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Introduction

In the long history of participatory (and potentially counter-hegemonic) media practices, citizen journalism is one of the more novel concepts added to the vocabulary used to describe these practices. More than other concepts, the concept of citizen journalism focuses on the capacity of citizens to generate narrations with a specific truth-claim, while at the same time avoiding the (traditional) professional link with mainstream media organisations. However, in the eagerness to sever the links with the professional mainstream media system, the concept of citizen journalism incorporates a substantial risk, namely a too strong individualisation because of its detachment from the organisational component of media production.

Firstly, the concept of citizen media risks individuating processes of non-professional media production, by detaching it from the embeddedness in media organisations, which is still a vital safeguard for these participatory processes. Other conceptual frameworks tend to embed these participatory processes more strongly in the activities of community media (Howley, 2005), alternative media (Downing et. al, 2001; Atton, 2002), civil society media (Carpentier, 2003) or citizen media (Rodriguez, 2001). Secondly, non-professional media production risks becoming (too) detached from the broader social structure of civil society and (new) social movements (NSMs). Arguably, participatory media are in many cases part of civil society, while also other civil society and NSM organisations enter the world of media production, through affiliation with alternative media organisations, or through their own media production.

This chapter wants to analyse these relationships between professionalism and amateurism, and between citizen journalists and activists within a civil society context, showing the interconnections between - and hybridity of - these discursive categories and the related mediated practices. More specifically, we will focus in this chapter on one specific case, related to the political, legal, military and humanitarian crisis of the Iraq war, and the (communicative) counter-strategies of the peace movement it provoked (and still provokes). The case study of a peace march organised on March 16, 2008 by the peace movement and supported by a platform of 61 organisations will allow us to unwrap many of the complexities that remain hidden behind the notion of citizen journalism, including its hybrid links to civil society and NSMs.

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[1] All three authors hold academic positions, but Ludo De Brabander combines this with a position at Vrede vzw ('Peace NGO'). However fruitful the collaboration has proven to be, it also bears witness of the complexity of the relationships between academia and activism, and their occasional inseperatability.

NSMs (Communicative) strategies

In recent decades, the nature and structure of social movements has considerably altered compared to classic social movements such as labour unions or even to NSMs such as the green movement. It could be argued that the majority of social movements nowadays are not purely membership-based anymore, but are rather made-up by networks of society-centred advocacy-based organisations and fuelled by often dispersed but highly prolific activists. Another major change is related to the transnational nature of many of the issues at stake, such as the environment, peace, global trade, migration, etc. As such issues need to be addressed beyond the sovereignty of the nation state, a drastic surge in transnational advocacy initiatives could be observed (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

Starting from a framing-perspective and drawing on the US civil rights movement, McAdam (2005) identifies 6 strategic challenges for movements that aim to become *'a force for social change'*. The first two challenges are inward oriented: recruiting core-activists and sustaining the organisation. This has been covered extensively by the literature on social movements (for an overview, see della Porta and Diani (1999)). The four other challenges for activists can be characterised as more outward oriented. They relate to getting attention in the mainstream media, to mobilising beyond those already convinced, to over-coming social control (and possible repression) and finally to *'shape public policy and state action'* (McAdam, 2005: 119).

McAdam's overview shows that we should avoid reducing all NSM activities to communication only, but at the same time we should also avoid underestimating the communicative dimensions of these activities. Media and communication strategies play an increasingly important role in the mediation and the convergence of different interests, spheres, and actors. This can be seen in terms of the intrusion of alternative into mainstream public spaces – providing a platform for alternative discourses, in terms of representation – normalising alternative discourses or lifestyles, but also in terms of being an agonistic battleground over meanings and conceptions of what constitutes the public interest and the common good (Mouffe, 1999).

But most recent studies on activism within media and communication studies focus almost exclusively on the opportunities and constraints that the internet provides to organise movements, to facilitate the transnationalisation of struggles, to increase networking and mobilising capacities, as well as to strengthen the public sphere by facilitating discussion and the dissemination of counter-hegemonic discourses (see e.g. Cammaerts, 2005; Gillian and Pickerill, 2008). Alternative information needs alternative channels of distribution and the internet provides activists with a user-friendly and cost-efficient medium for the unbiased and unmediated distribution of alternative information across the boundaries of time and space. As Rucht (2004: 55) puts in: the internet allows for movement-controlled media that *'secure autonomy and operational flexibility.'*

However, while the internet increasingly constitutes an 'opportunity structure' for activists and social movements, this clearly needs to be embedded in a larger communication strategy, including other channels to distribute their aims and goals, as pointed out earlier by McAdam. In this regard, face-to-face interaction, (positive) attention in the mainstream media, the use of pamphlets or establishing a presence on alternative radio stations are as important as being active and present on the internet. While the relationships of NSMs with alternative media are often reasonably good (Bailey et al., 2008), making use of the mainstream media requires the development of what Rucht (2004: 37) calls adaptation strategies, or *'the acceptance/exploitation of the mass media's rules and criteria to influence coverage positively'*. This is legitimised by the need of NSMs for mainstream media to *'broaden the scope of conflict'* and push their message to a mass audience, *'because most of the people they wish to reach are part of the mass media gallery, while many are missed by movement-oriented outlets.'* (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993: 116)

Arguably, NSM are built on a combination of these different formal and informal communication strategies. But at the same time, their (communicative) networks are not limited to thematically or strategically affiliated organisations. The peace march case study that is discussed below will show the complexities of these alliances, and how the borders between participatory media, citizen journalists and peace movement activists will become blurred.

Case study: the Belgian Anti-War Platform commemorating the Iraq invasion

Months before the US-led coalition started a new war against Iraq (March 20, 2003), peace and other social movements as well as many individual citizens from around the world, prepared for what would become one of the biggest protest events in history. The combination of the global indignation provoked by this crisis, with the mobilising and coordinating capacity of global social networks - in particular the Regional (European) and World Social Forums - resulted on February 15, 2003 in more than 600 anti-war protests in over 60 countries with millions of participants. It became clear that *'these were the largest and most momentous transnational anti-war protests in human history.'* (Epstein, 2003: 109) The Belgian protest march of 15 February 2003 was built on a similar structural basis and organised in a Platform of more than 200 organisations including labour unions, Third World-, women's-, environmental-, youth- and political movements. An estimated 100.000 people joined the demonstration in Brussels.

However transnational this protest movement was, there were always specific national circumstances that resulted in important differences. In the Belgian case, most political parties were (more or less) opposed to a war, in contrast to countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, Spain or Italy, where the governments had promoted a military approach to deal with Saddam Hussein's regime. This also had consequences for the media coverage, as mainstream media coverage tends to stay in line with the national political consensus (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005: 13-14; Nohrstedt and Ottosen,

2000: 25). As in most other countries, the Belgian demonstrations continued, even after President Bush officially declared the end of the war. Between the anti-war movements worldwide there was still some limited form of exchange of information through the internet or in meetings and conferences, but the international coordination of actions and demonstrations withered. Although the specific political demands that accompanied the demonstrations differed from country to country, in essence they mainly kept focussing on the '*Stop the war, stop the occupation*' slogan.

The peace march of 16 March 2008

As in previous years, the (fifth) anniversary of the invasion in Iraq was preceded by an international meeting of peace activists. On December 1, 2007 the World Against War Conference in London issued an appeal to launch global demonstrations between the 15th and the 22nd of March 2008.[2] Their final declaration demanded the retreat of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan and called to demonstrate as well against a possible attack on Iran.

The Belgian Anti-War Platform decided to hold a 27 km long peace walk from Leuven to the capital, Brussels, on March 16, 2008 under the banner of '*Five years of violence in Iraq = Enough! 1000 walkers for peace*'. About 250 people started walking in Leuven, with several hundreds of activists joining the march along the way. Arriving at the endpoint, the Brussels Jubelpark, some 1.000 protesters formed a large peace sign (see Figure 1). This event was supported by a coalition of 61 organisations from within the peace-, north south-, women's-, environmental- and youth-movements as well as labour unions and political parties. They signed a Platform text[3] asking for (among other things), the '*withdrawal of the occupation forces*' in Iraq and the termination of the agreement between Belgium and the USA that permits the use of the Belgian infrastructure for military transports to the Gulf. The Platform declaration also emphasised a '*non-violent approach*' to the tense relations with Iran and urges for an ending of '*the colonisation and annexation of Palestinian territories by Israel.*' While the political declaration clearly focused on Iraq, the Belgian NGOs of the Anti-War Platform - as is also the case with the anti-war movements in other countries – linked the Iraq War to other conflicts in the Middle East region.

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[2] Declaration of World against War Conference on: http://theworldagainstwar.org/
[3] Peace in the Middle East: Now! On: http://www.motherearth.org/nowar/en/home_en.php

Figure 1: The human peace sign at the end of the peace march

Photo: Olivier Van Acker (vzw Vrede – published on Indymedia)
(http://www.indymedia.be/files/DSC04397.jpg & http://www.indymedia.be/nl/node/26625)

Communication strategies in a changing context

February 15, 2003 was in many ways exceptional. Over the years, the media and local political attention for Iraq and the degree of indignation of a large number of citizens, as well as within social movements decreased. As in other countries, the yearly demonstrations commemorating the invasion of Iraq attracted less and less protesters. The mainstream media's attention for the protests was equally diminishing, forcing the Belgian Anti-War Movement to develop a number of specific strategies.

Firstly, they decided to rely more on alternative communication channels, ranging from the distribution of posters and flyers (see Figure 2), building a dedicated website (http://www.geenoorlog.be), publishing their arguments in the magazines and on the websites of the Platform members, using individual blogs, sending out (chains of) e-mails, organising small conferences and anti-war meetings and aligning themselves with alternative media. This strategy resulted in the inclusion of two alternative media organisations (Indymedia.be and Radio Campus[4]), both based in Brussels, as Platform members.

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[4] The case study will focus on the role of Indymedia.be because of spatial constraints. In doing so, it is not our intention to underestimate the role of Radio Campus.

Figure 2: Poster of the peace march


Source: www.geenoorlog.be

Secondly, the Anti-War Platform developed a strategy to attract mainstream media attention. This was for them one of the most important reasons behind the decision to organise a long peace walk followed by a mass meeting to form a large peace sign. Since a 27 km long march was not likely to attract massive mobilisation, the organisers choose deliberately for media attraction as the main objective. To avoid negative coverage on the expected low amount of participants, the organizers took the precautionary measure to communicate the event as '*1.000 march for peace*'. By introducing the closing event - the meeting and the formation of a large peace sign – the Belgian Anti-War Platform hoped to lower the threshold for less motivated (or disabled) protesters to participate in the anti-war day. Also achieving mainstream media attention remained an important consideration: having 1.000 people to form a peace sign could provide the mainstream media with attractive pictures and stories.

The latter strategy did prove reasonably successful, as most of the major newspapers, as well as Belgian TV (VRT, RTBf, VTM) and Radio (Radio1, Q-Music) stations, covered the march. Two days before the march, the national news agency Belga had already used an Indymedia posting on the peace sign story, announcing the anti-war event. Not surprisingly, the meeting of the Platform organisations following the March 16 event, evaluated the media

coverage with mixed feelings,[5] as the action had generated only small and factual articles, focusing on the spectacular and to some extent ignoring the political message the Platform organisations wanted to communicate.

In contrast, the more alternative channels generated more coverage. Print and online social movement magazines like Uitpers, Solidair, Visie, and Vrede included articles on both the conflict and the actual peace march. In addition, the platform organisations produced a considerable number of (online) texts which dealt with the event. Excluding media websites, 24 different texts could be retraced on the websites of the socialist union ABVV, the (smaller) political parties Groen!, KP and PvdA and affiliated organisations like Doctors for the People, peace movement organisations, ecological organisations, the Third World organisation Oxfam and the feminist organisation VOK. Interestingly, also the municipal website of Leuven included a reference to the march[6]. But especially the Independent Media Centre Indymedia.be provided extensive coverage of this one event, as they published 18 postings on the march, which included 75 photos and one video (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of postings on Indymedia.be relating to the peace march
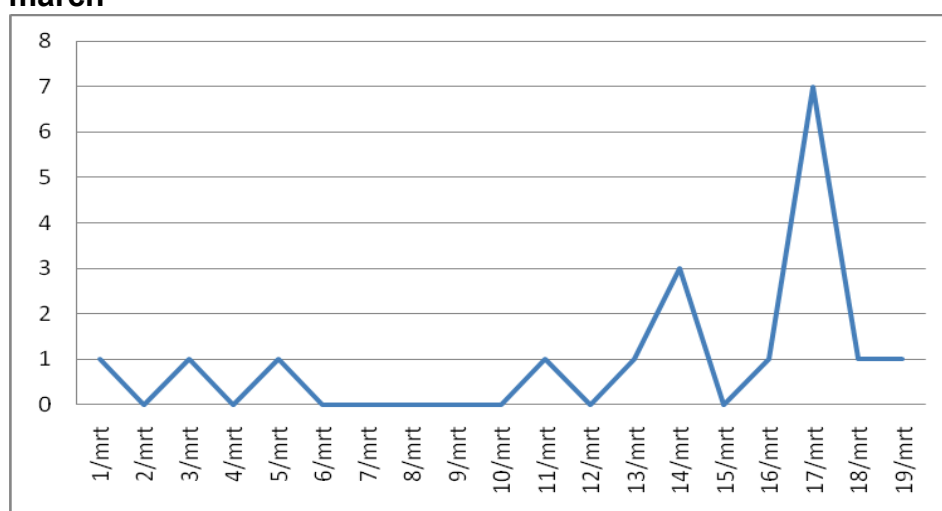
Already two weeks before the actual march, a number of articles made reference to the march and contextualised it. Two Indymedia-articles (March 3 and 5), posted on behalf of Indymedia.be before the actual march, dealt with Indymedia's participation in the march. The March 3 posting explained that they are participating to '*tell a story about the media and war*' and will '*put together some sort of an act on media and war.*'[7] The March 5 posting then shows the actual preparations of the Indymedia.be core staff members for this act at the march, where they plan to become walking television screens (see Figure 5)[8]. From the day of the actual march onwards, 10 reports were

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[5] Report of the meeting of the Anti-War Platform, April 2, 2008 (not published)

[6] This overview is based on a Google search with the combined Dutch keywords "peace march" and "Iraq", on .be-websites only. Only texts with a clear focus on the peace march were selected. The search was performed on May 18, 2008.

[7] http://www.indymedia.be/nl/node/26278

[8] http://www.indymedia.be/nl/node/26307 (Last Consulted on 19/05/2008)

posted, reporting on the actual peace march, but also on Indymedia.be's presence at the peace march.

Figure 5: The Indymedia delegation preparing for their peace march act

Photo: Han Soete (http://www.indymedia.be/nl/node/26307 & http://www.flickr.com/photos/hansoete/2312585064/)

Citizen journalists cum peace activists

The active presence of the Indymedia.be (volunteer) staff members at the march already shows the interwoveness of citizen journalism and peace activism. As Figure 5 shows, the Indymedia.be journalists not only report on the march, but at the same time they support the objectives of the march with their non-detached presence, which opens up a dialectical process of presence and representation. But the interwoveness works both sides. When analysing the 18 postings on Indymedia.be, it becomes apparent that at least 8 of these postings were made by authors clearly (and sometimes explicitly) affiliated to the peace movement. 5 of these postings are authored by the spokesperson(s) of the Anti-War Platform, 2 of them by a journalism student doing his internship at one of the key organisations of the Anti-War Platform (Vrede vzw), and one other uses a name (NatoGameOver) that refers to another peace movement organisation (Bomspotting & Vredesactie). Yet two more postings were made by an author who is affiliated to Doctors for the People, an organisation that is in turn linked to the PvdA, a left-wing political party which is also one of the organisational members of the Anti-War Platform.

Figure 5: The Indymedia delegation at the peace march

Photo by Erik Van Roey (Indymedia -
http://www.indymedia.be/files/15_Stappen_voor_vrede.jpg &
http://www.indymedia.be/nl/node/26630)

Through this process of interconnection, they illustrate that participatory media like Indymedia are civil society media (or citizens' media – see Rodriguez, 2001), and need to be seen as an inseparable part of civil society, a societal segment considered crucial for the viability of democracy. These participatory media facilitate the access and participation of non-media professionals to the media, and through these participatory media, citizens can be active in one of many (micro-)spheres relevant to daily life, organise different forms of deliberation, and exert their rights to communicate. At the same time, these media also contribute to the democratisation *through* media (Wasko and Mosco 1992: 13). Alternative media can overcome the absolutist interpretation of media neutrality and impartiality, and offer different societal groups and communities the opportunity for extensive participation in public debate and for self-representation in a public space, thus entering the realm of enabling and facilitating macro-participation.

As argued elsewhere (Carpentier et al., 2003), these participatory media are also rhizomatic. They are characterised by diversity, they cut across different boundaries (generated by market and state), they are part of large civil society networks, and act as meeting points and catalysts for a variety of

organisations and movements. The peace march case study quite nicely illustrates how these different movements and organisations interact as part of a fluid civil society network, where different alliances are established, disintegrate and are re-established again, according to specific needs, delineated in space and time. Moreover, the involvement of key staff members of the peace movement also shows the complexities of the non-professional status of participatory media producers, as these authors are remunerated by their (peace) organisations and their professional tasks include the mediated distribution of the ideological positions of their organisations. From this rhizomatic / civil society perspective, all organisations can be seen as (part of the) NSMs, with sometimes converging and sometimes diverging objectives, that work together to achieve specific aims through a combination of direct action, mobilisation, and communicative strategies. Simultaneously, they all transcend the traditional frontiers that surround civil society (media), for instance by combining a diversity of professionalisms and amateurisms.

What nevertheless remains crucial to this debate about citizen journalism is its organisational embeddedness. The use of these technologies, and their participatory potential cannot be detached from their organisational component. Participation is organised, and is in many cases produced, by the operations of formal (or sometimes informal) organisations. Even in the blogosphere, the existence of the individual writer-publisher is a romantic illusion because the blog-infrastructure is provided by a variety of organisations and companies. Admittedly, in the web 2.0-era this organisational context is often – as Jenkins (2006) argues – a commercial and commodified context, which results in a combination of top-down business processes with bottom-up consumption and production processes. The web 2.0 platform YouTube, owned by Google, is a case in point here. But the interconnection of Indymedia and the peace movement that was discussed here shows that strong participatory media organisations independent from state and market can still play a crucial role as facilitators of both the process of mediation and the process of participation.

Although citizen journalism can thrive in more commercial and commodified contexts, it is also faced there by the threat of incorporation by a diversity of mainstream media organisations that reduce the intensity of the participatory process. Many mainstream media have been trying to develop business models to incorporate citizen journalists, and to reduce their role to providers of information, keeping the media professionals' role as gate-keepers intact. Although far from perfect, strong participatory media organisations can provide a non-commercial and non-commodified context, where the top-down business processes play only a limited role, and where the risk of incorporation is less substantial. The peace march case study shows that the alliance of an online participatory platform with the peace movement can contribute to a viable civil society and to the democratisation of our public spaces.

Conclusion

Citizen journalism offers a number of opportunities to better understand the contemporary conjuncture. The increase of mediated participations, at least partially through the popularity of web 2.0, has become a significant part of this contemporary conjuncture. It would be hard not to mention blogging, vlogging, webzines, internet radio (and television), podcasting, digital storytelling and wikis here. The danger of focussing on online interactions and strategies is that the importance and capacities of 'old' media are ignored. These media clearly still play an important role in the everyday lives of many people. Citizen journalism is a concept that allows enriching these participatory debates, by emphasising the potential of citizens to participate in the process of media production as non-professional journalists, thus disarticulating the need for professional employment in the media industry from the concept of journalism. The peace march case study illustrates that a diversity of non-media professionals from a variety of organisational origins can actually contribute to the in-depth coverage of a specific event that is considered relevant to all of them.

At the same time, each concept incorporates specific risks. For one, the concept of citizen journalism has become the object of a discursive struggle where mainstream media's practices have attempted to engulf and rearticulate it. This process of incorporation of citizen journalists into the mainstream media often reduces the journalistic role of citizen journalists, as professional journalists remain firmly in control in these kinds of settings. Moreover, it also reduces the participatory process to mere access and interaction, strongly reducing the power equilibrium which is constitutive for participation (Carpentier, 2007). Second, the concept of citizen journalism carries the risk of individuating participation, especially when the concept of citizenship is used in its reductive articulation generated through an exclusive citizen-state-market relationship. Citizen journalists risk being detached from the structures of civil society, which are vital in constructing civility, and being seen as individuals that directly relate to the (market) media or the entire polis.

For these reason, the embeddedness in participatory organisations, which are in turn part of a rhizomatic civil society, is seen as crucial in protecting citizen journalism. This does not imply that citizen journalism is impossible within a commercial or commodified context. It does mean, however, that civil society remains a nesting home and safe haven for citizen journalism, protecting it from incorporation and eventually annihilation. At the same time we should avoid a too romantic position and recognise that power imbalances, authoritarian practices and processes of exclusion can also arise within civil society. In the case of the peace march coverage, the lack of texts generated by non-networked citizens is reason for concern. Furthermore, the complexity of the different roles and positions should be recognised, leading to high levels of overlap and collaboration between different civil society (sub)networks. But at the same time this fluidity should not be used to discredit citizen journalism, as the non-exclusive embeddedness in civil

society, and its many movements and organisations, needs to be recognised as one of citizen journalism's main features.

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