Gordon's global village

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Marshall McLuhan's idea of a 'global village' has taken a battering in recent decades so it was interesting to hear Gordon Brown speak with visionary zeal of his hopes that the Internet can bring people around the world closer together. I know that Gordon's political fortunes are at a bit of a low point but he is still Prime Minister so it is worth reading what he said at some length:

> …the greatest arsenal of power today is not nuclear or biological or chemical but people — the discovery of our capacity to come together across borders and oceans and to stand together as one. And what I want to argue is that the joining of these two forces – the information revolution and the human urge to co-operate for justice – makes possible for the first time in history something we have only dreamt about: the creation of a truly global society. A global society where people anywhere and everywhere can discover their shared values, communicate with each other and do not need to meet or live next door to each other to join together with people in other countries in a single moral universe to bring about change….

This is lovely idealistic stuff, but Gordon gives a concrete, topical example, that is in stark contrast to Tony Blair's disillusionment with the Internet and New Media:

> Some dismiss the internet as a shouting match without a referee, but let us remember its power for change: that the monks of Burma with only a begging bowl and their blogs persuaded the world to bear witness to their fight against oppression – and now tell us of their struggle to survive in the face not only of natural disaster but an unnatural dictatorship that cares more about its survival than theirs.

Of course, as Kim Fletcher writes in the Guardian, the success of the Burmese generals in censoring coverage of the current crisis in the Irrawaddy Delta reminds us of the limits of all media, be they New or Old.

But in terms of vision, Gordon Brown's hope that a globalised media can increase connections between people is very central to the Polis agenda. The Polis founder, Professor Roger Silverstone wrote about this in his book Media and Morality. He writes about how a 'Mediapolis' can be created where there is a richer discourse between people's through global media.

The fact that we can now have a world-wide conversation doesn't mean that voices won't also be raised in anger. Al Queda is one of the most successful global communication brands. The Danish Cartoons showed how international communications can turn rapidly to hatred.

So it is vital that we know more about how the news media and humanitarian agencies communicate there issues from one group of people to another. And that is precisely the subject of Polis' programme of work which begins in the autumn. Email us for more details at polis@lse.ac.uk

Thanks to the ever-insightful Simon Dickson for pointing out that part of Gordon Brown's speech.