Information, Society and Justice: Towards a Proactive Agenda for Intellectual and Political Engagement in a Globalising World

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Abstract

This article examines and sets the agenda for engaging issues of information, society and justice in a turbulent world. Its captures the political and intellectual precursors to the current global development and information order. We argue that the current atmosphere, chaotic and unjust as it is, contains both challenge and opportunities, particularly for countries and communities that are often constructed as victims of an unjust world. We then identify the key agenda for research, activism and debate for scholars, activists and development practitioners, as exemplified by the principles, visions and objectives of a newly formed international peer-review journal – *Information, Society and Justice* – based in London.

Keywords

Information, Society, Justice, Activism, Neutrality, Agenda

Introduction

Today's World is riven with turbulence, chaos, injustice, and inequality of immense magnitude. The current international system and, by logical extension, countries and communities that make up the so-called 'global village' are coming to terms with phenomenal transformations at diverse levels – political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, scientific and technological. As a result, a multiple but deeply inter-connected set of 'orders' or 'disorders' are emerging (see, Roberts, 1995, 1996). The 'new world order', born in the aftermaths of the end of the Cold War, is characterised by the ascendancy and dominance of United States and its allies. This new order has effectively

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This editorial represents the views of the authors: it does not reflect the opinion of the Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University, or those of the members of the Journal's Editorial Board.

replaced the post-World War II order (1945-1989) which was characterised by a 'bipolar' ideological, scientific and technological warfare, with huge implications of global (and local, country-specific) balance of power. Following the unification of East and West Germany (1989), demise of the Soviet Union (1990), and former US President George Bush's unilateral proclamation of the victory for the United States (1991), in that sequence, the world has become more unequal and insecure, contrary to expectations from many angles of the world. Huge swathes of countries and communities – particularly those in developing economies – are subjected to repression, marginalisation, underdevelopment, disinformation, propaganda and deceit staged by the victorious West, all aimed at consolidating the emergent order and overcoming any actual or potential threat to it. A case in point is neo-liberalism and internationalisation of neo-liberal values all around the world – an agenda promoted through diverse means ranging from diplomatic, intergovernmental and governmental 'persuasions', to covert and overt operations (e.g. media military campaigns, the latter exemplified by the current 'war on terror').

The high-handed and aggressive manners in which the United States and its allies are promoting liberal values[1] provide a potential breeding ground for protests, resistance and clamours for change. To be sure, Western mindset towards the majority of the world is one of suspicion, contempt and derision: these poor countries could be invaded and/or instructed at will; obedience is a matter of compulsion and not persuasion. 'The South is under siege from an international community [in fact, Western powers] impatient to meddle in its affairs. States of the South are losing their sovereignty, which in many cases was only recently or tentatively acquired' (Chubin, 1995: p. 412). If Chubin's observation is anything to go by, the world is far from being a serene, egalitarian and just entity promised in international statutes. As Schubin further argues, 'no international order sustained by great powers can provide equal justice for all states, but much can be done to alleviate…inequality (Schubin, *ibid,* p. 428). To resolve this, these powers need to 'explain, prepare, negotiate, coordinate and create a consensus with other states' (Bull, 1977: p. 227 in Chubin *ibid*). Bull's proposal, advocated at the height of the Cold War, remains relevant – perhaps more relevant – in the current international dispensation.

In the following sections, we briefly examine the challenges of the world today and implications for change.

Globalisation and 'Digital Divides' – Challenges and Opportunities

Globalisation has been defined as

> a rapidly developing process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals worldwide. It is a social process which involves a compression of time and space, shrinking distances through a dramatic reduction in the time taken – either physically or representationally – to cross them, so making the world seem smaller and in a certain sense bringing human beings 'closer' to one another (Tomlinson, 1997, p. 22).

Globalisation manifests itself in dynamic ways, which range from social, cultural, political and economic to geographical (for details, see Wolf, 2004). Two key impacts of globalisation are of particular importance here: external and internal. Externally, it results in the breakdown of traditional boundaries of states allowing transnational actors – such as foreign corporations, capital and citizens – to cross into other countries, either virtually or physically, to carry out activities that are hitherto regulated by the local state.

Locally, globalisation also impacts on the behaviour, processes and expectations of local actors and institutions, by making them responsive to the instantaneous pressures of the global domain. This, it is argued 'has serious implications for the essence of national democracy, which is supposed to be about the capacity of citizens to participate in the process of decision-making and, in the process, to influence government policy and action' (Ya'u, 2004, p. 13). There are concerns about 'digital divides' between a technologically advanced and wired North – Europe and North America – a less wired developing world (see Al-Suqri and Afzal in this Issue). The latter is perceived to be at the receiving end of ICTs and globalisation. As such, some argue that globalisation allows for the wheels of imperialism to be re-invented: as Banerjee and Listead (2001, p.638) imply, globalisation is 'colonialism for the new millennium'. Y. Z. Ya'u echoes a similar concern:

> Globalisation is enabled by new information and communication technologies (ICTs) that have made it easy to move vast quantities of market information and intelligence, as well as capital, around the world… The result is the resurgence of imperialism, this time represented by knowledge dependence… Within this context, therefore, Africa [and the global South] faces the challenge of imperialism anew (Ya'u, 2004, p. 11).

On the contrary, others argue, more optimistically, that ICTs – a key feature of globalisation – in fact provide 'a key resource that should be maximised by …nations in order to achieve competitiveness in the current dynamic world order' (Shibanda and Musisi-Edebe, 2000, p. 228; see also, Ayers, 2004). In view of the foregoing opposing positions, we are of the opinion that a more hybrid perspective is quite reasonable: globalisation and ICTs have created both *challenge* and *opportunities* for less developed countries and the world at large:

> While globalisation, neoliberalism and ICT have adverse effects on marginalised classes in Africa and the global South, they have fortuitously given rise to the much-needed space for engaging issues of democracy, inclusivity and popular struggles (Tar & Durrani, 2007: p. 503).

We also argue that all over the developing world globalisation has necessitated the invention of 'novel spaces' and radical forums for engaging poverty, exclusion, human rights violation, abuse of power, environmental pollution etc.:

> The development has to be seen in terms of the difficulties and challenges posed by neo-imperialism parading as a benign force for good, while in reality it is the very source of inequality, poverty and, above all, intellectual and policy autarchy of immense proportion (Tar & Durrani, *ibid*).

Throughout the world, a variety of forums have mushroomed to engage with, or be part of, the globalising world. Key examples include the following[4]:

1. *Transnational Networks* such as *The World Social Forum* formed by civil society groups in the global South to protest the ills of neoliberal globalisation to share experiences and narratives, and forge collaborative networks to confront a common enemy and *The World movement for Democracy*, formed in

Durban, South Africa to reflect on democracy and inclusion, share expertise and experience in democracy promotion and build strategies on solidarity (See Adbul-Raheem, 2006 and Bujra 2006 for a first hand reflections on a recent meetings of the *World Social Forum*) .

2. *Virtual Networks* promoted through instantaneous facility for communication and political action provided by the internet. A key example is the Pambazuka News 'the authoritative pan-African electronic weekly newsletter and platform for social justice in Africa' is creating a new space in two ways: first is its wide perspective which encompasses the whole of Africa; secondly, it takes an unashamedly Pan African perspective 'for progressive social change in Africa'. For the first time, claim the owners of Pambazuka News, a new voice has emerged championing the rights of working people in Africa. It carries insight into issues that the traditional Western-based media do not deal with – for example, the greed for oil that is fuelling the 'wars' in Somalia and Sudan.

3. *Intellectual Networks* – this is closely related to those identified above, but is also a domain in its own right because actors within it survive by argument and philosophy. To them all human phenomena are subject of investigation. By intellectuals we mean those engaged on issues of human good. Though they are by no means united, there is a significant scope for unity amongst many with shared political values – for instance network of radical scholars which comprises of die-hard academics who have participated actively in the ideological struggles of the Cold War era, as well as young academics who are waking-up to the adverse effects of neoliberalism. No doubt, radical intellectuals (and their formal and informal networks) represent the most resilient, but also highly divided, of all anti-capitalist and anti-establishment forces. Key examples of radical intellectual forums include scholarly societies and publications such as the *Review of African Political Economy*, an activist journal seeking to combine political activism with intellectual debate, and think-tanks such as *The Third World Forum* based in Dakar, Senegal.

4. *Media Networks* – such as *Al-Jazeera* have sought to provide both a rallying point for anti-establishment voices, and a countervailing space for news and documentaries that are contrary to, or critical of, those perpetuated by mainstream western media houses like *Cable News Network* (CNN), *Voice of America* (VOA)*, American Broadcasting Corporation* (ABC), *The Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* (CBD). Another important development in media Networks is the formation of *La Nueva Televisora del Sur* (Spanish for "The New Television Station of the South") - teleSUR.

In sum, it is argued that globalisation and ICTs should be construed not as a foreign project that is counter-productive to local states and economies, but one that fortuitously creates both challenges and opportunities for engagement.

The Imperatives for Activism & Change: the Stark Realities

Given the foregoing depictions, it is reasonable to assert that we live in a period of momentous changes that will reveal, in years to come, some real transformations of revolutionary magnitude. Major political and social movements take decades and sometimes centuries to make their impact through the social fabric of societies.

Sometimes, small, imperceptible changes flow like little streams only to become massive rivers that cut through mountains, creating valleys and lakes.

Social changes and revolutions happen in the same way. They take place at several levels, often reinforcing each other. These include social, political, scientific and technological shifts that are no less significant than major earthquakes. The growth of capitalism and imperialism was one such major social movement. This saw the domination of over three quarters of the world by European colonialism. In its relentless march to maximise profits, this phase of capitalism eliminated a large number of peoples and communities around the world. It overthrew local civilizations and lifestyles wherever it sought resources. It enslaved millions of people, physically moved them half way around the world and left Africa impoverished, depopulated with its resources plundered. The legacy of slavery is felt among the African American communities in USA even today, as Vernellia Randall records in her provocative book, *Dying while Black: an Indepth Look at a Crisis in the American Healthcare System:*

> Over 100,000 Blacks die every year that would not die if Blacks had the same death rate as Whites…the current health and health care inequalities are directly traceable to slavery. Blacks still suffer from the generational effects of a "slave health deficit", segregation and racism (Randall, 2006, p. 19).

The sheer force used to 'subdue' local peoples is now well accepted in the academic world, although perhaps not in popular consciousness.   The 'extent to which imperial rule rests on coercion, on the policeman torturing a suspect and the soldier blowing up houses and shooting prisoners' is well documented, for example by Newsinger (2006). Such torture and massacres were not confined to the heyday of the British Empire. They continue under imperialism under the leadership of USA. Events in Iraq today indicate that governments of Britain and USA have failed to learn lessons of history and have misunderstood and misused the power of their military-industrial-technological might.

But the role of information and mis-information is crucial in the development of our thinking. The real history of the British Empire's damage to other countries is neatly parcelled into sealed boxes in some libraries. National leaders calmly ignore unpleasant facts about colonial and imperialist damage done to people all around the world – damage from which they have still not recovered. But as Brogan (2005) records, the then Chancellor of Exchequer, Gordon Brown, asked Britain to stop apologising for its colonial past. He called for the '"great British values" – freedom, tolerance, civic duty – to be admired as some of our most successful exports'. No mention here of the massacres in almost every colony, no mention of the 'mobile gallows' that the British colonial administration used against the people of Kenya during their struggle for liberation, no mention of the land and resource grab that that was integral part of British colonialism in Africa.

Civallero (2007, p. ix) points to the power that information, backed by force, can have when he says: 'Information means power; economic power as well as social, political and human. This power has been seized by a few and is not often shared.' The point is, with advances in information technology which is increasingly becoming familiar and accessible to majority of the world, including less developed countries, 'information' is

becoming a powerful tool for exposing the evils and injustices embedded in imperialism – both past and present.

Another powerful tool is history which serve always teaches lesson, and provides the basis of memory, conciousness and action. As history has revealed, the British Empire did not last for ever. The same history is revealing that Empire that replaced it, USA, is fast coming to the end of its global rule in economic, and thus political and moral, fields. But unlike the British Empire which died quietly, USA Empire is likely to create a big bang before it collapses. This is another area that is providing major social change in our time.

Perhaps what is significant in the changes taking place today is that the powers which are seeking to replace USA are in a different mould than the previous imperialist ones in which imperialism is continuously reconstructed and reproduced as one imperialist power (e.g. USA) replaced another one (e,g, Britain, France, Germany). In the near future, China, India, Brazil and Russia, together with other countries in Asia, are poised to become major economic and moral contenders of the international system. It is reasonable to argue that the current US-dominated unipolar system will be gradually replaced by a multi-polar system. This in itself is no guarantee that they will not end up fighting each other - and drag the whole world into chaos and disintegration. But so far they have not shown any imperialist tendencies of land grab, military expansionism, resource plundering and mass massacre of peoples. What is emerging is a major realignment of political power. Harris (2006) assesses the current situation:

> China, Brazil and India have emerged as important global powers, creating political waves across Europe and the US. Not only are they becoming more assertive in transnational institutions like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), but their economic weight is felt throughout the world. As the Financial Times has pointed out, the rise of China and India 'heralds a transformation of the global economic and political order as significant as that brought about by the industrial revolution or by the subsequent rise of the US'. [Quoting: Editorial, 'The rise of Asia gathers speed', *Financial Times* (29 December 2003), p. 10].

At the same time, another set of changes taking place in the Caribbean and South America is providing an alternative model for developing national resources to meet the needs of local people, rather than to enrich transnational companies. This includes the experience from the principled stand taken in Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia which provides hope for millions who have lived and died in poverty for generations. Information about their vision and action is fast becoming a new model for other countries which have had little or no development under the watchful eyes of the World Bank-IMF-WTO driven programmes.

It is this social shift on a global scale that provides an interesting background to the birth of ISJ. It is the technological developments that make it possible for this journal to be launched in on-line and CD-ROM formats. It is also these developments that make it possible for the editorial team, as well as contributors, spread out around the world to come together in a new community committed to the aims of the journal. The aims of the journal, as well as the stand that DASS takes, as mentioned by Prof. Gabriel in his welcome message, relate very much to the commitment to justice for all. This has to be at the forefront in every field as we face a situation of increasing erosion of civil liberties under the guise of "war against terrorism". They are then helped by states which are

either too weak or are ideologically aligned to the corporate agenda. Imperialism uses wars and enemies as one way of keeping its profits accelerating. New ones are created when old ones are no longer available.

But this gives rise to resistance from people. Their resistance has also taken a new dimension with the availability of new technologies. Just as imperialism spreads its wings ever wider driven by 'globalisation', so will people's resistance and coping strategies. For the latter, this is no time to be 'neutral' when neutrality equates complacency and agreement with oppression and exploitation. This 'neutrality' is embedded in the work of many media and information academics and practitioners who shy away from addressing issues of politics of information. Durrani and Smallwood (2006, pp.4-5), writing on the role of librarians [an example of a working class], relate this assumed neutrality to their class position:

> The global librarians… take pride in their non-political stand, in their "neutrality" in the social struggles going on all around them. They claim to be outside social struggles taking place in their societies, somehow uplifted to a loftier position by their "professional" training. Their class position in their societies isolates them from the struggles of working people whose basic need for information is ignored by their libraries.

This then affects a free flow of information without which real democracy and justice are not possible. This is especially true for alternative information which does not meet the class interests of the ruling classes. Even more restricted is information about and analysis of resistance to social oppression and economic exploitation that go hand in hand with the market economy model. Thus one aim of ISJ is to capture this resistance which does not get much recognition and acknowledgement in mainstream media and indeed in some academic research.

Information, Society and Justice – towards a Proactive Agenda for Intellectual and Political Engagement

The idea of establishing a new journal was rooted in, and emerged from, the challenges posed by globalisation and ICTs. We note that cross-cultural and virtual communications have thrown out new opportunities and dangers: ICTs have allowed for the mass proliferation of both legal and illegal activities. We are particularly interested in the 'opportunities' for activism and information-sharing, both physical and virtual: conferences, networks, chartrooms, blogs, you-tube, instant messaging etc.: ISJ is a product of this unique opportunity. As we discussed burning issues that confront the world today, and marginalised countries and communities in particular, it became obvious that a new forum is indeed necessary not only to publish critical discussion on issues of inclusion, democracy, justice, resistance and liberation, but also to allow those whose ideas are often silenced to have their say in the public domain.

In identifying the ISJ's 'identity' and remit, the following are pencilled down after the usual intellectual debates:

1. ISJ will be a **peer-review journal** governed by the principles of anonymity, freedom of expression, activism-intellectualism, and intellectual property

rights. All articles will be referred by at least two reviewers. This process will be overseen by the Coordinating Editor will receives submissions, assess its suitability, reject or send them for peer-review, communicate the outcome of the review process to authors and liaise with them to improve the quality of submission before being published. The Coordinating Editor will be assisted by other members of the editorial board.

2. ISJ will be **a progressive forum** committed to providing a proactive space for a critical discussion of the issues around information, society and justice. It will focus on a diverse range of issues including – but not limited to – development, equality, human rights, inclusion, justice, liberation and democracy. A journal of this kind is in short supply in the mainly commercial journals sector.

3. ISJ will be an **interdisciplinary journal** whose interest will transcend specific disciplines. Here we take our cue from John Gabriel's welcome message, 'we cannot understand the big issues of our day by restricting ourselves to discrete academic disciplines. Nor can we expect individuals, communities and the wider society to understand problems in accordance with those disciplinary and professional silos… the journal seeks to bring the fruits of interdisciplinary analysis and research findings to bear on policy debates and social action. It seeks to build individual and organisational capacity through an enhanced critical understanding.' (See this Issue, p. 1).

4. ISJ will seek to **bridge the gap between intellectualism, policy and activism**. The journal targets not the academic audience – as is often the case in most journals – but seeks to erode traditional barriers between academics, policy practitioners and campaigners through the diversity of its material. All three need to be able to communicate across their respective discourses and this journal offers them a space to do so.

5. ISJ will have **a social and political agenda.** It is not neutral and will seek to provide a space both for intellectual publication and political participation. Again, Gabriel cast this remit in better words: 'the journal has an explicit social purpose. These days, few make the assumption that the growth in both the volume and global reach of information guarantee greater democracy and social justice. Information is never neutral and this journal has clearly nailed its colours to the mast in harnessing information to the safeguarding of human rights and the promotion of social equality.' (Gabriel, ibid). In addition, ISJ will be a forum for expression for those groups traditionally poorly served in terms of information (e.g. refugees, trade unionists, women, children and young people, the elderly and ill, and the poor) and seeks to promote a greater awareness and sense of possibility across these groups' (ibid). ISJ will be a forum for people struggling to assert their rights – to information, to communicate, to achieve justice, to a fair share of the products of body and mind, to meet their material and moral needs as human beings.

6. To allow greater reach and publicity, ISJ is provisionally registered as an **open-access electronic journal** under a 'Creative Commons Attribution, Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License.'[2] The aim is to allow free circulation of the journal's articles and briefings, particularly to those parts of

the world where commercial publications are unaffordable. Given that the internet is increasingly accessible and affordable to the developing world, it is hoped that ISJ will attract a high readership.[3] This way, the all-important vision of sharing information and knowledge will be facilitated.

7. ISJ will be an **international journal** committed to transcending geopolitical and cultural limitations: it will be an international journal with an equally clear focus on international readership. In doing this, we aim to complement and not challenge existing area-study journals such as the *Review of African Political Economy, African Affairs, Third World Quarterly* and *Race and Class.*

We aim to reach out to all those committed to the ISJ stand on social, economic and political justice. In all countries, the ruling classes have used their control over information to influence people's world outlook and social awareness. Developments in information and communication technologies in recent years have given them even more power to control destinies of peoples, countries and the world as a whole. Those who control information and systems of communications also decide what interpretation to give to people's history and culture. They decide which ideologies, individuals and political and social movements "live" and which will die. This is no crude mind control. This is a silent and hidden hand going into our collective minds to organize our collective information and knowledge. Aspects of information that are unpalatable to the ruling classes are deleted and those that legitimize their rule are magnified. This newly recreated world is then projected through all means of social communication: mass media, the education system, arts and culture as well as through libraries and archives. But of course, the ruling classes do not have the field to themselves. Their actions inevitably give rise to people's resistance as they assert their ideas, visions and leaders. They develop their own interpretations of history and create new ways of storing and disseminating their views and perspectives.

ISJ's Structure & Content

Each issue of ISJ contains a combination of articles, debates, reflections, briefings and book/film reviews. *Articles* are extended work seeking to engage intellectual theory and/or policy discourses; they are often informed by empirical evidence. *Debates* and *Reflections* are shorter pieces dealing with controversial issues, and seeking to provoke or compound existing paradigms and debates. *Briefings* cover topical and informative matters which deserve to be placed in the public domain. ISJ also carries *Think pieces* – such as poetry and fiction – in so far as they provoke, engage or promote intellectual and policy debates in themes of relevance to the Journal.

The content of the first issue of the journal exhibits a fair spread of materials across the key thematic sections of the journal. It also reflects some of the key issues described earlier: for instance 'globalisation and digital divide' (Al-Suqri and Afzal); 'social justice' (Bowie); 'media' (Gough-Yates; Afzal); 'liberation' (wa Ngugi; Durrani) etc. In the main Articles Section, four submissions explore diverse thematic issues ranging from media to women, and digital age to democracy. In terms of geographic focus, these articles – and the briefings that follow them – cover different regions of the world. The first article by Anna Gough-Yates explores the changing depictions of working women (revealed as 'new women') in UK's women's magazine industry in the period 1980s-90s. Gough-Yates

argues that this nascent change is to be understood more clearly when 'we consider them in relation not only to feminist accounts of commercial culture, but also to a closer analysis of commercial practices.' She also notes that far from imposing magazines on an unsuspecting 'market gap' of women, even where 'gaps' in the market exists, the translation of this into a product that women will want to read is much more tasking. Instead, she argues, 'the economic practices of magazine publishing can only be understood when we also think about them in terms of the cultural conditions in which they exist.'

In the article that follows, Shehina Fazal focuses on the role of electronic media (TV) and, in particular reality TV shows exposing an on-going controversy around race relations and multiculturalism in the UK. Fazal focuses on the live events of the *Celebrity Big Brother 2007* (CBB 2007) on UK's Channel 4 which was broadcast between 3rd and 27th January 2007. She reveals that *CBB 2007* not only prompted a national debate on issues of 'race', racism and multiculturalism but, perhaps more importantly, it also sparked an international diplomatic drama between Britain and India – thus pushing the matter to international public domain. Fazal outlined and critically explores 'two key areas that should be rooted in the understanding of the discourse surrounding the *CBB 2007* controversy: multiculturalism and transnationalism. She then proposed that 'these two areas provide an understanding of the increasing legitimacy given to social segregation of ethnic minority communities since 9/11 and 7/7. The paper suggests that the contemporary understandings of multiculturalism and social segregation have to be foreground, when analysing entertainment programmes such as *CBB 2007*.'

In the third article, Mohammed Nasser Al-Suqri and Waseem Afzal look at the challenges libraries face in the age of globalization and digital divide. In agreement with some the issues raised in this editorial, they argue that information technology and globalization are the two most influential forces of the modern times. To them, 'IT has given new meanings to the transmission, dissemination and storage of information, whereas globalisation is reducing the importance of geographical boundaries'. In this spectacular yet uncertain scenario, they argue that libraries, as an important social institution, have been affected in many ways particularly how they plan and execute information retrieval, storage and transmission to the service users. Among the areas of challenges for libraries thrown on libraries by globalisation include, 'graphic user interface, digital imaging, efficient transfer and storage of texts' as well as issues of 'information privacy', 'copyrights', and 'information security'. Finally they note that libraries have to come to terms with these challenges by creating robust facilities capable of satisfying the dynamic information needs of society.

The final article by Usman Tar offers methodological reflections on the causal nexus between liberal democratization and ethnic conflict in Africa, based on a critique of an empirical study conducted by (Smith, 2000). The key question which framed and prompted Smith's work is whether or not liberal democratisation is capable of containing ethnic conflict in Africa. Smith sought to engage the existing intellectual consensus which argued in favour of the capacity for democratisation to encourage peace. Smith used a quantitative method to arrive at a mixture of positive and negative results. In engaging Smith's methodology, Tar questions the utility of adopting a single method. Instead, he argues, that in studying African politics a mixture of methods (positivism vs interpretivism; quantitative vs qualitative approach) will perhaps allow for a better examination of issues of democracy, conflict and political transformation in the continent.

The second main section – *Debates & Reflection* – carry three main pieces. First is Duncan Bowie's article on housing policy in London. Bowie addresses an important issue that is relevant to social justice: how is housing and social justice agenda delivered in London. He asks whether or not the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, is delivering on his housing and social justice objectives. He argues that though Mayor Livingstone's ambitions were quite robust and ambitious, it is far from solving London's crisis-ridden housing cul-de-sac. He explains that while 'the quantity of new homes built in London has increased [particularly during Livingstone's tenure], the type of housing built does not meet the targets set for affordable housing and for family sized housing, most homes completed being relatively small and expensive flats for sale.' As an anecdote, Bowie suggests radical policy changes required to ensure that the Mayor's housing and social justice agenda is delivered more effectively.

The second debates paper by Mary Davis and Sukhwant Dhaliwal reports on a research project on the impact of religion on trade union relations with black workers in the UK. The project highlighted a number of baseline issues framing the role of religion trade unions-black worker relations. They include the resurgence of a religious identity at both individual and group level; the de-secularisation of public policy; the implications of new race relations and religious discrimination regulations on the world of work; the debate on the decline of trade union membership and density in the UK and its consequence for black workers; and the discussion on alternative methods of organising, in particular the notion of 'community unionism'. The report notes that 'despite the poor historical record of trade unions in fighting racism, there was a clear and unquestioned consensus among the interviewees that unions have a huge role to play in this regard".' It also found that 'Black self-organisation within the trade union and labour movement is by now an accepted structural imperative, although its practice and level of embededness varies greatly from union to union'; and that 'a new 'Black led' approach to organising Black workers in the form of Black Workers' Forums was welcomed.' In view of this and other key findings, Davis and Dhaliwal conclude that 'more work needs to be done in order to present a less London-based analysis of what is clearly an important issue for Black communities and for the trade union movement as a whole throughout the UK.'

A final debates paper, published in this issue courtesy of *Pambazuka News* – an internet news resource – explores issues around justice for veterans in Kenyan liberation struggle – the Mau Mau movement. The concerns raised by Mukoma wa Ngugi touch upon some of the issues that ISJ addresses: justice for the cause of colonised and oppressed peoples, the correct interpretation of history of resistance, the way information about the liberation movement in Kenya (as in the rest of the colonial territories) has been depicted by scholarship, the role of academics and artists in society. This is not to say that those involved in the struggle have similarly forgotten about their struggles or have internalised the distorted views that colonialism has imposed on their achievements and struggles. An example of activism in this area is the depiction of the achievements and the history of the Movement in Wakamba artwork – better known as producers of items for the tourist trade. The artwork represented in the few selected photos is part of a larger exhibition of work of the Wakamba artists. This was exhibited in Nairobi in 1976 as a partnership between academicians at the University of Nairobi and the artists.

The current Issue of ISJ also contains *Briefings* from research Centres within London Metropolitan University and outside networks. The briefings showcase how these

institutions are working to make change happen. They key point is, social understanding needs to be connected to social action. ISJ is sponsored by the Department of Applied Social Sciences – with the emphasis here being on 'Applied'. The question arises as to how academics and professionals "apply" Social Sciences. In future, ISJ will carry an Activist's Section which will bridge the gap between theory and practice; teaching and learning; and between the world of ideas and the real world out "there" with all its struggles.

Finally the *Think Piece* Section includes materials on the struggle for justice for victims of mass killings in Rwanda, as well as a brief from Sinclair Coward on the provocative book *Dying While Black* (2006) by Vernellia R. Randall which was launched in a the series "Debates & Lectures" sponsored by the Department of Applied Social Sciences on 19 November. Coward captures not only the highlights of the event but also a key argument of the book: 'a powerful indictment of the US health care system, a system where black health outcomes on nearly every health measure are worse than in many developing countries.' This Section also includes a variety of poems dealing with issues ranging from survival, womanhood to liberation. This novel initiative allows for inclusion of creative works that are outside the confines of scholarly articles alone. Popular voices have always used the oral medium to express their hopes, aspirations, struggles and resistance in songs, dance and music which give meaning to their lives. We hope to make these voices more widely available.

This is also relates to another point made by Prof. Gabriel in his welcome message: bridging the gap between the academic world and people's lives. The songs of struggle of the often (officially) voiceless communities need to be linked to the voice of researchers looking for evidence and using the latest research methods to make sense of complex social phenomena. Thus ISJ is proud to remain a peer reviewed journal even as it seeks to make its pages and columns available to those not living in the academic world. We are making ISJ available to all under the Creative Commons licence as an indication of our commitment to breaking the barriers that prevent free flow of information to those who need it. We are also making ISJ freely available in CD-ROM format to those who may not have access to broadband. We will explore ways of funding a print version so as to reach even more people, especially in parts of Africa, Asia and South America where the print medium is still dominant. Related to this is our commitment to support languages that people speak and to break the embargo that English language often imposes on speakers of other languages. The inclusion of the Kiswahili poem, *Sina Habari,* indicates our commitment to making relevant material in all languages available to our readers.

ISJ has vision of a world based on principles of equality and justice. It is only when people have such a vision that they struggle to make this vision a reality. ISJ hopes to play its part in putting such a vision on the agenda – and work towards making it a reality.

End Notes

1. In doing so, Western countries (particularly USA) have often taken unilateral action and violated international norms as exemplified by the invasion of Iraq in 2003 which was unleashed in spite of UN disapproval.

2. For more details see http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/

3. ISJ homepage is currently based in the Department of Applied Social Science, London Metropolitan University: http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/depts/dass/research/informationsocietyandjustice/informationsocietyandjusticejournal.cfm.

4. The examples that follow are cited from our previous joint work on the emerging networks for engagement instanced by the realities of globalising world (Tar and Durrani, 2007)

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