

# Facebook the Conqueror

## The neo-colonial side of the technological attack

Facebook has recently become the biggest nation of the world – with a population of over 1,5 billion Facebook is bigger than China and India. In 2015 Facebook chose a new strategy to grow even faster. With its presumptuous project *internet.org*, that was quickly renamed into *Free Basics* because of strong resistance Facebook intends to smartly develop 100 poorer countries: A strongly clipped free internet app on smartphones is supposed to imprint Facebook's choice of internet services and Facebook's form of connectivity on the poor. In India this neo-colonial network project has today, the 2nd of February 2016 suffered a severe setback because of massive resistance.

Google and Facebook want to cover the world with the most close meshed net possible that connects everything with everyone. With an enormous technical and financial effort (balloons, satellites, drones) the yet to be developed regions of poorer countries are to be connected. Thus Facebook's „greatest philanthropic initiative“ *Free Basic* is the imperial pretension, to conquer the developing countries in terms of communication technology.

### **One does not measure something one does not want to acquire**

There is nothing less at stake than world-wide access to communication as a maximally invasive option to control all people. As the political economy rules by leaving us with the liberty of competing economic interests, cybernetics controls and steers by allowing us to communicate and to access information. *Free Basics* is supposed to bring around one billion of yet unaccessed Indians into Facebook's free-net. Narrowing down the horizon of information to a filter bubble of less than 40 platforms and service providers that conform with Facebook's world view is taking colonial incapacitation to a whole new level.

A technological attack completely in line with Schumpeter's „creative destruction“: radical divestiture of out-dated informational and social structures in favour of maximal isolation of the individual to weave every single one of them into a whole new net of algorithmically controlled interaction. No kind of access, no kind of manipulation can be created to be more all-encompassing – without ever using any kind of coercion. In Silicon Valley irreversible changes of lifestyle of this kind are today called „disruptive innovations“: „We invent products without which you cannot live any more.“ Awareness in society for this fundamental change is so much behind that the technocratic bullies have a walk-over. For the time being they need not fear any criticism or resistance.

While in the times of colonial conquest Christian missionaries at least took the trouble to travel separately from the invading troops in today's techno-imperialism bible and gun come hand in hand – in the guise of a smart technology that provides the conquered with integration into a network and the „power to share“. According to the conditions of the conqueror of course.

### **Techno-imperial charity strategies**

Prettily made up as development aid Microsoft invested a lot of money in computer and education centres in India already in the 90ies. The not very surprising condition was the application of Windows and Microsoft software for all computers engaged in the project. Several generations of pupils acquired all of their computer skills under the reign of Microsoft: from software over system administration to software development. All that wasn't hardware, was Microsoft. Bill Gates „robbed“ hundreds of millions of kids the perspective of skills to develop free software as well as the advantages of using them. That may sound nitpicking to computer-distal people, but for the contemporary form of “crowdworking” this „conquest“ and controlled „education“ of the youth in countries like India turning them into digital nomadic work-force it was crucial.

In a lot of Latin-American and African countries the initiative of the Bostonian MIT „*One Laptop Per Child*“ demonstrated a further technological conquering expedition. Even this seemingly altruistic project (every child shall have a laptop) remained within the limits of the classic paternalistic concept of IT development aid where all to often promise a glorious future to the underdeveloped children of the global

south should they use this gadget, or that app, or whatever else.

The restrictions for the „poor to be developed“ or paternalism forced upon them within the framework of the current enforced bliss by Facebook are taking it much further. Indeed the gratitude is much weaker and the opposing wind much stronger.

## High level resistance

Although Facebook tries to make its censored free-net look as „empowerment“ the public debate is dominated by terms used by online activists and small start-ups concentrated around the initiative „*SaveTheInternet.in*“. *Free Basics* is there labled by imagery like „green gardens surrounded by high walls“. When Zuckerberg on a much noticed visit to India during the fall last year expressed: „An unequal internet is better than no internet“, reproaches of his opponents, some of them celebrities, became more pronounced. There was talk about „land grab“ and „economic racism“. The discussion got to the point where several corporations – among them Indian Times – one of 37 chosen corporations whose websites (next to the one of facebook) was supposed to be launched by the end of November on the Zuckerberg-internet for the whole of India canceled cooperation with facebook. They joined the campaign for net neutrality that protested along with 400.000 people against the facebook censored internet.

The public pressure with its request for unconditioned internet access is so powerful that by the 24th of December 2015 the Indian authority for the regulation of Telecommunication (TRAI) sees itself forced to deter the project until at least the questions risen about net neutrality have been amply clarified. The next day a noteworthy clear comment is made by the by no means leftist *Indian Express*:

„(...) These millions of users outside Europe and the USA must be brought to the internet as equal users. Otherwise digitalization will only reproduce the inequalities of class, sex, and race that we seek to erase y giving unlimited information to everyone“

Since then facebook has incited a true PR battle using rather questionable devices. Zuckerberg asks all Facebook users with a prepared form to protest against the unplugging of *Free Basics* demanding from the authorities to reinstate its operation. The campaign *SaveTheInternet.in* has protooled a number of cases in which users have described that without their doing or even inspite of their refusal they were added to the list of supporters of the facebook campaign. Even deactivated facebook accounts are supposed to have acted as supporters. His opponents are defamed with the with the statement: „Instead of giving people access to some basic Internet services for free, a small group of critics demand that people pay equally to access all Internet services; even if that means that 1 billion people can't afford to access any services.“

With the help of a gigantic PR campaign #DigitalIndia Zuckerberg and the Indian prime minister Modi try to regain mutually lost territory. Without success – on the 8th of February the authorities finally refuse the realisation of the project: No service is allowed to provide discriminating rates based on content. Period. For now and at least the next two years the decision is irrevocable. The broad resistance against facebook's colonial paternalism has had signaling effect on at least 35 other countries in which *Free Basics* is already operating: On the 2nd of January this year Egypt unplugged the facebook net after only two months without giving a reason. In Nigeria also strong protests can be heard against a limited internet. The solgan of the movement is:

„All the internet. All the people. All the time“

Of course modern techno-imperialism is not banned. Facebook continues to pay people in India, Mexico, Turkey, and the Philippines only four Euro per hour to research nude photos and pornography on its sites. That is half of the US minimum wage. Beyond facebook's immediate zone of influence a lot of the poor in Asia and Africa continue to work for famine wages on dumps where millions of tons of electronic waste is stacked. Children continue to work in (Coltan) mines to obtain rare earth elements that are used to satisfy our need for smart phones. The main burden of the technological still remains totally unsmart colonially exported.

## „decryption by call“ tipped in one day

Governments worldwide are presently trying to decapitate „end-to-end“- encryption of communication and data saving with renewed effort. The used strategy: secret services no longer try to pry into documents, mails, audio-, and text-messages through the back-door alone. Security services now aggressively demanding to be let in by the front-door referring to global terrorism. After the Indian government had restricted the acceptable length of encryption keys, it launched a draft law in September 2015 according to which every encrypted communication has to be preserved in clear letters for a period of 90 days to be delivered at request to security services. This home based data preservation is supposed to be valid for any private or business-related data traffic.

The uproar and immediately following resistance was overwhelmingly massive. Published on Monday, the 21. of September 2015 and corrected in the late afternoon with the exceptions of WhatsApp and Facebook the law was completely withdrawn on Tuesday (after only one day!)

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