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# Connecting African Activism with Global Networks: ICTs and South African Social Movements

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## Abstract

In this article the potential of ICTs to amplify the work done by social movements and activists in South Africa will be explored. Against the background of new discourses of Pan-African Unity such as those around the African Renaissance and the New Plan for African Development (Nepad), the use of ICTs by a South African activist group, the Treatment Action Campaign, will be investigated to establish how these communication technologies can embed local social movements within larger political and communicative networks both on the African continent and globally.

## Résumé

Cet article étudie la capacité des TIC à élargir le travail accompli par les mouvements et activistes sociaux d'Afrique du Sud. L'utilisation des TIC par un groupe d'activistes sud-africain sera analysée, dans le contexte des nouveaux discours sur l'unité panafricaine, tels que ceux portant sur la Renaissance Africaine et le Nouveau Plan pour le Développement de l'Afrique (NEPAD), afin de voir comment ces technologies de la communication peuvent être intégrées aux mouvements sociaux locaux, dans le cadre de larges réseaux politiques et communicatifs, aussi bien sur le continent africain qu'ailleurs.

## Introduction: New media technologies, activism and the 'fifth estate'

In her 2003 Harold Wolpe lecture, Jane Duncan stated that 'another journalism is possible', even in the face of an increasingly convergent and commercialised global media. Quoting delegates at the conference on media

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and globalisation at the World Social Forum, Duncan refers to the emergence of a 'fifth estate', alternative media networks created by social movements in order to remind the traditional, commercial media of their societal responsibilities. New social movements worldwide, according to Duncan, are also busy reclaiming the traditional media.

Increasingly, non-commercial media are on the agenda of social movements internationally. Free speech radio and television stations are being established as spaces for non-commercial journalism, and a new layer of emerging grassroots media is springing up (Duncan 2003).

Also in South Africa, Duncan goes further to show that social movements are increasingly producing their own media to further their causes. She mentions newspapers and newsletters springing up, and suggests that micro-radio be further explored as a vehicle by these movements.

Duncan does not mention the possibilities that the Internet might pose for South African social movements, although she does refer to Indymedia, an alternative media network that uses the Internet to great effect. Indymedia (www.indymedia.org), an international network of non-commercial journalists that also has a South African branch, similar networks like Civicus – an organisation distributing information about civil society activities to more than 4,500 subscribers all over the world (Civicus 2003) – and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), a network linking other NGO networks, have used computer systems to amplify local struggles at relative low cost and with high speed across a global support system (Kidd 2003:58).

That the Internet can assist in network formation, makes sense when bearing in mind that it has been 'about networking' from its inception: 'not just networks of wires and hubs but networks of people' (Gurak & Logie 2003:25). The Internet's capability of linking people and forming issue-centered communities can be seen in numerous petitions being circulated and protest networks being formed[1] (ibid.:43–44).

Cultural minorities have also successfully used the Internet for empowerment. Many examples exist, such as Hawaiians (Wood 1997), Indian diaspora in the USA (Mallapragada 2000) and the Cherokee Indians (Arnold & Plymire 2000). Virtual communities in cyberspace make it possible for such groupings to gain social power and consolidate their cultural identities in spite of societal constraints or geographical borders by producing and circulating their own knowledge (Arnold and Plymire 2000:188).

Some of the advantages that the Internet holds for grassroots networks are that the medium is suited towards a non-hierarchical structure and that it reduces the need for centralized communication. The Internet can also assist activists to mobilize participation by augmenting existing communication

methods. The notion that the Internet signifies a radical break with the old ways in which society will be ordered, however, has been amended by those proposing the theory of 'amplification' (e.g. Agre 2002; Brants 2002), contending that the Internet will serve to enlarge and accelerate processes already in place in societies and organisations, rather than create entirely new forces. Rather than a revolutionising force, the Internet is embedded in larger networks of societal processes and amplifies existing social forces when appropriated for use by participants in the communication process (Agre 2002:315–6 ).

The speed of communication on the Internet also enables activists to act more quickly and co-ordinate their activities on a regional, national and international level (Pickerill 2001:366–7, 370; also see Bray 1998) and to circumvent regulations monitoring political organization (Baber 2002:294). In combination with more traditional media like press, television and radio, the Internet can create a 'global media space' for deliberation, dissemination and mobilisation where individual contributions can result in decisions being made from the bottom up (Moore 2003).

Apart from facilitating mobilization, the Internet can also help to build support networks and promote solidarity, between local and international groups that share similar interests, and also aid communication across physical or ideological distances and the sharing of ideas and skills with other movements or groups (Pickerill 2002:367). Bennett (quoted in Tilly 2003), highlights several ways in which digital media are changing the way activists operate internationally, such as greater introduction of local issues into larger movement discourses, increasing the strategic advantages of resource-poor organisations within social movements and combining older face-to-face performances with virtual performances. Throughout these media, local struggles can be magnified to reach national or even global agendas giving them access to remote information germane to their struggle (Mele 1999:291–2, 304). For this reason the Internet (as well as other ICTs such as mobile phones) has been a valuable tool in the activities of the new 'superpower' (Moore 2003) or the 'third wave of democratisation' (Karl et al. cited in Struwig & Conradie 2003:250), namely the global social movement of citizen activists that represents a broad agenda including social development. Most recently, observers such as Tilly (2003) have noted the use of cellphone text messaging to create 'flash mobs' engaging in protest action. Tilly mentions in passing protests in Nigeria and Ethiopia, but does not elaborate further on examples of the use of ICTs by social movements in Africa.

Can social movements in Africa, where access to technologies are hindered by a number of economic, cultural, social and political factors (Wasserman & De Beer 2003), follow the example of their international counterparts?

Can the Internet and related communication technologies, such as e-mail and cellphone messaging, be used as a form of alternative media by organisations working at grassroots level, such as Duncan shows with regard to traditional media? If so, how would this contribute to the building of Pan-African and global networks of resistance?

This article does not attempt to provide definitive answers to these questions, but explores some of them by focusing on a specific South African social movement as an illustration of how ICTs can be used for activism.

## The post-apartheid 'ultra-left' and ICTs

In post-apartheid South Africa, a number of new social movements have come into being. These groups protest the ruling ANC governments' lack of service delivery on a range of issues, including health care, electricity provision, housing and land restitution. These movements have met with opposition from the ANC and those aligned with the ruling party, with Thabo Mbeki branding them the 'ultra-left' (Forrest 2003).

These groups are opposed to corporate globalisation and form part of overlapping networks, both inside the country – with their leaders playing central roles in different organisations – and globally, having links with other activists in Third World countries (Jacobs 2004:210). Although having their origins among poor communities, these movements often use the Internet[2] to publicise their message, since they do not view the mainstream media in a positive light due to its perceived bias towards the elite or eschewing of political issues (Jacobs 2004:212–3). The Internet also provides a relatively cheap and easy way to self-publish information (cf. Bennett 2003). This does not provide an immediate solution to the needs of social movements wanting to communicate their message, since only a small percentage of South Africans, mainly the elites, have access to the Internet (see Wasserman 2003b for a discussion of connectivity in South Africa). Although the Internet may assist in mobilisation for protest action, it is probable that the bulk of this communication will have to be done through more traditional means. Some other ICTs, like cellphones, might prove more useful in reaching the core constituencies of social movements in South Africa. However, the internet may broaden the support base of activist groups to also include elites in South Africa and abroad (Jacobs 2004:213) or help them to form links with like-minded groups on the rest of the continent and globally.

These networks not only amplify (Agre 2002) the reach of local organisations, but have also become a public sphere in themselves, decentralised and broadly distributed across many nodes without being dependent on the continued existence of every single one of them (Bennett 2003). In the case of African CSOs using the Internet, this aspect of networking might be advan-

tageous in the light of the huge connectivity problems on the continent. By creating networks in which the different nodes support each other, the demise of certain nodes would not necessarily have to mean the collapse of the whole network.

As an example of how activist groups in post-apartheid South Africa use ICTs, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) will be discussed. While successes (or failures) of specific civil society groups in their use of new media in specific contexts should not too easily be extrapolated to draw conclusions about Africa as a whole, an investigation into a specific case can be of value. By looking at how certain civil society movements use the Internet and related technologies, one might get an understanding of how they 'form part of the forces that constitute global ICTs, but do so quite specifically as groups with particular physical space and goal commonality' (Mudhai 2003). Although taking place under very specific circumstances, the communication facilitated by new media might be subject to similar power relations, political processes and discourses elsewhere. Moreover, by investigating the wider networks of which specific social movements form part and which are made possible through these new media, one can also start exploring the potential of ICTs for solidarity building, the creation of a pan-African or global public sphere and mobilisation across borders and boundaries.

By considering the ways that TAC make use of ICTs to spread information, mobilise supporters and establish global links, some insight might be obtained into the potential and limitations these technologies hold for similar organisations in Africa.

## The Treatment Action Campaign, ICTs and network-building[3]

It has been said (Bennett 2003) that global activism, marked by inter alia mass demonstrations and publicity campaigns is currently at 'impressive levels', and that the Internet and related technologies have in many cases helped organisations to overcome limits of time, space and even identity and ideology. These technologies have, in other words, facilitated the establishment of global networks and the co-ordination of protest action that would not have been possible before (Bennett 2003).

One of the issues around which such a 'global community' consisting of a variety of roleplayers has emerged, is the provision of Aids drugs to developing countries (Redding 2003). The interaction between these participants in the debates has taken place on a different level than traditional interaction between nation-states, but has taken the form of networks of activists reacting to (in different ways and with different foci) the processes of neo-liberal globalisation (Redding 2003). The South African activist group the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) can be seen as one of the members of

this global community. It is one of the most effective and active of the post-apartheid activist groups (Forrest 2003) and its 'media-friendly' image has ensured extensive and favourable media coverage (Jacobs 2004:231, TAC 2003j). TAC's main objective is 'to campaign for greater access to Aids treatment for all South Africans, by raising public awareness and understanding about issues surrounding the availability, affordability and use of HIV treatments' and protest against the 'excessive pricing of antiretroviral medicines' (TAC 2003a, 2003j) by big pharmaceutical companies. Currently the provision of anti-retroviral medicines (ARVs) in the South African public health service is very limited, a fact often attributed to President Thabo Mbeki's scepticism about ARVs and the link between HIV and Aids (see *The Economist* 2003). Recently, the government has called for an investigation into the 'roll-out' of ARVs in the public health sector, but a strategy has not been finalised yet.

TAC has been very visible through its civil disobedience campaigns, the largest mobilisation (up until then also the largest Aids march yet held in South Africa) being a march to parliament on February 14, 2003. It has also already won a case (regarding the provision of drugs preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV) against the government in the Constitutional Court (TAC 2003j). TAC makes use of the traditional media to promote its cause, but also relies on a website and email to communicate with supporters and establish links with solidarity networks. This makes it an interesting example of how new media technologies can be used by social movements in South Africa.

One of the reasons that the Internet might prove a viable option for a civil society organisation such as TAC is that it also appeals to members of society who can afford Internet connections. According to TAC's national secretary, Mark Heywood, TAC is 'primarily rooted in poor communities' (Heywood 2003) similar to several other social movements currently active in South Africa (see Forrest 2003; Haffajee & Robinson 2003; Kindra 2003). However, TAC straddles different classes and also appeals to the middle class (Geffen 2003), where it has 'managed to reawaken a spirit of volunteerism and commitment amongst many middle class professionals (...)' (Heywood 2003). This support base among a more affluent group with access to ICTs might be instrumental in establishing and maintaining a global solidarity network via the Internet and email. This use of the Internet to reach elites supports the observation by Bennett (2003) about the Internet's 'audience-building capacity' beyond activist circles. Already TAC uses an email list to distribute statements and important news (TAC 2003j) to approximately 1,400 subscribers (May 2003), including 'highly influential people' locally and

abroad (Geffen 2003). Jacobs, (2004:203) also attributes TAC's media success to the middle-class image of its leaders.

How does TAC use the Internet to create local, continental and global networks? The following observations are based on a series of interviews done with TAC officials at TAC's national headquarters in Muizenberg, Cape Town, in September 2003. Although this research brought other interesting aspects of TAC's use of ICTs (e.g. mobilisation) to the fore, this paper will focus only on the establishment of regional, continental and global networks. For TAC's use of the Internet for other uses such as mobilisation and spreading of information, see Wasserman (2003b) and Wasserman & De Beer (2003). In a certain sense, of course, the distinction between regional, continental and global networks is made redundant exactly by the overlapping networks and global reach of the Internet, creating a 'space of flows' in Castells' words, rather than geographical entities. Internet users for instance, may visit TAC's website via the website of an organisation situated in the USA. Nevertheless, the distinction gives an indication of different focal points, or nodes in TAC's support network.

***Regional and national***

Regional and national links are established and/or strengthened through TAC's use of the Internet and email.

As far as TAC's website is concerned, hyperlinks are provided (TAC 2003g) to South African Aids organisations and activist groups, such as the Aids consortium (a network of more than 300 organisations and 200 individuals) and the Aids Law Project, as well as local information resources such as the Actuarial Society of South Africa's Aids model, the health-care news agency Health-E and the Legal Resources Centre. TAC's regional and national hyperlinks as well as those referring to international websites (to which will be referred below) show similarities with activist or NGO websites in other countries, where the Internet's capability of linking to other websites is also used to expand and consolidate solidarity networks (Bray 1998). TAC's national manager, Nathan Geffen sees the Internet and email as useful tools for reaching 'organisations and middle-class people' and indicates that many supporters have found TAC through their website. Geffen's comments that traffic on the website also increases around the time of protest events, can be seen in page visit statistics provided via an icon on the web page (Nedstatbasic 2003a). During March 2003 the highest number of daily page views (178) was registered on 20 March, the day the TAC embarked on a civil disobedience campaign (TAC 2003f). Visits picked up significantly from the 19th and remained at relatively high levels from the 20th to the 24th. Geffen acknowledges that the members of their email lists 'are not the same people

who come and march', but that they have influential positions and are instrumental in terms of being able to influence policy. Mobilisation for protest action, Geffen outlines, is done through more traditional means like use of pamphlets, word of mouth, phone calls and house to house visits. This is an illustration of the amplification theory (Agre 2002; Brants 2002) that holds that the Internet does not so much introduce a force with entirely new political and social effects, but rather amplifies existing structures and forces. In TAC's case, their support network is amplified by the Internet to now also include members of the 'connected classes' that would otherwise not be reached through their more traditional mobilisation campaigns.

The National Executive Secretary of TAC, Ruka Cornelius, affirms that email is 'integral' to establishing links with NGOs on a provincial level. Traditional media like pamphlets are also used to provide TAC's email address to potential supporters, but a lot of the emails received by TAC are generated through the websites of other organisations that have links to TAC's website. Email is also an 'invaluable tool' for planning between TAC branches and an 'essential tool' in networking, although not all the provincial offices of TAC are linked to the TAC network yet. The chairperson of TAC, Zackie Achmat, has previous experience of using email networks in activist work in the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality and Aids Law Project. In his opinion e-mail serves 'multiple functions', makes communication within the organisation 'much easier, because it is regular, easy and cheaper', affords him more time to respond and enables him to express his needs more clearly, and also because it provides a record of communications.

However, TAC does not use ICTs in isolation from more traditional methods of spreading information through regional support networks: 'Emails get sent to provincial offices, who contact branches, who contact districts, who distribute posters and pamphlets at train stations and taxi ranks. We go to churches on foot – the message is more simplified usually – also go to NGOs, or fax all of them', says Cornelius. In a township like Khayelitsha, outside Cape Town, mobilisation is reliant on these methods, TAC volunteer Mandla Oliphant affirms. This method of spreading information to community leaders or via community organisations seems to recall the 'two-step flow[4]' process of communication, but also confirms Bennett's remarks (2003) that the constituents of the Internet communication process 'travel in chaotic yet patterned ways'. This might suggest, as do other examples in Africa[5], revising some of the theories regarding Internet communication as they are formulated in other contexts, to make provision for a less individualised form of communication. Instead of either many-to-one, many-to-many or one-to-many (cf. Burnett & Marshall 2003:47), the mediatory aspect in some African

communication contexts rather suggests something to the effect of one-to-one-to-one, or one-to-one-to-many.

The Internet and email therefore extends the range of communication tools available for internal communication within TAC itself, thereby amplifying (Agre 2002) communication networks rather than radically altering them. Achmat confirms that the Internet should be seen as part of a combination of communication methods. 'We have to combine the styles - formal and informal, for example video'. He also refers to a local television series, *Beat It*, which gave TAC exposure and created goodwill for the organisation. Although ICT brought about significant changes it has its limits: 'Contemporary, twenty-four hour media access, such as radio, Internet and so on, have revolutionised communication and organising. The disadvantage of course is that enemies do it too, people who are reactionary. Email is a very effective tool, but doesn't replace personal communication'. Achmat adds that TAC's email lists 'used to be completely open until the drug companies started using them to send stuff to our lists'.

While agreeing that TAC's website and email newsletter (see below) have made a 'significant difference' to middle-class support, Geffen reminds one that people from the working class and poor people are excluded from their Internet and email activities, due to limited access to the Internet and email. Geffen says that although all paid TAC staff have access, access among their general membership is 'very low' and something they need to address, through for example providing PCs to their smaller branches. According to Achmat TAC does provide its members with some training on the use of new media by sending them on IT courses. TAC's problems regarding the availabilty of computer hardware and lack of training is a common problem among politically orientated institutions and organisations in South Africa (Struwig & Conradie 2003:257).

***Continental***

One of TAC's mailing lists, africa@tac.org.za, is devoted to the Pan African HIV/Aids Treatment Access Movement (PHATAM) and according to Geffen has approximately 1,000 members. This movement was developed after 70 delegates from 21 African countries met in Cape Town in August 2002. A declaration, in which demands for measures aimed at preventing and treating people living with HIV/Aids in Africa were set out, was directed to national governments in Africa, donor countries, multilateral institutions, pharmaceutical companies and the private sector (PHATAM 2002). This declaration was also sent out on several lists in South Africa, the rest of Africa and abroad, including TAC's newsletter. This movement can therefore

be seen as having specific local and continental interests at heart, but with a global reach.

However, TAC's links page does not include this movement nor any other specifically African organisations (except those within South Africa).

According to Njogu Morgan, TAC International Co-ordinator (Morgan 2003), e-mail correspondence is used for lobbying and advocacy in other African countries. To express solidarity with similar groups and to share literacy materials with them. The email list is also used to provide 'the latest news on access to anti-retrovirals in countries, regionally and internationally, reports from members on their upcoming activities, strategising by members and [to offer] moral support when members pass on' (Morgan 2003).

Page view statistics on the TAC website (Nedstatbasic 2003b) show that the majority of visitors to the website came from Africa, with North America and Europe respectively in the second and third place. However, a break-down according to country suggests that most of these visits originated in South Africa, with other African countries like Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Congo and Kenya much lower on the list.

***Global***

TAC's website serves as a means for the local organisation to link with established global networks of solidarity and political pressure. TAC's links page (TAC 2003g) represents a wide range of activist groups or information resources from all over the world, including international organisations such as the Nobel Prize recipients, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and the United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids (UNAIDS). It also serves as a site for cross-reference to other protest events taking place internationally (TAC 2003j). TAC's international links signifies the extent to which TAC forms part of a new global movement of social activists (Moore 2003).

TAC's website also serves to embed local representations in global networks of meaning, which, according to Bennett (2003), is another important factor in the networking potential of the Internet. Through what he calls the 'global imaging' of protests, not only the organisation of protests but also their representation across geographical borders are made possible through the Internet. According to this logic, TAC's inclusion on its website (TAC 2003k) of photographs of its protest action as well as of events with high symbolic value like the visit Achmat received of Nelson Mandela, a funeral and an interfaith church service, activates liberatory and religious discourses respectively. By including these photos, TAC can also on a symbolic representational level 'simultaneously occupy local, national, and transnational global space' (Mittleman, cited in Bennett 2003). That TAC capitalises on

the liberatory discourses in the wake of South African democratisation, can furthermore be seen in the choice of date to orchestrate an international Day of Solidarity in the week of April 27, 2003 – to coincide with the ninth anniversary of South African democracy. This day is also further indication of TAC's worldwide solidarity network, since protests were held in New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Manila, Delhi, Nairobi and Brussels (Jacobs 2004:231).

Furthermore, the networks brought about by these linkages not only amplify the mobilisation of activists, but may also stimulate 'collective cogition' (Agre 1999) – through these networks individuals, such as those living with HIV/Aids may find the support (e.g. information, solidarity, shared experiences) they need while not actually necessarily participating in collective action.

Even though much of TAC's raison d'être is directly related to the vast socio-economic divides in South Africa, which makes ARVs inaccessible to the majority who do not have private medical care and necessitate special literacy programmes on a number of HIV/Aids-related issues (see TAC 2003j for examples of these) it also draws support from an elite, both nationally and internationally, including both black and white intelligentsia (Haffajee & Robinson 2003). This international support network makes it important for TAC to have a web presence.

Page view statistics on the TAC website (Nedstatbasic 2003b) also show much activity originating from North America and Europe, with many other countries also represented.

According to Geffen, TAC's email list for newsletters (news@tac.org.za) contains 'some very influential subscribers like the World Health Organisation and the United Nations as well as governments from countries abroad. TAC's newsletter is sent out once a week to approximately 1,600 subscribers. Another list, internat@tac.org.za, is dedicated to activists in and outside South Africa, and has a membership of about 150. Although protest actions are mostly held locally, TAC does sometimes co-ordinate protests in other parts of the world to coincide with local ones. This, according to TAC volunteer Mandla Oliphant, are mostly done through e-mail. Iming Lin, a volunteer fund-raising assistant at TAC, says the Internet is very important for making contact with social movements in especially the US, where people are used to donating money online. The Internet provides access to a larger number of people and email makes it possible to attach pamphlets, more easily than faxing them. Sammy Moshenberg, International Volunteer Co-ordinator, estimates that 80 per cent of the emails from prospective volunteers are from abroad. She is herself an employee of a women's organisa-

tion in the US, and the Internet makes it possible for her to spend part of her day doing her work for her US employer and the rest as volunteer for TAC.

It would therefore seem that ICTs are used pervasively in the activities of TAC, performing a variety of functions ranging from mobilisation to the spreading of information. As members of TAC's leadership have pointed out, however, these ICTs are effective predominantly inasmuch as they succeed in harnassing support from a connected middle class. For those activities aimed at the grassroots, traditional media are used. If TAC, with its large component of elite support (Jacobs 2004:233), is so limited in its use of especially the Internet, it will probably be more so in the case of organisations with a smaller measure of support among the elite. This might also be true in other African countries.

## The viability of ICTs for social activism in Africa

A lot has been written and said about Africa's communication backlog. Just as one should avoid a crude technological determinism in exploring the positive potential of new media such as the Internet, one should also not overstate the negative aspects relating to connectivity and lose sight of the innovative use of these technologies by activist groupings on the continent. Although Africa has seen a boom in the take-up of certain new technologies like cell phones (Ashurst 2001) the statistics regarding Internet usage is considerably less upbeat. The term 'Digital Divide' has gained common currency. It not only refers to inequalities in Internet access internal to even developed countries, where connectivity is unevenly spread according to social, racial, gender, age and spatial factors (Castells 2000:377), but, in the context of this paper specifically, to the vast difference between different regions of the world. Africa is among the poorest connected of these, although recent surveys suggest some growth (for a discussion of some these statistics, see Conradie et al. 2003; Wasserman 2003c; Wasserman & De Beer 2003). African connectivity figures are also subject to the same interpretations ranging from the utopian to the dystopian as are some of the Internet's applications (e.g. for e-democracy, see Struwig & Conradie 2003:252). Whether one takes an optimistic or pessimistic view of these fi-gures, the question of 'real access', including connectivity as well as the necessary skills and technological literacy, should be considered seriously. Furthermore, these inequalities are indicative of larger, structural inequalities between Africa and the developed world. Some fear that the digital divide might even perpetuate or exacerbate existing global inequalities of wealth and power distribution, and that access to information alone will not necessarily result in development (APC & CRIS 2003:13).

When assessing the potential ICTs hold for African social movements, connectivity problems should prevent overly optimistic analyses. The particularities of the specific social movements and the specific African country will have to be accounted for in these analyses, as they will differ depending on the situation. For instance, vast inequalities in Internet access exist in South Africa. Internet connectivity correlates with the racial, gender and class divides of apartheid (see for instance Webchek 2001, 2002), although there are some indications (Balancing Act 2003) of some improvement. Responses from government also included, with mixed success, so-called telecentres to combat the urban-rural divide (Conradie et al. 2003). This means that the way ICTs are used by civil society or activist organisations such as the Treatment Action Campaign will have to be shaped around these realities. As shown above, this might mean that the Internet is used mainly for expanding the activities of the social movements on a global level or among elites, or that new media technologies are complemented with more traditional ways of communication and mobilisation. In a survey done among South African institutions and organisations in the political sphere, including NGOs, a range of problems regarding affordability and skills were raised (Struwig & Conradie 2003:257). ICTs in Africa are often subject to strict regulations and taxes (Mutume 2003) and faced by a range of socio-cultural, economic and infrastructural hindrances (Wasserman & De Beer 2003).

Add to this the warning (Redding 2003) against the overstatement of the pervasiveness of the global movement around issues such as access to Aids drugs as this activism has mainly involved an intellectual and socio-economic elite, and a rather pessimistic view of the potential of ICTs and especially the Internet for African social movements and continental networks might result.

Nevertheless, the fact that ICTs should not be viewed as utopian terms, does not mean that one should opt for a completely dystopian view. ICTs like the Internet might not change the world completely, but they might change some things (cf. Nakamura 2002:xiii). While it remains necessary to remain realistic when exploring the possibilities of ICT networks for social activism in Africa, some successes have been achieved. While the use of ICTs by a group like TAC remain modest in contrast to the problems and challenges that still remain, the potential of this medium should not be discounted.

## Conclusion

In the era of globalisation one cannot think of Pan-Africanism without seeing African countries and African civil society as part of global networks of

power, the global economy and the global public sphere (see Alexander 2003). But this does not mean that African interests should be subjected to the global hegemony. The same new media that accelerates globalisation can also be used by African activists, to create a counter-flow of information and communication by publicising their aims to a broader audience. These media can also be used to draw on sympathies abroad and in so doing to embed local issues within global discourses and solidarity networks.

If there is a challenge where renewed collaboration between African countries is needed, where the demands to protect local interests from the negative effects of corporate globalisation[7] are urgent and where global solidarity should be sought and tapped, it is the fight against HIV/Aids. As Alexander (2003) points out, this pandemic will have an effect on Africa for decades to come and can make a mockery of the African Renaissance put forward by the same leader who has repeatedly received criticism for his questionable views of the disease. It is therefore fitting that an Aids activist group such as TAC should also harness the globalising medium of the Internet and other ICTs to fight this battle. In forming not only intra-continental but also global networks through the use of ICTs, TAC is indeed redefining the ideal of Pan-Africanism within the sphere of globalisation. This means that co-operation on a continental level in the pursuit of common goals cannot be seen separately from the continent's position within a global context. ICTs, as one of the facilitators of accelerated globalisation, create a tension between the local and the global. Through ICTs African issues can be incorporated within global spheres of influence. In this regard the example of the Pan-African HIV/Aids Treatment Access Movement indicates how a network can be established which simultaneously consolidates African organisations around an issue while opening this Pan-African network, via postings to other email lists, to global users forming communities of interest. The networks of which an organisation like TAC forms part and which is facilitated through new media technologies, should not be seen in technological determinist ways - they are not only a causal result of new communication technologies, but also of broader processes of globalisation on political, economic and cultural levels (Bennett 2003). However, a realistic view of the infrastructural limitations incumbent upon the use of ICTs in Africa should be taken. In this regard the priority given to the development of ICTs in the framework of Nepad should be welcomed.

## Notes

1. The ease with which the Internet facilitates protests also have a negative side– Gurak & Logie (2003:43) point out, for instance, that the anonimity of Web protests raise 'credibility concerns'.

2. Of the twelve prominent social movements listed in Forrest (2003), seven had their own official websites while information on some of the others were included in the web pages of other civil society groups. Some of the most important groups having their own websites, were the Treatment Action Campaign (www.tac.org.za), the Anti-Privatisation Forum (www.apf.org.za), the National Land Committee (www.nlc.co.za), the Education Rights Project (www.erp.org.za), the Anti-Eviction Campaign (www.antieviction.org.za), the Palestine Solidarity Committee (http://psc.za.org) and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (http://scnc.udw.ac.za/~ub/cbos/sdcea/whatissdcea.html).
3. The author wishes to thank Sieraaj Ahmed and Clayton Swart for their assistance in gathering information during fieldwork at TAC. Except when otherwise noted, all the interviews referred to in this section is transcribed in Ahmed & Swart (2003).
4. Oliphant adds that short message services (SMS) on mobile telephones are not used on a co-ordinated basis to extend the reach of other forms of communication. This might strike as surprising in the light of South Africa's robust cellular phone industry, built on the dearth of communication infrastructure in black townships created by apartheid. Cell phones has also been seen 'fulfilling ordinary Africans' aspirations for a voice', resulting in South Africa having more cell phones than fixed lines (Ashurst 2001:14-15). Consequently, cellphones are increasingly seen as a way of extending the limited penetration of the ICTs in Africa, through for instance SMS messaging (e.g. in health care, see Mayhew, 2003) or to provide wireless Internet connections (see Stones, 2003). SMS TAC provincial co-ordinator Thembeka Majali did indicate that SMS's are used by TAC co-ordinators to get hold of branch leaders, who would pass on the information to members – another example of a communication flow showing similarities with the two-step flow mentioned above.
5. Richard Koman (2003), notes the Ugandan example of community radio stations offering an email service to rural listeners. People can email one another care of the radio station, and at a designated time the radio will, at a small cost, alert everyone who has received an email.
6. In interviews with TAC members (Ahmed & Swart, 2003) many of them mentioned e-mail as the standard way of being informed of the deaths of co-members of the organisation.
7. Such as the pricing of anti-retrovirals through multinational companies, see Bond, 2003.

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