-questions: What are the dilemmas and challenges that communicators deal with in their everyday work? What are the power asymmetries present and reproduced in the communication encounters and in the language of the development projects? How dominant values coming from the modernization paradigm of development permeate concrete communication projects, materials and encounters?

Here I focus on a particular communication project carried out by the participants of this study, from the initial stage of proposal submission and negotiation with aid agencies, to the final stages of distribution of media materials and evaluation. This account works as a narrative thread that links to different cases, stories, examples and reflections from other projects these practitioners have done. The digressions or flash-backs illustrate antecedents and recurrent tensions and controversies that emerge in similar projects and show where the practitioner professional decisions come from. My intention, rather than to focus on a particular project *per se*, is to describe how typically this group of communicators work and how their previous experiences, and vision of communication impregnates their work.

6.1. Designing and Implementing a Project

The Charreras work on three of four different projects almost simultaneously. During my three visits to Colombia they were always in the middle of a large project while planning activities and trips related to another two or three. In the summer of 2004 they were brainstorming “*Caja de Cambios*²¹”, had just started “*La Pruebita*²²” and focused mostly on the last part of the *Aguasuelo*²³.

Not all the projects designed and implemented by the Charreras team follow the same series of steps. At times they join a work when it is already in progress, so the goal is to re-direct a stalled effort. In most cases they receive calls from former clients or from contacts who work in national and international development agencies, NGOs and local institutions. These contacts want the Charreras to submit proposals for an entirely new idea, to compete for contracts, or simply to become consultants to support an on-going program. After 15 years of building a reputation, the Charreras’s phone rings way too often and they have to pick-and-choose propositions, and reject some of them because of their small team and time constraints. In the case of the *Aguasuelo*, the project I focus on in this study, the call came from the GTZ’s communications officer who heard positive comments about previous radio educational material made in the coffee region by the Charreras.

²¹ *Caja de Cambios* or Changing Gears, a project on violence prevention in school settings

²² *La Pruebita*, The Little Test-Taste or Sample, a project on promotion of healthy eating habits

²³ *Aguasuelo*, a project on promotion of conservational agriculture.

6.1.1. Proposal and Counter-proposal

On August 10, 2005 more than 100 people crowded the conference room of the fancy Hotel Tequendama in Bogotá's downtown. The representatives of the German aid agency, GTZ, and the Colombian Ministry of Agriculture gave speeches describing the benefits of the joint effort on an agricultural program for soil preservation and environmental recover in the region of Boyacá. The event included the showing of a promotional video and a short introduction by Iván and Gladys on the main educational and communication strategy for Boyacá's rural communities called *El Aguasuelo*.

El Aguasuelo project consisted of a media and interpersonal communication campaign that included series of 20 radio educational shows broadcast through the commercial and community radio networks of Boyacá, and a set of audio files (CD and Mp3) and print materials (which include games, pictures, guides for facilitating small group communication, suggestions for special events, etc.) to be used by local leaders and by extensionists in community meetings to further the conversation on land conservation.

That evening in Bogotá Iván and Gladys rushed over the last five minutes of the event to explain the communication strategy by presenting a slide show that mainly included pictures of community members listening in groups to the radio shows. In the presentation they emphasized that communication starts making sense at the community level when local media and interpersonal channels join and engage audiences in the same conversation. The target audiences are the male and female farmers of the Boyacá region, and the ways to reach them are radio broadcasts and small group meetings. In these

encounters people listen to a clip of *coplas*²⁴ or stories, and get the motivation and the confidence to enter into a conversation around the principles of conservation agriculture from their perspective and their practice. Instead of seeing the media materials as simple icebreakers right before a specialist talks to an audience, the Charreras conceive their media messages as seductive entrance points that set the tone for a conversation; a conversation that includes the participants at the center taking charge of what is said. These conversations, according to the design, hold value in themselves. “The idea here is to propose, not to impose; to invite, not to push to convince people about something”, Iván noted.

Two elements are evident: first, the similarity of this proposal to the model of two-step-communication flow that has a long tradition in diffusion communication programs is readily observable. One step is the use of mass media, and the second step is interpersonal channels and the inclusion of opinion leaders as stated in Rogers’ Diffusion model. But the second element, the emphasis on conversation, the idea of inviting versus convincing is a deviation from the dominant persuasion model. It is rather consistent to the teachings of Freire and his dialogical pedagogy for social change. The *Aguasuelo* seems to be a hybrid project or a totally different species.

After the event, walking back to the bus station Iván and Gladys vented their discomfort with the promotional video, which was not part of their strategy and was material they disapproved from the beginning. The video shows two *campesinos* chatting and drinking in a store: the one who knows about conservational agriculture is handsome,

²⁴ Improvised songs or ballads.

tall and light-skinned, and the one who is resistant to change is shorter, older, fatter, and has darker skin. Both roles are played by professional actors that one can see on TV. The first one recites all the talking points from the GTZ manuals, while the other one doesn't listen. In its predictable plot, the video goes on and the two men meet months later. The one who was resistant to change was bankrupt. The "good one" looks successful and ends up helping his friend. Iván says this is the typical institutional video: technically well-done, but the characters are unrealistic and the language sounds "phony as a leather coin; it is pure institutional discourse adorned by music and fancy effects [...] it's made from the desk of someone in Bogotá, not from Boyacá". (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004). Gladys cringed recounting a controversial line in the video. One of the *campesinos* makes a comment on a poorly maintained lot of land by saying: "*peor que tierra de viuda*" "worse than [female] widow's land". (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 18, 2004).

The problematic reinforcement of race and gender stereotypes passed unnoticed by the institution. For the Charreras, it wasn't just the images and comments that were out of place, they also pointed out the cultural distance of the video makers that denied the more complex voice of real farmers, as well as the simplification of the plot in binary language of good and bad.

This video was the type of model that the GTZ officials wanted to "reproduce" into a series of radio shows. Looking back, the Charreras remember that the agency initially asked them to make a sort of continuation of the video in radio format. The Charreras disagreed with the idea giving arguments not only against the language of the

video, but also stating that the communication services they offer are not only about making media, but designing a communication strategy that aims for engagement and participation of local communities. This shows how one obstacle the communicators have to face is the narrow understanding of development communication among aid agencies and government institutions, as denounced by Gumucio-Dagrón (2002).

Six months earlier, Iván, Gladys and Pedro Pablo wrote a proposal explaining their strategy: A well-connected set of ideas summarized on an “ABC”, that in Spanish stands for: A, knowing the audience; B, Benefits (understanding and proposing clear benefits to that audience); and C, *comportamientos*, or behaviors and practices that people would adopt to obtain certain benefits. So far, the proposal follows the script of the social marketing campaign formulas including focus groups and pre-testing messages. However the Charreras added an extra C, so the proposal becomes another formula “ABC+C”. The last C stands for “*Cuento*”, or tale. Here they argue that the main resource of their communication strategy is to tell a story that unleashes desires to know more about the subject and participate in learning activities about it, instead of explaining a task to do or a behavior to perform.

Their proposal explicitly expressed the need to know the audiences, then the team would need more money and one month more than what the GTZ timetable described in its terms of reference, in order to do field research, organize focus groups and for distribution of materials and training community leaders that would reach those exact audiences. Extra time and resources for research was an initial point of disagreement given the fact that the agency had done baseline diagnosis on the issue; therefore it didn't

see the need for the communicators to dedicate several weeks to visit sites, even less when an agronomist associated with the GTZ program and with the national environmental office called CAR (*Corporación Autónoma Regional*) was assigned to supply technical information. The proposal came back and forth twice. Iván took the lead explaining to the agency officials that they wouldn't agree to work on a program without getting the sense of place nor understanding how this issue affects people's everyday life and without exploring concrete audiences' needs and knowledge on conservational agriculture. Eventually, the agency accepted the Charreras' request.

Negotiating every point of the project and writing proposals and counterproposals seem to be a common occurrence in the Charreras' work. Educating the agencies on what communicators can do also has been part of their job for years. Bety Toloza, the Director of Communication of SEPAS²⁵ who had hired the Charreras and worked with them before, finds this assertive style unusual, but positive, for communicators.

I was surprised to learn, to see that Iván and Gladys are..., but mostly Iván, is stubborn with the proposals. He decides if he takes it or not. And he positions himself as he had the right or the power to say 'I won't accept these terms' or 'wait a minute, here there is an alternative'. [...] You know... like *turcos*! Iván is a *turco*!²⁶ (laughing) You say to him, this is the project, and he says, 'let's see... let's review this'. So, it's not like the client is always right. No. And I like this a lot because for us, people in communication, this means some status [...] so,

²⁵ SEPAS, Secretariado de Pastoral Social de San Gil.

²⁶ *Turco*, in Colombian slang means "clever merchant". It carries a pejorative innuendo when used to label Middle Eastern immigrants as *turcos* (wrongly assuming all are from Turkey). They are stereotyped as furtive or sly businesspeople. Iván himself makes fun of his Middle Eastern ancestry saying that when negotiating his *turco self* comes out.

people can see that thing [negotiating] is also what we can do... or should do. (Tolosa, B., personal communication, September 3, 2004).

For Pedro Pablo the success of presenting and negotiating proposals and counterproposals resides in their particular communication style.

Even the proposal contains certain style. They [Iván and Gladys] are interested in making things [objects] to talk. They have given a lot of value to the *form* and to make it coherent with what they think. [...] Even in the draft of a proposal they don't follow the formalities; they invent their own way to present their arguments in their own terms, so the proposal itself contains a dosage of that which is promising, a contagious thing; which is like flirting, calling attention; and then, in the process and the product you can see these elements as well. (Rincón, P.P., personal communication, September 15, 2004).

Calvelo cited by Gumucio-Dagrón (2001), Cliff (1997) and others have indicated that communicators in social development are misunderstood and perceived as low-status practitioners. In this case the Charreras team, after many years of struggle, has achieved professional recognition, and positioned itself as the specialists in the *strategic* dimension of communication. They have learned to assert themselves and its communicative power, as shown in the very proposal they submit and in the negotiation process.

6.1.2. *Gathering Data*

a. Visiting the Sites

Carlos Julio Castro, the GTZ-CAR agronomist who also works for the national rural development agency CAR, guided the communicators to their visits, shared technical information and participated as the expert during the entire project. Visits were routine for him, while for Gladys they represented physically demanding expeditions:

Everyday we hiked on those gorgeous hills for hours and hours, from a small farm to the other. There are not roads... we parked Carlos Julio's car by a crossroad

and walked on muddy paths for days by foot. I wasn't ready for that; I wasn't in good shape; my poor legs hurt. [...] but it was beautiful. I'm in love with Boyacá. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004).

Gladys, putting herself in the interview, describes her embodied presence in the sites. Her encounters and visits were both physical and emotional challenges.

The poverty is really extreme. One wonders how they are going to do with their children [...] it is hard to hear the stories and feeling that all these problems are too big to solve, and one wonders what I am doing here, how can I help. One doesn't enter to those homes, *drink agua de panela* (a sugar cane drink) with them and stay the same... Once, after leaving a home, I had to sit on a rock and burst into tears. But still I think just going there and listening attentively is important. One man said that never before anyone from the media went to talk to them. He asked me: 'are you journalist? Journalists never come over here'. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004).

For two weeks Gladys, and then for other two weeks Iván, visited several sites asking people about their struggle with the land and also about the options that the conservation agriculture project offers to them. They collected testimonies from eight sites, interviewing several family units in each one. The visits were meant, according to Iván, to understand the issues and the nuances from the local community in their own words.

But finding the subjects for interviews, getting into the communities, and asking questions is not a straight forward task. The visitor/researcher is an outsider who enters a site and leaves it whenever she/he wants. Coming from the cities to the villages with cameras and recorders, and preceded by the name of an institution to ask questions imply a power relationship over the locals. Tensions in negotiating entrance to communities were not very apparent during the *Aguasuelo* visits, although the Charreras had to ask Carlos Julio to spend more time in certain places to get to know from all family members,

and not only from men, or to visit sites that were not the poster farms of conservational agriculture to hear other perspectives and reasons for opting for other practices.

In a previous project, the issues of power during data gathering became very salient. During a visit to an impoverished barrio in the outskirts of Cartagena, populated by African Colombians, Jesús Abad and Iván were expected to interview and take pictures of teachers and youngsters from a number of secondary schools. This task was part of the evaluation of a “Life Skills” international program. The day they arrived at a school, a group of selected students were waiting for the visitors standing on a row, dressing ties and gala uniforms under the burning Caribbean sun. They were the ‘best students’ singled out by the local program coordinator to talk to the ‘distinguished’ journalists. Iván and Jesús Abad decided to extend their visit for three days instead of only one day in order to create a different relationship with the all type of school kids, not only the ‘model ones’ and with the teachers, and also to visit their families and other sites. Before asking any questions, Jesús Abad lent to some children an extra camera for them to experiment, and Iván let them play around with the tape recorder. Playing and talking, and participating in a *fútbol* match, and sharing informal meals and walks, the students and teachers were able to share spontaneous views of their school life and the particular project they wanted to evaluate. The result was a number of complicated stories and impressions from the project, instead of the adulatory speeches that some of them were expected to recite.

The decisions of the local coordinators who ordered the students to wear ties and pre-selected their answers in order to please the external agencies are part of a history of

power relations shaped by years of top-down development interventions. Their choice of mimicking the project's discourse and silencing their own community's nuanced perceptions fits into the logic of managing modernization interventions. This is a problem, also denounced by Scott in his book *Seeing Like a State* (1998), that communicators face in their work: a tendency among development agents to control the fluidity of experience in order to fit it into the script of modernization-like practices and language.

Gathering data is affected as well by the local interplay of class, race and gender expectations. In 2002, Gladys and Iván traveled to Cali to participate in a baseline research for a program on school violence prevention. They were supposed to visit several barrios and interview teachers and community leaders. The organizers, who knew Iván before, introduced the couple in such a way that Gladys felt professionally excluded. "I felt like if I were the wife traveling for free to be the companion of the husband. People called me 'Mrs. Chahín' (although her last name is Herrera) and the first day everyone, including the interviewees, interacted with me as if I were an accessory there". (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005). Gladys collected some productive data but struggled trying to diffuse the perceptions of the wife companion.

For the *Aguasuelo*, as much as for other projects, the content of the interviews served as data for shaping the approach to the communication strategy, but in addition, the sounds, images, and observations of the peasants' daily life were central to get the sense of who the target audiences know, do and like. Gladys recalls:

Boyacenses are so musical! People have *tripes* and in no time they are playing and singing *coplas*, and improvising songs. And I love to sign too. In a couple of visits we ended up singing. And that is why we [Charreras] later on, decided to produce the radio series resembling that way of talking: people chatting sitting in a circle, and making *coplas*, getting serious, then teasing each other; and so forth, and that is what we did, but in radio. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004).

One finding from these visits was the popularity of *vallenato* music among *campesinos Boyacenses*. *Vallenato* is a musical genre with roots in the Colombian Caribbean. It is easy to assume that in the Andean regions people listen only to folk genres like *bambuco* or *torbellino*. However, *vallenato*, according to the field notes of the Charreras, was omnipresent over the local radios and people in the sites sang *vallenato* songs. This led the team to further investigate with the radio stations about audience's musical preferences. The clues that came out motivated them to ask Darío to compose a *vallenato* song for the main theme for the CD and radio series.

The visits enabled the Charreras to reach three goals: *first*, to gain a close understanding of the issue beyond the technical information; *second*, to grasp the images and sounds related to the sensorial landscape of the region, including sayings, language inflections, songs, jokes, aromas, food, clothing and images of Boyacá; *third*, the visit served to gather powerful testimonies or 'sensuous stories' and identify characters and situations that crystallized certain key educational points of the project, which could be used for the print materials or the radio series.

b. Interviewing, Selecting Subjects and Getting *the Core* of the Interview.

Gladys believes that a difficult group to interview is the one comprised of officials and community leaders. “Not only is it hard to get to the core of what is engaging, but also these interviews are less productive for the purposes of radio; they are just abstract stuff”. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004). For the *Aguasuelo*, Charreras were advised to contact a leader who knew the program and the region and who could make a productive interview. Gladys reported that she interviewed him for two hours and only the last 20 minutes were valuable.

I let him say his speech. He talked and talked like a politician about the program, and the institutions, and how well they are. I let him say what he needed to say. When he was about to finish, he told me, casually, about the creek and the time in which he was a kid and loved to swim naked in the cold water... that memory of his youth, that story I used! (Herrera, G., personal communication, July 22, 2004).

Here the leader adopts a formal institutional-sounded language, abstract with a few buzz words of development discourse. Even though the content and the intentions are valuable for the radio show, Gladys believes that his language “doesn’t communicate; and doesn’t work for radio” (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004). I raised the question on to what extent the Charreras’ fascination with stories that capture “the *campesino*’s voice” becomes a problematic issue since it may be lead to essentializing a social group: expecting all members of the group to talk only in “their (*campesino*) way”. In my conversation with the Charreras I asked if they perceive a risk of “putting people in their place” by implying that “*you have voice in radio if you talk this way*”. They considered that the leader’s language, as well as other officials’ language

that they tend to cut-off “more likely exclude and separate people, rather than reconnect to the audiences’ everyday life. In our show we select the material that helps to create a bridge; that actually communicates with someone”. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004). I wondered if the leader chose to speak that way precisely because he had learned that it gives him access to be heard by the powerful ones. “I don’t know, but you may be right” Gladys said. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004).

While gathering data, the communicators have to navigate the waters of offering voice to certain people over others, and making choices editing, including and *excluding* certain (formulaic) language over the language that happens to be consistent to the aesthetics and philosophy of their work.

In a previous job, which aimed to strengthen a program of sustainable coffee farmer cooperatives in rural Quindío, Gladys, Darío and Iván gathered large amounts of data but for a while they didn’t reach the “core” around which they could build the entire project. That sort of ‘golden nugget’ is elusive, “until we don’t grasp a meaningful central idea we cannot move on and create a message” Iván says. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004). Gladys came back from the field one day fascinated with an interview she had with a group of women at the coffee farmers co-operative. They were wise and witty and one particular interviewee would lift her shoulders gracefully while saying “Hmmm... who knows?” and she would follow “but what I know is...” After listening to that interview the team decided to focus on the idea of *knowledge*: what people know and take for granted; what people forgot or doubt about their local

knowledge and can discuss with others on several topics related to sustainable coffee farming. “*Hmmm... ¿Quién sabe?*”, “Hmmm.... Who knows? became also the motto and title of the radio series. That was the “golden nugget” the Charreras found.

For the *Aguasuelo* project data collection offered a massive amount of raw material but no concrete ideas of what to do with it. The next step would be finding the core, and then, designing the communication strategy and creating provocative messages around it.

6.1.3. *The Approach*

a. Creating the Paths to Communicate

The researchers shared their testimonies and field notes, plus transcriptions of some interviews to the rest of the team in their brainstorm meetings or “creative workshops” to plan the details of the communication strategy. This time the agronomist Carlos Julio joined them and all retreated for three days in a farm near Bucaramanga.

Designing the strategy required the group to come out with certain clarities on the problem. In other words, they needed to reach an agreement not only on the steps and tasks that followed but on that “*intangible thing*” that for Pedro Pablo seemed to emerge from the brainstorming sessions.

When there is a new project Iván says: ‘*hermano*, it’s this and this’, and we all get together for little creativity workshops, just to read the data and brainstorm ideas about the project. Thus one sees where things go. To be part of the creative process of the project is crucial. I have been with the team identifying and constructing that intangible thing: what to do with this assignment. And that is the most difficult part when the moment to [graphic] design comes. [...] those previous moments are crucial; that participation in the process of getting the [meaning of the] story; what one expresses in the conversation is that thing that is in tacit form and you catch it! It’s very cool when one has been part of the

creative process because it [the task] flows easier, faster. (Rincón, P.P., personal communication, September 15, 2004).

Pedro Pablo calls these meetings: creative workshops. Why? Iván explains the struggle to be creative during the making of the *Aguasuelo*.

I read this definition of creative thinking [...] ‘to do the usual stuff by unusual ways’. And this was what we tried to do with the soil preservation agriculture. If that thing is our topic, how we are going to look at it? How to arrive there from diverse places? And that was the fight we had with Carlos Julio at the farm. [He said] ‘No!! How come you say ‘from diverse points’? The message is clear: preservation, crops rotation. That’s it!’ Yes, I said, that’s the place we want to arrive to but not the starting point, brother! We had to add a path or a few paths to the place we want to go for the mundane person to get access there! We should add this path that makes sense from the daily life of the person; and this is not just to put there a piece of [technical] discourse and that’s it. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004).

Gladys remembers they pushed for an overall message that shows “ways to connect to a situation of the everyday life of a person, or some sort or metaphor so he (sic) becomes interested in listening to the other perspectives on agriculture, and in noticing that certain actions actually make sense”. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004). But the agronomist wanted a more explicit, univocal message.

In retrospective, Carlos Julio commented on those days of confrontation: “One has the idea one has to say this and this and this, you know, what people have to do. But I noticed that the communicators have others methods and it’s not that simple just to say things like that. I’m not a communicator, so I have to hold back and learn” (Castro, C.J., personal communication, August 20, 2004) Iván also felt the tension between their professional views.

Those were four days in the farm with Carlos Julio swearing to each other, and arguing and arguing just to come out with two little pages [laughing] and the pages said silly little things like ‘*porque te quiero te cubro*’, (because I love you I cover you) o ‘*en la rotacion esta el placer*’! (rotation is pleasure!) Just imagine when we handed out that to the GTZ! They are so logic and mathematical and square-rish. ‘What these *huevones* (sluggish ones) are thinking?’ [they might say] But those two pages contained the key decisions to make the programs. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004).

Another element of disagreement resulted when deciding the communication approach. Carlos Julio felt that they were losing their direction. He insisted on focusing on the devastating consequences of erosion due to unsustainable practices in order to make people move toward adopting conservation agriculture. His idea was to show the seriousness of the problem and to clearly define what was bad and what was good in terms of use of land and to scare farmers. Iván, Gladys, Pedro Pablo and Darío agree with the general idea but argued for a different take: The use of a “not-scary” tactic.

b. Against the “Fear factor”

A recurrent idea of the Charrera’s work is their decision to promote communication messages limiting the use of fear. “Our suggestion to avoid the ‘fear’ approach is based on the idea of inviting people to listen to our messages, to engage with certain propositions, not to react just out of fear” (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004). This theme of an inviting tone versus the use of scaring tactics comes out as a recurrent preoccupation of the Charreras team.

Iván evokes the tension of approaches in a similar situation that happened months earlier during the production of the Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (DHF) prevention program in Santander. The local public health board wanted to copy a campaign message

made in Puerto Rico by the OPS (PAHO, Pan American Health Association) that used fear as a main argument.

The model that initially we were supposed to follow was a Puerto Rican communication kit founded in the logic of fear; the whole logic was threatening; its rational argumentation said: 'Dengue is a fatal disease', 'these are the number of deaths', etc. And in terms of the emotional content, well, the images were scary: a mother crying telling how she lost her child. And the doctor in white robe saying this is what can happen to you, etc. The board of health in Bucaramanga liked this approach and wanted us just to do the same. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004).

Gladys recalled that there was a discussion on whether or not to use fear depending on the focus on prevention or promotion.

To deal with the DHF as prevention, the messages should follow the tone of crisis, like saying 'Act now or die!' Some people of the institution at that time liked this tone, but they realized that we didn't really have a DHF emergency. We insisted that we rather follow the idea of promotion; promotion is much more linked to making emphasis on healthy life styles, to promote decisions and behaviors made by people concerned with having a more harmonious life. Sometime more positive and long-term related. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004).

After a lot of debate the 'non-scary approach' for the DHF campaign won, and according to the institutional evaluation, it was successful²⁷ (Luna et al. 2004). Similarly, Pedro Pablo pointed out the problem of using a denouncing, alarmist tone. "It limits the imagination. I see in all our work a sort of idea of 'let's see things in a new way; let's explore this, let's imagine alternatives' [...], not only 'Wow! Terrible!' [type of] reaction". (Rincón, P.P., personal communication, September 15, 2004)

²⁷ The Denge Hemorragic fever evaluation showed that close to 90% of the target audiences gained recognition of the problem and the actions to control the mosquitoes breeding sites.

Not only the Charreras tended to use what they call the “inviting tone” but also particular messages are thought to be impregnated with this notion. The first time Gladys faced a moment in which she dealt with a decision on how to frame a particular message was in 1992 in Quito, during a training workshop at CIESPAL. This, she remembers, was a turning point in her professional life.

In one of the workshops I created a [short-format radio] piece that I thought my classmates would love. But my instructor [José Ignacio López Vigil, the founder of AMARC and revered leader of community radio]²⁸, totally destroyed it during the group evaluation. He dumped the script in the trash can!! My God! What was it? Well, my piece drew a story of something I witnessed in Málaga, at the hospital. A grandmother crying inconsolable when received news about her daughter who just delivered a baby. I approached her and asked if the baby wasn't all right. She said crying: it's a *baby girl!* That was the tragedy: a girl. I asked why? And she said girls come to the world to suffer. Well, my piece was well done in terms of sound, but the approach wasn't... the criticism was [...] why to show what you don't want to see, why not to depict what is desirable for the community to see... why if we are in the middle of fiction and documentary, why not to open up the space to imagine something desirable. That thing made me think. So, the exercise would be more interesting if I can show a grandmother who, in spite the expectation for a boy, she finds out that to receive a baby girl is good news, why not? And ask what to be a girl means for all of us, and how to make a space to welcome girls. So I kept thinking that we [communicators] tend to take the easy way to show: this is wrong! bad! or just dangerous, to scare people. So, I think it's easier to reinforce and repeat in media what is damaging rather than to do the opposite. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

The lesson Gladys learned was to move the focus of her writing from despair (not fear, in this case) to a story of new possibilities; a sort of fictional utopia. “[It's] like opening a little window to imaging what if...” (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005). That was the approach the Charreras wanted for the *Aguasuelo*

²⁸ José Ignacio López Vigil, a radio producer and educator, president of AMARC, Latin America during more than 10 years. He helped to coordinate the network of radios during the Nicaraguan revolution and wrote a book on the Farabundo Martí Radio in El Salvador

production. After days of deliberation, they convinced Carlos Julio “with the help of few *aguardiente*²⁹ shots” – Iván joked, “and the GTZ coordinators, to use a seductive format, instead of using fear”. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004)

Why had they rejected to use the “fear approach”? Iván thinks it is less pedagogical.

Fear may create negative responses and feelings... defensiveness, despair, ‘oh... nothing to do here!’, that type of thing. Or people just go and do what they are told to do, and that’s OK, but that’s just a forced reaction. What we want is to call the attention in a joyful way; a way that put people in the mood for engaging in a civic conversation”. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004).

Gladys and Iván couldn’t recall exactly the sources, besides that learning moment with José Iganacio López Vigil in CIESPAL, that can back up their assumptions about the benefits of a not-fear approach. I told them that the use of fear in communication has a long scholarly tradition, from political propaganda to health prevention. As a consequence of this exchange, one of my commitments to them was to search and share sources of scholarly work that would help them to support their battles in future projects. Back in the U.S. I translated and shared fragments of a classic study done by Kim White at Johns Hopkins University on the very topic.³⁰

²⁹ White rum made with sugar cane

³⁰ The literature on Fear Appeal in Health Communication suggests that strong fear appeals are more persuasive than low or weak fear appeals. But fear appeals motivate adaptive “danger control” or a sort of fear control. Kim White as researcher of University of Michigan notices that strong fear appeals and high-efficacy messages produce the greatest behavior change, whereas strong fear appeals with low-efficacy messages produce the greatest levels of defensive responses.

6.1.4. *Molding the Idea in Words and Sounds: Losing the Point to Regain the Point*

Once the parts agreed upon the general approach and the direction of the messages, the Aguasuelo project entered the stage of materialization of ideas that take shape in metaphors, words, sounds, music, lyric and images.

The communicators fought to baptize the series with a name that would convey a concrete, fun, easy-to-remember image that is also part of the farmers' environment.

However, the name of they suggested created some discrepancy. According to Gladys:

I would love the sonority of a rooster making noises on the radio waves. The “Ki-ki-ri-ki” (cock-a-doodle-doo), was the name we wanted [for the series] and we tested it with few people during the first weeks [of message design]. It had the flavor of the region, but the GTZ's liaison person didn't want it. She initially proposes something like ‘Conserving our land’ or something like that! Can you imagine? (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004).

The agency said “No” to the Ki-ki-ri-ki arguing that the meaning was too open.

Gladys complains “We came out with *Aguasuelo*, which is not the best option. It's not a real word but a pun: it has “*agua*” and “*suelo*” (water and soil) in it, the two elements people have to care about and together it sounds like *aguacero* (storm).” (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004).

The slogan the Charreras decided was “*pongale la ruana al suelo*” (put the poncho on the soil). Gladys' observations of people's clothing helped here. Everyone, women, men and children wear long *ruanas* (heavy wooden ponchos). *Ruanas* could work as metaphors, Gladys thought: “We came out with the idea of using the image of a huge *ruana* covering the soil, protecting it from rain and harsh winds as people do when

they wrap themselves up in their own warm *ruanas*” (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 22, 2004).

The central theme was crop rotation. This notion was introduced by songs, scripts and print materials connecting it to examples of the everyday life. According to Iván the proposition to crop rotation should come from a place different than agriculture:

We said, Ok rotation, but let’s think of this not as an order: rotate! But rotation as something good: rotation and pleasure, because variety is pleasure, so there is something good about it; to rotate means also to change and to rest, and to move. Then, if one doesn’t change the exhausting routines life becomes harder and boring, and the soil also feels that way, gets tired, gets bored... so we started a [radio] show with a fantastic song that Darío wrote, the song of the bored guy. Yawnmm! [yawning] That song! (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004).

This is the way the songs were composed, according to Darío:

I sit there, grab the guitar, or the *tiple*. It’s simple; it’s almost mechanical for me. They [the rest of the Charreras] are bombarding ideas and I’m there doing my stuff. They are talking about the soil and the guy who feels so bored. I start yawning, robbing my eyes, stretching... and with the guitar (singing in Spanish) *me llaman, me llaman el aburrido...* (they call me, they call me the bored one... playing the first line of the song in different popular genres). I play around making alterations for a while, and next day, or in two more days I’m done. Here is a new song. That’s what I do, simple. (Moreno Suárez, D., personal communication, August 20, 2004).

The process of transforming an idea into a script takes a long road. The team holds brainstorming meetings that can take several days. Iván leads the meetings presenting research findings and posting salient themes. The themes are supported by concrete stories they found in their research.

During one of these sessions I observed, the making of *Caja de Cambios* project, there were five themes or salient ideas to be somehow addressed. Iván wrote them down on a portable board and on five walls of the house they posted pieces of papers that contained particular cases or stories to illustrate the theme. After talking for hours about whether or not the themes were relevant, the group needed to explore ways to transform each one of them into audio material. I noticed that the group didn't always directly use the concrete cases/stories on the wall for a script, but used them as a springboard to make up new stories, or to mix elements from several of them into a more attractive new story.

Gladys believes digressions are productive. The creative process requires losing the point to re-gain the point. "If we are talking about breastfeeding and the need to support new mothers sharing techniques, we don't want to write directly about that: these are the techniques. No. We rather take a detour getting, for instance, into a fantastic story adapted from one of Garcia Marquez's novels" (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005). The story she refers to is from the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, about the mysterious plague of oblivion that takes over the mythical city of Macondo. People had to struggle to remember the name of every object by posting name tags that read "house", "cow" and so forth. The Charreras' script tells what happened when children were born and the parents forgot how to feed them. Villagers offer pineapples and rice to the newborns, and all sort of items. One mother feels her own breast milk coming out, but she forgot what to do with it. Then she has to find other women and ask them pieces of information until all together reconstruct the knowledge of their own bodies.

But the Charreras not only strive to come out with a beautiful and powerful story, real or fictional or a mix of both, they also focus on writing in a way “it works for the ear” as Iván says. Their interest for exploring the language of radio comes from the years of training community radio producers. Those radios faced the challenge to compete against local commercial radios, and in order to do so, they were forced to re-discover the medium’s potential as the “scenario of the mind”. Gladys’ instructors in CIESPAL, as well as AMARC leaders, insisted on the search for a *sensuous radio*. This search implies, among other things, “to write for the ear” and to explore dramatic genres, story telling and short formats to connect to audience’s cultural experiences and imagination. The Charreras are committed to that search and their productions are examples of sensuality.

Writing for the ear implies, paradoxically, that the written word is visual, concrete, and that the narrative shows more than it says. These are the tricks according to Iván:

Better to say ‘potatoes’ than ‘carbohydrate’; better to use short sentences, use effects, and use music with meaning, not just as filler. I mean, we need to use the ingredients of sonic language: a combination of words, effects and music in proportions that they depict a scene and don’t cancel each other out. (Chahín, I., personal communication, September 9, 2004).

The sources Charreras use in the radio scripts are not always fiction. They work with testimony as well. In the series called *Mmmm, quien sabe?* or “Mmmm, who knows?” about successful sustainable farming in the Quindío coffee region, the central resource is the voice of the peasants, their inflection, their flavor, their humor. In a particular show that touches the issue of migration (leaving the coffee farms to go to the cities), there is a clip in which a little girl describes her favorite places in the farm: she

points what *vivir bueno* is. Or what well-being means for her. All she does in three minutes is touring the farms with the listeners. The clip comes from an edited interview, so the child is not acting, she is actually telling and showing with playful words why she loves the creek, the chicks, the wind, the fruits, the neighbors' truck and she makes the corresponding sounds. The clip and other stories that come in the accompanying manual invite listeners to engage in conversation: what are the places people left or don't want to leave? Why? What does *vivir bueno* means for each one? What is preventing people from living a good life in their own lands? What are the alternatives in each case? What do people need and what can they do to stay?

One of the most stressful moments comes at the stage of script writing. Gladys has become the "designated writer" but all of the team members write drafts or participate in the building of the idea of each script. According to Iván,

Gladys is very detailed in the way she constructs the phrases. I read it loud, I get the general idea. But Gladys sees word by word. I trust her observations more than anything. [...] I would make an outline and then Gladys comes and adds flesh and bones and I revisit it, edit it and then she comes and makes the final polishes. There were like 6 or 8 drafts to read and re-write before we had the final script. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 20, 2004).

There is not a rigid division of labor between the main couple of the team. However Iván writes more of the proposals and reports, plus directs most of the radio production, while Gladys, who masters the language of the educational materials, puts her energy into writing and doing interviews. Iván recalls,

In the making of '*Hummm quien sabe*', she says: 'I think I made the most beautiful interview of all my life! Take a look.' I read it and I start moving the texts up and down, this first, this later. I had like a mental knot, this thing, this

other one go there and that and pruummp!, the text has a different order. It's ready! I doubt that I ever can make an interview like she does. Her interviews are beautiful, that's her style, that's herself. But when she shows it to me I can imagine how to put it together in sounds, for her beauty to be emphasized. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 20, 2004).

Agency officials, other communicators, community members and even relatives tend to give Iván all the credit for their projects. Gladys has been the director of a few radio series and some campaigns, but still Iván is the most public figure of the team. While he meets with agencies and presents proposals, she is in charge of invisible fieldwork in communities gathering data and writing scripts. She feels her work hasn't been always recognized and valued. Given the gender roles expectations and assumptions in Colombia, she has been "put in her place" a few times.

I used to keep silent, but I recently started to correct people. When I hear someone saying 'Ahhh, so, are you Iván's wife? I love his radio shows, his CDs are awesome!' I take a breath and say yes, we have been working together in many projects, and these you mention are actually programs I directed and wrote. But it's awkward to say so. Although Iván is very proactive in giving me the credit whenever he goes and introducing me as a professional writer, people tend to look at me with much less credibility. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

The division of labor in this team and the gendered value of their work generate tensions that from Iván's perspective had been easy to resolve due to the maturity of their relationship.

There are moments in which with pain we have to cut off texts that don't go with the idea, so Gladitas, says, 'Ayyy, but this part is so cute!' And I know it's cute. But it doesn't serve the goal here. So, one feels bad. Sometimes there is tension; sometimes we get upset. And I think that it helps that we are learning to negotiate like partners, that we have this (romantic) relationship, because we are more assertive to say what may upset us. We have been learning to handle our irritabilities. We learn to say this with affection, or when we are arguing, we stop

for a moment and we can say, ‘well, this doesn’t need to become a big problem; let’s find an alternative’. Some people believe it’s a disadvantage that we live and work together and I feel it’s an advantage, because being partners allows us a deep level of communication. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

Yet, for Gladys, there is discomfort in the way other people value her written work. When reading out loud her texts in a business meeting for the Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (DHF) prevention program, Gladys felt self-consciousness of other people’s assumptions on her writing.

Maybe it’s just me but there I am, sitting in a meeting with all those doctors and epidemiologists, and the nurses, and I read my texts [for a manual], and feel uneasy, shy. They don’t know how to react: they say ‘cute’ and they may think my texts are sort of goofy. Some people actually laugh, which is good. (...) And at least at the end this writing proves effective. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

The other team members in few occasion venture to write scripts. Pedro Pablo had written some scripts, but his support at the time of writing is to tell stories of myths and fantasy that he heard growing up in the leper colony of Contratación. While Pedro Pablo’s contributions have been used in several storylines, Darío says he is much better with his guitar than with the pen, although he offers his source for metaphors, colloquialisms, jokes and puns. Jesús Abad comes to the brainstorming sessions only when there is photography involved in the project. He reads texts and proposals and easily “gets” the sense of the assignment.

6.1.5. Studio Audio Production

When the moment of audio production comes, there is a lot of orchestration behind the scenes. Iván fixes schedules for rehearsal meetings with local actors and

actresses a week before recording; Gladys makes arrangements for food, transportation, extra clothing, and for leaving the home' chores done as if they were moving out of town. These tasks that she does efficiently are gendered. The male members of the team do not necessary pay attention to these actions and she assumes them "naturally".

Meanwhile, Darío and other guest musicians get ready with the musical arrangements. Production and post-production means long hours and days in the studio room until all the lines are recorded. One advantage of the Charreras living in Bucaramanga was their loyal team of actors and actresses formed during many years. Some of them were spontaneously 'discovered' during the years of Iván making rural radio PSAs and Gladys's SENA's shows: they found the talent of a technician of an environmental office, a bartender, a secretary, Dana the daughter, Luisa Fernanda the niece, plus a group of young talent identified by Gladys during *La Espumita*, and a group of amateur actors and actresses who worked for a local theater company.

For a larger project called *La Aventura de la Vida*, that included dozens of audio dramas, Gladys included in her budget an amount for training young radio actors. This work became a seed-bed of talent. Now in Bogotá, they are rediscovering and sometimes bringing from Bucarmanga a few people who support their audio projects with their voices.

Gladys learned that a key to success of studio production is to keep people energized in the studio. After several hours in a claustrophobic room repeating lines with almost similar intonations, people can get frustrated and exhausted. Gladys rushes from the recording room to the control room and calmly talks to the actors, asks people to take

breaks often, jokes and tries to prevent tensions. Iván makes his sample intonations and describes to the actor/actress the point of the storyline and the mood of the characters. Iván is the director, Gladys is co-director. Besides taking care of the people who comes and go from the studio, they both consider it critical to create a relationship with the sound operators who often are not familiar to deal with complex drama scripts and several people recording at a time. Recording five minutes of drama would take five hours; and that is only pre-production. Therefore the moods are as important as the technical aspects of production. According to Iván,

Working in studio, no doubt it's completely emotional. It is connected to our everyday life and I think this is not a defect but on the contrary this [connection] makes it [the job] exciting, and it's a beating heart one feels when we are doing something right. This is not a job you do with distance, with just technique and cold-blood, no. It's a job of emotions and our shows are somehow soaked within these emotions... like the cook recipes of *Como agua para chocolate* (Like water for chocolate). If you cry, well, all your *comensales* (companions at the table) will cry with the food, and if you are deeply in love and are full of passion, well, this will unleash things like in water for chocolate. [...] For instance in some stories of *La rana*, there is an episode that to me is the one I like the most: 'The frog that ate the sun'. I think it's wonderful; it has all the joy of the moment when it was produced. It was produced with happiness; there are other stories that have less joy but more thought, or more pleasant moods... it depends on the moods. There were beautiful scripts that at the moment of production fell down because of the inner tensions. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004).

For the *Aguasuelo* project, the Charreras decided to use a talk-show format with testimonies, music, *coplas*, puzzles, and humorous prerecorded drama clips. Each radio show deals with a particular topic and is hosted by Gladys, Darío, Iván, Carlos Julio the technician (See Figure 2). The choice for this format was made because talk-shows account for the highest ratings in the region. It also resembles the chatting style of the

campesinos as observed in the visits. Another factor helped the idea of talk-show: The possibility of inviting a national celebrity to participate in all the pre-recorded shows. Jorge Velosa a musician, actor and respectable humorist native of Boyacá accepted to join the team of radio hosts, formed by Carlos Julio, Iván, Darío and Gladys.

Velosa is an emblem of the *ruana* country. He is the most important Boyacá's folk singer and composer known nationally for using traditional instruments and creating colorful lyrics and uplifting tunes praising *la tierrita*, or one's land and *campesinos'* wisdom. He also was the star of a national TV comedy show in the 1980s. Bringing a celebrity to participate in development projects is one of the central suggestions of Entertainment Education for social change. With Velosa's wit, the radio show is a lively (prerecorded) conversation with multiple segments and resources.



Figure 2
The Charreras recording *El Aguasuelo*

The core thread of the show is made with clips, or the edited samples of peasant's testimonies collected by the Charreras during the research phase of their project. Carlos Julio's voice is only one more voice, and technical information is not the center. The other hosts, Darío and Gladys, act like the counterpunch to Velosa's wit comments. He brings his guitar to chant the situation of the land with sayings, rhymes and songs.

According to Gladys,

This is a show that I, if I were a person out there, would stop and listen to, and I would enjoy it even if I had no interest in Boyacá or in agriculture or the environment. You can see the (sound) controller also laughing, that's a good sign. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

The whole show is pre-recorded but the challenge was to make it *sound* like live radio. The Charreras decided to record for good, with no or minimal edition. In doing that the main tool is the ear. Iván recalls as follows:

We were in studio recording for good [...] and when I am in the middle of a phrase and feel stuck there, I do this (a sign) to Gladys and immediately she picks up; keeps talking. And if I see her in trouble I jump with the next phrase without respecting the script but respecting the ear; what the ear is telling. If the ear tells me that you are hanging in a phrase I come out with something to keep up the rhythm. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2004).

6.1.6. *Dealing with, Finding, and Using Images and Objects*

The kit, the cage, the CDs, the manual and every one of its pages has a design. In the *Aguasuelo* case, Pedro Pablo connected the elements of the region: a huge *ruana* unfolding over the hills, trees, water, musical instruments, a colorful collage of identifiable figures that work as icons of each for each page and each one of the conservation principles the *Aguasuelo* promotes.

The Charerras started to pay close attention to images since Iván participated in the evaluation of usability and impact of a series of health communication campaigns in Santander back in the early 1990s. One of the anecdotes he recalls is the packet for oral health promotion, made in Bogotá by a PR agency. In one of its manual, a photograph of two old peasant women wearing their long skirt outfits sit in a circle. The caption says that poor dental hygiene causes serious problems. The page across shows a young female, with an urban outfit, light skinned smiling to the camera, she is an example of good oral care. Images of rural versus urban, old versus young, darker versus lighter subjects seem to be unproblematic for some designers. Iván recounts this story adding that it is hard, at least in Bucaramanga, to find photographers and graphic designers who are sensitive with their images and aware of their biases.

When Jesús Abad joins the team, after being introduced by common friends in Medellín, the Charreras celebrate. “He has the eye”, but not only that, Iván says, “he conveys the sense of respect for people in his work” (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005). During my failed interview with him in Medellín, I saw Jesús Abad in a permanent search for images, like studying the city in a state of wonder. In 2005, Edex, the Basque agency that sponsored the “Life skills” project called *La Aventura de la Vida*, asked the Charreras to participate in the project’s evaluation and to find a way to communicate the findings to the national and international donors and other participants. The Charreras proposed a qualitative evaluation in a photo-narrative form. Jesús Abad traveled with Iván and Gladys to 14 Colombian towns interviewing people and taking pictures. The result was a small book with large full page or double-page photographs that

capture interactions between parents and children, and between teachers and students. These snapshots show the concrete places in which the project happened and had an impact. One can see the protagonist in the everyday interactions: the barefoot fisherman coming home holding a tune in one hand, a book and a child on the other; the carpenters' workshop and his children; the grandparents playing with kids, the modest playgrounds of schools. Each picture tells a story and includes a companion text, testimonies of the characters that anchor the meaning in a narrative style.

Pedro Pablo arranged the photos with subtle graphic elements, pictures and typography. This book is one of his favorites, but he has done projects by only using his illustrations, playing with typography and blank spaces. In some works like *El Rebosque*³¹, or *Aguasuelo*, subtle icons of trees, the butterflies, owls or *ruanas* support the layout's design. The result is often a colorful, easy-to-read material in which the graphics, as he says, are not just ornaments but communicative elements that support the identity of the project.

Besides working on print materials, Pedro Pablo is also in charge of designing objects, artifacts that are impregnated by the culture of the region. According to him,

Creating the *Cuchipando* funnels (a series of 12 interactive two-meter tall sculptures) was so much fun, and I have done bunch of other things: posters, T-shirts, cages or packages [for discs and manuals], calendar, stickers, puppets, you name it. Even I'd participated in the search for craftsmen, for workshops, handmade stuff, because it is like taking advantage of all that wealth in our culture; [...] There have been those little discoveries of people who are doing very traditional things (bags, ornaments, fabrics) but when adding a little touch of creativity the thing becomes a novelty, even for them (the artisans) it's surprising. (Rincón, P.P., personal communication, September 15, 2004).

³¹ El Rebosque, a campaign to decrease deforestation in Norte de Santander

The quest for images, inspiration and meaningful objects, is part of the distinctive way to look at communication and to create messages that become a landmark of the Charreras. Pedro Pablo continues,

This has been a working style for me, and mainly for Iván and Gladys. They find a woman at the farmers market and talk to her and include her in a radio story. They are always in that search, finding people, finding stuff, buying little things that may be inspiring for a project, finding characters, listening to people, to stories. And those things are the richness of their work. Then, when one takes a look at the productions, one sees that the work has been spread onto with all of that. Why is this so attractive? Well, it has the participation of all those people; all the magic that diverse people add. That reflects on the productions. These things don't go unnoticed. This has been and intension from the start; that the material talks to me 'look ! there is something cool here; some secrets, some magic, come to see!. (Rincón, P.P., personal communication, September 15, 2004).

6.1.7. Radio Networks and Interpersonal Channels: Spaces of Conversation

The Charreras' *Aguasuelo* proposal follows their tradition of networking with community radio stations and local community leaders. Audio materials are designed to circulate in several scenarios: farmer's meetings with GTZ agronomists and rural extensionsits, rural high schools integrating the audio clips, songs and other activities as part of the curriculum; adult education civic centers, and commercial and community radio stations, which can broadcast the entire series of pre-recorded talk-shows, or only few clips, songs, or a combination of them as inserts in their own programming.

The involvement of the Charreras with Boyacá's community radio dates back to the 1990s when community media promoters fought for legalization nation-wide. Several years after obtaining licenses, some of the stations experienced financial hardship and struggle to maintain their listenership. Trying to find ways to compete with commercial

radio and to raise their quality standards, stations have organized in networks, with the support of a progressive wing of the Ministry of Communications and international associations like AMARC. Iván and Gladys accompanied these organizing efforts by mostly training staff in radio production and programming design.

Iván notes that during all these years, community radio strived to find the meaning of its “community” name. There is a previous successful experience in which this meaning was crystallized. The *A Gatas* project on promotion of Early Childhood Development (ECD), involved the coordinated work of 19 stations of Santander and Boyacá. A team of two radio reporters along with a school teacher of each town got together to received training on research methods to gather data for the program. The 38 people led weekly focus groups or discussion sessions on ECD that they simply called “chats”. These chats took place every Sunday mostly in public places; therefore the locals identified them as “chats at the park”. Each team facilitated public chats on child development during 20 weeks in 19 towns. The results and salient ideas of the chats became the content of radio shows broadcasted weekly. But not only the chats yield the radio content, they in turn continued multiplying the conversation in other scenarios like the schools and health centers.

This massive effort of coordinating 19 teams in 19 different towns producing radio, exchanging materials, organizing chats as public events beyond the walls of the stations represented the emergence of the network of community radio in Santander and Boyacá. In total after 20 weeks the radios hosted 380 “chats at the park” and produced 38 radio shows covering most topics on ECD, plus networking with local institutions,

families, churches and activists. The *A gatas* program of 2001 designed by the Charreras, strengthened the presence and image of the community radio stations in the region and empowered their staff members with training on research. Four years later, the *Aguasuelo* project resembles this previous experience and includes some of the stations that also participated in *A gatas*. In August of 2004 a series of workshops to train radio members and other community leaders took place in three local towns, including Zipaquirá.

6.1.8. Training Community: Workshop on Communication

Zipaquirá is a small Andean town four hours away from Bogotá in the high plateau region of the Boyacá state. Twenty five people, mostly community radio personal, rural agricultural extensionists, and adult educators, all directly or tangentially involved in promotion of sustainable agriculture, arrived from diverse areas of the region to an old colonial style hotel to participate in a three-day workshop on media and communication for conservation agriculture. The invitation flyers read: “*Aguasuelo* Workshop, designed by Iván Chahín and Gladys Herrera. Sponsored by the German agency of international cooperation, GTZ.

This workshop, besides introducing the *Aguasuelo* materials to local community leaders also aimed to collectively brainstorm ways in which people can use it, complete it and adapt it to their needs. “Community leaders”, arriving to the hotel, are people identified and invited by local state coordinators of agricultural development as influential (according to Carlos Julio) community members. Some of them say they signed up to come to Zipaquirá because they want to learn “communication skills”.

a. Games on perspectives

Iván, Gladys and Darío were busy setting the visual aids and handouts. Iván introduced himself and the others, handed out an agenda, and made a jokes about the hotel, teased Darío and explained the activities. His strong Santanderian accent and his colloquial tone, his casual clothing, make him look approachable. After an icebreaker exercise in which people have to move around the tables, put together a large size puzzle and introduce themselves, the group seemed energized and ready to talk. The next activity required the lights off.

Music invaded the space and on the big screen the colorful images of Zoom popped up. Istvan Banyai's wordless book "Zoom" was presented here as a slide show with a background soundtrack. It opened with a close-up of a bumpy red object. The next slide shows the object from a distance and people see it's the comb on a rooster. Moving still further back, the next image shows that the rooster is on the window of a small house. The next one, still further back, shows the house, the village it is in, and a big hand. Each new image provided a view from further away: the hand belongs to a girl who is playing with the village, which is a toy; and the toy is an image of a magazine read by a passenger of a bus and the bus is in post card; and the successive images, 33 in total zoom out diverse scenarios from the rooster to the planet earth. (Appendix 4)

The workshop participants kept making ahh! surprising sounds with each new slide. After the last slide Iván asked "What did you see?" A couple of people confessed it was a bit confusing at the beginning. The woman next to me nodded. But they didn't say what they saw yet. Iván insisted "What are all these images about?"

Participants dared to speculate “It’s like a dream, someone is dreaming, everything shrinks” someone says. Others said: “You are in one place, and then it disappears and you are transported to another place”; “The one who is holding the camera is playing God”; “Everything is connected”; “each person sees a different story”; and so forth. Iván tied up the comments,

As you said, all images represent a perspective. One perspective alone doesn’t allow us to understand the whole story. In communication that seems like a problem but actually this is a good thing, because if I add my perspective to yours, and to the other one, and the other, one, well, they are all different, but I start to have a broader understanding of things and most likely I will end up smiling in surprise as you just did, when you see the connections and the pieces of a larger story. In other words, one needs to explore other pieces of the story, and seeing them all in perspective gives one an understanding much further than what one thought one saw at first glance. (Chahín, I., personal observation, field notes from August 12, 2004).

During the trip back to Bogotá I asked Iván about this part of the workshop. He remembers that his daughter Dana got that book as a present, and Gladys and him found it fascinating and adapted it for their work.

When we show this stuff people arrive to conclusions very far from what we think; I think this is part of literacy about diversity; because one cannot say, look this is just the rooster’s crest; because it is also part of a window, a farm, a city, a sea, a planet; that’s what we need to learn, that if we keep adding perspectives we gain in understanding. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 12, 2004).

The person next to me kept writing notes perhaps on what everyone says while the female teacher didn’t even touch her pen and hadn’t talked yet. Iván was in charge of this segment. Gladys stayed in the background while Darío blended among the participants. The session continued with more “multiple perspective” type of activities like the one that consisted of drawing two dots on a sheet of paper, and by covering one

eye and nearing the paper to the other eye to find the blind spot. Some people remove their glasses and follow the exercise. Some joke about “you are winking at me!” A Tibasosa’s extensionist found his blind spot and announced it with surprise. The teacher on my other side mentioned to me that she knew this “trick” before. The following conversation added to the idea that one cannot see it all.

One more game is an adaptation of the “boggle” word game. On the big screen appeared an image of a square grid that contained nine random letters. Iván gave the instructions. Participants had three minutes to find as many words as possible, to look for connected letters in each possible direction. Laughing about some weird words and made up spelling, participants kept adding hidden words to the list and concluded that each individual doesn’t see all the words; that some words are easy to find for some people but are invisible to others, that the best and largest list of words needs to be made collectively. This time everyone said a word. The female teacher offered a long word and smiled. Now she was getting into the game.

These exercises on perspective that the Charreras used the first day in all the workshops emphasize the collective nature of knowledge, the need to work cooperatively, the partiality of one’s views, the need to recognize that each individual brings different perspectives and that those perspectives have to do with our backgrounds and locations. These elements are consistent to Freire’s tenets in adult education and, in general, to the participatory approach to communication for social change. The themes are proposed by other themes emerge from the conversation. What participants bring,

their stories and knowledge is favored to the center, is written on the board and discusses collectively.

b. Using material to talk or “tickling the tongue”

Participants were asked to listen in small groups to samples of *Aguasuelo*. They grabbed music boxes, and sat by the patio or by the halls to listen to one clip of *Aguasuelo* and one of *Humm quien sabe?* The clip of the child touring the farm made people smile. Some loud laughers responded at Velosa’s wit. They listened to the testimony of a farmer who says he never has been brainwashed. The farmer lists a number of old slogans of politicians, and advertisements by using a funny voice, but he says that this time, cautiously, he has made up his mind and changed his dealings with the soil just because he sees the evidence, not because he feels any pressure. This testimony shows consistency to Roger’s Diffusion model that includes local opinion leaders to influence behavior change.

After listening in groups Gladys asked participants to discuss the suggested questions from the manual. Conversation ensued for about an hour. The questions were just pretexts to reconnect the topic to everyday farming routines. People explored why and how it is hard to change soil depleting practices. For a while they talked about the failure of previous soil conservation attempts, about the problems of land ownership, about poverty, migration, and even someone mentioned the damaging presence of the Monsanto products (the multinational agriculture corporation). The man from Tibasosa redirected the thread of conversation: “If we are the peasants who are supposed to listen

to this radio show we may need to think of things that they can do right now, and things they need help with” (observation and fieldnotes, August 12, 2004).

After Gladys asked for “how did it feel to listen to these audio clips?” People reported: Enjoyment, curiosity, connection to the stories, compassion, interest to know more about the topic, desire to listen to these clips again with neighbors and family. One person said the drama and the farmer’s clip made him feel *cosquillas en la lengua*, it tickled his tongue, which is a way to say it made him feel a desire to talk.

“That is what the audio materials are all about” Gladys tells me during the break. “I love the way that guy said it: ‘*cosquillitas en la lengua*’, little, non-intimidating stimuli for sharing what you know, your viewpoint”. (Herrera, G., personal communication, August 12, 2004).

In the evening, after a short walk around the cold streets of Zipaquirá, the workshop participants seemed more connected, they knew each other’s name and after dinner, they circulated the guitar that Darío brought along, and shared *coplas* and songs.

The next day the activity was about exploring and inventing ways to use *Aguasuelo* audio materials. The groups now were more cohesive, people joked, played and came out with posters and drawings showing scenarios, activities and ideas on how to use the kit. Some suggested group listening in community centers, or playing certain clips during site visits to farmers. One group suggested doing socio-dramas at the school and inviting parents to multiply conversations. Community radio members contributed with several ideas about airing live shows on certain dates, promoting contests on better “*ruana* protected efforts”, or broadcasting from strategic sites that have positives stories

fighting erosion. On the walls of the room the groups posted the list of ideas on how and where to use the *Aguasuelo* audios. Then, each participant walked around the gallery, read and voted for the favorite list. Gladys summarized and asked for more details on how to make these proposals real. With a high energy level the participants closed the session making a list of doable commitments; they took their *Aguasuelo* kits home and exchanged numbers and emails addresses.

After the workshop some participants committed to meet on-line on yahoo groups³². There was a session supported by Carlos Julio and other GTZ personal in each region to train people in how to communicate on-line by using the computers at the CAR centers and how to login in to these groups. They created accounts when still in Zipaquirá. And in a few weeks they sporadically meet on-line. Iván and Gladys posted the memories of the workshops under the name: *Four ways to use the Aguasuelo kit* which combines the production of the group members during the posters exercise.

6.1.9. Evaluation (or lack of)

Evaluation refers to many different options: evaluation of the workshop, the materials, the process, the way the overall *Aguasuelo* campaign met particular communication and educational goals, or in a longer term, the evaluation will say if the Agriculture for Soil Conservation program met the objectives introducing practices that sustain the soil. There are many moments and modes for evaluation and the Charreras only had the opportunity to control one of them: evaluate the workshop, and evaluate, to

³² Aguasuelo on line group <http://espanol.groups.yahoo.com/group/elAguasueloradial/>

some degree the communication materials. The Charreras asked in the last hour in Zipaquirá: What would be the first thing you bring home in your suitcase after these three days? What are you going to do with that? What improvements you expect in a future workshop? The comments were positive for the most part. People remembered the games, the Zoom images, the songs at dinner time, the comradeship. One person says she had no played any game since she was a child, and here she allowed herself to play again. Many people felt they gained confidence to use and multiply the materials. A couple of people say they understand that communication requires creativity, that communication is about listening to others, not only talking to others. One participant says: “Thank you! Here we didn’t receive recipes but useful principles to keep working in our communities.” The complaints were mostly about the hotel, the cold rooms or the food.

Evaluation of the overall impact of the communication strategy took a few months after broadcasting the entire sets of shows in a number of stations and holding certain number of meetings in civic centers hosted by the GTZ. The Charreras were not in charge of this evaluation. GTZ and other local organizations evaluated six month later and found out that all community stations had broadcast al least half of the shows; that according to technician’s reports most target audiences had listened to the shows; most community leaders trained in the workshop had hold small group meetings using the kit; and after visits made by Carlos Julio and other CAR personnel, the *Aguasuelo* is the reference point for their visits and sessions. I didn’t find numbers on these evaluations, but the oral report of the GTZ Colombia director Herbert Frombert who was enthusiastic about the communication work.

Evaluation, however, is the weakest aspect of the Charreras work. Besides two complete evaluations made by external parties one for the DHF or mosquito campaign, and other for the Life Skills program, the rest of their projects lack time or budget for formal evaluations. The only input the Charreras obtain comes from participants' feedback: their letters, emails, the yahoo discussion groups. And as Iván says, the team needs to learn about evaluation, and connect to local universities, to academic, or other centers that can help them see what the lasting impact of their efforts is. So far, it is often the case that agencies and organizations *sense*, without formally evaluating, that materials are working well because people keep asking for copies of the CDs, or asking for more events, using the names of the series in their meetings, etc. Pedro Pablo believes "something may be working well, because our phone keeps ringing and ringing" (Rincón, P.P., personal communication, September 15, 2004).

In this chapter I made visible the "behind-the-scenes" of a typical development communication project made by the Charreras team in Colombia. I highlighted examples of negotiation, dilemmas, resourcefulness and creativity in the team's everyday practice. There is a low-formalized occupation for which there are not spelled out professional protocols and neither a long tradition of formal training. The Charreras have learned to do their job by experimenting, by combining knowledge from other fields, from their family and political environments and from their aesthetic sources. They keep reinventing ways to use communication in their local realities and working together with international agencies, institutions and community organizations.

Commonly, communicators in the field of social development are perceived as low-profile practitioners of an elusive occupation. However, opposite to the assumption that communication simply implies implementation of diffusion steps, the experience of the Charreras team studied here and the analysis of their complex activities and performances reveals their high-profile role in a project and their capacity to: 1) design communication strategies, 2) educate agencies and institutions in terms of what communication for development represents, 3) transcend the behavior-change on one issue- only approach to explore possibilities of conversation and deeper civic engagement, 4) train and build alliances with other professionals like the agronomist of this story, 5) identify and challenge language that reinforces oppressions and exclusion, 6) create approaches to issues from an inviting and non-intimidating way, 7) do research, explore the audience's complex views, while being aware of power asymmetries embedded in the practice of development interventions, 8) search for meaningful stories that touch people's culture and their emotional selves, 9) master the craft of *sensuous* writing and production, 10) invite people to transgress the modernization-like language and explore visual, subjective, grounded messages and objects that "lose the point to regain the point" and that open up roads for participatory communication, 11) network with community media and empower their personal by including them in local development projects, 12) facilitate dialogue-oriented training sessions with community members and social change agents for them to multiply the use media materials in ways that favor broader understanding of issues and enables people's participation in civic life,

and 13) Continue and facilitate a dialogue with and within the community reflecting on the process and outcome of the program.

CHAPTER VII
AESTHETIC AND ETHICAL TOOLS IN THE PRACTICE OF DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNICATION

In previous chapters I described the practice and discussed the professional role and the relevance of communication practitioners in the field of social development. In this chapter I examine the “how” part of their work. The “how”, in this case, is not reduced to a list of techniques, but refers to the framework and the principles that the communicators have identified and used in their projects and community education experience. This chapter addresses research question number three of the study: What are the principles and the strategies that guide the practice of communicators for development? It also addresses its sub-questions: How do these principles fit into larger frameworks of development and communication? How do the communicators work toward reducing power asymmetries embodied in development communication interventions? In what ways do development communicators reflect on practices that challenge existing ways of doing communication for development?

This chapter is organized in three sections. The first one describes and discusses a dominant communication model consistent to the modernization approach to development. The Charreras refer to this way of communication as *cantaleta*. Here I show examples of *cantaleta*-informed process and postures, which I describe as

modernization posture. In the second part, I discuss *encanto*, another term colloquially used by the communicators of this study that refers to one of the tools they embrace to engage with audiences and community members. The third section introduces and offers examples of a second tool for development communication: *confianza*, or trust. The meanings of *cantaleta*, *encanto* and *confianza* in the context of the communicator's work have emerged from the Charreras' self-reflection. Here I examine their meanings and provide connections between these tools, their frameworks, concrete examples presented in form of vignettes, and explain their contributions to the field of development communication.

7.1. *Cantaleta* or the Modernization Posture

The word *Cantaleta* comes from *cantar*, or to chant, to sign. In old Spanish it means “annoying or burlesque song” RAE (2006), a disharmonious set of voices and musical instruments. According to the Collins dictionary (2004) it translates as “constant nagging; boring chorus; tedious refrain” (p.115). The following are some elements of the *cantaleta* related communication efforts.

7.1.1. The Communication Experience and the Tired Body

Vignette 1

In San Gil, a group of *madres comunitarias* (grassroots organization of mothers who provide community child care) participate in a radio workshop led by the Charreras. During a break they comment that this workshop is very engaging as opposed to most of the meetings they attend with local NGOs. ‘Meetings are important but are tiring and the seats ‘tax’ one’s rear-end’, says one of the participants, giggling. The other three women next to her nod their heads and one

of them adds ‘When I’m finally home, my family asks ‘how was it?’ And I say L.M.D.S.!’ The whole group laughs. They know the acronym: *Lo Mismo De Siempre*, The Same Thing As Usual.³³

These women in San Gil coined the “L.M.D.S.” acronym that the Charreras had adopted and used in their workshops and in their own practice. L.M.D.S. illustrates the participants’ experience of being caught in a predictable, dry and tiring situation. The content of those meetings they complain about is probably valuable but the experience is perceived as tiring. Iván jokes about a “maxim” that his team keeps in mind while planning meetings and workshops: “people’s attention is directly proportional to the buttocks resistance”. (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

The women participants feel exhausted at the end of the community meetings. They report that they usually leave home before 6:00 a.m., work in the informal sectors as street vendors or maids, then in their own barrios at the community daycare, and later in the afternoon or in the evening they attend community meetings. They often walk or take the bus home when it’s already dark, and when they are back they have to face the “second shift,”³⁴ which refers to the dual labor of women in the economy outside home and also in the household doing domestic chores and taking care of elders and children. The vignette depiction of a woman who feels *taxed* after sitting for hours in low-engaging meeting offers clues about the disconnection between community development interventions planed only at the content/mind level, versus an approach that recognizes the participant’s motivations, needs, everyday practices and their embodied experiences.

³³ Personal observation, August 11, 2004, San Gil Colombia

³⁴ Arlie Hochschild coined the concept in her book by the same name.

The modernization tradition that splits mind and body, and privileges mind leaving the experience of the body unnoticed, essentially affects all fields from education to development process.

The lack of attention to the participants' effort to be present, to their gendered work, and to the conditions where communication takes place reproduces the path for 'L.S.M.D.', a synonym of *cantaleta*.

Vignette 2

In Floridablanca, a crowd fills the community center for the launching ceremony of a new health program on *Municipios Saludables*, "Healthy Towns". There is music, refreshments and speeches. Some people lean against the walls, others sit on the floor. It's almost noon and the ceiling fans stir the hot air. The Public Health officer in charge of the opening speech is taking too long to go on the stage. In the other room she desperately tries to find the slip of paper with the text of the Ottawa declaration for Health Promotion, which talks about a holistic view of health, healthy environments and communities, etc. Twenty minutes, thirty minutes pass by... people wait impatiently. Babies cry; some adults doze off until the officer finally comes out and triumphantly reads the declaration. At the end of the event, after the snacks one person wonders 'what is happening in Otta..? Otta...What?'³⁵

Iván recalls that day in Floridablanca: "I wish she would not find the damn sheet! She would have to use her own words. But no, she just read some bullet points and we never got to know what that Ottawa thing means for us right here." (Chahín, I., personal communication, December 18, 2005). The vignette depicts the paradox of a well-intentioned program that is launched in a scenario in which the buzz-words "coming together" or "healthy communities" resound in the speakers, but the very configuration of the space contradicts their meaning. The long time people have to wait for an official to

³⁵ Personal Observation, December 18, 2005, Floridablanca, Colombia

talk connotes low regard for the audience; the heat, the formulaic speeches, the packed room with a stage in front and only few seats available taken mostly by the outsiders, speaks of not only of the distance between institution and community but also of the separation of social groups due to class and educational opportunity. In that environment the points of the Ottawa Declaration that states the value of engaged communities and healthy environments, kept hardly registered, perhaps only as *cantaleta*.

The Charreras complain about these paradoxes. They have wrestled on several occasions with aid agencies to allocate resources for improving the time and space conditions of their communication projects. In their own workshops they are attentive to the tiring bodies, to the place, the arrangement of the seats (in circle as much as possible), the light and the quality of food. Gladys is obsessed with banning sodapop, and includes fresh fruit sorbets in the menu as much as possible. The use of time is planned out keeping in mind the length of the activities proposed to the participants. They design short exercises that make people move around, “perspective games” like Boggle or Zoom, and include breaks for people to take walks, to play, and even to nap for few minutes after lunch. Darío told me that in his opinion the most productive workshop “ever” in his life took place in San Gil during the *A Gatas* project. The participants enjoyed the beautiful view of the Chicamocha canyon from the hostel/meeting center located on a well-ventilated hilltop. Every evening the entire group would take a walk and end up dancing in an improvised salsa bar nearby. Then they, people from diverse age groups, would go back to the hostel and chat and sing until midnight. This group, which became the leader team of the *A Gatas* program in 19 towns of Santander, would

hardly say that their experience was L.M.D.S. but a time that inspired them to work together and get more involved in their communities (Moreno Suárez, D., personal communication, August 20, 2004).

7.1.2. Speaking in Cantaleta Code

Vignette 3

During the Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (DHF) prevention project, one of the issues of tension between public health specialists and communicators was to make decisions about the desired behavior and the content of messages. Iván recalls the discussion: “The health team wanted to include this instruction in the 30 second-radio spots: ‘We have to tell people to scrub the rigid-walls containers’ But what the heck is that? I wonder what image comes to the mind of a person when hears: ‘rigid walls containers’! This is Chinese for me!!” After long debates in which the specialists pushed to follow the PAHO manual to the letter, they finally agreed with the Charreras and the rigid (wall) words disappear and became simply plates, tubs, flower vases, old tires. Identifiable objects of the everyday life. (Chahín, I. personal communication, August 18, 2004).

The nurses and epidemiologists of the DHF project, as much as Carlos Julio in the first stages of the Aguasuelo and the health official in Floridablanca, represent the institutional and technical voices of their development fields. They seem to focus their attention on the precision of the content to deliver, while communicators are interested in making linkages between content and meanings. The representatives exert pressure to not deviate from the authority of the PAHO, or GTZ manuals or from the bullet points of the Ottawa Declaration. They seem to seek consistency with larger discourses of development in their respective fields that give them a sense of control over the limits of what can be said and how. They read the alterations suggested by the communicators (i.e., rigid walls versus plates and vases), or the exploration of meanings in the context of people’s everyday lives, as possible risks of “losing the point,” but also as a risk of de-

centering the monopoly of the official knowledge on which development programs are founded.

Thus, *cantaleta* appears to be the code within which much development communication interventions are created. It is consistent with the logic of modernization and its set of assumptions (modernization is about neutral facts and knowledge, a-historical, individual-oriented, mind-oriented, universalistic, urban, secular, and top-down directed processes) (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Diffusion processes and social marketing campaigns in the so-called developing regions fit into this category when they clearly separate places between the ones who know and the ones who receive knowledge, and offer little or no room in their communication designs for diverse ways to engage with messages. Their goals are not open-ended conversations neither they convey multiple meaning making, but, as some critical scholars have pointed out (Gumucio-Dagrón, 1991), modernization informed experiences seek “obedient responses”, follow prescriptive goals, and focus only on measurable behavior change.

However, *cantaleta* not only permeates the communication practice of the institutional players but also of *all* participants entangled in the development game. As an example, the community leader interviewed (and cut-off by Gladys) who mimics the speeches of the GTZ, adopts a modernization-embodied posture that falls into the development-as-discourse expectations.

Gladys and Iván had also reproduced *cantaleta* situations, and some of their writings and materials show its marks. However, having identified the problem years ago,

they struggle to challenge that posture. Gladys explains that they make a conscious effort to resist *cantaleta*, which appears in many forms,

Cantaleta messages come in different ways, some health promotion spots can be repetitive and scolding: do this, do that! They ask for people's obedience; they don't invite but demand something. Other times messages relate to the "fear approach", if you don't do this... look what happens! Like a parent scolding a child. We all have done *cantaleta*! One also can see it [an example of *cantaleta*] in the mission and vision statements of organizations. People spend time writing those things that are for the most part meaningless, innocuous words. They just sound like L.M.D.S. Those are *cantaleta* as well because they don't make you excited about anything but rather can turn you off. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

Cantaleta represents a power relationship that updates itself in the web of social relations. It refers to the *posture* of modernization. I chose the word *posture* because it implies the adoption of a gesture of formality associated with a superior authority, with a language and tone that reinforces the unequal places of social groups in society.

Bennet (2001), a philosopher of modernization, formulates some clues to find the origin of the pervasiveness of *cantaleta* in these modern times. She argues that the modern, urban, secular and techno-oriented society displaced and dismissed the mainstream everyday experiences that cannot be controlled, organized in categories, explained and predicted. "Rationalization encompasses a variety of related processes, each of which opts for precise, regular, constant and reliable over the wild, spectacular, idiosyncratic and surprising" (p. 58). This definition resembles Scott's critique of high modernism and its impossible task of organizing social life in bureaucratic ways.

Spectacular and surprising then, are some ingredients of a sister term that opposes *cantaleta*: *encanto*.

7.2. The Aesthetic Tool: *Encanto*

7.2.1. “*Cantar*” and “*Encantar*”

Vignette 4

The *Cuchipando* (Figure 3) is a human-size colored funnel-shaped artifact installed in 12 public places of Bucaramanga, mostly parks as part of a street theatrical performance that invited surprised citizens “to see the imagined city” and tell stories of the community of their dreams. This colorful device adapted from a local folktale was one of the ingredients of a larger multilayered program called “City of Hugs,” aimed to promote public interest on the issue of ‘healthy’ urban communities and reduce violence. The communication strategy was designed by the Charreras team and supported by the City Hall and the Pan American Health Association (PAHO). The *Cuchipando* event is crafted as an aesthetic experience. It involves seeing through the funnel, performing with actors, recreating a legend that already existed in the oral culture, storytelling, retelling, making up possible endings, remembering places, imagining possible versions of a better city, sharing with others, touching the *Cuchipando*, manipulating its vision angles, exercising the muscles of play, being a player in the public place with other fellow citizens, and entering into an unfamiliar but joyful realm of possibilities right there at the too familiar plaza or park.³⁶



Figure 3

Looking through *El Cuchipando* during “City of Hugs” program in Bucaramanga

³⁶ Personal observation, several days during December 2001, Bucaramanga. This observation took place before I started the research.

This vignette highlights the point that communication for development interventions gain in intensity and response when they explore its aesthetic resources; when they activate an inviting gesture to partake in communication encounters. People walk into the encounter with their bodies, senses, images, stories in a “state of interactive fascination” (Bennet, 2001; p.5). They feel enchanted; “struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday” (p.4).

The fascination of the Charreras with the aesthetical experience and the playful engagement with participants calls the attention to a core but overlooked issue in the practice of development communication: the materialization of situated and embodied events that facilitate and unleash genuine, spontaneous, joyful, engaging communication. The Charreras call this experience *encanto* (enchantment).

Canto in Spanish means “song” and *cantar* “to sing”; *canto* is a root word shared by *encanto* (enchantment) and by its sister word *cantaleta*. While *cantaleta* means “constant nagging”, *encantar* is defined by the *Real Academia Española de la Lengua* as “the act of leaving vivid impression in the senses, doing wonders by using magic powers” (RAE, 1997). Bennet (2001), in her book, “The Enchantment of Modern Life,” states, “enchantment entails a state of wonder” (p. 5) and with Fisher she writes “[enchantment is] a moment of pure presence” (p. 5).

Bennet defines enchantment as “a mixed bodily state of joy and disturbance, a transitory sensuous condition dense and intense enough to stop you in your tracks and toss you onto new terrain and to move you from the actual world to its virtual possibilities” (2001, p. 111). The Charreras see this poetic opportunity of *encanto* in

their communication practice as powerful invitations for social change that occupy senses and not only minds, and by calling the attention to embodied experience, challenge the distant disembodied dryness of development discourses.

Although a communication encounter cannot sustain in a permanent state of wonder, the tool of *encanto* helps to facilitate setting the tone, to humanize the entrance of participants creating a disposition to engage and exchange with others.

7.2.2. *Smoothing the Road to Regain “la Palabra”*

Vignette 5

In Bucaramanga, members of community radio stations produce a show on civic issues. The guest, a community leader, sweats nervously before the microphone. Two or three minutes remain to go on air. One of the radio staff attach on the microphone an object made of foam, with round spots like eyes, long eyelashes and an elastic band that ties the foam making the shape of a smiling mouth (a 4). In a second, the intimidating microphone transforms into a goofy face that looks at the surprised guest and makes her laugh. The rest of the people in the studio laugh as well. Then, much more relaxed, the radio interviewee gets into a fluent and spontaneous chat. (Rincón, P.P., personal communication, September 15, 2004).



Figure 4
Community radio producer and the foam microphone

Pedro Pablo designed the microphone's face and hundreds of foam faces were distributed to the national and Latin American network of community radio stations affiliated to AMARC. During our interview, Pedro Pablo goes to his desk and shows me a black and white picture (Figure 5). He tells me he was in a book fair when by chance he saw in a church publication a picture of Hebe de Bonafini, the legendary leader of *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina using *his* foam microphone. He admits "this is a simple, cheap, playful little thing but it's less intimidating than a bare microphone. [...] People get surprised, smile and somehow enter in a good mood for communication." (Rincón, P.P., personal communication, September 15, 2004)



Figure 5
Hebe de Bonafini, leader of *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, using the microphone

The image of the microphone foam implies presence, a pause, and a smile. It carries the value, as Bennet (2001) would say "of being charmed by a novel encounter" (p.6.). Iván loves that tool because in his view it helps to relieve tension during studio production and during interviews. The little face that looks at one's eyes in a goofy way, instead of reproducing the distance of the artificial environment of the studio that

according to him “pressures people to prove themselves and ‘speak in tongues’, ” helps to shake away the stiffness of the situation, and then the conversation is more likely to become authentic and productive.

Getting into the mood for engaging in communication or smoothing the path to participation are some of the benefits of *encanto*. The grace and poetic elements that activate that mood, and undermine the formality of the communication encounters by creating a moment of presence and connection do facilitate the road to own *la palabra* (the word); a road that historically has excluded the oppressed ones.

Martín Barbero (1996) argues that “the conquest of true subjectivity requires the conquest of the word, hidden in the tangle of obscure symbols that are possible to unveil by breaking out the false coherence of the discourse masked by fear” (p. 39). *Fear*, as he denounces, is the very feeling of being disempowered by discourses that exclude people as subjects, and reinforces gestures that dismiss history, voices and experiences. Fear in front of the microphone, or the ancestral shyness to say “I know this”, versus pondering “Hmmm, who knows?” (like the women in Quindio did), reminds of the Culture of Silence. This learned silence needs to be broken by attentive communication opportunities aware of power dynamics and full of gestures of *encanto*. This is a sort of midwifery work that cares for the body and the emotional being of the pregnant one, a work of helping to give birth to the word, *la palabra*.

7.2.3. “*Encanto*” or *Edutainment*?

Encanto and *edutainment* are related concepts, but they are critical different between them. In 2002 Gladys was invited to Holland by the Radio Netherlands division

of education to participate in radio training. The four-week training session included the Entertainment and Education approach (E-E). There she entered into a controversy regarding the notion of entertainment and its links with *encanto*.

Vignette 6

Almost all the radio samples that our instructor presented to our class were really boring. I was expecting something very different from a former British actor, an expert in drama and education, but what he showed from his work with Afghani youngsters learning English was terrible. One sample was about a teacher commanding the Afghani to do something silly and say it; in a kind of old-teacher style tone “repeat after me”. The music and the voices were supposedly fun, but the whole thing was condescending, treated people as if they were dumb. Nothing interesting there, just commands, and commands, repeat, repeat, poor audiences! We [the trainees] almost died of boredom listening to those examples. During the meals we would mock the clips, and would act like the Afghani were suppose to act repeating silly things like parrots. We would laugh out loud. One day, we listened to another show on drug prevention that talked about crime and crime, and terrible addictions, and more crime. I spoke up calling attention to the lack of grace of these productions and the lack of proposing something attractive to the audiences. I didn’t want to be impolite, but I said it. “Look, people fall asleep with that! That concept of education as bombarding all content one has without caring for the audience, just make people to turn the radio off”, I said, “what is the use of that?” I said so in my poor English! My classmates almost clapped. The instructor was mute for a while and then we all had a good conversation on the use of entertainment in education but he basically disagreed with me. In my final evaluation he and the other instructors sat with me and said that my work is very creative but that can be dangerous because I privilege the entertainment over the educational goals. Well, I am not traumatized with that evaluation because I don’t see that’s a problem. My clips are *too* creative? *Too* entertaining? That’s like saying “I’m *too* happy”, is that a bad thing? (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005).

Gladys agrees with the general notion of E-E. It is defined by Singhal & Rogers (1991) as a process of purposely designing and implementing a media message both to entertain and to educate in order to increase audience knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior (p.xii). However E-E does not necessary equate to *encanto*. Many cases described as representatives of E-E, like soap

operas in South Africa, stage dramas in Ethiopia, music video clips in Mexico, etc. may be infused by *encanto*, others could be just *cantaleta* content attached to some entertaining ornaments to momentarily grab audience's attention, or anything in between.

Gladys remembers her other instructor, José Ignacio López Vigil in CIESPAL saying that E-E can be just a sort of cherry-flavored-cough-syrup-trick that works only once or twice to attract audiences because people can identify the artificiality of the added flavor that tries to cover the taste of the insipid medicine (content). The worries of the instructor at radio Netherlands about *too* much entertainment in Gladys' work seem to correspond to the idea of separation between "serious content" and a controlled dosage of entertainment that just grabs attention but doesn't allow audiences to get too much fun.

On the other hand, *encanto*, Gladys explains, implies a value in itself; it entertains, yes, and excites people's senses and imagination. It shouldn't be reduced to the package or the little drawings that make the text less boring. The real *encanto* is to make the whole thing beautiful, the whole experience from head to toes really special. (Herrera, G., personal communication, December 17, 2005). Therefore, *encanto* is not reducible to the signifier of a preexistent content. Here the communication challenge seeks to permeate with an aesthetic posture the content itself, the approaches to that content, the tone, the gesture, the way to tie it to everyday life of particular situated people, and to put it at the center of conversation to be examined collectively by participants who feel invited by images, stories, words, settings, and meaningful non-exclusionary gestures.

7.2.4. “Encanto” as Engaged Pedagogy

Vignette 7

A group of school teachers gather in a classroom for a new type of meeting: to listen to a four minute dramatized audio clip called the “Geography of Rafael Pombo”. Pombo was a famous 19th century Colombian poet, an equivalent of Mark Twain for Americans. The audio clip tells the story of an eight year-old kid who asks the teacher for directions on his homework about writing the impossible geography. The teacher, instead of correcting the mistake, takes advantage of the confusion and helps to reconstruct the peaks or Pombo’s poetic life, his depressions, his fertile valleys of playful rhymes, the sources of his rivers of creativity, etc. And both end up using Pombo’s art to recreate the full bio-geography of the writer. The clip is part of a set of 10 stories of the *Caja de cambios* “Changing Gears”, the campaign designed by the Charreras team to promote “life skills” among teachers and parents of children at high risk of violence in Bucaramanga’s public schools.³⁷

A group of teachers listening together to the *Caja de Cambios* clips, shared stories, some of them close to the Rafael Pombo’s geography reflected on their classroom experience and came out with ideas on how to transform their classrooms into spaces of productive non-violent communication. They started out by connecting to their emotions, struggles, and their desire to serve life beyond the school. The list of suggestions they came out with seemed to me surprisingly similar to the ideas proposed by the feminist writer bell hooks regarding “engaged pedagogy”. She and the Colombian teachers discussed themes such as restoring the passion for knowledge and learning in the classroom, connecting learning with joy and not with fear and punishment. They (hooks and the teachers) talk of their need to reconnect their creative energy inside and outside the classroom, to value the contributions and identities of all students in the class, to recognize their students –and their own-- embodied experience of learning, and to allow excitement, as much as knowledge to be generated collectively (hooks, 1994).

This pedagogy of inclusion and engagement that hooks, the teachers and the Charreras advocate represents another facet of *encanto*, with a scope and consequences that are larger and more complex than the E-E formulations. It

³⁷ Personal observation, December 19, 2005, Bucaramanga, Colombia

displaces the focus from delivering, controlling and separating correct and incorrect knowledge to recognizing diverse aesthetic venues and learning styles as ways to engage, create and learn with others. The expectation here is that the habits of inclusion, excitement for differences, and the creative energy of the workshops would eventually permeate the classroom and the life beyond school walls.

7.2.5. Moving from "Cantaleta" to "Encanto"

Vignette 8

At the end of the second day of a workshop on "communication skills" in Medellín Blanca, the local coordinator of El Comité de Antioquia, a NGO dedicated to promoting the rights of people with disabilities, confesses that she writes stuff that she wouldn't read herself. "Help out me here! I don't like these documents but... Can I make them differently? Can I? I have a lot of stuff to say, but I don't feel authorized to say my own stuff, I'm scared Dr. Jaramillo is going to ask me the exact words, these indicators, these content here..." Oscar, a social worker joins in agreement. "Disabilities are still something separated from us. I feel emptiness in many things I say, or we say..." Blanca makes a proposition, "Please, we need to authorize each other to change this discourse. Even Dr. Jaramillo's discourse. Please!".³⁸

The workshop participants, mostly caregivers and social workers, expressed the difficulty of naming and talking about disabilities. The problem was not just to deal with the political correctness of the language, but the need to explore language(s) powerful and compelling enough to open up a conversation on this issue in the rural areas of Antioquia, which are affected by violence -- particularly the presence of landmines, extreme poverty and racial exclusion. Workshop participants felt that they were living two separated experiences, one on the ground, where they witness the struggle of

³⁸ Personal observation August 29, 2004, Medellín, Colombia

survivors, stories of invisibility, resourcefulness and pain; the other experience, the institutional one which is marked by reports, manuals and protocols that sustain the dissociation with the challenges they face on the ground. And at this point of the workshop, Blanca makes the proposal to “change the discourse”.

Vignette 9

During the break (of the same workshop) Iván goes to the hotel kitchen and brings a tray full of napkins. Participants are asked to close their eyes and receive one napkin each with one of these items: peanuts, marshmallows, prunes, grapes, mints, strawberries. People look confused. They are asked to touch the item, smell it, taste it and, finally, describe sensations related to the item without saying its name. (Figure 6) After listening to each other, the participants open their eyes and move around the room forming groups with people who share similar descriptions. One group ends up combining raisins and prunes. After the exercise some participants say that they need “to learn to listen to concrete, sensorial detail”, and that they would like to “train the muscle to name everyday sensations.”³⁹



Figure 6

Workshop on sensorial experiences and exploration of language, with members of *El Comité de Rehabilitación de Antioquia*

The rest of the workshop seemed like a creative writing class. It included riddles, story telling, and word games with images and metaphors, and even an

³⁹ Ibid

exercise that used a clip from the Italian movie *Il Postino*, in which the postman of Pablo Neruda seduces a woman by using metaphors. Participants are asked to “write” an audio letter like the one the postman composes to Neruda at the end of the movie, by using expressive resources different than the words they use in their institutional communication. In the third and final day of this workshop participants work on “translations” of their own projects and reports that they send to the media, circulate in their organization or among community groups into stronger and more meaningful messages.

The Charreras adapted some of the exercises of this workshop from Gianni Rodari’s work. Rodari is a children’s books writer, teacher and the author *The Grammar of Fantasia* (1999). He advocates for the playfulness and the anti-conformity of words. “Why do kids love guessing riddles? Because that is an experience of conquering the world.” (p.3) Iván reports that in several meetings he had found a recurrent complaint from the participants: they often feel asphyxiated in their own abstract speeches that sound like *cantaletas*.

These activities like playing with words, and with images help people to humbly explore their capacity to communicate and, at the same time, to train the muscle of using words for naming and describing, not for masking their insecurities or their need for feeling power like bureaucrats do. [...] We need to be more visual in our communication also adding sensations that are otherwise kept unspoken; and it seems that people feel a bit insecure doing that. This workshop is just a space to feel safe initiating that exploration, and examining our language is particularly useful when we are trying to enter into a dialogue on disabilities. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 29, 2005).

Moving from *cantaleta* to *encanto* then requires intensive play with language or languages. One participant offered, “It is a liberating thing when one recovers the beauty

of language not to repeat stuff but to create with it". Freire would agree with that statement, as for him emancipation (or social change) does not happen without naming the world (1976), and to name the world would necessitate a new literacy, in which subjects regain confidence in their voices and feel "authorized" as Blanca puts it, to produce meaningful communication.

7.3. *Confianza* - Trust

The other central tool that the Charreras identify as critical in their everyday work is *Confianza*. In Spanish the word *confianza* carries several meanings: confidence, self-confidence and trust. Here I explicate the elements of *confianza* according to the contexts in which it is mentioned and reflected upon by the communication practitioners of this study.

7.3.1. Cultivating Reciprocity

Vignette 10

The Southern part of the Santander province is well-known for being one of the most peaceful regions of Colombia. It's not rich but the land is fairly distributed and many social cooperatives sustain a relatively healthy local economy. Bety Toloza, senior communicator from SEPAS, the main NGO of the region, talks about radio, trust and civic engagement. "The Charreras are always weaving something with someone", Bety says. They worked to set up our radio team here in the early 90s [community radio station *La Cometa* in San Gil]. Then, one day, out of the blue, Iván calls 'hey, there's this project called *A Gatas*, for Early Childhood Development', something that, apparently, had nothing to do with us but Iván somehow saw that *La Cometa* team could join the project and multiply its audiences. Well, we say yes! And not only *La Cometa* would join, but also other community radios that were part of Redesander (the community media network of Santander). Overnight, or over a few months, our radio people attended the workshop, did research, met with several grassroots groups that work on family welfare, and they started seeing themselves as researchers, working shoulder to shoulder with activists, leading a project, not just reporting. Look at Fernando now, look at Lilia now, they got little wings! They really started using

the radio network. [...] People just needed to have the chance; to gain confidence, and look what happens to *La Cometa*, and the networks are involved in more stuff everyday. You can see the repercussions since about 2002. (Toloza, B, personal communication, September 9, 2004).

For *La Cometa* radio team, one consequence of being trusted and included in the *A Gatas* project had been the generation of new relationships with other community stations, local groups, and institutions. Since that contact, they have exchanged pre-recorded materials, they circulate legal, technical information, and they pull together resources for training their staff. Fernando Tibaduiza, station coordinator of *La Cometa* comments that organizations that work on children's issues or related areas have gained visibility in the media environment to voice their ideas and concerns, and at the same time the radio producers and reporters have found in these groups sources of information and a route to connect to broader audiences. (Tibaduiza, F., personal communication, August 10, 2005).

The Charreras and *La Cometa* team had a previous relationship as radio trainers-trainees, and since the *A Gatas* experience their relationship had strengthened and intensified. The radio station became the key ally of the Charreras in the region circulating their materials among member stations of Redesander, broadcasting educational radio series made by the Charreras like *El Aguasuelo* or "*Humm Quien sabe?*" and gaining feedback from their audiences. Both organizations have benefited in their relationship building a net of communication and cooperation. Placing trust in others who respond in a reliable way unleashes not only the conditions for the emergence of groups, spaces and actions that facilitate civic engagement, but as Putnam (2000)

notices, it also cultivates bonds of reciprocity, which are fundamental in increasing social capital. And social capital is considered a key factor for social and economic development.

7.3.2. *Who Is Perceived as Trustworthy?*

Placing trust in others implies a perception of their trustworthiness. In community projects situated in the context of power differences the construction of bonds of trust seems a complicated task due to expectations and perceptions of others inscribed in a history of dependency, social exclusion, gender biases, broken promises and all sorts of sources of distrust. The following vignette shows the case of the Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever prevention project, *Tate-Quieto al Dengue*, as an example of the difficulties in the perceptions of trustworthiness and the ways the situation was handled it.

Vignette 11

The Charreras convinced the public health coordinators of the DHF prevention program to include local commercial radio personalities of Bucaramanga to broadcast educational messages or PSAs in their shows and in their own style. Some of the public health specialists resisted the idea for a while, arguing that radio people in town were uneducated and didn't have the capacity to fit into the educational goals. The Charreras, radio people themselves, met with a diverse group of radio announcers. [They form] a mix bag which includes the guy who yells "goaaaaalll" for several minutes during soccer matches, the tropical music show hosts known for teasing and flirting with the female audience members, the young rap, hip hop, and techno DJ who speaks a sort of Spanglish, and other more traditional radio announcers. That was a group who after receiving basic guidelines from the Charreras opened up a three minute space every Thursday morning for a new DHF announcement that would be inserted in their regular chat, not as a separate segment. The PSAs connected to stories and activities of the larger communication campaign. The radio stations would get paid for five weeks of announcements. After the first week the public health specialists were alarmed with the imprecision of the language and called for closing the deal with the radio people before they would misinform the audiences. Iván and Gladys had to intervene asking to the agency for patience and more time to work closer with the radio personalities to explore with them ways in which the announcements

connected to the rhythm of their shows and style of the broadcasters without losing key information. The result was that all the radio people enjoyed and used the dengue stories not only for three minutes but much longer, and most of them also kept announcing them after the five weeks contract and for no fee. “The stories were not forced into their programs. People played with them, owned them, made few mistakes at first but those didn’t matter; that was part of their learning”. This is the way Iván explains how the radio hosts, unlikely participants of health education, became allies and key players of the success of the dengue prevention strategy. (Chahín, I., Herrera, G., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

In this vignette the public health experts’ negative judgment on the reliability of the radio announcers to perform a task that they were paid to do, indicates the difficulties in building a relationship with partners and community members who are not considered to be at the same level of education. Distrust here expresses the idea of separated social groups: the ones who represent written versus oral cultures; enlightened and formally educated groups versus popular, mass culture oriented groups. Under these sets of notions the radio workers are perceived as unreliable; in need of control not as recipients of trust.

In my interview with Jackeline Hernández one of the experts in charge of vector borne prevention programs from Proinapsa-UIS (the NGO associated with PAHO in Colombia), she explained her doubts about generating that type of open participation in health education. “Some people are not trained, and they may send inaccurate information. The Charreras want to open up participation, but let’s be honest; participation is a myth in health education; there isn’t enough evidence of that and Iván doesn’t have the theoretical strength to prove otherwise.” (Hernández, J., personal communication, September 12, 2004).

This was a lengthy interview in which I experienced ethical dilemmas. I entered to it with the predisposition of hearing the “other side” of the issue, for which I didn’t feel much empathy. Then I found that Jackeline has done extensive studies on health education and she is in charge of designing and teaching several public health courses at the graduate school level and talks with care and thoughtfulness. She positioned herself as a researcher. I understood her ideas of using systematic, proven models and her desire for thinking beyond what she sees as parochial frameworks. She tried to connect to me by using statements like “*you and I both know...*” including me in her “league” and by doing this she may be implying the exclusion of others who don’t hold graduate degrees. I sensed that there was tension and confrontation during the project.

Iván didn’t see the flexible participation of the radio announcers as a problem. He believes that experts fear to lose control; they tend to worry about content and forget to trust and to offer people the opportunity to become trustworthy. In the case of the radio hosts, given the chance, they would demonstrate their competence and trustworthiness to accomplish the task. However, they do it in their own terms and following their own aesthetic style, not necessarily responding in institutional language. I see two salient elements in his idea of trust.

The first is perception of trustworthiness. The party that places trust onto other group to do something needs to learn that perhaps the other group responds in diverse aesthetic ways and languages, and that those divergent responses don’t indicate failure, but difference. The second is becoming trustworthy. The radio announcers needed support to learn how to respond to the commitment. Once they found a meaningful

connection to the project and saw the benefit of being part of it --found their own interest as Hardin (2006) would put it, they would respond in a reliable manner. This may indicate that groups may increase the chances of becoming trustworthy if they are granted the support and opportunity to find their self-interest, and as a consequence of it, the desire to preserve the relationships with the agencies and other groups that have positive expectations of them.

7.3.3. Getting Wings or Self-confidence

One manifestation of being trusted, as Bety Toloza observed in *La Cometa*, is people “getting wings” or self-confidence. That is the case of Lilia Espinosa.

Vignette 11

The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare, ICBF, announces a grant fund and calls for regional communication proposals that meet the main goals of the institution. Lilia Espinosa, the youngest reporter and producer of *La Cometa* in San Gil, joins Fernando Tibaduiza, the station’s coordinator and together they travel to Bucarmanga to meet the Charreras who would work with them in designing the proposal. Lilia remembers she was ready to take notes in her notebook at the Charreras’ place. Fernando and she expected the Charreras to have organized some ideas. But instead of a plan they found questions: what impressed you about the ICBF goals? Fernando and Lilia gazed at each other. “Oh! Here it’s supposed we should be contributing! Great! So my ideas have value then. This is really unusual because one goes to meeting to take notes, but this time things are not coming only one way,” Lilia recalls. She opens her notebook and starts collecting her thoughts and all together comes out with nine possible topics of interest. “I was so excited. I was asked my opinion and they took notes of what I said! I felt great, because I was very new in radio; I was just a beginner, so that meeting was important to me. (Espinosa, L. personal communication, August 10, 2005).

Self-interest may bring people together, but in the interaction something else emerges. In this case, self-confidence derives from the perception of being trusted by others. Lilia in the complete interview mentions several instances of concrete gestures,

communication clues and interactions that offered her a foundation for growing confident in her work. She remembers also how the SEPAS communications director Bety Toloza “deposited *confianza* in her,” making arrangements for trips, sponsoring her to attend training sessions and asking and listening to Lilia attentively. Some clues include making eye contact, sitting with her informally sharing everyday life stories (personal self-disclosure), and using a language of provisional statements versus statements of absolute certainty. These elements are also described by Gibb (1991) when proposing a language for cooperation in organizations.

7.3.4. Trust or Putting Judging into Brackets

The Charreras don't dissociate work from home, and one clear lesson about trust comes from their own family relationship.

Vignette 12

After listening to some audio clips I asked Dana if she participated as an actress this time. She says, no, she's been busy and I see her coming closer to me and her parents for a quick hug and kiss, then she rushes to the door. Iván tells me what is going on. “These past days we had been talking to Gladys about Danita, and we were a bit worried that she is not as affectionate to us as she used to be. Thinking and thinking and observing her, we arrived at the point that she is putting most of her energy into her new interest: the boy she is dating. She is nurturing a new relationship that is uncertain for her. So when we understood that, we relaxed, we know she loves us, although right now she is not expressing it as much. So we stopped judging her or us, or putting pressure: ‘choose that boy or us!’ No. Our way to deal with this has been: ‘good, feed your love for him, and besides, let us be accomplices of that interest in your life’. This means trusting in her, and she has been more open and happy sharing with us. This has been such a nice learning experience because when we get to see this in daily life, or to understand why other people do what they do, it is possible to find simple and even joyful solutions. (Chahín, I., Herrera, G., personal communication, December 18, 2005).

This lesson on trust transcended the family life and reached the communication work. The workshops I witnessed in Zipaquirá, Medellín and San Gil started with the exercise of “Zoom”, the 33-slide show of Istvan Banyai's illustrations. Each image contains the clues to the next one. All images are partially connected as part of larger tale. Iván suggested with that exercise that “We need to find other pieces of the story, and seeing then all in perspective gives us an understanding much further than what one thought one saw at first glance.” (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 19, 2004). And with the exercise he connects to the notion of trust:

“Like in the Zoom pictures, there is a piece of truth in each view that we need to recognize. So the act of communication starts with trusting that everyone brings a piece of truth. To understand that your opinion makes sense is an element of trust in my relationship with you; we had found that this element of trust helps in communication because it decreases judging and blaming; it serves to remind me that you are not stupid, or ignorant, or nothing of that sort, but that simply your journey, your experience is different from mine, and therefore you have a different way to deal with things. But this doesn't mean we need to keep us apart, but on the contrary this recognition invites me put our views closer, to touch them, to confront them” (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 19, 2004).

During small group communication, these principles of trust and collective exploration of what make sense for each participant are received with reserve from some institutional players. The Charreras had been received criticism about the risk that their stories and ways to instigate conversation may lead participants in community meetings to digress and talk about other issues beside the particular project's goals. For instance, besides focusing on the eradication of the dengue vector, they instead talk about the

quality of the water in their communities, the health services available, and more. The Charreras believe that is not a problem.

If people get excited and start making connections between one story and the other, “Look at this!” “No, look at that!” “This is what happened to me, etc”... that is good. The goal for us is not asking people blind obedience by repeating and repeating a message ‘clean the “rigid-walls containers’, ‘clean the rigid-wall...’ I may achieve that the person says “OK, OK, I will clean that damn thing”! But this is not our larger goal, our goal goes beyond that, the goal is building citizenship. (Chahín, I., personal communication, August 18, 2005).

For the Charreras, conversation and its messy digressions and ramifications from the main issue are not the problem but the virtue of trusting people to engage in encounters that spark energy and interest to discuss what matter for them as a community in the long term.

In this chapter I have described the two main tools used for the Charreras in their development for communication works: *Encanto* and *Confianza*. I discussed how these tools represent ways to counterbalance *cantaleta* which is a dominant form of communication present in modernization language that reinforces prevailing power structures. I said that *cantaleta* embodies a modernization posture, and used the term *posture* to indicate that *cantaleta* goes beyond the institutional speeches. It additionally refers to non verbal communication, to the space, the settings, the control over people’s performances and the dissociation with embodied experiences of communication. I also offered examples of how *cantaleta* pervasively appears and informs the encounters and speeches of community members, development partners, and other diverse players of development efforts.

The responses to *cantaleta*, according to my ethnography, are *encanto* and *confianza*. *Encanto* is an aesthetic tool that can be found in a range of forms, from the recognition of the asymmetrical and embodied experiences of participants in development projects, to the exploration of their languages, images and creative resources to de-center normalized ways of seeing and communicating. The other tool is the ethical tool of *confianza*. The vignettes describe how relationships of trust do not develop in a vacuum, but develop –or not between individuals who occupy specific social roles and who have expectations and perceptions about each other’s trustworthiness. Communication efforts in this context are means to build social trust by creating connections and networks of exchange and reciprocity, by offering to individuals the opportunity to demonstrate their reliability, and therefore to be perceived as trustworthy. And finally, by trusting that there is a degree of truth in each participant’s voice and by acknowledging it, communication reduces the temptation of ignoring or removing the different view but rather exploring it and conversing with it.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The professional field of the development communication practitioner has gained attention in recent years among international development agencies. Two international meetings of scholars and aid agencies at Bellagio, Italy, in 2002 and 2004 discussed the competences of these practitioners and made curriculum recommendations that supported the creation of educational programs in Latin America under the initiative of the FAO and The CHANGE Project, plus an on-line program at Ohio University. The attention on the practitioners' role is due to the agreement on the fact that the only guarantee for sustainable development is the participation of communities defining the type of change they want and getting involved in the collective interventions to achieve it (Huarcaya, 2006, Irigoien 2002, Melkote and Steeves, 2001). The process of community participation of requires the presence of what Gumucio-Dagrón (2002) calls a "new communicator". The profile of this new specialist combines knowledge of communication tools, technologies, critical thinking, and direct experience in development process, cultural sensitivity, and creativity.

Therefore communicators would be seen as significant protagonists in the process of development, not just as media makers, intermediators or interpreters from aid agencies to communities, but as *mediators*, the ones able to articulate the interests of

social groups located in diverse cultural sites and crossed by diverse forms of exclusion. Their role requires the ability to recognize and to challenge what Martín Barbero (1993) describes as the divisive nature of the market that separates senders and receivers; subjects and objects of development.

My ethnographic study adds to and enriches this on-going discussion on the role of communicators. Its contribution lies in the fact that the elements that describe the professional competences come from the exploration of the hands-on experience of local practitioners: their voices, self-reflections and the observation and analysis of their decisions and their methods.

I started this study posing three main questions: who are the professionals in the field of communication for development and social change? How do they work? And what are the sources and principles that guide their work? With these questions I wanted to make visible the presence of communication professionals in development projects, to examine the concrete steps and complexity of their everyday work, and to learn lessons from their reflected experience.

The following list of conclusions/recommendations summarizes critical elements derived from the analysis of the Charreras' practice. Although the conclusions are contingent to a particular experience in Colombia, the lessons from the dilemmas, methods and principles that guide the work of this group generate connections to the existing literature, fill its gaps and open up new lines of inquiry.

8.1. Subjects with Agency and Agendas

While in most literature and institutional reports the practitioner's presence remains invisible or it is taken for granted, the observation of the Charreras everyday work brings to the foreground the presence of subjects, the agency of communicators in the design, plan, and execution stages of a project. Agency here is understood as the purpose and meaning that the participants bring with themselves to each project. It does not represent disconnection to larger social structures. On the contrary, it means that their personal histories and social locations are entangled in the ways they make decisions, solve problems, and use language in their daily interactions.

Gladys is an agent when she searches the field for the "golden nugget" interview in order to find a story that connects to her definitions of change, health, gender or beauty. That's her agenda. When Pedro Pablo yearns to grasp the "intangible thing" in each project this means there is a subjective bond that ties a task to his creative vision. Darío and Jesús Abad have political agendas. Throughout the years Darío's radical language changed and he has learned to express his views with music and wit. Jesús Abad keeps using his camera to tell stories of violence and peace because he is personally marked by them. That is what he brings to his communication work. Iván asserts his agency as well, presenting counterproposals and redefining the terms of reference for the projects. He has a clear agenda, shared by the rest of the team: to work towards citizenship building surpassing the limited institutional objectives that affect only one single issue of behavior.

This group of people don't see themselves as radio producers or PR communicators for the aid agencies, or as journalists. They are self-defined by their desire to articulate the different worlds they belong to, by their past experience in the rural areas, by their activist/artistic/political work, or in their community radio passion. These personal interests, tied to their long-term concern for their communities, are actualized in their practice when they find opportunities to partner with development organizations to work on particular projects. Here, the definition of development communicator, articulating needs from different worlds, comes closer to Martín Barberos's notion of *mediator*.

Recognizing the communicators' agency and agendas means that aid organizations must *first* see them as partners in the business of development, and not as neutral gears involved in mechanical diffusion of messages. Communicators perceived as agents and partners can participate in creating strategies, discussing, adopting, adapting, and pushing the limits of dominant communication models and expectations of development agencies and other players. By the same token, community members involved in the process activated by communicators will also be seen as partners, agents and active participants of the development plans.

The recommendation for educators of development communicators is to include in the curriculum space to debate productive ways to mediate the interests of social groups. Also, as a pedagogical tool, it should be fundamental to share biographies, motives and the sources that strengthen one's agendas and to contrast them, to feed them with diverse notions of development and change.

8.2. Blending, Altering and Proposing Theories and Methods

The Charreras' refusal to marry to one single communication model or approach is one of the virtues of their work. They dare to mix. Their flexibility allows them to open the doors of social marketing methods without renouncing their idea of community participation through conversation. As Morris (2003) observes, most of the development communication practices are placed in a continuum between diffusion and marketing models, and participatory and critical approaches.

The ABC of social marketing in health communication, a tool popularized by PAHO training that consists of segmenting target audiences, becomes in the Charreras reinvention a new formula, the ABC+C; the added "C" emphasizes *cuento* or tale, and it comes with the suggestion: "less content and more stories, more meaning." Additions and adaptations like this one need to be explored, evaluated, and validated in their contexts instead of dismissed for lack of consistent theory.

One of the experts I interviewed implied that the communicators should learn from state-of-the-art models, and that is a fair suggestion. However I wonder why it is not also the other way around: learning from their practice. The problem I see is not the lack of connection to theory; it is rather that theory hasn't developed at the same pace with the experience of practitioners who are using a mix of sources that haven't been conceptually discussed yet.

In an occupation in which the protocols are not formalized, in which there are neither codes to follow nor professional associations to discuss limits and procedures, the

Charreras invent in their everyday work. And by doing so they are creating connections where there were none before. *Confianza* and *encanto*, for instance, are fruits of that way of thinking and mixing.

The implications for academia are several: The “impure” mixtures, adaptations and application of communication models of the practitioners need to be evaluated and systematized. These might be starting points for new hybrid modes of knowledge in the communication field.

8.3. Resisting the Modernization Posture

Under the instrumental rationality of modernization, the language of the development communication field becomes instrumental as well. And that problem was detected by the Charreras, they call it *cantaleta*. *Cantaleta* translates into an attitude, a posture, a gesture, a way of seeing and expressing, and a desire for fitting into the authority that gives legitimacy to the discourse of development. In spite of the good intentions of NGOs, agents and agencies, practitioners, extensionists, and community members, the *cantaleta* posture/lense splashes and permeates all interactions in the field.

This posture, as discussed by Scott (1998) is rooted in an administrative and engineering rationality designed from the point of view of the administrator, not from the organic, unexpected, messy, creative and uncontrollable life of people. What to do with *cantaleta*? The Charreras invented these two alternatives: *encanto* (enchantment) and *confianza* (trust). Both terms and concepts emerged from their own practice doing communication for development.

Encanto hace contacto. “*Encanto* creates contact”, Iván repeats in his workshops.

Recovering the enchantment of the human encounter can be dismissed as emotional or childish; however it represents a serious invitation of non-intimidation to enter into dialogue; to be present, to be an excited participant. *Encanto* speaks of being in a world that still has hope and beauty. And as Bennet says, it is hard to love (or to work for change) in a disenchanted world (p. 160). Unlike E-E, *encanto* does not represent an attractive form that disguises an insipid content, or only a package to make products more entertaining or popular, but a powerful source for challenging a rationale of exclusion embedded in a language disconnected to life. *Encanto*, as seen in the example of Geography of Pombo script, or in the case of the *Cuchipandos*, also represents exploration and play: ways to find meaning and to enjoy genuine communication in a way that makes us express, laugh and imagine change.

In the context of a country afflicted by disenchantment, political violence, distrust, institutional inefficiency and corruption, the proposition of *encanto* entails not only an aesthetic but also an ethical opportunity. It opens up a space to connect to others in a place outside the modernization discourse; it allows people to reconnect to the words of “what if...” and imagine ways in which new social arrangements could happen.

This connects us to the principle of *confianza*, or trust. The discussion on *confianza* that implies placing trust in others and surrendering the monopoly of truth, building relationships of reciprocity, and becoming trustworthy through communication encounters also goes in the direction of reshaping the development discourse.

These themes generate avenues of academic exploration and connections to themes and disciplines unusually linked to development and communication studies. The aesthetic principle of *encanto* that includes the presence of the expecting body would require the use of phenomenology, psychology or other appropriate lenses to examine the embodied aspects of the communication experiences.

The topic of *trust*, which can be considered an ethical principle, is already part of a vast academic exploration in sociology, psychology, ethics and political science, and would need more concrete links to the area of development communication studies, or even to be included as an indicator of a programs' evaluation. How the diverse communication encounters build trust between institutions and communities, and how the social networks activate and stimulate bridges of reciprocity through development communication interventions, are just a few questions that derive from this study.

Even though a scholarly tradition that links interpersonal communication studies and adult education studies to development communication already exists, it would be productive to entangle it with the notions of *cantaleta*, *encanto* and trust derived from this ethnography. Reconnecting to Freire's first works on education and the liberatory potential of dialogue, plus Martín Buber's (Smith, 2001) classic contribution to communication ethics is valuable here. Buber's postulates regarding the I-You relations built in the human encounter, versus I-it instrumental relations resonate to me as versions of *encanto* and trust (I-You) versus the teleological relations (*cantaleta*) that de-humanize the other (Lipari, 2004).

8.4. Language, Power and Midwifery Work

For disempowered groups as the peasants of Boyacá, the history that had silenced them has been long. Being peasant, darker skin and poor, in Colombia implies fear, shame and it can be an experience of non-existence. Thus, in a routine production of a radio show, for instance, the voice of the peasant interviewee does not necessarily flow just because the microphones are open; for that voice to emerge, there is a sort of midwifery work to do. In a particular vignette of this study, the tiny invention of the foam face microphone that helps to “smooth the path to participation” as Pedro Pablo explains, represents an effort to help the birth of *la palabra*, the word of the oppressed that has been historically excluded and that would require the imaginative, caring and gentle support of the communicators to emerge, breaking down what Freire called the Culture of Silence (Martín Barbero, 2001).

Observing the work of the Charreras reminds us that even the craft of communication is not reduced to a matter of message-making skills. Given that communication is permeated by power dynamics, the craft also involves choices on who is represented and how; it includes and excludes voices; it invites participation or restricts it. The Charreras’ attention to the detailed episodes that form the routine of the communication practice indicates awareness of the power asymmetries engrained in the development field. When the students in Cartagena are not allowed to spontaneously speak, when Gladys cuts off part of an interview with a community leader, when an educational video character jokes about women being unable to maintain the land, or

when the health representative goes up to the stage to read a declaration that she doesn't apply, in all these instances the Charreras makes visible the problems of modernization discourse and their reinforcement through the unbalance of power.

However, some situations remained unnoticed. In *Caja de Cambios* one of the productions I observed, the Charreras dramatized a script on the stressful life of a female teacher from her day in the classroom to her life at home. The script, the directions for follow-up activities, and the conversation dissected the school life, the pressures teachers have, struggles with curriculum, load, and so forth. But gender inequality was not mentioned. I failed to notice it until months later, listening to the audio clips. And the Charreras didn't notice this neither. One limitation of this study is the lack of content analysis of media materials in which it would be possible to see consistency or incongruence between speech, intentions and the materialization of discourse.

The implications for those interested in the formation of development communicators are many. I highlight the need for the "midwifery of the word" aspect of their work. There is a too-long tradition in communication studies placing emphasis on the sender as the central protagonist of communication. In the approach modeled by the Charreras, the interest displaces the center of attention from methods that the sender uses to captivate the audience, to the emergence of the voices of the protagonists. This new center entails the work of *encanto*.

A key element for the development communication curriculum, besides teaching models, theories and skills, is to identify power dynamics. Race, class, gender and other

challenging “isms”, need to be embraced in a conversation for development, not just as separate content issues but as permanent dimensions of analysis and criticism.

8.5. The Porous Nature of the Development Discourse

Escobar (1996) sees development from a structuralist perspective. In his view, the development discourse is a regime, or a system of procedures, languages, roles, rules, internal logic and definition of limits and expectations of what needs to be studied, what needs to be done, and what change should mean. It is both the container and the content. Although practitioners, agents and community are informed by and trapped in this powerful discourse regime, using Escobar’s (2004) term, which I compare to *cantaleta*, the discourse has pores.

Aid agencies and governmental organizations are not particularly interested in embracing self-reflection and criticism of their foundational myths. However, given the opportunity, middle rank development workers and other players might be able to see the presence of *cantaleta* in their own practice, and to explore its alternatives. In the example of *El Comité* in Medellín, the group integrated by mostly agency officials expressed their desire to challenge their own institutional language. One of the coordinators asked authorization to the group to redefine the way they write and talk, and to find meaningful expressive forms to interact with the communities where they work.

Similarly, some agents and officials who worked with the Charreras expressed that they changed their personal attitudes regarding their use of language. Although in

different degrees, these representatives have engaged in self-evaluation and communication designs that challenge *cantaleta*.⁴⁰

Therefore the role of communicators, as in the case of the Charreras, has the potential to push the limits of the development discourse. The perspectives games, such as “finding one’s blind spot”, the Zoom slide-show discussion, the olfactory exercise with food, the conversational practices of using “spring board materials” such as the Geography of Rafael Pombo, all of these exercises de-center the modernization language, allow digression, emotion, imagination of new alternatives, irreverent stories and propositions that move outside its logic. This is one way in which the discourse is challenged.

Another possibility to push the limits and stretch the pores of the development discourse is by exploring situations of trust. For the agency representatives, regaining trust in the process and in the communities requires taking the risk of losing degrees of control over process and outcomes that are formalized in the discourse of modernization. It implies allowing and valuing digressions and interpretations, and giving room for messiness in people’s uses and dealings with content and information that go beyond the institutional goals but help to train the muscle of civic engagement.

⁴⁰ Carlos Julio Castro, from the GTZ, Jorge Luna, from the Public Health Board of Santander, Blanca P. Mantilla and Jackeline Hernandez from Proinapsa-UIS, Patricia Tellez, from The First Lady’s Social Service Office, and Blanca Moreno coordinator of *El Comité de Rehabilitacion de Antioquia*, and Francisco Aparicio from Floridablanca’s Social Development Office.

8.6. Limitations of the Study

These are the most salient limitation of the research:

This study had focused on the work of a particular group of communicators. They are not representative of the many versions of communicators at the grassroots who may have more formal training and who may be working full-time for development institutions. The conditions of the work and the particularity of the backgrounds of this Colombians represent an experience that cannot be generalized. More research needs to be done contrasting the practice of communicators under dissimilar circumstances and in different countries.

Another limitation refers to the discussion on the aesthetics and ethic principles that I introduced as a contribution of the Charreras to the field of development communication. These key concepts require much more exploration and need to be framed under conceptual categories. That would be part of a new research. In this study these categories emerged from the ethnography and they were not discussed previously in the review of literature. Therefore, these categories require their own reference frameworks and connections to lines of thought in communication ethics and aesthetics.

Finally, another set of limitations come from my closeness with the participants and my fascination and respect for their work. There are some critical aspects that I was not able to notice even months after gathered data and failed to discuss with participants at the moment. One of those aspects that I tried to reconnect later in the process has to do with the politics of talking, which I briefly touch in pages 127-128. While

acknowledging this difficulty I consider that content analysis of productions made by communicators may lead into the direction of understanding the connections between the practitioner's narratives of their practice and the materialization of media and messages.

In Sum

In this study I had highlighted the agency of the development communication practitioners and their contributions to the professional field in the case of the Charreras team. Their reflections went beyond the description of instrumental steps, but a deep discussion on ways to promote citizenship, connectedness, and community engagement. Their practice coincides with what some scholars (Morris 2003 and Peterson 2007) have emphasized about the combination of approaches (modernization and participatory) and beyond that, their experience points out to the strategic and creative ways in which the power dynamic ingrained in the modernization posture can be resisted.

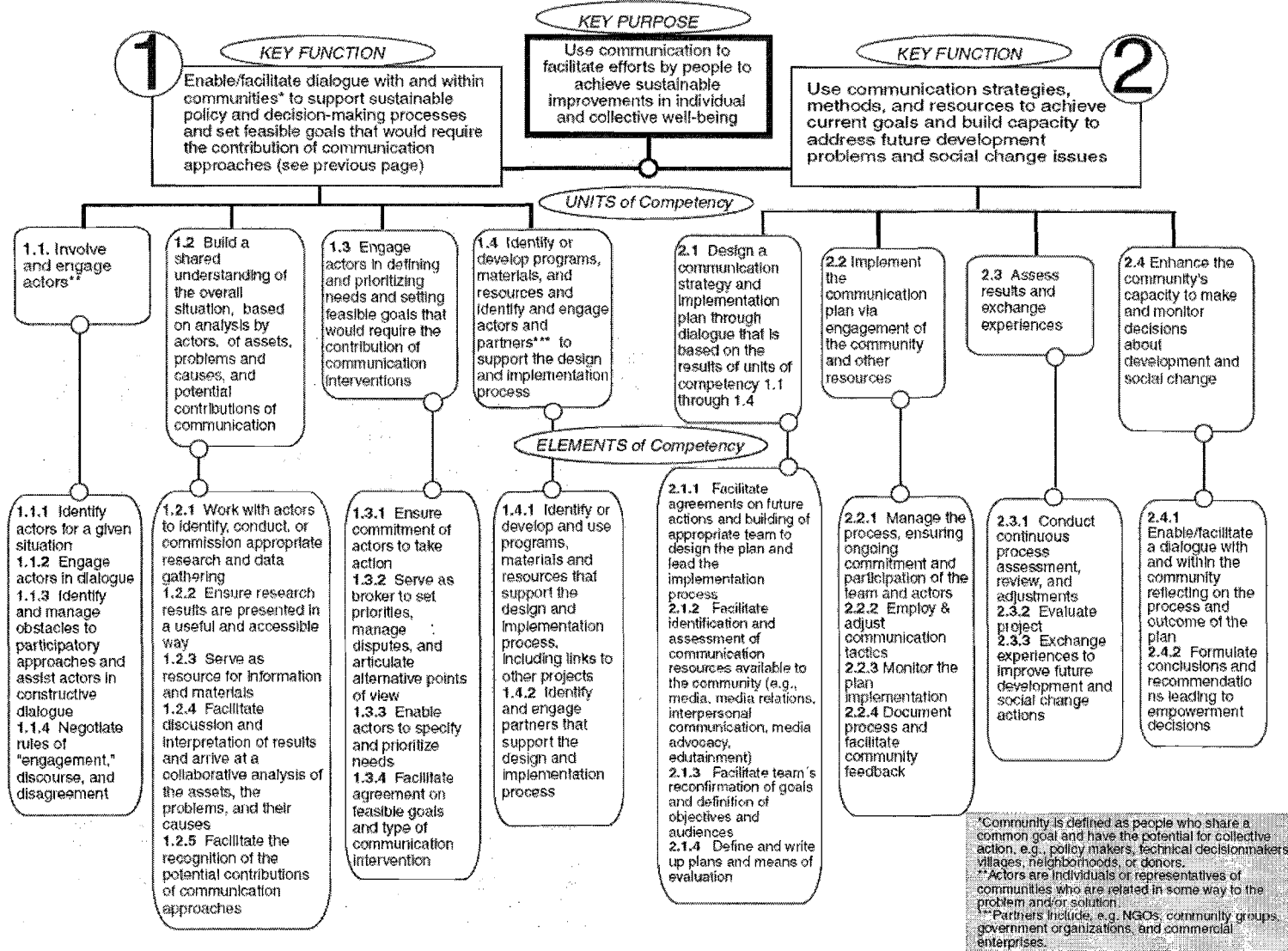
I do not mean to imply that the overarching project of modernization, its implications in the global economy and its colonialist agenda, will all disappear as a result of simple exercises of trust and de-centering views. However, I have induced through my observations, and described throughout this study, that the communication approach used by the Charreras of Colombia holds the promise for new possibilities for hope, imagination, and alliance in the development field.

APPENDIX A

A MAP OF FUNCTIONS AND COMPETENCES FOR DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNICATORS

Designed by Irigoin, M.E., & Tarnapor Whitacre, P. (2002)

Part III: Functional Map for Communication for Development and Social Change



APPENDIX B

GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION OF THE COMMUNICATORS

Biographies	
<p>Here I will ask what every subject brings to the field from her own background, the way she defines the field, and also the tensions between the subject's particular reflections and the socio/cultural or institutional conditions of her work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic data (name, age, gender) • Number of years in the Dev Comm field? • Most salient Projects/ programs designed and implemented? • Do you work for an institution, government or agency? Independently, under a contract, as a staff member? • How do you get interested in the field of Dev Comm? • What personal experiences (at school, family related, spiritual, political, aesthetic skills, etc.) were influential in your current activity? • How have you learned about this professional field? • What has been beneficial in your personal growth as communicator for development? (academic formation, professional networking, participation in programs/ projects, community feedback, agencies evaluation, etc.) Examples • When you are asked your profession, how you define it? Is it easy to define it? Why yes or why no? • Who, what work or communication project/products have influenced your own work? • The fact that you are (gender, class, educational level, urban or rural person, etc.) has played a role in your work as communication practitioner? • How did you get interested in improving life conditions for the poor (social change)? Have these ideas been transformed or challenged after your experience in this field? • Has it been rewarding what you have done? (Emotionally, professionally, monetarily) In which cases, why? • Has the experience been frustrating sometimes? (Emotionally, professionally, monetarily) In which cases, why? • How do you describe your experience (feelings included) working for an agency/ NGO, government institution? Examples. • How do you describe your experience (feelings included) working in rural areas, impoverish districts, or with marginal communities? Examples • How are your feelings entering into the communities' space? How do you deal with the idea of being outsider or somehow insider? Does it matter if you are female, male, white, mestizo, middle class, high educated, urban, etc.) • Have you found room for experimenting with ideas, formats, language, and strategies in your work? • How do you "nurture" your imagination for designing communication projects and products? Where do you find, borrow or translate ideas from? • Have you incorporated in your personal or family life some of the concepts, information, knowledge that you use in your work? • How do you find your work different from other's Dev Comm works? What would it be an ideal scenario for successful Dev Comm practices?

Micro Level	
<p>1. Project design</p> <p>By reconstructing the experience of a particular project or campaign I will explore the road from identification of development issues to conceptualization and from conceptualization to materialization of proposals.</p> <p>I will explore assumptions on development and communication, and negotiation with agents and partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the initial idea of a project is born? Who's the initiative? • Why a particular development issue (health, environment, gender inequality, etc.) is considered for attention in a given place? How serious, prevalent or urgent that issue is that need intervention? • What are the assumptions about the issue and the ways to overcome it? • What are the assumptions about the population that is affected by the issue? What is expected to happen with the communities? • Have other projects/ programs attempted to deal with the issue? • Is communication part of a larger strategy of development in this case? Or is it considered mainly a communication media program that will be used for canalizing other development issues? • Describe contacts with the agencies and partners (and in a given case, community members). • Is there connection with institutional goals/agendas/ policies/ budget? Do the general expectations match? Does the proposal need to be changed in order to fit the agencies requirements? • Is there community participation in the definition of the project? Have people been consulted about the need to deal with the issue? • Are there connections or disconnections between the proposals' discourse (language, style, set of assumptions about communication, development, participation, research, etc.) the agency's discourse? • Have you written "counter proposals" that challenge (reshape, or subvert) the agency's initial idea? • Writing the draft of the proposal: Is there some theoretical foundations informing the proposal? Is there information and local knowledge that is taking into consideration for writing the proposal? • Describe the decision-making process in defining target audiences, objectives, phases, methods. • Does the proposal follow some models of media campaigns or public health education models prescribed in manuals, etc? • What is the communication component of the proposal defined? And why some media is selected? Interpersonal communication, media (materials for radio, TV, video, press, internet, ads, etc.) multimedia campaign, edutainment? • Once the proposal is presented, how the negotiation with agencies about ideas/ development models/ audience/ budget/ timeline, reach/ etc. happens?
<p>2. Field-work</p> <p>I will explore</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming the research and production team for the project. Who is invited and why? (university professors, "media experts", scientists, community educators, artists,

<p>here the operationalization of the proposal, the different stages from baseline research to situations related to being-in-the field and facilitating or not participation.</p>	<p>social workers, researchers, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the team members learn about the main goals, assumptions, and methods of the project? What have been some obstacles here? • Research: if any, what type? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does the team learn about the issue? What are the sources of knowledge? (technical and scientific knowledge and local people's knowledge) - Research methods, designing research questions, "extracting" knowledge or constructing knowledge? Learning about attitudes, resistance points, myths, beliefs, perceptions and practices on the issue. - Are there gender, class, urban/rural differences acknowledge in the research sample? - Describe the experience of going to the field, contacting people for the first time, finding liaison persons, target informants, introducing the project team and presenting the project. - The research method for gathering local data: leaning toward qualitative or quantitative information, asking questions, making surveys, organizing focus groups, testing research tools and assumptions, etc. Who are the sample population? Why? - How do local people take part in the research? How do they get to know the results? How do they are consulted to participate as informants? - How does the team deal with logistics? Transportation, accommodation, mail, recording devices, computers, etc. -Analyzing and interpreting information collected, organizing themes. -What are the limitations or the advantages of the research fieldwork? - Time and budget issues. • How do research findings are translated into guidelines or useful information for the project. • Implementation of the project: Participatory components. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do the phases of the project include participation of community members? Who are they? Opinion leaders, people already organized in associations, non associated-individuals? Does the project require organizing members of the community? Are they interested in the issues? How do they get engage in the project? -Does the project become part or integrated to local ongoing projects? How does it connect to local expectations / assumptions of social change? - Limits to generate participation: views of the outsider and bias against the sponsoring agency, highly politicized environment, etc. -What does it mean participation? Attendance to meetings, inclusion of local voices, partnership with local organizations, inclusion of local knowledge, decision-making, adapting the project in order to include local interests, ownership of the project, continuity of the project leaded by community members, mutual learning, etc.? - What are the ways to facilitate local acceptance and participation? How does the personal connection (trust, credibility) happen? (The performance of the communicator to deal with suspicion, fear, skepticism).
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshops design: How to make them interactive, playful, useful? - Perceiving power issues in participatory settings: who are more likely to be listened to? Issues of class, gender, educational distinctions among community members in their interactions with development communicators. What is the "cost" or "price" to participate for community members? And their perceived gain? Using community's resources and initiatives: places, contacts, logistic, ideas, celebrations, associations, etc. • Being personally connected to the people in the field: time and intensity of the relationship, emotions, fear, tensions, despair, personal fulfillment or passion. How it is being too close, too distant or just close enough?
4. Making Media and Communication Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing previous materials (content, language) • Deciding about what media channels to use and why. • Deciding about primarily and secondary audiences. What are the goals of the materials: inform, educate, favor conversation, etc. • Producing for community members or with them? In their channels or others? • Incorporating the research findings about audiences, local language, knowledge and practices in the media materials. • What type of formats, genres? Story telling, direct explanation, illustration, exemplification. • Favoring local people to produce their own media/ messages • The creative team: coming out with tittles, songs, slogans, logos, identification characters. Who does these? • Dealing with other specialists: musicians, graphic & visual designers, etc. and finding a balance between aesthetics and purpose of the materials. (Whose aesthetics? • How to conciliate the educational goals of the materials and the entertainment value? Playfulness, attractiveness of materials. Pre-test processes. • Incorporating local flavor, humor, stories, music, slang etc. • Incorporating pop culture and other symbolic products in the design process. • Writing process. How is to be participatory in the language or in the text produced? Tone, provocative, persuasive, educational, informative, etc. • Engaging one issue in itself or connecting to other issues and context: environment, education, gender... intolerance, distrust, etc. • Transcending and dealing with larger issues or focusing on one topic? • Is the material created to be used, played with, listened only once? • Issues of authorship: one voice, one "last word" conducting the meaning? Or there are ways to including local aesthetics and voices. • Representing the other: representing the poor, woman,

	<p>children, peasant, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical quality (radio, video, manuals, etc.) what is professional quality in the context of local, small scale development projects. • Costs? Are professionals paid by what they do? Are there sources to produce with standards of quality? • Presence of the agencies during the production process of media and the products: credits, prescribing certain content, feedback, support, etc. • Distribution criteria, feedback, post test. • Following up the use and impact of the media. • Writing the final report (who is the audience?)
5. Reflexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall evaluation of the goals of the project. Qualitative, quantitative? Done by the same team? • Options for continuity of programs. • Room for self - sustainability of the projects. • Team self-evaluation • Writings, documents, archive of materials. • Agency evaluation • Community evaluation on the project.
Meso level	
I will explore the ways in which the professional practice transcend the local setting and inform the field of development communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What to do with all the evaluations? And with the final reports? • Do they inform other projects? Do they sediment new knowledge? Are these experiences available / accessible for other people, agencies, communicator, government, to learn and reply them elsewhere? • Issues of knowledge: Publishing? • Grants? • Opportunities for networking or learning from others and strengthen the field? Conferences, workshops, other studies? • Connection to universities. • Adaptation of successful experiences in other national media, commercial media, internet, etc.
Macro level	
Connection to larger and critical issues of development and the context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumptions about social change • How do they learn about development issues, public health, etc. • Critical views: Do they recognize connection of the issues to conditions of inequalities? Or, Do they see the problems at the individual behavioral level? Something in between/ • Do the project, materials and the process foster dialogue, deliberation, reflection? (in a Freireian way?) • How do the project has transcendence beyond the campaign or the issue itself? In the larger Colombian context? • How do they inform their discourses? • Do they accommodate, adapt, adopt models and formulas? • Do these projects somehow deal with or challenge the climate of distrust and conflict in Colombia?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES WITH AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Questioner for agencies representatives

1. In which cases the projects sponsored by your agency include communication materials and strategies? Why or why not? (When and why did you agency started incorporating communication process as fundamental part of the development programs?)
2. How do you recruit the communication practitioners that will implement these projects? What are the criteria to select them?
3. Why a particular development issue (health, environment, gender inequality, etc.) is considered for attention in a given place? How the initial idea of a project is born? Who's the initiative?
4. How do you negotiate the theories, models, reach, assumptions of development and participation with the communicators when defying the terms of the proposals?
5. How important is community participation in your projects and how communicators do promote it?
6. How does the decision making process happen when dealing with producing materials (discussion about language, formats, content, images, technicalities, budget restrains etc.?)
7. What are the characteristics of a successful communication project? What type of skills / knowledge, characteristics you find useful for professional communicators?
8. Does your agency evaluate the communication component, disseminate finding, knowledge, exchange or systematize the communication experience gained in the field?

Guidelines for community members' interview

(After the Aguasuelo workshop, also with the *A gatas* participants in San Gil)

1. Where is the person coming from? Is she/he walking, taking the bus? Travel with children?
2. How did she /he know about this project?
3. What does she/he like from this overall project (radio, workshop, media message)? Why?
4. How does she/he like the (media messages music, color, story, pictures)?
5. What you don't like? Why?
6. Does this story sound familiar to you?

7. Have you talked about this?
8. What do other people say?
9. Do you feel you learn something new today?
If yes, what? Is that useful?
10. What would you tell you family when you go back home?
11. What would you change of this experience?

APPENDIX D

A SEGMENT OF THE SEQUENCE OF "ZOOM" BY ISTVAN BANYAI



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