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EDITORIAL NOTE

HERMAN WASSERMAN

The accelerated globalization of media, especially as a result of technological advances during recent decades, has impacted greatly on the way media and journalism is being understood in the developed world. Media have become pervasive in everyday life, and new media technologies have blurred the distinction between producers and consumers. Distant regions of the world have been brought in close proximity due to the global reach of media, and global media organisations have aggressively penetrated new markets around the globe.

Several critics have argued that the global flow of informational and cultural content is not only a one-way street — in the era of global media, contraflows and hybridities have emerged that challenge binary perceptions of global informational flows. Yet media and communication scholarship is still dominated by perspectives from the global North, due in part to the political economy of research and publishing. The result is that experiences based on the interaction between media and society in the developed world are given the status of theory, only rarely to be challenged by counter-perspectives from other regions of the world.

It would be too crude and simplistic to equate the imbalance in media flows with a new type of colonialism, yet it cannot be denied that current global asymmetries of power map onto the history of colonial domination and subjection. Although globalization does not equal imperialism, the process of globalization cannot be fully understood without understanding the history of colonialism and its persistent legacies.

To understand the way media constructs and impacts upon global society today, it is therefore necessary to link our view of contemporary global media architectures, markets and flows with the history of colonialism and decolonization; the persistent patterns of domination and exclusion with colonial and postcolonial discourse; and refuse an ahistorical approach to the challenge for equitable and ethical global media.

Herman Wasserman is a professor of Journalism and Media Studies at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom (H.J.Wasserman@sheffield.ac.uk).

This themed issue deals with research questions related to the above approach to global media. Not all the articles in this issue are of the critical nature characterized by Raka Shome and Radha S. Hegde (2002) in their seminal article on the intersections between postcolonial theory and communication. The issue does feature critical contributions such as that of Shome, who continues her exploration of the intersections between postcolonial and communication studies in this issue, but also includes more descriptive contributions which chart recent developments in global media or provide case studies of media in settings in the Global South.

In her article, Raka Shome again argues for the importance of examining postcolonial relations in communication and media studies. She suggests two new areas of investigation - affect and technology - that she argues are of importance to communication scholars. For Shome these two areas constitute some new realms of postcoloniality that await significant examination from communication studies, and it underscores the significance that these two areas have for a postcolonial communication framework. For communication studies, especially as it relates to issues around globalization, postcolonial studies could provide communication studies an avenue of closer political engagement with the social. As Shome points out, communication studies have tended to favour apolitical and 'sanitized' models of inquiry, which are inadequate to with the complex power relations within which global communications are enmeshed in the contemporary moment.

Such power relations attendant upon global communications is a point of focus in Last Moyo's article on the representation of the Zimbabwean crisis on CNN. Moyo argues that the global media in their coverage of the crisis have tended to foreground human rights and good governance issues at the expense of other perspectives which could have helped to explain the multi-faceted nature of the Zimbabwean crisis. Taking CNN's representations of the crisis as a case study, Moyo argues that while CNN played an important role to promote human rights within that context, the appropriation of this discourse was largely selective and race and class remained its cardinal principles for agenda setting. Moyo is of the opinion that in the global age, global news media need a paradigm shift 'from Eurocentricism to polycentricism' where its news must embody and articulate the multiple narratives and worldviews of the postcolony.

Staying with the coverage of Africa in the global media, is Levi Obijiofor's article on media discourses about Africa. Obijiofor argues that Western media increasingly engage in distortions and selective reporting about Africa, and asks the questions: Why is Africa depicted in the Western media as an economic disaster, a continent of contradictions, a continent marked by political instability, poverty, diseases, as well as bizarre traditional belief systems and cultural practices? Does bad news about Africa make good news copy for Western journalists? While the imbalances in global news flows have been a recurring complaint since the New World Information and Communication Order debates in the 1970s, Obijiofor also puts some of the blame of the warped discourses about Africa at the

continent's own door. He points to the lack of free and independent journalism in many African countries, and urges African countries to adopt new technologies to facilitate improvements in the socioeconomic conditions of their people.

Issues of media representation is also the point of focus in Viola Milton's article, in which she discusses the construction of social identities on South African television after apartheid. Milton explores the idea of 'diversified cultural citizenship' in contemporary South Africa, pointing to the opposing vectors of identity construction as seeking at once homogeneity and heterogeneity. She presents a case study of a popular soap opera on the South African public broadcaster to explore how difference is negotiated on South African television and how concepts such as 'rainbow identity', 'African Renaissance', 'South African' and 'African' are (re-) inscribed in an attempt to reverse the impact of colonization.

We return to Zimbabwe in Zvenyika Mugari's article on national ICT policy formulation. ICTs are widely seen as facilitators of media globalization, but how do the development of these technologies play out in a postcolonial locality? Mugari points to debates on the digital divide which tend to articulate the divide in terms of levels of communications infrastructure and tele-density differentials between rural and urban areas or between developing countries and the developed world. Drawing on empirical evidence, he argues that these new technologies tend to reconfigure communities across new spatio-temporal boundaries, resulting in new forms of presences and absences, inclusions and exclusions that call for more rigorous action research of many different ICT initiatives already on the ground in many parts of Africa.

The recurring theme in this issue of global flows and contraflows is given a visual rendition by Myriam Redondo in her article on new visualization tools for understanding global communication tools. Cartography has always been a concern for postcolonial critics, who argued that dominant projections of the world like those of Mercator serve to validate a particular Eurocentric vision of the world. Redondo's article gathers some new visualization tools that are leading to maps which allow a new point of view in the classic perceptions of the World and its 'others'. She argues that these new maps might have the potential to complement and renew classic approaches to International Communication.

Taken together, it is hoped that the articles collected in this issue reiterate the need for critical-theoretical as well as empirically grounded interrogations of global media, the constellations of power within which they are embedded and from where they provide constructions of the postcolony in the current globalized moment.

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POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES: MAPPING NEW TERRAINS OF INVESTIGATION

RAKA SHOME

This article explores the intersections of postcolonial and communication studies. Arguing for the importance of examining postcolonial relations in communication and media studies, this article in particular discusses two areas of investigation — affect and technology — that are of importance to communication scholars. It argues that these two areas constitute some new realms of postcoloniality that await significant examination from communication studies, and it underscores the significance that these two areas have for a postcolonial communication framework.

Keywords: postcolonial, affect, technology, modernity, tradition, diaspora, transnational, communication, media

It has been well over a decade now since communication studies first began to engage with postcolonial studies. Since about the middle 1990s, we witnessed a growing (but still limited) interest in postcolonial cultural logics as they inform relations of communication and culture. August 2002 saw the appearance of the first ever special issue on this topic in a communication studies journal generously published by *Communication Theory* (guest edited by Shome, Hegde & Grossberg). Today one merely has to attend an NCA (National Communication Association) or ICA (International Communication Association) conference to witness the increase in the number of papers that have postcolonial, globalization, or diaspora in their title. So it is not necessary (at least one hopes) in 2009 to justify that

Raka Shome is a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University (r.shome@yahoo.com).

postcolonial studies have begun to impact communication studies and, one hopes, transform it.¹

When I first began working on postcolonial studies in the early 1990s in the U.S. one hardly heard the term even mentioned in communication studies. Thank God that is not the case anymore. But still, communication studies has a long way to go in engaging the cultural politics of the postcolonial.² By this I simply mean that while there have been some engagements of postcolonial conditions by communication scholars, the intersections between postcoloniality and relations of communication still require more attention. Or, to say this differently, if we can agree that relations of postcoloniality keep changing as cultural, political and economic structures of the contemporary world continue to shift in complex ways, then the powerlines that connect postcoloniality with communicative relations are also ever shifting and changing. Hence the relationship between postcoloniality and communication does not constitute a foregone conclusion. It is always awaiting new discoveries, new interrogations, and new answers. Much of this paper is concerned with examining such new and emerging relationships between postcolonial and communication studies.

In what follows, I chart out a couple of contemporary cultural areas where I believe postcolonial studies require significant intervention from communication scholars. I want to mention as an aside that while work has been done in postcolonial communication studies on issues such as media representations and media flows (that have constituted a primary focus of communication scholars) there are new, emerging, conditions that are centrally informed by postcolonial logics that also require the attention of communication scholars. It is to some of these logics and conditions that I now turn.

POSTCOLONIAL AFFECTS³

The notion of affect has received minimal attention from communication scholars. An exception is the work of Lawrence Grossberg who has consistently argued for the importance of examining affect as a site of cultural politics. Grossberg in various places (1992, 1997 among others) has argued that communication studies have been too invested in issues of signification and identity (that is, too often we take identity as a starting point for our examinations of power instead of addressing how particular fields of affect position us in particular ways resulting in particular kinds of identity and its politics). I want to extend Grossberg's argument to the field of postcolonial communication studies; I want to suggest that our times are such that we are witnessing the production of complex postcolonial affects that mobilize our identities in significant ways.

Explaining affect as a type of 'psychic energy', Grossberg discusses it as 'the strength of investment' (in Harding and Pribram, 2004, p. 873) people have in their practices,

identities, experiences, everyday life etcetera that determines 'what matters to an individual' (Harding and Pribram, 2004, p. 873), what s/he values, and the emotional intensity that structures those values (Harding and Pribram, 2004, p. 873). (See also Shome, forthcoming). Similarly Sarah Ahmed's (2004) work on the cultural politics of emotion has argued for the importance of how particular emotions (for instance our hatred towards 'terrorists') may serve to 'align some subjects with some others and against other others? How do emotions move between bodies? ...I argue that emotions play a crucial role in the "surfacing" of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs' (p. 117).

The notion of postcolonial affect that I offer here borrows from Wise and Velayutham (2006) notion of 'transnational affect': 'the circulation of bodily emotive affect between transnational subjects and between subjects and symbolic fields which give qualitative intensity to vectors and routes thus reproducing belonging to and boundaries of transnational fields' (p. 3). Following from Wise and Velayutham (2006) by postcolonial affects I mean the social emotions produced by various contemporary logics of postcoloniality (e.g. logic of militarism; of terrorism; of new age spirituality; of free market consumerism; of media globalization; of immigration and more) that result in various affective fields that position identities in particular ways and illicit particular emotions from them that structure relationalities between identities.

Take, for instance, the case of immigration (and I use the U.S. context as a case in point) which is one of the central contemporary logics of postcoloniality. Certain immigrant bodies (for instance Mexicans) illicit particular kinds of emotional responses from the public (disgust, hatred, condescension). These emotional or affective responses serve to mobilize and position such identities in particular ways (that is, they are criminalized and constructed as thieves). These emotions themselves are both an outcome, as well as constitutive of, cultural logics of immigration. The emotions of hate that the public feels towards Mexican bodies constitute an example of a postcolonial affect; 'structures of feelings' through which a relationality between Mexican bodies as 'other' and the dominant culture is constituted. This is how, to return to Ahmed's argument noted earlier, emotions move between bodies setting up a relation between them; a relation that is never fixed for the movement of emotions between bodies, i.e. postcolonial affects that produce a relationality of identities shift. Postcolonial affects are contextual because what affects emerge, and dominate a given social landscape, at a particular time have to do with larger geopolitics that may inform local (and also global) politics in particular ways.

Consider how after 9-11, the black body in the U.S - ever the site of fear - was momentarily relieved from the public's critical gaze. The postcolonial logic of terrorism that framed the events and public perception after 9-11 resulted in the production of an affective field in which, as the brown Muslim body became a site of fear, the black body was rearticulated through an affective landscape in which it became 'one of us' instead of 'them,'

however temporary. The postcolonial gaze of the dominant culture shifted through, and as a result of, an affective field ruled by fear, terror, and hatred that was directed towards bodies that looked 'international' or that looked like a 'Muslim' body while domestic non-white bodies (that could be visibly identified as belonging to the territory and space of the U.S.) were temporarily relieved of the critical gaze. Thus, the study of postcolonial affects, I want to argue, must play a primary role in the examination of postcolonial communication relations because it is crucial to understanding how identity politics shift, change, and are rearticulated through and by affective energies.

Postcolonial studies, given its emergence in English departments in the U.S. academy, have been primarily invested in issues of textuality—that is, the focus remains too often on the textual or representational politics of colonialism. But when we begin our postcolonial interrogations with the issue of affects, we are then also compelled to change some of the very questions that we may ask about colonialism and its cultural relations. Or, to put it differently, taking affect as an important focus of our investigations invites us to rethink the political in postcoloniality in rather different ways. Moving away from the primacy of signification, or the primacy of identity (without however denying their significance to questions of the political), the issue of affects invites us to examine how emotions function in postcoloniality; how they become political; and how through that politicization they enable certain logics and regimes of colonialism in contemporary times while at the same time that they are also outcomes of these logics.

Contemporary militarism after 9-11 is an example. Dominant emotions about 'Muslims' in the West that have a historical legacy certainly shaped our response to the very attacks of 9-11; these historical emotions were re-intensified in the present after 9-11 and led to, while at the same time were shored up by, a regime of militarism and geopolitics that changed the contours of the world forever. The 'clash of civilization' logic through which much of the U.S. and other nations of the West unleashed a world wide Islamophobia was also a clash of emotions. This was a clash in which the emotions of humiliation, anger, and hatred of the U.S. and its allies towards the Muslim world could constitute the grounds upon which a regime of militarism could be launched while the 'emotions' of the Muslim world became criminalized and marginalized in the process.

Indeed, to allude to Sarah Ahmed's quotation cited earlier, the aftermath of 9-11 certainly has shown us how in contemporary postcoloniality, emotions do move between bodies. But they move not just between bodies, they also move between nations and national identities often redrawing their relationships with each other in ways that rewrite the lines of geopolitics and belonging. The works of scholars such as Tuathail (1996) and Grewal (2005) among other have indicated that geopolitics is linked to biopolitics. One could also argue that contemporary geopolitics (which is always imbricated in logics of colonialism) is also linked to what may be crudely called emotional politics—which is also a politics of belonging, of identity, of connections and disconnections, of nations and their relationships

with each other, and of the management of population (through the reification of emotions such as fear, hatred) both within and without the nation. The politics of postcolonialism is thus also a politics of affect.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION

Another area that I want to argue also awaits significant examination is new technologies⁴. New technologies such as cell phones, online shopping, webcams, etcetera have today become signifiers of contemporary modernity. Such signifiers of contemporary modernity articulate, and are rearticulated by, new postcolonial logics of connections and disconnections. How so? As this is clearly an emerging postcolonial field, no conclusive comments can be offered. But let me still try.

New technologies rearticulate the field of race through a politics of the visual and the auditory that produce new forms of postcolonial connections and disconnections. My cell phone rings while I am at South City Mall in Kolkata. I am at the food court at the Mall relishing some authentic Bengali food—hilsa fish and curry. My cousin brother in London is calling. Away from ‘home’ (Kolkata, India) he too misses Bengali food. He is calling me excitedly to tell me that he is in Brick Lane in London—a Bangladeshi hub where you can find authentic Bengali food. We both chat excitedly about eating hilsa fish (a signature Bengali delicacy). For us, hilsa fish is tied to memories of old family get togethers during special occasions where we would all relish several pieces of this delicious Bengali fish. I ask him how he is enjoying his afternoon (referring to London time) weekend hilsa meal and he says he loves it. I too tell him that I am relishing my dinner (referring to Kolkata time) at the food court in South City Mall.

This is a complex diasporic connection enabled by the mobility of cell phones. Unlike landlines, where one has to be stationary—that is, he and I could only have had this conversation when we were done with our experience of eating hilsa fish and come home possibly to call each other—this is a heightened mobility of the auditory that intensifies the diasporic connection across borders as time and space disappear. Both of us experience, through that auditory mobility, the joy of eating hilsa fish ‘together’ at the same time (as though we are back again at the same family dining table) while actually being positioned in different geographies. My brother then texts me after we are done eating and have hung up: his message reads ‘thanks for joining me for lunch’ (lunch referring to London time); I reply back ‘well, thanks for joining me for dinner’ (dinner referring to Indian time). In this brief experience, the ‘local’ (hilsa fish as an authentic signifier of Bengali identity) transcends, as it were, the local (the geography of Bengal) and in the process rearticulates two different geographically situated transnational identities once again back into the ‘local’ (eating authentic Bengali cuisine while being stretched across time and space) but a local

whose flavor has now been remade through, and enabled by, the global flow of technology. In this re-making the flavor of hilsa fish intersects with the nostalgia of old family get togethers, and becomes re-constituted through complex ingredients of the global in which differences of time and space both (seemingly) disappear while at the same time that these differences also come together through global technology. This is a connection in which a transnational interaction becomes heightened through the meeting of technology and cuisine and articulates two transnational identities through a nostalgia for 'home' that is a characteristic feature of diasporic identities.

Consider other examples as well. Online shopping spaces that cater to South Asian diasporic consumers have emerged all over in cyberspace. Such online shopping sites invite consumption from diasporic Indian consumers especially at the time of religious festivals and traditional occasions. Diwali, for instance, is a nationwide Indian religious festival: it is the festival of lights and fireworks. All over India it is a time of gift giving, celebration, and family togetherness. Sitting in New York in front of my computer, I am able to order Diwali sweets online (especially some traditional Indian sweets) and flowers that will be delivered on Diwali day early morning to my family members in Kolkata. While I cannot be with them, and eat with them the sweets I send, these sweets nonetheless become not just sweets in this diasporic connection enabled by technology. They function as a transnational symbol of my nostalgia and desire for an Indian tradition while being in an another modernity: the United States. The global online shopping sites that target Indian diasporas are often very successful because they articulate, in their marketing practices, religious festivals and other traditional holidays, thus creating, and providing a space for, the expression of a diasporic nostalgia that re-articulates tradition through the modernity of global technology.

Consider also webcams and new telephonic technologies such as Skype phones. These new technologies enable new forms of diasporic connections with families and friends globally scattered. The ailing and ageing mother in India, ever worried about her diasporic daughter or son, can now 'see' her or him and vice versa, even if it is for a few minutes each day through webcams. She can speak to her or him without worrying about escalating telephone bills due to the free service that Skype generates. The grandmother who cannot be with her grandchild in the U.S., or London or Australia or Hong Kong can regularly 'speak' to, and see, the grandchild through the space enabled by the webcam and free Skype connections.

In instances such as these, diasporic familial connections intensify across time and space and their multiple modernities and traditions. Grandmother and grand-daughter develop a diasporic relationship through webcams and free phone lines; husband and wife, where the husband may have gone to the West on a year long project while the wife stays back in India, are able to maintain some semblance of a relationship and feel great that they can at least 'see' each other, however, partially a few times a day. Indeed new technologies such as these enable and foster virtual diasporic relationships that often become more 'real'

than the 'real.' By this I mean that the distances that lie inbetween the multiple geographies in which such diasporic subjects are situated due to global flows and currents today, and that are traversed by such new technologies and the fragmented forms of communication they enable, solidify love, desire, and caring towards each other on a daily basis (where both parties are able to engage in such diasporic communications at their leisure and in their own spaces). There is nostalgia that distance creates that nurtures the relationship.

When you are in the same city, relationship between mother and daughter, son and father may sour; you are in each other's faces (there is often no nostalgia that can bind the relationship; there is no distance inbetween that can nurture the relationship; you try to stay out of each other's way). But with diasporic distances that can now be traversed through new technologies the desire to connect to the overseas son, daughter, or grandson/granddaughter is often far more intense and produces far more desire for each other. Such new technologies that ironically enable such desire for communication often make such relationships more 'real' (and ideal) while relationships in the same city or household may fade away clouded by bitterness, collisions, and adjustments that sharing the same physical space often results in.

A pertinent question here may be, well, how is this different from older forms of communication such as telephone? That too can sustain nostalgia and desire for relatives abroad. Yes, but not with the same level of intensification. Computer cameras enable us to 'see' the person regularly, each day; free phone services such as Skype whose software can be downloaded onto one's computer and that incurs little economic costs enable a 'freedom' of connection that is different from the heavy costs incurred by international long distance telephone bills. Additionally emails, blogs and Facebook (in which you can post your photographs) also enable a transnational familial connection that produces a sense of proximity and relationality (however virtual) that old fashioned telephone connections simply cannot replicate.

Arjun Appadurai's (1996) work has been seminal for the discussion of media, diaspora, and migration. A central thesis of his work is that global media flows enable the production of post-national communities and subjects. While Appadurai's work has been critiqued for undermining the role of the national at the expense of the global (and I am not interested in entering this debate here as it is outside the scope of this paper) an interesting implication of his argument that is relevant to my examples above is how tradition itself is being re-nationalized through global flows of technology. This results in a situation in which tradition, instead of being a construct or practice frozen in time, in the past, becomes re-energized through global connections provided by new technologies.

Thus, an important outcome of how new technological flows provide new forms of connections between diaspora and the nation is that they often enable the coming together of tradition and modernity in complex ways that illustrate that tradition and modernity are not necessarily opposing forces and that tradition itself can be reified, and globally solidified,

by the forces of (as in the above cases—Diwali, eating hilsa fish) contemporary modernity. So in contemporary globalization, the line between tradition and modernity becomes blurred—a blurring that invites us to rethink these conceptual categories and the conventional assumptions that underlie them.

The Diwali festival at ‘home’ (in India) takes on new meaning as the overseas Indian can now participate in it (however partially) by sending gifts through online shopping spaces and Diwali greetings through electronic cards backed with religious tunes (that many of these online shopping spaces offer) that will arrive in the email account of the loved ones at ‘home’ in India on Diwali day. Tradition itself can now be downloaded through the computer—live moving images of a Diwali festival at home can quickly be uploaded on YouTube or sent as a webcast to the loved one overseas that is informed by an instantaneity that enables the overseas diasporic to once again virtually participate, as it were, in the ‘traditional’ religious festival at ‘home.’

Thus, new technologies that enable new forms of postcolonial connections invite us to rethink the relationship between tradition and modernity that has always been central in postcolonial interrogations and in colonial encounters. When tradition can be reified and virtualized through some of the latest forms of modernity, what happens to ‘tradition’? In particular, what happens to our assumption that tradition is static and local, and that the modern is mobile, changing, and a signifier of the present (which today is synonymous with globalization)? Global flows of technology that articulate new logics of postcolonial diasporic connections certainly unsettle conventional notions of tradition and modernity; they unsettle the dialectic of tradition and modern and invite us to see that tradition is not a frozen category. Tradition itself today is being shored up by globalization; similarly modernity is not necessarily just about looking forward beyond tradition; forces of contemporary modernity (such as new technologies) enable re-creations of traditions, allowing new cross border flows of traditions such that tradition itself can become an integral part of the landscape of contemporary modernities.

But one must at the same time be careful about monolithically celebrating new technologies as seemingly constituting utopian possibilities of diasporic connections. As critical studies of new technologies have shown, new technologies certainly enable new forms of access but they also deny access to the underprivileged. If one cannot connect to the world without a computer today, then there are too many who live outside of these modern forms of communication. Diasporic connections enabled by new technologies are extremely class based; they do not connect to those on the other side of globalization, those outside of the luxuries and flows of globalization. A poor mother in a village in South India, for instance, would not be able to virtually connect to her son on Diwali day who may be living the life of a menial worker in the Middle East. Her primary communication with him may still be in the form of letters he and she write to each other, or through a monthly telephone call from a local phone booth in the village. Thus diasporic intensifications

enabled by new technologies reproduce a cosmopolitanism that is anchored on class based mobilities. Such intensifications however cannot expand diasporic connections across borders and boundaries where globalization only selectively flows in. Gayatri Spivak (2003) has talked about the 'restricted permeability' (p. 16) of global frontiers; new logics of diaspora that are enabled by new technologies provide one instance of such restricted permeability.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary logics of postcoloniality are increasingly shored up by forces of communication. New forms of connections and disconnections, new logics of belonging and mobilities, are enabled by relations of communication and its various informational structures. As a result, I want to suggest that the terrain of postcolonial studies, thus far dominated by fields such English and Comparative literature, finds itself leaning more towards problematics that concern, and should concern, the field of communication studies. This is not to suggest that disciplines such as Comparative or English literature do not have anything to offer postcolonial studies as, indeed, the wealth of important work in Comparative Literature and postcolonial studies certainly attest otherwise. Rather, what I am suggesting is that the shifting landscapes of contemporary postcolonial relations are unleashing new logics of postcolonial connections (and disconnections) that are significantly imbricated in logics and relations of communications. Consequently, communication scholars need to engage such logics of the postcolonial. Such engagement would also expand the horizons of communication studies—a field that, for the most part, has been rather apolitical in its engagements with the social. This is a field that has tended, thus far, to lean quite heavily on quantitative and sanitized qualitative models of communicative inquiries. Engaging with emerging communicative and mediated logics of the postcolonial would serve to re-energize our field while at the same time that it would re-energize postcolonial studies through an attention to complex communicative logics of the global in contemporary times. Communication studies, thus far on the margins of postcolonial scholarship, today finds itself in a moment where the postcolonial awaits new interrogations from a communication framework. Our discipline must seize this moment; in doing so, it would expand the theoretical frontiers of both communication studies and postcolonial studies in ways that would be mutually beneficial.

ENDNOTES

1. See here Shome & Hegde (2002).
2. Examples of scholars working on postcolonial issues (broadly conceived) in communication studies include among others John Erni, Nitin Govil, Ien Ang, Kuan-Hsing-Chen, Annabelle Sreberny, Soyini Madison, David Morley, Koichi Iwabuchi, Herman Wasserman, Shakuntala Rao, Hemant Shah, Radhika Parameswaran, Sujata Moorti, Marwan Kraidy, Michael Curtin, Shanti Kumar, Dilip Gaonkar, Radhika Gajjala, Radha Hegde, Paula Chakravorty, K.E. Supriya, Youna Kim, Rona Halualani. The order of names here is arbitrary; it is not meant to indicate a hierarchy of importance. Further, the list here is clearly not exhaustive but rather offers a sampling of scholars in communication studies. I must also admit that given that the underlying impulse and critique of this essay is geared towards communication studies in the western academy (primarily the U.S.), most of the names included here make up a sample of scholars who are primarily situated in the West (and in particular the U.S.).
3. For an elaboration of this point, see Shome (forthcoming) in *Blackwell Companion to Intercultural Communication*, Eds R. Halualani & T. Nakayama (forthcoming).
4. In communication studies, works of scholars such as Radhika Gajjala and Paula Chakravorty constitute some exceptions. See also Shome (2006).

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LAND, RACE, AND NATION IN THE GLOBAL AGE: INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AND THE REPORTING OF ELECTIONS IN FRAGMENTED SOCIETIES

LAST MOYO

Zimbabwe has been going through a political and economic crisis for nearly a decade. Although the causes of the crisis are complex and multifaceted, the global media have tended to foreground human rights and good governance issues at the expense of other perspectives. This article focuses on CNN's representations of the crisis within the context of an election. It argues that while CNN played an important role in human rights within that context, the appropriation of this discourse was largely selective and race and class remained its cardinal principles for agenda setting. I conclude that in the global age, global news media need a paradigm shift from Eurocentricism to polycentricism where its news must embody and articulate the multiple narratives and worldviews of the postcolony.

Keywords: Elections, global media, Western media, discourse, postcolony, race, land, news agenda, post colonial

It is now becoming increasingly clear that the collapse of the socialist block more than a decade ago had far reaching consequences for the African post-independence nation states

Last Moyo is a senior lecturer in Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa (last.moyo@wits.ac.za).

whose fledgling democracies were still very weak and fragile (Bhabha, 2005; Pilger, 2002; Tsie, 1996). The emergence of an all-domineering discourse of globalization in the nineties to define and structure the new unipolar dispensation, meant that these post colonial states had to relinquish or ignore certain aspects of their electoral and national agendas due to the pressure exerted on national economic policy by the neoliberal globalization's market forces. As Tsie (1996, p. 75) argues, the free market reforms forced southern African governments to fold back on economic matters, yet 'selective and co-ordinated state intervention [was] a necessary condition for growth and development in the SADC region.' Globalization's push for the free market economy also meant that elections as a way of generating consent around certain public policy and developmental goals between the state and its citizens became heavily compromised due to the erosion of autonomy in framing national politics and economics. Suffice to say that from this perspective, globalization weakened the social contract between the state and citizens in postcolonial Africa. Globalization's language was deregulation, not decolonisation, free market reform and not the quintessential agrarian reform usually indispensable for addressing inequalities in most postcolonial societies. In an almost idealistic fashion that ignored the poignant historical experiences of post colonies, globalization immediately constructed a new myth that was inconsistent with the experiences of these communities claiming that 'human beings possess equal moral status... and persons are subjects of concern for everyone' (Hayden, 2005, p. 11). Suddenly in this new dispensation, all global citizens shared a universal responsibility to protect each other regardless of national boundaries, culture, religion and race. In the so-called global village, the human race was said to be like a big family of equals where world peoples and governments will always assist each other in pursuit of greater happiness and development for all.

The power of globalization as a myth can be seen in that even today most people perceive it as an unquestionable and inevitable reality (Koffman, 2003; Rothkop, 1997). It 'is assumed simply to exist, rather than being understood as part of a politics of naming' (Rizvi, 2007, p. 257). The global media, famously castigated by Herman & McChesney (1997) as the new missionaries of corporate capitalism, are the ones that are deployed in generating a milieu of ideological meanings around events such as national elections, referendums and the national political elite. They frame reality not necessarily truthfully or objectively, but in ways that raise interesting debates about the role of Western journalism in the African continent and the developing world.

In view of the above issues, this article discusses how CNN reported Zimbabwe's combined presidential and legislative elections between March and June 2008. It focuses on the discourses that were appropriated by the conglomerate's news narratives and tries to problematize them against the backdrop of the postcolonial realities of the colonial legacy and globalization's free market politics. The main question that runs through the critique is that of the extent to which the global media, as the agents of globalization, can be seen as

fighting for justice on behalf of all citizens of the world. How do they represent post colonial realities and in whose interests? For example, as an international organisation, CNN's editorial policy clearly states that its news will always be independent and that it will always strive to quote diverse international public opinion on issues (Time Warner website, 13 October 2008). In one of its news commercials, CNN also boasts that its news is always based on a deep understanding of the culture and history of the communities that it covers in its news. Such claims by CNN imply that it consciously tries to transcend its structural, ideological and institutional limitations to be a voice of the voiceless wherever and whenever such people can be found. This point is critically examined against the backdrop of the dialectic between postcolonialism and globalization. As Massey (1994, p. 3) rightly observes, there is always a power geometry to globalization, 'some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving- end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it.' Bhabha (2005, p. 12) also contends that there is always a 'colonial shadow [that] falls across the successes of globalization.' Against this backdrop, the article also implicitly deals with the question of what prospects exist for democratic communication in a globalized world through international television networks such as CNN.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The agenda setting theory informs and underpins arguments that are made in this article. As a theory, agenda setting emphasizes the centrality of the news media in influencing public opinion by selecting or excluding certain issues, events or individuals as newsworthy or not newsworthy (Fulton, 2005; Entman, 2006; McCombs, 2005; Weaver, 1977; Goffman, 1974). Fulton (2005, p. 223) contends that 'by covering some events or issues (and omitting others) the news media put these events on the public agenda...as issues of importance that need to be debated.' Through focusing on two recent elections in Zimbabwe which were held on March 29 and June 27, 2008, I argue that CNN played a critical role in framing the salient issues about the election and the candidates. The first poll, which allegedly failed to produce a clear winner between the presidential candidates, was generally peaceful and this gave CNN an opportunity to construct what it wanted the voters to consider as the salient issues of the campaign. Here the news agenda was primarily focused on white farmers, their private property rights and other negative issues relating to Mugabe's land redistribution policy. In the second round elections, I argue that there was a discourse shift in CNN's coverage from the latter to constructing the run-off election around violence, black voters and their civil and political rights particularly by the state and the ruling party supporters. Through discourse analysis of news myths, I also extend the argument that the media can no longer just be seen as setting the agenda of *what* voters think

about in an election, but also *how* to think about those issues that they prime as salient (McQuail, 2005; Paletz, 1987). Agenda setting is not just about salience transfer and the framing of public debate, but it also involves how news is also used by the news media to 'confirm the myths and stories that we already believe to be true and obvious' (Fulton, 2005, p. 223) about candidates, their policy strengths and weaknesses. Discourse analysis is used to analyse the myths or ideologies that are embedded in news about candidates. This method is appropriate because it is generally perceived as pivotal in understanding how discourse is implicated in reproducing myths within which individuals or events may be framed (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2003; Fairclough, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Discourse analysis is therefore used to examine how class, race and other ideological interests are articulated in CNN's news agenda.

CONSTRUCTING ELECTION AGENDAS: HALF TRUTHS, OMISSIONS, COMMISSIONS, AND THE SELECTIVE APPROPRIATION OF DISCOURSES

In the global age, global media such as CNN have tremendous influence in shaping public opinion on social, economic and political events taking place in most parts of the world (Ismali, 2008; Pilger, 2002; Herman & McChesney, 1997; Bagdikian, 2004). The deregulation of the developing world's media environments in the nineties resulted in the domination of their markets by well equipped transnational media corporations which now wield overwhelming influence in setting national and global news agendas (Van Ginneken, 2007; Mohammadi, 2005; McChesney, 1999). For example, CNN which is a part of the gigantic Time Warner conglomerate is viewed by more than 1.5 billion people in over 212 countries and has hundreds of news offices and correspondents across the world (Van Ginneken, 2007; Bagdikian, 2004). In collapsed economies such as Zimbabwe where inflation was nearly 2 million percent during the time of the elections, global media virtually face no resistance to their news hegemony because of the weak and compromised local or national media systems (Ranger, 2005; Moyo, 2003; Zaffiro, 2002). Ultimately, the different voices and worldviews from the national media usually end up drowning in the semiotic excess of the unidirectional news flows from the international media. In the absence of strong national media institutions, the risk of media imperialism where foreign media and its concomitant corporate interests dominate the ideological and political landscape of the weaker states legitimised through the rhetoric of globalization is seen as high (Boyd-Barrett, 2005; Aginam, 2005). The result of this is that the national perspective of postcolonies can be reduced to a secondary or subaltern view because of the dominance of the global

mainstream across the world. Van Ginneken explains the nature of this ideological domination:

Most media material circulating across continents is produced by Euro-American media organisation. They primarily employ Western media people to cater to Western media audiences. Non-Western media people and non-Western media audiences play only secondary roles. This is particularly true for news. Not only do major definers come from the US...and other Anglophone settler states, but even within these societies certain social groups are over-represented (Van Ginneken, 2007, p. 71).

Hence, the complexity surrounding the metropolitan media's representations of the postcolonies is that Anglo-American media do not necessarily espouse a homogenous national perspective, but the views and interests of certain social groups or classes in the West. I therefore argue that even with the advent of globalization, race and class are still very important indices for understanding postcolonial representations in global media. I also contend that some of these were cardinal factors in CNN's construction of the election agenda which was largely based on half truths, omissions, commissions and the selective appropriation of certain discourses (Ndlela, 2005; Willems, 2005). Clearly, as a reconstruction of the events, news from the international media does not present the objective reality, but a competing version of 'truth' (Koch, 1990, Allan, 2004). In discourse analysis, these competing representations of reality are generally seen as not neutral, but as directly or indirectly linked to the 'opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control' (Wodak, 2001, p. 2). As such, my critique of CNN's news also seeks to delineate the intricate ideological connections between Western institutions and their media on postcolonial representations. However, it is imperative to understand at the same time that regardless of the negative ideological factors, Western media are still somehow able to play a role in democracy and human rights in Africa and other parts of the developing world (Zhao & Hackett, 2005; Mitchell, 2007). The only question is on whose behalf do they play that role and how effective is it?

FIRST ROUND ELECTION: MUGABE, WHITE FARMERS, AND THE LAND ISSUE AS THE PRIMARY AGENDA

One of the major techniques of news narratives is to frame stories around personalities or individuals (Allan, 2004; Koch, 1990). In political news, they often do this by focusing on an individual and constructing them as the protagonist of a story where the myths of heroism, villainy or turpitude are used not only to thematise the story, but also to produce a sense of conflict in it. This news strategy always looks as a normal and natural way of reporting issues, especially in elections where individuals campaign for political office. In

CNN, the individualisation or focalisation of news was through Mugabe who became the archetype of Zimbabwe's protracted crisis in the narratives of the election. Mugabe was repeatedly primed and framed as a former liberation hero who had turned dictator to destroy his country because of greed and selfishness. He was continuously represented as having transformed into a destructive, irresponsible and villainous character that symbolised continued suffering for Zimbabweans if they voted for him:

A hero of the country's civil war against the white Rhodesian government, Mugabe became the first black prime minister in 1980. But nearly, three decades later, he has consolidated his rule over all aspects of Zimbabwean life, and the country does not appear better for it... The economic free fall is traced to Mugabe's... controversial seizure of commercially white-owned farms in 2000. Mugabe gave the land to black Zimbabweans who he said were cheated under colonialist rule and white farmers who resisted were jailed (CNN, 30 March 2008).

Mugabe is represented by CNN as a power hungry individual who is merely interested in consolidating his rule regardless of the fact that the country is collapsing because of his long stay in power. Here, the subtle and ideological nature of news as a myth maker can be seen in how CNN spins information into a narrative where cause and effect are constructed as obvious and commonsensical. From a number of other possible news angles or frames, the crisis is limited only to Mugabe's long stay in power and his 'controversial seizure of commercially white-owned farms.' This act of simplification whose intended point is usually to mobilise polysemy and reduce ambiguity of a story by minimising other possible interpretations, unfortunately amounts to mystification through the selective articulation of phenomena by CNN. Fulton aptly explains this point:

By presenting events as the work of individual people, constructed as characters by reference to their names, ages, occupations, and often stereotyped or conventional attributes, news events suggest that most events are a result of individual human agency and their impact is to be perceived mainly through individual experience. At the same time, institutional factors, political relations or environmental consequences are often elided (Fulton, 2005, p. 242).

As Barthes (1982, p. 116) argued about narratives many years ago, 'myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing; it distorts: it is neither a lie nor a confession: It is an inflection.' The distortion by CNN here is in imputing the Zimbabwean crisis solely to Mugabe as an individual in both his official and personal capacity. Bagdikian (2003) and Chomsky (2004) contend that the big Western media such as CNN do not completely negate the 'truth' in their narratives, but tend to allude to it and then twist it and frame the narrative in a manner that promotes their agenda and is consistent with certain interests. They socialise Western

audiences to understand and judge other societies through stereotypes and perceived cultural differences, 'instead of political and economic processes by which we judge ourselves' (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 94). From this perspective, the use of binary oppositions of black versus white therefore sought to delineate the Zimbabwean crisis merely as an ethnocentric, racial conflict since, as CNN claims, 'Mugabe gave the land to black Zimbabweans who he said were cheated under colonialist rule.' Apart from these constructed polarities which obviously have an effect of not only misrepresenting the nature of the crisis in postcolonial Zimbabwe, there is an interesting point about modality where CNN seems to distance itself from the view that postcolonial racial disparities were a product of an unjust system that was itself based on racism. Conversely, CNN does not distance itself, professionally or otherwise, from the claim of 'white owned commercial farms.'

Mamdani (2002), who argues that most of the contemporary problems in Africa are directly linked to the legacy of colonialism, speaks of the 'bifurcated' colonial state where tribe and race were pivotal in one's 'inclusion or exclusion in a regime of rights', including land ownership rights. He posits that:

Ethnic citizenship does not just evoke a cultural difference. It [had] material consequences also. A civic citizen may acquire land- like any other material good- through transaction, and...rights of inheritance. But an ethnic citizen can claim land as a customary right, a kin-based claim that is a consequence of membership in an ethnic group (Mamdani, 2002, p. 22)

RACE AND ETHNICITY DEFINED THE WORLDVIEW AND SOCIAL RELATIONS OF THE COLONIAL EPOCH

Mamdani (2002, 1996) observes that the colonial discourse appropriated race and ethnicity and constructed them as political (not just cultural) identities where social institutions and the media were used to normalise and naturalise inequalities associated with these differences. Being white came with citizenship rights, including private property rights to land which was expropriated from the indigenous black people through violence and at times genocide (Sibanda, 2005, Collins, 2001). The political identities of black people were constructed within the discourse of tribe thus reducing them to natives (not citizens) who did not enjoy any legal protection to land ownership. The hypocrisy of the colonial discourse is in that 'unlike native, settler was not a legal identity. Everywhere [it] spoke of natives and not settlers' (Mamdani, 2002, p. 32). As such, being a native had negative political and economic consequences while being a settler was a ticket to rights and privileges which, in the case of Zimbabwe, engendered the postcolonial crisis due continued racial inequalities.

Perhaps the unintended or unconscious result of this colonial discourse in its postcolonial manifestation is that Western media always construct the identities of black people only as servants of a postcolonial capitalist order that still largely remains a colonial status quo. CNN falls into the trap of appropriating this colonial discourse because of its characterisation of the Zimbabwean crisis as a race question where 'evil Mugabe' has simply mobilised his black supporters to fight what it projects as the innocent white farmers. As Sachikonye (2004) contends, the Zimbabwean crisis was a product of a very deeply entrenched colonial legacy and arguments that limit it to human agency are simplistic and reductionistic:

In sum, land expropriation was a significant aspect of the process of colonial conquest and of modernisation through large scale commercial agriculture and proletarianisation. It was a major social engineering programme undertaken by the colonial state. The consequences of that programme of modernisation and social engineering would reverberate well beyond independence in 1980 into a new century (p. 5)

The problem is not necessarily CNN's exaggerated interest and focus on Mugabe and his land policy, but that this interest is not based on the acknowledgement of the colonial legacy and the problems of a settler white capitalist hegemony in post colonial Zimbabwe. As Raftopoulos (2004) observes, the Zimbabwean crisis is a very complex configuration of many class struggles which are not only linked to white farmers, but also workers, women, students, and other marginalised groupings. As I also argue elsewhere, it is a problem that is compounded by globalization's neoliberal policies of the free market economy (Moyo, 2007). CNN's emphasis on the race myth as its conceptual mapping of the crisis therefore shows its appropriation of the dominant stereotypes of Africa as a place of ethnic conflicts naturalised as the hegemonic lens of viewing the continent by the colonial and neo-colonial discourses (Mitchell, 2007; Shohat & Stam, 2000). In that sense, CNN can be accused of obscuring issues more than it reveals them.

Whereas CNN's personalisation of the news narratives can simplify stories to make them intelligible to its audiences, it also conversely undermines the context and processes that inform human agency. As a result, it becomes very difficult to understand why Mugabe and his supporters behave the way they do. To that extent, by refusing to acknowledge history, the coverage of the Zimbabwean crisis by CNN resembled how Western media generally represent the Palestinian and Israel conflict where the former are often depicted as violent stone throwing mobs. These media hardly contextualise Palestinian actions as resistance to occupation (Philo & Berry, 2004; Ratzkoff & Sut Jhally, 2004).

Similarly, the actions of Mugabe and his supporters were not constructed by CNN as a response to centuries old colonial dispossession but rather as motivated by racial hatred since those whites who try to resist land invasions are arrested. CNN's refusal to

acknowledge the colonial and postcolonial connections in the conflict so as to give a historically informed account not only amounts to simplification, but also disinformation through omission and commission. The use of binary oppositions of black aggression and white resistance or black perpetrators and white victims, obviously does not only sanitise the latter while demonising the former, but also oversimplifies what is otherwise a complex story. The Zimbabwean postcolonial experience has a well documented account of the role of Western powers which CNN hardly talked about in its news (Raftopoulos (2004; Sachikonye, 2003; Saunders, 2002; Stoneman; 1981). For example, Raftopoulos (2004, p. 3) argues that British influence in Zimbabwe's constitution entrenched the unjust land rights of the white settler minorities into the postcolonial order as 'issues around the radical restructuring of the legacy of economic inequality were effectively put on hold at independence.' At independence, the 'new constitution [crafted in London] constrained the capacity of those who had been dispossessed of their land to claim it' (Sachikonye, 2004, p. 6). Hence, CNN's focus on Mugabe as an old and somewhat irrational dictator who 'has ruled Zimbabwe with an iron fist for nearly 3 decades' (CNN, 28 March 2008), while true to some degree, fails to tell the Zimbabwean story in context and perspective. As Sachikonye (2004) further observes, good governance was always going to be a problem for any leader in the postcolony because of the pseudo-reconciliation where after independence, 'regardless of the history of expropriation,...all Zimbabweans, *especially the black majority* [my emphasis] were to enjoy abstract equality rights in the eyes of the law' (Ibid, 6).

While Mugabe as a candidate concentrated on his land reform programme as the key issue which he has always framed as a continuation of the decolonisation agenda, CNN ignored that and focused more on Zimbabwe's hyper inflation, unemployment, food shortages, lack of clean drinking water, and the low life expectance for Zimbabwean citizens. It stated that, 'Mugabe's land redistribution policies caused food production and agricultural exports to drop drastically...Empty supermarket shelves are a common sight. People dig holes in the ground for filthy contaminated water and turn to the black market for fuel' (CNN, 28 March 2008). As former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, once opined, the global media such as CNN only 'mention land either to highlight the plight of the former white land owners or to attribute food shortages in Zimbabwe to the land redistribution programme' (Mbeki, 2003, pp. 4-5). Writing in criticism of the *New York Times*' portrayal of post-colonial Sudan, Mamdani (2008, p. 4), also argues that the Western media always 'reduce complex political contexts to morality tales unfolding in a world populated by villains and victims who never trade places.' While repeatedly showing images of the negative impact of what it called Mugabe's land grab policy, CNN never questioned the immorality and unfairness of the new postcolonial black government having to pay for land (through the Willing Buyer Willing Seller scheme during the 1980s) that was colonially acquired or even highlighted the case of the poor majority who had remained landless and dispossessed in post- independent Zimbabwe. CNN interviews focused mainly on the urban

poor, suffering working classes, the changed lifestyles of middle classes, and not on the rural people and the elite who benefited from Mugabe's land reform. Again, it did not show that Britain, America, the IMF and World Bank had also been part to the protracted crisis because of previous historical connections and the sanctions by the EU and America (Bernstein 2003; Sachikonye, 2003; Cliffe, 2005). Apart from the clause, 'For his part, Mugabe remains defiant, blaming his woes on the West', always repeated at the end of most news bulletins, CNN never told the Zimbabwean story from Mugabe's perspective as one of the candidates. Instead, Mugabe was represented as an isolated, defiant, dictator that was opposing the commonsensical norms and not as a hero of those Zimbabweans who support what the ruling party has constructed as Zimbabwe's *Third Chimurenga* (third revolution). By focusing on neoliberal discourse factors such as hyper inflation, price controls and the collapse of public infrastructure instead of the national political economic question, CNN successfully represented Mugabe as anarchic, incomprehensible, and defying the basic, natural and commonsensical values of national governance. Hence, as Bignell (2002, p. 124) argues 'news discourse, even in the apparently balanced and objective context of news, [uses] the currently dominant ideological myths about society as its "neutral" way of perceiving events.'

CNN's dichotomous representations of 'Us' (the Western countries and their progress) and 'Them' (Africans countries and their problems) overlooked the colonial and neo-colonial connections between these countries, 'as if the deplorable tyrannies and dictatorships of our day, which must be destroyed, are not part of the intricate negotiations, and internecine histories, of world powers and their histories' (Bhabha, 2005, p. 6). Part of the problem, as Ndlela (2005, p. 73) argues, is that these oversimplifications in the international media when reporting on other societies are intended for profit maximisation through creating captive audiences at home. His analysis of how Norwegian media reported the Zimbabwean crisis concluded that:

[Their] representations reduce, shrink, condense, and select, reject aspects of intricate social relations in order to represent them as fixed, natural, obvious, and ready to consume. What these media do, therefore, is to choose one aspect (selection), inflate it into the defining characteristics (magnification), and then establish it as the most easily recognisable image (reduction). (Ndlela, 2005, p. 73)

CNN thus reduced the complex, multi-layered Zimbabwean narrative to a single individual to the extent that Mugabe's image sums up the Zimbabwe problem. Allan (2004, p. 47) concurs that much of the time, the commercial media tend to go for personalisation because 'an emphasis on human actors...is preferred over abstract descriptions of faceless structures, forces, and institutions' which are usually difficult for their targeted Western audiences to comprehend.

Apart from the land issue, CNN seemed to lament Mugabe's push for black ownership of industries in a story headlined, 'Zimbabwe: Blacks to control industry' (CNN, 10 March, 2008). The story which was based on the colonial and neo-colonial myths of white progress and black incompetence, seemed to suggest that it was wrong for the indigenous black people to control the economy since under Mugabe's indigenisation policies 'the once prosperous Zimbabwe had suffered economic crisis' (Ibid, 10 March 2008). Mugabe, unsurprisingly, was not constructed as a symbol of black empowerment or black revolutionary experience as his national public media had portrayed him in the election, but as a symbol of continued human suffering and degradation. Meanwhile, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, Morgan Tsvangirai was represented as a man of the people who would bring jobs, food, and re-establish political and economic order and progress in the country. According to Mamdani (2002, p. 25), such worldviews or representations exemplify a residual or resurgent colonial discourse which constructs race as a qualification to certain regimes of rights, especially land and industry ownership rights. Colonialism naturalised racial difference by creating a 'civilisation ladder' where black people were economically marginalised on the basis that they were 'yet to be civilised' (Ibid, 25).

In the post-colonial globalization dispensation, racial disparities are no longer justified using the civilisation ladder as such, but on the basis of development and the rule of law (Young, 2003; Furedi, 1994). Hence, changing the colonial status quo is always associated with great economic risks and underdevelopment. For example, according to Moyo (2005), when the new government tried to continue with its orderly land reform in the 1990s during the advent of the free market reforms in the country, Britain, the World Bank, and the IMF discouraged it arguing that resettlement of the landless masses 'would result in overall decline in output and in the number of people gainfully employed in agriculture' (Sachikonye, 2003, p. 230). Whereas CNN may rightly be portraying Mugabe as a sadistic dictator in some respects, it is wrong to suggest that blacks must only be content with jobs and not the ownership and control of their economies. Through the use of the constantly repeated myth of Zimbabwe as the 'former bread basket' of Southern Africa, CNN generated fear in the electorate by equating Mugabe's indigenisation policies to further economic collapse and not black empowerment. This breadbasket myth is denied by Pilger, (2008, p. 3) who argues that postcolonial Zimbabwe 'was a profoundly unequal society up to its ears in debt, with the International Monetary Fund waging war on its economy, waving off investors and freezing loans.' Yet, the myth of the 'regional bread basket' was constantly used by CNN in a way that, while overlooking internal racial disparities in post colonial Zimbabwe, effectively portrayed white dominance and black subservience as a natural and normal face of post colonial Africa. Clearly, CNN's news myths here served an ideological purpose of 'giving an historical intention a natural justification' (Barthes, 1972, p. 155) and

proved how inadequate global journalism is in explaining the contradictions of the postcolonial world.

Consciously or unconsciously, CNN shows how global media appropriate the 19th century philosophy of race hierarchies propounded by thinkers such as Hegel, Gobineau and Renan who constructed the black people as the lowest and least civilised of all races (Shohat & Stam, 2000, p. 45). This philosophy now articulates itself through a Eurocentric characterisation of the global village through Western media and other institutions where it is naturalised as common sense. In the words of Shohat & Stam:

Eurocentricism bifurcates the world into the 'West and the Rest', and organises everyday language into binaristic hierarchies implicitly flattering to Europe: *our* nations, *their* tribes; *our* religion, *their* superstition; *our* demonstrations, *their* riots, *our* defence, *their* terrorism (2000, p. 2).

CNN also appropriated these top-down Eurocentric dichotomies. For example, whereas it was silent on the violent nature of colonial dispossession, there was always repetition of some negative imagery of Mugabe's land reform in 2000 which was often characterised as *his* 'land invasions', *his* 'violence', *his* 'defiance', but never *his* 'revolution', *his* 'colonial redress', or *his* 'resolve'. These binaries that appeared to be part of a strong self righteous wave of Eurocentricism make the Western media a liability to a form of global village that is based on ideals of human rights and historical memory.

SECOND ROUND ELECTION: MUGABE, BLACK VOTERS AND THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS AS THE SECONDARY AGENDA

McChesney argues that although the global media, as key beneficiaries of neoliberal globalization, are politically conservative, they 'at times, have a progressive impact on culture, especially when they enter nations that had been tightly controlled by corrupt crony media systems...or nations that [have] significant state censorship over media' (McChesney, 1999, p. 23). In this section, I contend that the coverage of the run-off by CNN gives a good example of how the global media can sometimes have a positive impact on democracy and human rights especially in authoritarian and restrictive media environments such as Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2003; Zaffiro, 2002; Saunders, 2001). However, I also argue that their commitment to the two principles is fraught with contradictions and can sometimes be seen to be in service of neoliberalism, global capital, and Western governments.

One of the major things that characterised the run-off election, at least judging from what local and international observers said, was violence. Chief among these organizations was the Pan African Observer Mission (PAOM), a group that was made of African Members

of Parliament from various countries. This group reported that 'the prevailing political environment throughout the country was tense, hostile and volatile' (PAOM, p. 54). It stated that there were 'high levels of intimidation, hate speech, violence, war rhetoric, displacement of people, abductions, and loss of life and many abuses of other rights and freedoms' (Ibid, p. 34). The claims were corroborated by, among other African regional groupings, the SADC Observer Mission which also noted that the conduct of the ruling party was not consistent with the principles of free and fair elections. In terms of the characterisation of the violence within the context of post coloniality, this violence is what Mamdani (2002) refers to as non-revolutionary or counter-revolutionary violence. It is violence which falls out of the decolonisation agenda and also counteracts the democratic ideas brought about by the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. It is violence that could also be characterised as unredemptive, criminal or sheer state terrorism because it allegedly sought to punish people for voting against the ruling party in the first round of elections.

CNN played a critical role in exposing the human rights abuses that took place in the run off. The news discourse at this point had shifted from the private property rights of white farmers to civil and political rights of MDC supporters who consisted mostly of the black poor majority in urban areas and rural areas. When violence broke out in the run off campaign, CNN reported that an unnamed white farmer had 'told CNN that 10 of his workers [had been] ambushed by militia men and severely beaten. Another said he saw militia men drag a farm worker...and stab him to death with knives and spears' (CNN, 23 April 2008). Through a well co-ordinated strategy of investigative reporting, citizen journalism of blogs, and news reports and footage from churches and NGOs, CNN exposed the rising tide of violence through the months of May and June until the day of voting where deaths allegedly included even senior officials of the opposition and their relatives. By mid May, it exposed that 25 MDC supporters had been killed and by early June a total of 66 people had been killed while '200 were missing and 25 000 had fled the country' (CNN, 10 June 2008). These claims were corroborated by pictures of opposition supporters with broken limbs, body injuries and burns, and funeral gatherings of victims.

Apart from exposing violence, CNN also provided a platform for the concerned African leaders, global institutions and other moral voices to condemn the abuse of civil and political liberties in Zimbabwe. These included people such as Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, European leaders, and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. They all, including the UN Security Council, reportedly condemned the Zimbabwean government for its violent retributive campaign against its citizens. CNN also helped to facilitate the free flow of information and raising the alarm on electoral violence in a country where alternative voices have limited access to public media. It gave alternative voices such as civil society and the opposition parties a platform, because as the observers noted, the opposition had neither been given any space in the public media nor been allowed to hold rallies in the run off.

Although CNN's role in human rights was not indisputable in the runoff, it however, needs to be subjected to criticism within the context of Zimbabwe's post-colonial narrative. According to Zhao & Hackett (2005), the global mass media's human rights concerns in emerging democracies are ineffective because they do not seek to promote sustainable democracy and development, but certain liberal interests from West. They argue that, it will be a 'naïve belief [to think that] transnational mass media...will ... promote dialogue and build bridges of understanding between peoples, classes, and cultures [and races] (Ibid, 8). Chomsky and Herman's (1994) propaganda model of 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims can be used here to understand why CNN fell short in this regard in Zimbabwe. According to the two authors, Western media always selectively apply the human rights discourse in accordance with their countries' interests and geopolitical alliances. These media 'consistently portray people abused in enemy states as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by their governments or client states will be unworthy victims' (Chomsky & Herman, 1994, p. 37).

In Zimbabwe, CNN's worthy victims were the white farmers and opposition supporters who both shared the criticism of Mugabe's regime that has become increasingly unpopular with most Western governments. However, human rights have previously been abused by the postcolonial government at a much greater scale when it killed about 20 000 Ndebele people for their allegiance to opposition politics immediately after independence (Zimrights, 1999; CCJP, 1999; Ndlovu, 2002). Yet at that time, the American and British governments enjoyed excellent relations with Mugabe as proven by his award with the prestigious title of the Shining Knight of the Order of Bath by the Queen of England and his honorary degrees from some Western universities such as the Edinburgh University (Scotland), University of Massachusetts (US), and Michigan State University (US). This seems to have been largely a reward to Mugabe's post-independence racial reconciliation programme which never changed the colonial status quo and left the British settlers in charge of most of the arable land in the country (Roftopoulous, 2004; Sachikonye, 2004). The Matabeleland genocide, largely ignored by the Western media at the time, was always reported in retrospect in the election as a footnote to the news agenda for political change in Zimbabwe. In one of its accounts, CNN acknowledged this selective articulation when it stated that, 'the massacre and beatings of thousands of civilians [in Matabeleland] was little reported at the time and is still barely condemned' (CNN, 28 March 2008). According to Lee Chuan et al (2002, p. 91) these contradictions and inconsistencies of Western media are because they 'operate within the same institutional relationship to power structures and share the broader similar ideological prism.'

The Western governments and their corporate media's ideological coalescence and the selective appropriation of the human rights can be easily demonstrated in different parts of the world. While they criticise enemy states such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, and China, they generally ignore the plight of 'unworthy victims' in Palestine, Iraqi, and Garcia islands

mainly because their governments or client states are the perpetrators (Philo & Berry, 2004; Pilger, 2002; Abramowitz & Cheek, 2003). The Garcia islands, owned by indigenous blacks called Chagossians in Asia, makes a good parallel with the Zimbabwe case. As far as the Garcia islands are concerned, the big Western media have acted in complicity with Britain and America by ignoring the human rights violations of the indigenous people who were dispossessed of their island when America usurped it to build a military base. The indigenous people were forcibly removed and dumped by the dockside in Port Louis, Mauritius without shelter, food and clothing (Pilger, 2004). Interestingly, unlike in Zimbabwe where British settlers were dispossessed of 'their land' by a black government, there has never been a sustained campaign and agenda setting in the Western media about the violation of the private property rights of the Chagossians despite a British court ruling in their favour in 2000. This observation implies that, regardless of the global village myth, race still matters for the global media in addressing national and global injustices. As Zhao & Hackett (2005, pp. 5-10) argue, the lack of impartiality in Western media in the global age is because they are merely 'national-based media systems' that operate internationally for mainly profit maximisation and not for global justice. As McChesney (1999, p. 75) observes, the global media are 'politically conservative because... [they]...are significant beneficiaries of the current social structure around the world, and any upheaval in property or social relations-particularly to the extent that it reduces the power of business, is not in their interest.' In Zimbabwe, the crisis was caused partly by the upheaval in property relations involving British TNCs such as Lonrho, Anglo-American and others and white settlers who both owned vast tracts of land and controlled the mining and manufacturing industries. In the news narratives from CNN, the Zimbabwe crisis is constructed first and foremost, as the result of this 'violent upheaval.' Perhaps this can also explain why in its news on the Zimbabwean initial harmonised elections, CNN always foregrounded factors such as inflation, unemployment, food shortages, and disrespect of private property rights as the cause of the crisis as opposed to foregrounding the colonial legacy, equitable distribution of land and other resources. As CNN stated, 'Strict price controls punish businesses that price goods above levels set by government, a new bill forces foreign-owned businesses to give controlling interests in their operations to black Zimbabweans' (CNN, 28 March 2008). It can be argued this makes a good example of global corporate journalism which would easily condemn price controls, but not criticise or investigate the price fixing and carteling that was alleged by the Zimbabwean government.

Bhabha (2005) argues that such contradictions and mischaracterisations that appear to be a discourse that is entrenched in neoliberal globalization's narrow elitist interests, cause confusion and conflict in the post colonies. In a way that almost directly addresses the Zimbabwean problem, he contends that 'the global aspirations of the Third World national thinking belonged to the traditions of socialism, Marxism and humanism, whereas the dominant forces of contemporary globalization tend to subscribe to free market ideas that

enshrine ideologies of neoliberal technocratic elitism' (Ibid, 9). Furthermore, he shows how globalization has for the postcolonies like Zimbabwe remained a myth that effectively distorted people's social relations, created new forms of expropriation, and replaced real space (land) with virtual space (network society). He asserts that:

While it was the primary purpose of decolonisation to reposses land and territoriality in order to ensure the security of national polity and...equity, globalization propagated a world made up of virtual transnational domains and wired communities that live vividly through webs and connectivities online... The landscape of opportunity and choice have definitely widened in scope , but the colonial shadow falls across the successes of globalization (Bhabha, 2005, p. 8).

CNN's ambivalence not only to postcolonial racial iniquities, but also to the vagaries of neoliberal globalization presided mostly by Western companies and White settler capital, shows a clear ideological leaning towards the interests of global and local capital that still remains largely in favour of white people. Through omission and commission, the violence of the colonial and postcolonial economic order on the black majority is either ignored or whitewashed, while political violence on the same is overtly criticised. As such, it can be argued that CNN's new 'worthy victims' of civil and political rights in the run off are used merely for political capital against an 'enemy state' as opposed to fighting for a just and equitable global society. As Falk observes, human rights discourse in the global age has failed to deal with injustice because it is now 'deeply embedded in contemporary geopolitics [and] is difficult to separate from the ebb and flow of great power' (Falk, 2008, p. 17). In other words, the global media propagate a highly ideological and sophisticated human rights discourse that obfuscates truly democratic social relations of classes and races. To that end, CNN can be accused of intended or unintended institutional racism defined by Verlot (2002, p. 31) as new form of racism in which, 'institutions generate or sustain racism, whether through daily handling of people (everyday level) or through the mechanics of society (structural level).' While in the Western context CNN's free market ideology would not be seen as racist but elitist, in the postcolonies it mutates into racism because of its subtle insistence on the private property rights of white settlers while also openly discouraging incorporating the indigenous people into the mainstream economy. CNN's ideological approach gives the impression that it is constructing a bifurcated postcolonial state of political democracy for blacks and economic democracy for whites. This culminates in slightly modified colonial status quo where blacks can now enjoy political rights, especially to vote an 'enemy state' out, but not the rights of self-determination to confront the complex global network of Western TNCs and settler capital.

CONCLUSION

The Zimbabwean case study shows that the role of global media in the developing world largely remains a controversial issue (Van Ginneken, 2007; Bagdikian, 2004; Philo & Berry, 2004; Pilger, 2002; Chomsky & Herman, 1994). CNN's selective appropriation of the human rights and democracy discourses demonstrates that despite the misleading claim of neutrality and objectivity by the Western media, international journalism still operates from a very Eurocentric mindset which is still partially and perhaps unconsciously informed by historical, political and ideological values that have framed the relationship of the West with other countries in the past hundred years. Schudson (1978) once observed that among these unspoken, but organic values, 'are beliefs in ...capitalism, God, the West, Puritanism, the Law ... property, and perhaps most crucially, in the notion that violence is only defensible when employed by Western states' (cited from Van Ginneken, 2007, p. 184).

In a global village that presupposes the equality of races, justice, and the plurality of worldviews in news, I argued that Eurocentricism is epistemologically privileged over other world views and social narratives in defining the world and its social contradictions. Shohat & Stam (2000) argue that Western media must transcend this to become polycentric in their world view if they need to play a meaningful role especially in the post colonies of the Third World where media dependence on stereotypes is prevalent. In their view, polycentricism, as opposed to Eurocentricism, 'is not about the touchy-feely sensitivity toward other groups, [but] about dispersing power, ...empowering the disempowered, about transforming subordinating institutions and discourses' (Ibid, p. 49). While it can be argued that CNN's coverage of the Zimbabwe election had a minimal, but strategic intervention in supporting the internal push for human rights and democracy, it however, sometimes unwittingly undermined these ideals by overlooking connections between the national economy and the political superstructure, especially within the context of the unmitigated colonial legacy in Zimbabwe. The selective appropriation of economic rights and civil and political rights along race and class continuums meant that its news narratives failed to show the dialectical and fragile relationship between the economy and human rights in the construction of a vibrant postcolonial state and market forces that peacefully co-exist with the ambit of the rule of law. As such, CNN's news narratives on postcolonial Zimbabwe arguably amounted to a decontextualised Eurocentric rendition that promoted a largely ahistorical, simplistic and distorted understanding of the Zimbabwe crisis as reflected through the political process of an election.

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IS BAD NEWS FROM AFRICA GOOD NEWS FOR WESTERN MEDIA?

LEVI OBJIOFOR

This article examines the elements that underpin the controversy over Western media's coverage of Africa, including growing perceptions by African political leaders and journalists of the increasing distortion of Africa by Western media, as well as how the conventions of news selection and reporting serve to create a particular media discourse about Africa. The author poses the questions: Why is Africa depicted in the Western media as an economic disaster, a continent of contradictions, a continent marked by political instability, poverty, diseases, as well as bizarre traditional belief systems and cultural practices? Does bad news about Africa make good news copy for Western journalists? These questions and more are explored in this article.

Keywords: Africa, Africa's image, bad news, journalists, news reporting, news media, Western media.

The images of Africa in the Western media are, by and large, images of misrepresentation (Michira, 2002).

Many Americans have images of Africa that are anachronistic, partial, and often inaccurate... The perception of Africa that most of us grew up with – unknown lands somehow exotic and divorced from the rest of the world – has unfortunately persisted in some quarters despite the last 25 years of Africa's independence and increasing presence on the world stage. It is a misconception that ignores compelling realities (Schulz, cited in Terrell, 1989, p. 132).

The way Africa is reported in Western news media and the image of Africa that has emerged from the reportage of Africa have remained a touchy topic of discussion among

Levi Obijiofor is a senior lecturer in Journalism at the School of Journalism and Communication, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia (l.obijiofor@uq.edu.au).

African scholars and political leaders. The debate is not likely to end soon, essentially because nothing much has changed in the way the Western media reports Africa. In the 21st century, Western media's fascination for negative news about Africa has remained as intense as it was during Africa's colonial experience.

There is indeed a plethora of literature on how Western media coverage of Africa and other developing countries is distorted and framed in negative concepts (see Golan, 2008; Franks, 2005; Michira, 2002; Chaudhary, 2001a&b; Beaudoin and Thorston, 2001; Chavis, 1998; Domatob, 1994; Fair, 1993; Reeves, 1993; Anyaegbunam, 1993; Ebo, 1992; Hawk, 1992; Bosompra, 1989; Terrell, 1989; Pratt, 1980; Masmoudi, 1979). The vast literature shows that the image of Africa portrayed by Western media is riddled with misrepresentations and stereotypes. Terrell (1989, p. 132) quotes former US Secretary of State George Schulz who criticized the ignorance and misrepresentations that underpin American media's coverage of Africa. According to Schulz:

Many Americans have images of Africa that are anachronistic, partial, and often inaccurate... The perception of Africa that most of us grew up with – unknown lands somehow exotic and divorced from the rest of the world – has unfortunately persisted in some quarters despite the last 25 years of Africa's independence and increasing presence on the world stage. It is a misconception that ignores compelling realities. (Schulz, cited Terrell, 1989, p. 132)

Nevertheless, some Western editors and journalists still dismiss complaints by African leaders about the misrepresentation and stereotyping of Africa in the media as part of a growing movement in Africa to bash Western journalistic practices. Regardless of Western editors' vision of Africa, research evidence (as illustrated in the preceding paragraphs and elsewhere in this paper) continues to show quite clearly that Western media coverage of the continent consists of a diet of negative news and stereotypes.

WHY AFRICANS SHOULD WORRY ABOUT HOW THE CONTINENT IS REPORTED

Why should Africans bother about how Africa is depicted in Western media? This question underscores the importance of foreign news and how it is reported. It is important for Africans to be concerned about how the continent is reported because the way Africa is reported affects not only how the world understands Africa and its people but also how the world interacts with African people. Wolter (2006) argues that foreign news is important because the way it is reported affects how we perceive and react to people from different parts of the world. Wu and Hamilton (2004) concur, stating that foreign news reporters

influence the public's and the government's knowledge of foreign events. "Foreign correspondents have a dominant role in informing the public and, at times, the government about foreign events" (Wu and Hamilton, 2004, p. 519).

Apart from how we perceive people from other cultures and how we communicate and interact with them, foreign news also influences the direction of foreign policy. Amanpour (1996, web document) draws on endless media coverage of the conflict in Bosnia in the late 1990s to illustrate the power of foreign correspondents to influence foreign policy. She notes that the US government ignored the conflict in Bosnia until three-and-a-half years later when the "genocidal ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, mass murder, cities under siege, shell-fire and sniping" forced the US to take the lead to intervene in the Bosnian conflict, in concert with NATO member states.

Governments simply hated seeing the constant stream of blood from Bosnia spilling onto the front pages and TV news broadcasts, increasing the pressure on them to do something. It's a phenomenon that has become known as the CNN Factor (Amanpour, 1996, web document). Amanpour argues that the media was able to influence the foreign policy of the US government and NATO members because of a policy vacuum. According to her: '... the media's influence only really applies when there is a policy vacuum. When governments do not have a coherent policy, press reports and TV pictures rush to fill the gap' (1996).

The preceding analysis suggests that negative portrayal of Africa in the Western media has consequences not only for how Africa relates with the world but also how the world understands, perceives and engages with Africa.

AFRICA AND BAD PRESS

There are many reasons why Africa attracts negative coverage in the media. Some of them are external to Africa. Others are indeed home-grown. Perhaps the most consistent reason why bad news about Africa makes good news copy in Western newsrooms is the media's fascination for negative events. Incidentally, negativity and conflict constitute two of the dominant news values in journalism (see Conley and Lamble, 2006; Harcup and O'Neil, 2001). Conflict and negative news events serve the interests of media audiences. As Conley and Lamble (2006, p. 87) put it, "Conflict attracts reader interest and, therefore, has news value." Chaudhary (2001b, p. 242) believes that negativism is a common news value in western newsrooms.

Among Western broadcast journalists, negative or 'conflict' news is an unquestioned news value. Several communication scholars examining the news selection patterns of journalists have found evidence that journalists rate negative news as more important and

more newsworthy than positive events and that they give preferential display to negative events.

The unanswered question remains: Why do Western media present proportionately higher negative news about Africa than they do in their reporting of Western countries? Michira (2002) identifies a number of reasons, one of which is the growing commercialisation of the media in the West and the commercial media's focus on profit margins. As he explained it:

The media select stories that can sell and omit those that cannot; then they report those selected in a way that makes them sell well. The result is the trend of crisis-driven journalism of churning out news faster, going for the quick and headline-seeking superficial coverage that seizes on the outrageous, the dramatic and the exceptional without bothering to place it in its proper context (Michira, 2002, web document).

With regard to the US media, Shoemaker *et al.* (1986) believe that deviance is a major reason for US media coverage of foreign events. But Golan (2008, p. 53) argues that 'deviance alone does not make an event newsworthy. It is possible that the visual images linked to an event may also influence its newsworthiness. Gatekeepers might select the more visually sensational footage of a train crash over visuals of hungry children in Mali.'

Africa's misrepresentation in the Western media could be attributed to journalists' inability to understand and communicate the most basic facts about Africa: that is, Africa is a vast and complex continent of no fewer than 53 independent countries made up of more than 700 million people who speak over 1500 languages. Culturally, politically and economically, African countries differ in various ways. Unfortunately, these differences are not reflected in Western media's reportage of Africa. It is lousy journalism combined with lack of editorial supervision that endorses a news report in which Africa is depicted as one country rather than a continent of many independent countries.

One of the problems with Western media's reportage of Africa is that some of the reports about Africa lack contextual information. Hawk (1992, p. 4) identifies some of the factors that highlight lack of context in stories about Africa: 'Media presentation of needed contextual information about Africa is limited by commercial and financial considerations of editors, the personal opinions of editors and correspondents, and press restrictions of host governments.' Writing in Nigeria's *Punch* newspaper, Ishiekwene (2008, web document) insists that lack of context in Western media coverage of Africa also exposes the contradictions in Western-style journalism:

[W]hen people have complained about how Africa is reported, it is the context question that is at the heart of the debate. Context that does not deny that corruption is endemic and must be confronted head on, but one that also recognises that in some of the worst corruption cases in Africa, big foreign firms such as Halliburton or Siemens have been implicated as well.

Context that recognises that one-pill-cures-all prescriptions from international financial institutions, especially the IMF, have sometimes worsened some of the basket cases. Context that recognises that Africa is a continent that is as diverse and complex as it has a lot in common. Context that recognises that Nicolas Sarkozy's peccadilloes, for example, cannot be anymore a representation of the political ethos of the European political elite than Robert Mugabe can be said to represent the values of all politicians in Africa.

One consequence of this style of reporting is that, over a number of years, the mental and psychological image of Africa presented by Western media to Western media audiences is that Africa is a failed continent ravaged by political instability, economic backwardness, extraordinary famine and drought, poverty, diseases and culturally primitive ways of doing things. For instance, in reporting conflicts in Africa, the contextual background such as the underlying causes of the crises, including how the West contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa, are conspicuously absent from Western media reports about Africa. It is perhaps this missing element in Western reporting that prompted Nyarota (2004, p. 35), seasoned former editor of *The Daily News* of Zimbabwe, to argue that Western news organisations that assign reporters to cover events in Africa deprive 'African journalists the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the coverage of countries they understand better than the average Western journalist'. This argument assumes that African journalists would do a better job of reporting Africa than Western journalists on the basis that African journalists have the background knowledge of the continent and perhaps better understanding of the sociopolitical and economic contexts that inform African events.

In an argument that resonates the notion of 'parachute journalism', Nyarota (2004, p. 35) states: 'When Western correspondents fly in to cover an event at short notice, they can gain only a superficial understanding of the crisis and, also, they might have limited or no access to the most knowledgeable and relevant sources. And in places where dictators are in power, the locals can be suspicious of Western journalists, while government officials are fearful of association with them'. Although parachute journalism has come under fire from a number of journalists and journalism academics, Erickson and Hamilton (2007, pp. 141-144) argue that parachute journalism is not necessarily a bad thing because it is used to: complement foreign coverage, not to cut down on it; add more expertise to the pool of foreign correspondents maintained by news organisations (e.g. US news media that sent religion experts to Rome to cover the death and funeral of Pope John Paul II); and to provide an opportunity to retain former foreign correspondents who might be intent on joining other news organisations that could post them overseas again; etc.

While Nyarota makes a valid point about Western correspondents' lack of background knowledge of Africa and lack of access to reliable sources, it is important to note that the same fear and suspicion that government officials have of Western reporters is also extended to African journalists.

Nyarota points out another drawback of Western correspondents' reporting of Africa, that is, their inclination to rely on foreign diplomats, staff of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies in Africa as authoritative sources of African news. This raises the question of bias in news sources used by Western correspondents in Africa. The weaknesses inherent in Western-style reporting of Africa should not imply that, in covering the continent, African journalists present flawless reports. It is important to mention that the involvement of local reporters in the coverage of Africa can often be problematic, especially in societies riven by inter-ethnic politics where journalists fail to resist the temptation to reflect ethnic bias in their news reports. As an endorsement of this point, Nyarota cites as an example the unprofessional conduct and biased reportorial style of Rwandan journalists during the 1994 ethnic conflict in the country. According to him, the jailing of three Rwandan journalists on war crimes' charges illustrates vividly the extent to which the media can go to perpetrate ethnic hatred. Indeed, the Rwandan example shows that the media can serve as an instrument for dissemination of falsehood and the promotion of inter-ethnic violence. Similar partisan coverage has been identified in the different ways that Arab and American journalists represent the war in Iraq.

Worried by growing misrepresentations of Africa by Western news media, Nyarota (2004, p. 35) asked: 'Could African journalists not make a greater contribution towards the coverage of their own continent in the Western media?' The notion that the problems of Western-style reporting of Africa could be overcome by Western media hiring local Africans to serve as regional correspondents for Western news organizations is also problematic. For example, the use of local journalists by Western media organizations does not preclude the Western media from insisting that local correspondents should adopt Western angles and perspectives in covering foreign events. It is the Western media that dictates the kind of news stories that their foreign correspondents should report, including the angles to be adopted in reporting those stories. In essence, Western media can hire African reporters to cover events in Africa but the news reports can still be Western in orientation, tone, language and angle of coverage. That is, the message can remain the same even if the messenger has changed.

Further evidence of Western media's misrepresentation and stereotyping of Africa has been reported by Beaudoin and Thorston (2001). In their analysis of foreign news published in the home edition of the *Los Angeles Times* between August 1997 and July 1998, they found that Western Europe and Canada were portrayed as beautiful while Africa was presented as a continent dogged by power issues (and not engaged in peace). The authors concluded that 'depicting Africa in terms of only power (and not peace) may fail to characterize the nations' vast complexity of languages and cultures and its sense of harmonious gradualism' (Beaudoin and Thorston, 2001, p. 501). Similarly, a study of US television network coverage of Africa between 2002 and 2004 found that 'the majority of stories about African nations focused on negative and highly deviant issues such as conflict and disasters both natural and human caused' (Golan, 2008, p. 53). Additionally, research

by Larson (1979) showed that developing countries were poorly reported on US network television channels and that the stories tended to be crisis-driven. Pratt (1980, p. 39) studied the reportage and image of Africa in six US news and opinion magazines and found 'a preponderance of conflict-type and opinion issues'. He also found that 'Africa is not simply portrayed as politically gullible, naïve, and immature, but also as a continent whose course of action is precariously dependent on the Big Powers. As a conflict-ridden continent, it provides a good chessboard for flexing diplomatic muscle by the world's superpowers, ...' (Pratt, 1980, p. 42).

One way to improve media coverage of Africa is for African news media to take up the challenge of reporting the continent. To do so, it will be enormously important for African news media to maintain their own staff of foreign correspondents. This implies that African correspondents and reporters can report and interpret the world for Africans. Africans don't necessarily want news of Africa and the world reported through American eyes or through British eyes or through Asian eyes or through Latin American eyes. Essentially, Africans need African journalists, African foreign correspondents to interpret the world for Africans. When Western news media and their foreign correspondents appropriate the coverage of Africa, the image of Africa depicted in Western media reports is often less than respectable. The consequence has been that Africa's image is presented in a disagreeable manner. This is the reason why Nyarota (2004) argued that African reporters and correspondents would do a better job of covering the continent than Western correspondents are currently doing. But Nyarota's call was mainly in the context of Western media hiring African reporters to cover African events. The challenge is for African media organizations to access the resources that would enable them to engage in comprehensive and well informed coverage of Africa. This should include hiring African reporters who will report Africa and also serve as the main sources of Western news reports about Africa.

NEWS SELECTION, REPORTING AND PRODUCTION CONVENTIONS

The question has often been asked: Does negative news about Africa make good news copy in Western newsrooms? This question has received considerable attention in the literature on foreign news reporting. There are professional and non-professional reasons why Western media report Africa the way they do. There are also other reasons that shape the way Africa is framed in Western media reports. Some scholars see in Western reporting genre a conspiracy by the media to denigrate and devalue Africa. Fair (1993), for example, argues that 'good news' about Africa does not fit Western media's conceptions about Africa. She contends that, 'for African countries to be part of "all the news that's fit to print", as the slogan of *The New York Times* reads, it seems that news stories must include three elements: events, crisis, and conflict' (Fair, 1993, p. 7).

As the media constitutes the chief source of information on Africa for much of the world, the danger is that media reports about Africa, distorted and inaccurate as they might be, could form the basis of the knowledge that Western media audiences have about Africa and its people. Using the United States as an example, Hawk (1992, p. 3) emphasizes the power of the Western media to influence the American audience. 'Americans' knowledge of Africa is formed from many sources: school textbooks, the news media, church missionaries, and the entertainment industry. Among these sources, the media hold special importance, for it is to the media that individuals look to be informed... The media give meaning to current events and identify for the reader those events that are important.' This point resonates the agenda-setting role of the media.

The principles of news reporting operates at various levels, including how news events are selected and framed, the language in which the news is framed and the meanings attached to the events. For example, in reporting news, editors make judgments about which events to select and which events to ignore. Selection is a very important process of editorial judgment because newspapers are limited by space and there is no way a newspaper can accommodate all the news that it receives every day. Similarly, radio and television are limited by time. Radio and television organizations are guided by program schedules which specify what news items should be broadcast at a specific time and for how long. There are exceptions in which program schedules are not followed but, in most cases, they serve as a guide for each day's activities. In this context, news selection and production processes highlight the power of editors and other gatekeepers in the news production chain.

As mentioned earlier, journalistic news values such as conflict and negativity influence news making decisions. The standard news values cited in many journalism texts include conflict, impact, proximity, prominence, timeliness, currency, human interest and unusualness (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Conley and Lamble, 2006). By constant reference to news values as factors that determine foreign and local news selection, editors and journalists make judgments about what is likely to be of interest to their audiences. These judgments may be based more on anecdotal evidence than on scientifically verifiable fact. However, whether news values are applied in an unbiased manner or whether journalists' personal biases, attitudes and expectations influence their news judgments depends on individual journalists, their commitment to their professional and ethical values and the policy of their news organizations. It is in the process of selecting certain events and rejecting others, and in the process of explaining the selected events that journalists define social reality and also shape the way the public perceives that 'reality'. As Fair (1993, p. 13) pointed out, 'By choosing certain events, emphasizing certain "facts", and giving stories a certain tone, the news media structure and define reality'. In the case of Africa, the 'reality' that is presented by the Western media about the people and the continent is often far from real. For example, Hess (1996, p. 74) has suggested that news editors almost always adopt

a 'one-size-fits-all' definition of foreign news: news (was) a cyclone, a fire, an election, someone shooting someone else.

Fair (1993, p. 11) also perceives news stories as ideological texts positioned to serve as reflections of social reality conceived by the West. In doing so, the specificity of African experiences and actions is lost, and news of Africa essentialized and reduced to generalities. When the news media report on violence occurring among blacks in Africa it may be labeled 'black-on-black' or 'tribal'. That violence among whites is not labeled 'white-on-white' or 'tribal' (if it is labeled at all, violence among white 'tribes' is called 'ethnic' or 'nationalist') points to the powerful process of naming and un-naming. What is attributed to black Africans – and for that matter to all peoples of African descent – is named in ways shaped by trans-cultural and essentialized racial characteristics defined by dominant white European and American cultures.

In a related sense, Chavis (1998) demonstrates not only the power that journalists wield in reporting about different people and their cultures but he also illustrates how easy it is for Western journalists to demonise Africa and Africans:

With the stroke of a journalist's pen, the African, her continent, and her descendants are pejoratively reduced to nothing: a bastion of disease, savagery, animism, pestilence, war, famine, despotism, primitivism, poverty, and ubiquitous images of children, flies in their food and faces, their stomachs distended. These 'universal' but powerfully subliminal message units, beamed at global television audiences, connote something not good, perennially problematic unworthiness, deplorability, black, foreboding, loathing, sub humanity, etc. On the other hand, little is said about Africa's strategic importance to so called industrialized nations; her indispensability and relevance to world development, global technology, and the wealth of nations, derived from involuntary African largesse, are not acclaimed in the media (Chavis, 1998, web document).

One of the criticisms leveled against Western reporting of Africa is that, while negative news events abound in Africa, there are also positive news worthy of media coverage which are in general overlooked. Keane (2004) argues that Africans are beginning to hold their governments to account and this should be regarded as positive development in the continent. Using Kenya as an example, he states that corruption is being exposed and government officials are being dragged before the judicial commission of inquiry. Sadly, none of these positive developments is given attention in Western television news. Bleasdale (2004, p. 14) insists that journalists covering Africa have a responsibility to report good news and bad news. To dwell on bad news, the conflicts, the catastrophes and disasters that befall Africa and disregard the good news is unprofessional journalism practice. This skewed pattern of reporting also plays into the hands of those who accuse Western correspondents of bias in reporting Africa. However, Bleasdale (2004, p. 15) sees some positive results from media reporting of bad news about Africa:

Steady and strong attention by journalists can foment change. Faulty leadership can be exposed. Suffering and injustices can be reported. And when they are, slowly change can come at a political level. But if the circumstances are hidden, the voices of those who are suffering are silenced, and explanations about the crisis aren't provided to the rest of the world, then how can anyone be persuaded to act?

Why do Western correspondents often ignore positive news about Africa? For an insight, we must revisit the all-powerful news values, those elements which editors and journalists use as justification for covering or ignoring certain events. As noted in various parts of this paper, among professional news values used by journalists to assess the newsworthiness of events, conflict and negativity stand out. In fact, Galtung and Ruge (1970) proposed that the more negative an event is in terms of consequences, the more likely it is that the event would make the news. As Keane (2004, p. 10) acknowledged, 'We thrive on drama, and this habit of ours isn't going to change overnight.'

Should journalists – Western and African – continuously report on disasters that plague the African continent? This is a question that many journalists have grappled with for decades. While many journalists agree that news events in Africa or elsewhere should be reported in full, others worry about the impact of excessive focus on negative events in Africa. For example, Keane (2004, p. 9) states: 'What profoundly concerns me is the real damage to Africans' sense of themselves and of their nations' potential in the midst of journalists' relentless focus on their misery... from Congo in the early 1960s through Biafra, Ethiopia and into Sudan today... little has changed in our reporting of Africa's stories.' In a somewhat open admission of the flaws that undermine Western reporting of Africa, Keane (2004, p. 9) notes that 'Since the end of colonialism, Western correspondents have stood in front of emaciated Africans or piles of African bodies and used the language of the Old Testament to mediate the horrors to their audiences. That practice began four decades ago, and the template hasn't changed all that much.'

DOES RACE MATTER IN REPORTING AFRICA?

In her analysis of how race shapes the construction of Africa's media image in the Western press, Fair (1993, p. 8) raises an important question: 'Why are the countries of Africa and African people so under-reported or covered within such narrow framework?' Arguing that the coverage a country receives in the US media is directly proportional to the extent of that country's ties with the US (e.g. economic, social and cultural, geographic, and political proximity), Fair (1993, p. 8) states that: 'Because Africa, rightly or wrongly, is perceived by journalists and editors as not newsworthy when compared to other countries or regions where US geopolitical interests are seen as stronger and because these same

journalists perceive a lack of interest in Africa by the US public, reporting news from African countries is not a “good buy”.’

To understand how Africa is framed in the Western media, it is important to examine also the image of Africa that exists in the ‘Western mind’. It is this image that sustains Western discourses about Africa. Fair (1993, p. 10) puts it eloquently thus: ‘“Africa” in the Western mind cannot endure outside Western discourses..., for it is within these discourses that the West confirms the “Otherness” of Africa it has created. Africa’s media image as it exists in the American press has been formed, informed, and re-formed within these Western discourses in which the meaning of “Africa” is made. Within news stories occurs a reproduction of hierarchy and domination reworked and updated.’

Fair (1993, pp. 9-10) further explains that ‘The values and routines that go into producing news stories represent cultural conventions, rules, and codes that serve to construct boundaries of meaning. Within the news text, the journalist, as storyteller, relies upon ideas and images drawn from dominant interest, thought, and meaning but evoked as “fact”. In the coverage of African countries and peoples, one “fact” that explains much of African events is rooted in notions such as “blackness”, “primitiveness”, and “savagery” ‘. As she argued, ‘In the process of making “black” different, the representation of black Africa and the historical and cultural experiences of black Africans have been objectified through systems of classifying continents, countries, and peoples’ (Fair, 1993, p. 11).

CLASH OF CULTURES

The image of Africa depicted in Western media has been traced to Africa’s colonial history and its relationship with the West, in particular relationships developed with Europe over years and centuries of colonial rule. Appropriately therefore, we must revisit history in order to understand the roots of Afro-pessimism, the subtle subjugation of African cultures and values by West European values and practices. The historical relationship between African people and European colonisers was the subject of a powerful editorial in the *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. In the editorial, Anyaegbunam (1993) traces the origins of the ideological struggle between Africa and European colonisers, including attempts by the West to impose its values on Africa. As Anyaegbunam (1993, p. v) explained, ‘both physical and intellectual confrontation between Africa and the West have been common occurrences since the mid-17th century when Europe began to colonize, re-invent and re-name Africa’ in an attempt to reshape Africa to fit European ideological agenda and the African image the colonisers wanted. Anyaegbunam (1993, pp. v-vi) notes that, while the struggle for political independence might have subsided in Africa,

struggles against a certain type of domination still continues on the continent. This time, however, the fight is not for physical but intellectual liberation: namely the decolonization of the African mind... the colonization of the African mind was more subtle... Western colonizers won this battle without a shot being fired. To achieve this feat, they caused to be reified a set of views and values that placed everything African and black as the antithesis of everything Western and white; a dichotomy in which according to Mudimbe (1988: 16), darkness, evil and ugliness (black) was contrasted with light, good and beauty (white). With this mindset, Western missionaries and educators went to Africa with the goal of supplanting local cultural originality and creating in the African soul an inferiority complex...

Sardar et al. (1993) explore this 'master-servant' theme in their book – *Barbaric Others: A manifesto on Western racism*. In the book, they examine the codes and policies used by the West to justify colonialism, including reasons why colonised people often found it difficult to break off from centuries of European domination. Even after the colonial masters had left, many developing nations found regrettably that they were still mired in many problems, some of them caused by internal factors, others still a legacy of years of colonial rule. Sardar et al. explore these issues in their book, including various perspectives on how the West colonised Africa, Latin America and certain Asian nations.

On her part, Fair (1993, p.10) provides a disarming account of the historical process that led to the stereotyping of Africa and African people.

The hundreds of years of Africa's unequal engagement with the West through the slave trade, colonial and post-colonial relations has produced a system of classification of people and societies, which has left Africa marginalized... It is within this location of Africa on the margins, where Africa occupies a space between so-called tradition/underdevelopment and modernity/development, that the weight of historically bound relations of domination manifests itself. This manifestation takes place in the images and representations of Africa and Africans produced by and for white Europeans and Americans. These images and representations, drawn from a range of sources such as religious tales, storytelling, popular ideas, and scientific thought..., are tropes for relations between the West and Africa, naturalized and objectified for ready consumption.

Four years earlier, Terrell (1989) had examined a similar theme - the notion of 'civilised' European explorers and colonisers and their experiences with the 'primitive' Africans. He highlighted poignantly the tradition of unequal relationships between colonised people in Africa and the colonizers.

The tradition was carefully designed to maintain whites – regardless of nationality – in upper caste positions. Indigenous Africans and other non-whites were relegated to the lowest castes... All aspects of life in the Colonial societies, including churches, schools,

residential neighborhoods, financial associations and political organizations were carefully monitored to ensure white dominance and black subservience. In addition, whites used their courts and laws to maintain their privileged position. Newspapers and other organs of the Western press were integral to white domination (Terrell, 1989, pp. 136-137).

OBSTACLES TO COVERAGE OF AFRICA

It has been suggested (Fair, 1993) that Africa is full of hazards that undermine the efforts of Western journalists to cover the continent fairly. These hazards include 'sources reluctant to speak for their own safety, difficult travel conditions, censorship, inadequate communication facilities that make transmitting stories at times nearly impossible' (Fair, 1993, p. 7). Apart from these problems, Beaubien (2004, p. 10) has also listed other factors that undermine the coverage of Africa. While official corruption stands as a major problem, other obstacles include crumbling infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, internal rebellion, high prices of goods and services, and the dangers associated with air travel in Africa. While these problems should be acknowledged, it is curious that Beaubien did not explain how they differ from difficulties encountered by reporters who cover other continents such as South America and Asia.

Reporting Africa has never been an easy task for local and foreign correspondents. There are documented cases of official harassment and intimidation of journalists in some African countries such as Zimbabwe, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, Malawi, Swaziland, Namibia and Nigeria (especially during the military era). See, for example, Kanuma (2004, pp. 37-39) and Chipare (2004, pp. 39-41). In Africa, abuse of human rights and press freedom is common. As Kanuma (2004, p. 38) notes:

Most of the continent's regimes are highly undemocratic; a good number of them are led by people who shot their way to power after ruinous rebel wars. Others 'inherited' power and occasionally a leader might legitimately win an election. What almost all of these leaders have in common is that, once they are in power they entrench themselves at the expense of everything else. They rig elections, and they divert the constitution or rewrite it to contain provisions for a lifetime presidency. They deal with political opponents or dissidents by locking them up indefinitely in degrading conditions. They also legislate draconian press laws to muzzle the inquisitive, critical elements of the press.

If Western correspondents are looking for evidence of negative events in Africa to justify their portrayal of the continent, the evidence is all laid out in various parts of Africa. Africa has contributed to its own downfall and especially the image the West holds about the continent. Perhaps it is fair to say that Africa's greatest enemies are embedded within the

continental ridge. These include the extra-judicial killings in various parts of Africa, the endless conflicts and wars that ravage various parts of Africa, including the endless conflict in Darfur, Sudan — to name just one intransigent case. Also to be highlighted are the 2008 xenophobic attacks against foreigners in South Africa and the ongoing Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria. There are more. These conflicts create the impression — rightly or wrongly — that Africa is a continent of political instability.

CONCLUSIONS

Against the background of political tensions and endless conflicts in Africa, including the unequal relationships between European colonisers and African people, as well as the difficulties that Africa confronts as it struggles to free itself from mental, psychological and intellectual inequality with the West, it is not surprising that reports about Africa, cultivated during colonial times and sustained in modern times, have formed the basis for the way Africa is framed in media reports in the 21st century. The absence of deeper knowledge and understanding of Africa's history, including lack of appreciation of the diversity of African cultures and traditions have contributed to Western journalists' distorted images of Africa. An understanding of Western media's misrepresentations of Africa and the negative portrayal of the continent requires a good grasp of African history. This historical context is crucial because of the impact of colonialism on Africa. Overcoming the existing inaccuracies in Western media portrayal of Africa will involve untying the historical and economic knots that have cast Africa as the weakest link in the relationship of unequal partners. It will also require political, social, economic and cultural transformations within Africa.

To change the way Africa is represented by Western media, Michira recommends greater efforts by governments and the private sector to break the monopoly that Western media conglomerates enjoy through ownership, production and distribution of media products. It is a valid point but it fails to identify how the goals could be achieved. The call on African governments to establish alternative media to report accurately on African news events is not new. Following the recommendations made by the MacBride Commission (1980) during the debate over a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) at UNESCO in the mid 1970s and up to the early 1980s, several developing countries and regional organisations enthusiastically set up their own news agencies in order to disseminate more news about their countries and region. The objective was not only to increase the quantity of news about developing countries but also to pay more attention to positive news (often referred to as 'development news'). In the age of the Internet, it is important to investigate how technological changes have impacted the image of Africa in the

Western media. In essence, has Africa's image in Western media improved or deteriorated? Have new technologies resulted in greater quantity and diversity of news about Africa? To what extent are African media organizations able to source their own news without relying on the multinational Western news agencies?

The most pragmatic way for Africa to project its image to the rest of the world was laid out by Hachten (2004, p.87):

If Africa is to develop economically and politically in the coming years, Western news media must do a better job of reporting events there. But even more important, African nations must acquire free and independent news media of their own – news systems that utilize the new information technologies – communication satellites, global television, high-speed computer exchanges – that most of the world now uses.

In the age of new technologies, African countries must not only adopt the new technologies to facilitate improvements in the socioeconomic conditions of their people, they must also promote free and independent journalism, something that is currently lacking in many African countries.

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“I AM AN AFRICAN”: MEDIATING SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

VIOLA C. MILTON

While it has most often been understood as a site for the narration of a unified national identity, television has at the same time been associated with the development of diversified cultural citizenship (Hartley 2004). This article explores this idea, focusing on the mediation of (South-) African identity(ies) in contemporary South Africa where identity construction is pulled simultaneously in two directions: seeking at once homogeneity and heterogeneity. It presents a case study to explore how difference is negotiated on South African television and how concepts such as ‘rainbow identity’, ‘African Renaissance’, ‘South African’ and ‘African’ are (re-) inscribed in an attempt to reverse the impact of colonization.

Keywords: identity, nation/national identity, postcolonial, African Renaissance, Rainbow nation, South African, African

In February 2007 sister and two cousins, now 15, joined a youth choir in Pretoria, South Africa. One afternoon, as I arrived to pick them up after practice, I found them giggling hysterically. Upon enquiring about the cause for their merriment, they explained that they were waiting outside with their friend – who is black (we are ‘coloured’) – when they saw a car pulling up with a black couple. One of them pointed the couple out to their friend and said, ‘Hey, isn’t that your folks’ upon which he responded – with indignation apparently – ‘Are you crazy, my parents are white’.

Two years later, in July 2009, the appointment of Gill Marcus as the first female South African Reserve Bank governor elicited the following response:

The appointments in the core resource envelope of the country suggest that the ANC does not have confidence in the *blacks of African descent*,” said Duma Gqubule, director

Viola C. Milton is a senior lecturer in the Department of Communication Science at the University of South Africa (viola.milton@gmail.com).

of advisory firm Kio....Gqubule said the appointments suggested the ANC was more concerned about the financial markets that tended to unjustifiably associate competence with *non-African blacks*...But ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe defended his party's position. 'The ANC has always been a non-racial organisation [sic] that fights to eliminate gender, race and class contradictions. *Some people want to unbundle black to mean African. They want to nullify the traditional definition of black,*' he said [my emphasis]. (Qoza 2009)

In post-apartheid South Africa the issue of (national) identity remains a site of intense discourse and debate. Former Defense Minister Mosiuoa Lekota noted that as a nation, we must ask ourselves this question 'When will we cease to be Africans, coloureds, Indians and whites and merely be South Africans?' (in Nair 2004). Lekota pointed out the difficulty of representativeness anywhere outside (and as the Qoza reference above suggests, sometimes even inside) South Africa in terms of who is and isn't considered (South) African, observing that this has become an issue of [national] identity. The question constantly arises about what it means to be a South African in the 'new' South Africa and whether you're a South African first and then 'black/white/coloured/Indian' or vice versa. In this respect, the South African media continually address the issue of identity in an attempt to destabilize our perceptions of apartheid-ascribed identities with advertisements questioning 'what makes you black' (2005 advertisement for the radio station *Metro FM*) or what it means to be white or black (2005 advertisement for the beer Hansa Pilsner) in contemporary South Africa. Watching South African television today, one thing is clear; being (or becoming) 'South African' is hard work. Not least so because of the shifts and changes in government's conceptualizations of what 'being South African' might entail.

South Africa has to imagine its identity as a nation in a postcolonial, postmodern, globalized world where the very notion of identity - and national identity specifically - has become mired in ambiguity and controversy. Postcolonial mobility has opened up previously unimagined spaces of heterogeneity, cultural interaction and diversity, which underscore Benedict Anderson's understanding of 'the nation' as an imagined community, i.e. socially constructed. If one accepts Anderson's argument, it should stand to reason that such a construction is open to differing (often competing) visions of what 'the nation' should entail. Loomba (2005, p.173) argues in this respect that, 'perhaps the connection between postcolonial writing and the nation can be better comprehended by understanding that *the "nation" itself is a ground of dispute and debate, a site for the competing imaginings of different ideological and political interests*' [my emphasis]. In the South African case, the country is caught in a struggle to define itself on the one hand in alignment with a postmodern emphasis on non-essentialism that celebrates the hybridity of South African identities and thus allows the country to position itself as a legitimate player in global identity politics. On the other hand though, there is a strong contention for a more essentialist

definition as South Africa seeks to position itself as a leader on the African continent, which it hopes to revive. These contesting imaginings of the New South African nation, is resultant from government's own conflicting perceptions of who we are or might be(come) as a nation, as well as who would be included and excluded from this imagined national community. This ambivalence of a government wanting to function in a postcolonial environment, but still shrouded in essentialist nationalist ideologies necessarily impacts upon the ways in which 'the nation' – such as it is – is being imagined on national television.

Since 1994, South Africa has gone through great pains to unite a nation separated by decades of racist thought and practice. Stuart Hall (1996, p.247) reminds us however that the shift from the colonial to the postcolonial does not entail a 'break where the "old relations" disappear for ever (sic) and entirely new ones come to replace them'. Instead, he argues, 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past' (Hall, 1990, p.225). With this in mind, and considering the anecdotes above, one could very well ask with Bekker & Leildé (2006): Does race continue to carry deep meaning in South Africa and have the meanings attached to the ethnic and racial labels of the 'old' South Africa persisted? An exploration of the ways in which the South African Broadcasting Corporation (the SABC) addresses questions of nation and identity proves revealing in this regard.

The Independent Broadcasting Authority of South Africa (IBA) tasked the SABC to act as 'nation builder' in the new South Africa. The Broadcasting Act's (1999) mandate in this respect was conceived when the prevailing image of the South African nation, was Archbishop Desmond Tutu's metaphor of the 'rainbow nation'. Thus, the master discourse, that frames all discourses about identity on South Africa's public broadcaster, is the invocation of South Africa as the 'rainbow nation'. Archbishop Desmond Tutu coined the phrase to suggest a nation that is supposedly diverse in nature but united in spirit. The inherent contradiction of a 'unity in diversity' however, poses questions not only about the construction of the rainbow nation, but also its representation in the media. Rainbowism, in spite of its symbolic and reconciliation value remains in fact an empty concept. For rainbow at once signals one and many, but the many is defined primarily through the one. In terms of nation then, the rainbow-identity underscores Homi Bhabha's assertion that the nation can 'assume symbolic force precisely in so far as it is represented as a unity; yet national unity is always ultimately impossible precisely because it can only be represented as such through a suppression and repression, symbolic or otherwise, of difference' (Stratton & Ang, 1994, p.135).

Compounding the difficulty of representing 'rainbow-identity', is the fact that during Thabo Mbeki's reign as president of South Africa, the image of the rainbow nation with its emphasis on multiculturalism, slowly became replaced by the notion of an 'African Renaissance' – which in at least one of its conceptions, seem to contradict the populist interpretation of rainbow identity. While the latter discourse equated 'rainbow' identity with

a (albeit somewhat naïve) perception of the 'hybridity' of identity(ties) as evident in the postcolonial imaginary, Mbeki's vision of the 'African Renaissance' harkened back to a more 'nationalist' ideology in which South Africa is imagined as consisting of two nations – one black, one white. It might therefore be useful to unpack the mutations of 'national identity' under ANC hegemony before embarking upon an exploration of the media's representation thereof.

NATIONAL IDENTITY UNDER ANC HEGEMONY

Ramsamy (2007) notes that during its years as a protest movement, the ANC slowly came to embrace 'non-racialism' - a doctrine based on a common South African rather than ethnic or racial identity. However, as the ANC transformed itself into a political party upon the demise of apartheid, it experienced difficulty in garnering support from different segments of South African society. They therefore began to abandon their rhetorical commitment to non-racialism and increasingly adopted a pragmatic, multicultural conceptualization of the South African nation that could accommodate diverse, even antagonistic identities under one rubric: 'the Rainbow Nation' (Ramsamy, 2007). Thus then an ideology that expresses on the one hand that South Africanness cannot assume a single standard which aspires to be monolithic, but on the other hand, pursues a socio-political environment in which all interests and identities are assumed to be equally valid at the levels of government and civil society (Van Wyk, 2004, p. 91). One problem with 'rainbowism' is the lack of consensus about its meaning and even its viability as a metaphor for nation building and national identity in South Africa (Van Wyk, 2004, p. 92).

South African identity, like all postmodern identities, is fluid, taking on its rainbow configuration when desired, and an unspecified 'other' when not (Gqola, 2001). Thus, while rainbowism serves to reinforce notions of a united nation, it also contains suggestions that undermine this motif. Gqola (2001) argues that its stress on a precarious unity is based on the erasure of difference and the minimizing of the continuing effects of power differentials on members of the South African body politic. 'It simultaneously leads everywhere and nowhere, is helpful and dangerous because even as it asserts its presence, it signifies absence [...] One has to ask, what ends do these claims to political unity and diversity serve? Certainly, it enables the unself-reflexive embrace of rainbowism and "reconciliation" as key to the expression of a new South African ideal' (Gqola, 2001, pp. 100, 102). Thus it would appear that, in spite of its claims towards 'unity in diversity, rainbowism can only retain its usefulness as a metaphor for nation and national identity, if represented as a choice for or against a singular South African identity. In Gqola's words, 'rainbowism permits the farce of sameness and colour-blindness [sic] by erasing historical significance and the accompanying power dynamics which continue to influence the present' (Gqola, 2001, p.

103). The implication appears to be that South Africans are able to make one choice only—to belong together to a new nation, or to remain divided by offensive cleavages inherited from an unjust past. The two positions stand in an inverse relationship to each other. If older racial and ethnic identities persist, a national identity cannot emerge and, conversely, if and when these former identities dissolve, pride in and identification with the South African nation will flourish (Bekker & Leildé, 2006). Rainbowism's discursive mutation from a celebration of diversity and multiculturalism to 'one identity for all' did not happen in an identity-political vacuum.

Non-racialism, which once indicated colour-blindness, was rearticulated in the early 1990s to mean 'black', especially as far as affirmative access to social resources was now concerned (Tomaselli & Shepperson, 2001). Non-racialism in this respect moved from being an anti-sign to an affirmative sign as far as racial identification is concerned. For Louw (1994) there is a certain irony in that the National Party of the previous dispensation now paradoxically adopted anti-apartheid non-racial discourses, while the 'freedom-fighting' ANC increasingly mobilized racialism within the electorate. 'Black economic empowerment' (BEE) and 'affirmative action' became the new buzzwords in a country intent on 'righting the wrongs of the past'. Under Mbeki's reign, removing legislative and economic obstacles to black empowerment became the business of the ANC government. His seminal 'I am an African'-speech should be read and understood against this backdrop (http://www.soweto.co.za/html/i_iamafican.htm).

Tomaselli & Shepperson (2001) note that Mbeki's speech, with its postmodern, multiple hailing of identity(s), became the discursive basis of the Renaissance strategy: emphasizing black economic empowerment and affirmative action on the one hand and on the other, a clarion call to remember our collective history as the peoples of (South) Africa so that together, we may shape our future. In a sense, the speech rhetorically illustrates the ambivalence of the terms operative in the new South Africa: it originated within very specific discourses of struggle and oppression on the one hand and modernity and progress on the other hand. As Tomaselli & Shepperson (2001, p. 16) point out, the speech is both postmodern and nationalistic in nature, calling for a 'creation of new categories, new perceptions and recovering aspects of African identities, and hybridizing these into new identity formations'. However, Mistry (2001) notes that this call for new identity formations, has a very specific national target, i.e. black South Africans: 'It is clear for any reader that [Mbeki's African Renaissance] moves the emphasis from a cultural diversity program to one privileging a black African agenda. The implications of this is not one just confined to the borders of South Africa but rather its vision is much broader – embracing the rest of the African continent' (Mistry, 2001, p. 12).

For Distiller (2006), the African Renaissance is an important concept, because of its attempts to engage with the racism and inequitable political and economic structures imposed on the African continent. She acknowledges however that the concept is also

fraught with complex contradictions, as it invokes powerful affective associations that themselves draw their value from the colonial history the African Renaissance is attempting to counter. Appiah's (1992) assertion that "'the colonial' is not dead, since it lives on in its 'after-effects'" is especially apropos here (Appiah, 1992, p.71). He notes that colonial history still shapes contemporary identities, not only in the sense that past ideas and images remain embedded in contemporary discourses and identities but in the sense that the colonial constitutes one of the histories in relation to which people are positioned and position themselves. Thus then, Tomaselli & Shepperson's (2001) argument that, if the African Renaissance is to retain its usefulness as a concept, the idea of the Renaissance has to draw upon and not flatten out the wide and creative diversity of Africa. They argue that Mbeki's call to (a) common identity(s) must challenge us to navigate between the poles of historicization Tomaselli & Shepperson (2001) caution that the choice African people need to make is not between 'authentic' African identity and 'Eurocentric' nationalism, but rather that identity should be the basis from which Africans will represent their self-constitution as ends in themselves. Ahluwalia (2002) adds that '[a]n African Renaissance which does not degenerate into essentialism has the potential to transform the lives of many Africans who have been ravaged by the continuing legacy of colonialism'. And in this respect, postcolonial theory has much to offer, for as Simon Gikandi puts it, postcolonial theory is 'one way of recognising how decolonised situations are marked by the trace of the imperial past they try to disavow' (Gikandi, 1996, p.15). It can be understood as a 'code for the state of undecidability in which the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation (ibid., p.14).

Given South Africa's history of artificially separating and defining its citizens from top-down, Distiller (2008) asks, in what terms then, do we understand what it means to be South African? Brown's (2001) argument that a concept of a shared problematic of difference may serve South Africa well as the basis for national belonging perhaps offers the clearest path towards unpacking what the concept 'South African' may (come to) mean. This is not to say that the influences and affiliations of globalization be ignored, for indeed, as Brown (2001, p.759) argues '...in a postcolonial and postmodern world, "local" identities are imbricated in global politics and cultures, and South African concerns [thus] "speak" in interesting ways to, and of, the rest of the world'. In this respect, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (the SABC) provides an interesting platform from which to study the ways in which competing discourses about nation and identity are semiotically constructed to give meaning to the development of a (*singular* ?) South African nation.

THE SABC AS 'NATION BUILDER'

The SABC is not only a conveyor of culture and politics but has itself undergone various changes that are both reflective and resultant of the changes in the South African political public sphere. The SABC can thus be seen as a metaphor for a nation in flux, therefore an exploration of the ways in which the SABC encourage South Africans to think of themselves as 'South African' can be instructive.

South Africa's history of apartheid shaped SABC-TV's conception of its audience in terms of two distinct racial groups: black and white. This was in line with the apartheid logic of separate and uneven development that marked the National Party doctrine of the nation as a sacred and essential unit of difference (Nixon, 1994, p. 59, 62). The apartheid division in the wider society was mirrored in the structures of television channels divided into TV 1 for primarily English and Afrikaans-speaking whites, while TV 2 and TV 3 were for Zulu-speaking and Sotho-speaking blacks, respectively. Furthermore, SABC TV defined a South African as a white person, while black people were defined in terms of their ethnic groups namely, Vendas, Xhosas, Zulus, etc. (Currie and Markovitz, 1993, p.94). During the political turmoil that marked 1980's South Africa, the SABC became a tool in the apartheid government's 'Total Strategy' against black South Africans as a means of transmitting the coded messages of cultural apartheid.

The 1990s witnessed the transformation of the SABC from state to public broadcaster – primarily through privatization, a reduction of government funding and an increasing reliance on commercial funding. This was designed in part to ensure that future governments would be prevented from using the broadcaster to further its interests or to create its preferred identities- of which national identity could be one (Louw 1994; Teer-Tomaselli 2008). Thus the irony in the IBA Act of 1999 tasking the SABC with the objective of nation building is well noted. However, nation building in contemporary South Africa is a mammoth task, for as noted earlier, the cultural policies of the post-apartheid hegemony have already opposing agendas. The first emphasized the cultural diversity of South African society and worked through the 'Rainbow Nation' campaign during Mandela's reign (1994-1998). On the other hand, Mbeki's reign (1999-2008) reflects a vision of what he terms the 'African Renaissance', in which he essentially envisions South Africa as consisting of two nations - a wealthy white minority and a poor black majority (Mistry, 2001). As such, Mbeki's African dream is often derided as one that signaled the first cracks in the ANC's claim towards non-racialism, as observers note that this dream implied a preference for black above all else. Added to this is the inherent contradiction in claiming non-racialism while espousing 'Affirmative Action' which in essence asks that we declare who we are primarily in terms of race. And here, race not by choice, but as proclaimed by government¹. These

changes had a major impact on the SABC's structuring of itself and its discourses on nation and nation building².

Yvonne Kgame, General Manager of Content for the SABC, argues that contemporary SABC television promotes the democratization processes 'by fostering the concept of a single "South Africanness" and by promoting unity in diversity' (Kgame, 2004). However, as Barnett (1999, p. 274) argues, '... inherited economic, institutional and cultural conditions continue to impose limitations on the practical implementation of a progressive conceptualization of the mass media as a vehicle for nation building and democratic communication [in South Africa]'. SABC-television's current structure reinforces the ambivalence of a broadcaster trapped between two visions of 'the nation'.

At present, SABC television consists of a public service leg (SABC1 and 2) and a commercial leg (SABC3) (www.sabc.co.za). Each of these channels is then further segmented and geared towards specific social groups. SABC1, broadcasting in Nguni and English, addresses the young, black audience. SABC2 focuses on families and broadcasts on this channel are in Sotho, Afrikaans and English. The commercially-driven SABC3 appeals to more up-market English-speaking audiences. Orgeret (2004, p. 156) suggests that contrary to the SABC's assertions about nation building and unity, these transformations imply further divisions, perhaps even a return to/continuation of apartheid divisions. Furthermore, the SABC is increasingly reliant upon advertising revenue, resulting in a search for audiences that would be lucrative for advertisers, i.e., audiences with money. This search for ratings to please advertisers, lead Jacobs (2004) to observe that the segmentation of South African media coincides with class and race inequalities - segments that are now presumably facilitated by 'market forces' instead of by the state.

One could thus argue that popular culture in South Africa is working alongside political and social institutions to both chronicle the transformation of the country into a multicultural[?] democracy and imaginatively/materially create a New South Africa (Barnard 2006, p.39).

ON 'BECOMING' (SOUTH-) AFRICAN: THE STORY OF MANDLA AND ALYCE

To illustrate the arguments offered here, I wish to focus briefly on a specific storyline revolving around the upcoming marriage of two black characters in the popular South African soap opera, *7de Laan*, flighted on SABC2. The storyline is reflexive of a prevailing trend in South Africa's prime time television drama's that started towards the end of 2008 and continued throughout 2009: *Scandal* (e.tv) featured an interracial marriage where the struggle for prominence of cultural tradition was fore-grounded, *Isidingo* (SABC3) featured a traditional Indian wedding, highlighting the problematic of having to do so 'shot-gun',

Generations (SABC1) concentrated their traditional-wedding storyline on negotiating the wedding between the pregnant daughter of a chief (and an accomplished business women in her own right) and a wealthy businessman, while *Muvhango* (SABC2) dealt with the wedding-traditions when the chief himself takes a wife. Common to all these representations, were a focus on the importance of 'tradition' and 'culture' – specifically as it pertains to 'African' traditional culture. I focus on the *7de Laan* storyline primarily because this storyline marks the first time that this particular soap opera foray into the arena of a 'culture' and 'tradition' that is not white (cf. Milton 2008). *7de Laan* furthermore presents an interesting vantagepoint for this exploration because it is an Afrikaans soap opera geared towards a primarily (white) Afrikaans audience – though Audience Ratings reveal that it has massive crossover appeal across racial (and class) boundaries.

Before venturing into the exploration of this storyline, it is worth noting that although *7de Laan* consists of a multicultural cast and utilizes multicultural production peoples, it is written and conceptualized by white writers (this was revealed in personal communication with one of the writers). This is important to note because the (perhaps unintended) impact of this is that we, the viewers, are invited to imagine the 'new' South Africa, through the eyes of the white beholder. One outcome of this is that while the multicultural society is visibly represented, there is in fact a tendency towards homogenization, so that difference becomes elided and the assumed normalcy of a white, 'western' imagination is underscored. In essence, it could be argued that this multicultural soap opera is informed by the idea that what lay behind visible differences are essentially undifferentiated individuals attuned to the same values and norms. I have spoken and written about this before and do not wish to rehash those arguments here (Milton, 2008). This discussion is instead more interested in those instances where efforts are made to present 'the other' in terms of their own viewpoints, cultures, and lived identities, thus asking what happens when the uninitiated imagines- or re-imagines — a culture different from his/her own?

In this respect, *7de Laan*, as the SABC's flagship Afrikaans program is an interesting platform to explore. The program is flighted on the public service channel, SABC2 and, though multilingual, is marketed as an Afrikaans soap opera. The histories of both Afrikaans and the SABC are mired in controversy, with both struggling to rid themselves of the shackles of the past. The SABC legislatively broke its ties with apartheid, but remains shrouded in accusations of biased reporting and ANC favoritism. Its reliance on commercial funding further complicates the notion of the SABC as public service broadcaster as the search for lucrative audiences means that programming is skewed towards audiences attractive to advertisers, thus accusations of 'commercialization' of public service broadcasting is often added to the above.

Afrikaans has an even more uphill battle to fight in ridding itself from its apartheid associations. In spite of the fact that more than 50 percent of Afrikaans speakers are in fact not white (Statistics South Africa 2003:18), a central element of Afrikaner-nationalism was

the annexation of Afrikaans for the Afrikaners, while the knowledge that so-called 'coloured' people are also Afrikaans was at most, an after-thought (Kombuis, 2009). Traditionally, Afrikaans is thus seen as the language of the oppressor and debates about Afrikaans and the position of Afrikaans in the South African public sphere have done little to contest that. Moreover, the politics of identity - especially as it pertains to broadcasting in South Africa, is solidly linked to language politics³. The SABC also utilized Afrikaans as its flagship language during apartheid, while the reduction of Afrikaans in the post-apartheid media-landscape became a particularly explosive situation for the broadcaster from the mid-1990s onward [cf. Louw 1994]. Thus, looking at an Afrikaans language soap opera provides an interesting platform from which to explore the ways in which contemporary public service broadcasting imagines (a) South African national identity.

To contextualize the storyline under scrutiny, it is necessary to provide a short biography of the two central characters in the storyline: Mandla Khumalo (the groom) and Alyce Morapedi (the bride).

Mandla Khumalo

Mandla's story is very similar to the anecdote told at the beginning of this article. As a little boy, Mandla's mom – who was from a rural community somewhere in South Africa, was persuaded by her white 'madam' to leave Mandla with the madam and her family in order to give him the best possible chance of surviving in a changing South African environment. Mandla grew up in the white neighborhood, going to a model C school⁴, never (it would appear) returning to his ancestral home in the rural village. Mandla grew up to become a fine journalist, even winning awards for his journalistic efforts. But he had a deep, dark secret – Mandla was ashamed of his rural roots and when his real mom unexpectedly showed up in Hillside (the fictional town where Mandla works and plays), he at first did not want to acknowledge her, preferring instead to have his white mother come to the awards presentation ceremony. However, after many twists and turns in the storyline, Mandla eventually comes to appreciate his African roots and then proudly introduced his 'real' mom to his friends and colleagues. In due time, Mandla fell in love with Alyce Morapedi and now they are about to get married.

Alyce Morapedi

Alyce's story is quite different. She grew up as the only child of very wealthy parents who were never really there for her. They gave her everything money could buy, she is well travelled, very spoilt and as a result is used to getting her own way. Her parents, it appears, gave in to her every whim to compensate for not being there for her physically or emotionally. She grew up in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in South

Africa, although she was rarely ever home - because of her parents' busy lives they were either in hotels or in a foreign country. Alyce sings really beautiful and left Hillside for a while to go make a living off her talent. Upon her return, she took over the management of the nightclub where Hillside's young adults hang out and she fell in love with Mandla. At the time of writing this, she has finally succeeded in getting him to propose to her and they are now in the process of planning their wedding.

Mandla is interested in a 'traditional' wedding, Alyce wants a so-called 'white' wedding⁵.

7de Laan's wedding-storyline presents an interesting case study in the politics of identity construction in contemporary South Africa. Here you have two young, urban black characters, who want to get married. One recently rediscovered his African roots (see the connotations to Mbeki's call for South African's to get in touch with their innate 'Africanness') the other resembles the upwards mobile 'black diamonds'⁶, so out of touch with their roots, that they are often referred to by essentialists as 'coconuts'⁷: black on the outside, white on the inside. Mandla wants a traditional wedding to honor his family and his ancestors, Alyce wants a small 'modern'(read western) wedding and has problems with the way in which African tradition - in this case - defines women. She is adamant that she wants no part in an antiquated ritual, that devalues her position in society and, on a more mundane level perhaps, would not allow her to look 'cute' (in reference to the fact that she had to cover her hair with a headscarf throughout the ceremonies as a sign of respect for her elders and also her husband to be). More-over, her parents wanted no part of a traditional wedding either, for as her mother pointed out, Alyce's father is a well-respected businessman and they imagined that their only daughter would marry someone of equally high social standing, the wedding would take place in a church and the reception in one of the best venues the country has to offer. Apart from the fact that they considered Mandla to be unworthy of their daughter (given his lack of socio-economic credentials) her mother also questioned what her father's business acquaintances would think if they partook in a tradition that does not respect a woman's place in society. Besides, neither Alyce's mother nor her father had any idea of what a 'traditional' wedding would entail as according to their proclamations in the storyline, neither of them ever partook in one (which, given their age, rings a bit untrue, for even if they chose a different path for their own nuptials, it is highly unlikely that they did not partake in any while growing up).

In the above scenario, it could be argued that Alyce and her parents become 'stand - ins' for the Western Gaze (indeed, for the white writers themselves), i.e., those who cannot see and do not understand the culture and traditions of 'the other' and thus resists without full knowledge. Foster (1982, p.21) argues in this respect that '[t]hinking of other cultures often means thinking of the exotic, which in turn immediately evokes a symbolic world of infinite complexity, surprise, color, manifold variety and richness.' Of course, the same can

happen when one tries to imagine your own culture for the viewing pleasure of 'the other' (*Isidingo* and *Scandal*'s wedding-storylines being cases in point). While there are elements of exotizing tradition in *7de Laan*'s depiction of the wedding-storyline, for the most part however it unfolds in true post-colonial spirit: it represents the coming together of two cultural perspectives in which both learn about the other and which, in the end, seemingly leaves both transformed. Regarding the invocation of what a traditional wedding would entail, it could perhaps be argued that where 'the African' or the African culture is concerned, this is imagined, not so much for black Africans who already are familiar with traditional weddings, but rather for the uninitiated (non-black) Africans who are curious and need to be 'educated' about their African roots - be they WIC's or so-called 'coconuts'. This is in line with the SABC's mandate to 'inform, educate and entertain viewers and listeners' (Kgame, 2004). It is also in line with the African Renaissance vision of instilling pride in African roots and traditions as well as the 'rainbow' vision according to which the SABC had to ensure not only that diversity is reflected, but also that it is reflected positively: 'programmes should contribute to a sense of nation building and should not in any way disparage the lifestyle or belief systems of any specific cultural group...' (South African Broadcasting Corporation, 1996, p.10).

While it is tempting at this stage to indulge in an in-depth analysis of the storyline under purview, it must be acknowledged that a space like this allows only for a somewhat superficial discussion on some of the salient issues regarding the construction of nation and identity that emerges from a scrutiny of the different episodes. In this respect, three issues of identity construction dominated this storyline, i.e. gender, class and generation. While issues such as language and race are also pertinent, I would argue that in this particular construction, the former three were dominant.

Alyce's journey towards acceptance of a traditional wedding, in true soap opera style, was paved with many trials and tribulations – even resulting in a short break between her and Mandla. Her eventual capitulation to Mandla's request for a traditional wedding, were orchestrated by Maria (the older black domestic worker in the soap opera) and Aggie (the black domestic worker turned personal assistant/secretary at the *Hillside Times*). Both had lengthy conversations with her about her lack of pride in her own culture and traditions. Maria's intervention especially lead Alyce to an understanding of the importance of tradition for Mandla and she and Aggie both convinced Alyce towards a re-interpretation of what lobola might signify for women: i.e. one that does not consider the tradition to be 'buying' the woman (as in its non-African interpretation of a 'bride-price'), but that rather sees it as honouring the spirit and character of the woman in question as well as paying homage to her parents for raising her and allowing the groom to now partake of her. Thus, in spite of her mother and father's continued protestations to the contrary, Alyce gives in and agrees to a traditional wedding. This opens the floor for 'lobola'-negotiations to commence. 'Lobola' as '... a traditional Southern African custom whereby a man pays the family of his bride-to-

be for her hand in marriage. Comparable to the European dowry system, the custom is aimed at bringing the two families together, fostering mutual respect, and indicating that the man is capable of supporting his wife both financially and emotionally' (*Intimacy*, 2009). The lobola-negotiation is a complex and extended process, involving the extended families of both the bride and the groom. The process itself will not be discussed here, but three salient issues that emerged from the negotiation process will be explored in a little more detail, i.e., the issues of gender, generation and social class.

From a ('western'⁸) feminist perspective the lobola-negotiations becomes an interesting dance between 'buying' a woman and 'acknowledging the worth of a woman'. Setting the story up this way could potentially create a negative juxtaposition of 'us' and 'them'. At one point, Altus (the white owner of the events company that is planning the wedding⁹ and who is a friend to both Alyce and Mandla), for example says to Mandla 'eish, I'm glad "we" don't have to pay lobola', thereby implicitly pointing to the difference between a western (white?) culture - where Alyce and her family wish to locate themselves and a traditional (African) culture - often derided for being backward thinking. The *7de Laan* script however carefully avoids any form of negative cultural stereotyping in their efforts to 're-imagine' black African traditions - at least for the uninformed western thinker - as something to take pride in, something that celebrates (instead of demeans) women and their worth in society. In this respect, the older Maria plays a pivotal role in instructing the young Alyce (and the uninitiated viewer) about the importance of valuing culture and tradition. The script seems to suggest that, while it is important to accept that the youth may have a different cultural experience and ways of expression than older generations, it is not to say that the baby should be thrown out with the bath water. Instead, it pays to be open to experiences and perceptions that might radically change our own experience and perception of who we are as a people. Such a transformation process transcends the boundaries of race, generation, gender and class.

Mandla's own path towards reclaiming pride in his African roots, was not an easy one. Being brought up in the city, by the white madam for whom his mother worked, meant that he grew up devoid of an understanding and appreciation of so-called 'African' culture. Unlike the Morapedi's, who actively resist being drawn 'back' into cultural traditions that they sneer at, Mandla does in fact learn to accept the duality of his identity: one rooted in both a 'western' appreciation of his world and an affirmative pride in the African roots that shaped his early childhood. This is but one point of contestation regarding Alyce's choice of Mandla as her husband. The other is his lack of socio-economic credentials. Alyce, recognizing the importance of class for her parents, encourages Mandla to connect with her father through a focus on money – thus Mandla starts handing Mr. Morapedi advice about the stock market. This leads to various comedic situations as Mandla, who has no knowledge about the stock market, fears that his scheme will be uncovered. This being a soap opera, Mandla does get away with the pretence, in fact, Alyce's father starts to appreciate his value

as a potential son-in-law based on their interactions in this regard. It is however when the Morapedis eventually give in to a traditional wedding, that the really interesting commentary about class and identity emerge. Thabo Mbeki's invocation of the 'African Renaissance' invokes the imagery of a 'poor black' nation and a 'wealthy white' nation. What this discourse masks, is the fact that the post-1994 economic public sphere, with its GEAR policies aimed at black economic empowerment (BEE), in fact witnessed the rapid ascension of a black middle-class, that resulted in a deepening of the schism between the rich and the poor in South Africa¹⁰. Under the ANC's black economic empowerment initiatives and affirmative action, a small group of urban black people benefitted and became wealthy, while the majority of black people – and especially those in rural environments – remain poor¹¹. In this storyline, the wealthy Morapedis enter into lobola-negotiations with the rural – and much poorer – Khumalos. However, contrary to any expectation that the girl's wealthier family will have the upper hand in the negotiation process, it is the Khumalos that can in fact assert power, in this case, the power of tradition. They are the ones in the know and it is Alyce and her family that must take their cues from them in terms of what is acceptable and what not. The only 'power' that the Morapedis may have in this situation, is that they can make it too expensive for Mandla to marry Alyce. This however is never presented as a real threat in the storyline. Instead, what transpires is that it is the Khumalos who threaten to leave the negotiation-table several times because the Morapedis show no reverence to the rituals of tradition. In this respect, the soap opera metaphorically construct the process of negotiation that so-called 'liminal identities' engage in.

The eventual conclusion to the lobola-negotiation end up being a compromise between tradition and modernity, with both parties having to 'let go' of some pre-conceived ideas, for example Mrs. Morapedi is not allowed to partake in the negotiations (in spite of her insistence to counter tradition and do just that), but the Khumalos eventually agree to shun tradition and meet the Morapedis at a venue that is not their home, even though tradition demand that negotiations be held there. Of particular interest in this scenario is the way in which wealth and money become associated with 'forgetting one's roots', while a lack of these come to signal a rootedness in tradition and the 'old way' of doing things. It is the domestic worker Maria and Mandla's less wealthy, rural family that had to instruct their fellow black, but wealthier countrymen in the ways of their traditions. In this sense, the soap opera underscores the stereotype that the 'black diamonds' are out of touch with their African reality – a perception that is in fact not borne out by research. Research by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd and the UCT Unilever Institute (2006) who coined the concept 'black diamonds' revealed that contrary to what people believe about the 'urbanization' (often code for 'westernization') of this group, 58% of them in fact live in houses in the townships, with many of those living in the suburbs claiming to retain their connections to the township, 86% believe in lobola while 75% believe in slaughtering to thank ancestors (tnsresearchsurveys, 2006). So, the 'black diamonds' that *7de Laan* portrayed are in fact the

exception, not the rule. The other salient issue regarding this portrayal is the way in which tradition and modernity eventually finds common ground.

Senghor (1973), a proponent of the *négritude*-movement argued that for the colonized to come to an understanding of his identity, he had to '...first divest [him]self of [his] borrowed attire - that of assimilation - and assert [his] being, that is to say his "Africanness"'. Some interpretations of the 'African Renaissance' vision of South African identity ascribe to this essentialist, prescriptive construction of identity. *7de Laan* however, is careful not to fall prey to this so-called 'nativism'. Nativism is a concept Said used to refer to a general trend in the late '80s early 90's to 'reclaim one's past'. Nativism, for Said (1993, p. 228) is an enterprise that involves reassessing the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This reassessment results in the quest for delving into one's 'native' past and is a 'narrative or actuality that stands free from worldly time itself. One sees this in such enterprises as Senghor's *négritude*... or in the Garveyite back to Africa project for American blacks...' (Said, 1993, p. 228). For Said, it is important to move beyond the confines of such local identities which claim, for example, that only the Irish are Irish, or the Africans African - as can be seen in some of the comments by particular factions of the ANC in recent discussions about 'who is considered to be African' in contemporary South Africa. But as Ahluwalia (2002, p. 274) cautions, 'for an African Renaissance to have any lasting impact on the African condition, it is important [that it doesn't] replicate the essentialist positions advocated by movements such as *négritude*'. In fact, as early as 1974, Mphahlele (1974, p.6) argued that an exoticism replaced negritude (and I would argue some interpretations of the idea of an African Renaissance), arguing that while that might well be useful in the Francophone context, it is not so in the case of South Africa: 'I personally cannot think of a future of my people in South Africa as something in which the white man does not feature. Whether he likes it or not, our destinies are inseparable. I have seen too much that is good in western culture - for example its music, literature and theatre - to want to repudiate it.' In this respect, it is useful to remember Homi Bhabha's (1994, p. 33) argument that colonization was not *only* a process of cultural and political domination and oppression, but *also* a process of cultural hybridization which is best understood as a transculturation process which sees the creation of a new mixed cultural order whereby both colonizer and colonized becomes transformed.

This presents a useful metaphor for *7de Laan* and ultimately also the SABC's imagining of South Africa as nation: in *7de Laan* the conclusion sees a marriage not only of two characters, but ultimately of two worldviews – neither in the end gaining the upper-hand as they come to an understanding that 'authenticity' itself is socially constructed. Alyce and her parents – standing in for the 'western' audience is not left unaffected by traditional ways of doing things – to invoke Bhabha's perception of hybridity - leaving the township behind did not translate in the Morapedi's becoming 'carbon copy' 'westerners – in the final analysis, they were affected by tradition in much the same way as they impacted upon it. In

a similar way members of the viewing audience should come to the postcolonial realization that unequal power in spite, colonialism impacted upon the colonizers as much as they impacted upon the colonized. Van Staden (1997) argues,

On a national and regional level, Africanisation [sic] is not a pure, uncontaminated rejection of US-Eurocentrism, but a rearticulation of 'Africanness' in the context of global capitalism and its articulations of multiple regionalisms. Thus, popular culture in South Africa is not only about new national symbols, national-popular culture like rugby and soccer, or a 'traditional' African culture, but about an urban culture of raves, radio, television, rock music, Garfield, magazines and the Internet alongside mbaqanga, toyi-toyi, mass action, Nelson Mandela's face on coffee mugs, alongside the deployment of media forms in rural areas, etc. These are not juxtapositions but articulations: the creation of a space for daily life.

So perhaps, in the final analysis, it would appear that South Africa is not exempt from the postcolonial condition of hybridization. What this means for the SABC's 'nation building' project is that the journey from an apartheid past 'towards non-racialism, equity and unity in diversity', is not linear and appears to be pioneering various pathways that lead to various destinations (Bekker & Leildé, 2006). Thus, to steal from Van Zyl Slabbert, 'to be called a(n) (South-) African, is the beginning of a discussion, never the final word.

ENDNOTES

1. The apartheid-government segmented South Africa according to four distinct racial groups – white, coloured, black and Indian - and these same categories are still utilized today in service of government's affirmative action and black empowerment economic policies..

2. For a detailed discussion of the broadcaster's transformation, compare Louw (1994) and Teer-Tomaselli (2004)). This discussion focuses on interpretations of the transformation processes to honor the limits of space and further the argument posed here.

3. The enforcement of Afrikaans in black schools is often cited as the main catalyst for the 1976 Soweto uprisings which catapulted SA into more than a decade of violent protests, and public ostracizing.

4. Under the racial-segregation policies of apartheid, South African schools had separate government departments for the different racial groups. The different departments had different funding available, different resources at their disposal and issued different exams. Model C Schools were designated for white children. Post-apartheid, Model C schools were opened for all racial groups, resulting in a major move to these schools from urban townships. [cf. <http://www.erp.org.za/htm/issue1-2.htm>].

5. "White" wedding here refers to a so-called "western" wedding for which the bride often chooses to wear white as opposed to a "traditional" wedding which abides by a strict dress code (in the traditional cloth and colors of the specific group), has many rituals that must be observed (the most controversial of these in recent times the issues of "lobola" and "animal slaughtering) and for which there generally is no church service (the finalization of the lobola-payment culminates in the slaughtering of an animal to honor the ancestors and usually the bride is then taken to the house of the groom where a range of celebrations kick off to symbolically signify

the coming together of the man and woman as husband and wife) [cf. <http://www.matrimony.co.za/home/azindex.asp?id=2697>].

6. "Black diamonds" refer to South Africa's booming black middle-class. TNS-Research describes the group as "members of South Africa's fast-growing, affluent and influential black community [cf. <http://www.tnsresearchsurveys.co.za/our-expertise/black-diamond.html>]

7. "Black diamonds" are often simultaneously referred to as "coconuts". This is a derogatory term used to refer to black people who are 'black on the outside, but white on the inside' – i.e., they "look" black but "act" white and is meant to call out those perceived to have 'forgotten their (African) roots [cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ethnic_slurs].

8. The author acknowledges that the concept 'western' is itself a loaded concept that needs to be unpacked, but will refrain from doing so for the purpose of this article.

9. Mandela and Alyce's decision to get an events planning company to plan their wedding itself became mired in controversy, for as the residential authority on traditional weddings (Maria) explained to them, an 'authentic' traditional wedding is not planned by a wedding planner, but by the families themselves.

10. GEAR is an acronym for *Growth, Employment and Redistribution, and refers to the South African Government's macro-economic strategy* (Adelzadeh, 1996).

11. The ANC's policy shifts since assuming power in 1994 saw the party moving from a socialist inspired "RDP" project" to a more capitalist aligned "GEAR" approach. "Where the RDP had promised basic services for all, GEAR promised public-private sector partnerships based on cost recovery" (Kingsworth, 2003, p.39). This shift to neo-liberalism had some commentators arguing that the divide between rich and poor are growing ever bigger.

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TECHNOLOGISING THE VILLAGE AGORA: HOW TELE-CENTRES SET UP IN RURAL AREAS INSERT THE GLOBAL IN THE LOCAL

ZVENYIKA ECKSON MUGARI

This article is based on a study conducted against the backdrop of ongoing national ICT policy formulation in Zimbabwe. One point of consensus in the national debate captured in the E-readiness Report (2005) was the all too evident urban/rural digital divide across all sectors of the economy ranging from Education, Agriculture, Commerce, Health etc. The fact that country statistics for most countries in Africa show the rural populations as greater than urban populations logically justifies prioritizing the concerns of the rural population in any pro-people policy. However, most debates on the digital divide articulate the divide in terms of levels of communications infrastructure and tele-density differentials between rural and urban areas or between developing countries and the developed world. Questions of how these new technologies tend to reconfigure communities across new spatio-temporal boundaries, resulting in new forms of presences and absences, inclusions and exclusions call for more rigorous action research of many different ICT initiatives already on the ground in many parts of Africa. Drawing empirical evidence from the work of the Open Knowledge Network's ICT project in Zimbabwe this paper draws lessons with policy implications for dealing with the digital divide between the rural and urban areas within developing countries in terms of the nature and volume of content, language and direction of information flow.

Keywords: digital divide, e-readiness, glocalisation, ICT, intermediaries, local language, Openknowledge Network, telecentres, Zimbabwe

While to say the true word is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word

Zvenyika Eckson Mugari is the chair of the Media and Society Studies Department at the Midlands State University Gweru, Zimbabwe (zmugari@yahoo.co.uk or mugariez@msu.ac.za).

alone – nor can she say it for another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words. (Freire, 1996, p. 69)

Zimbabwe has been witness to few but largely uncoordinated efforts to bring the benefits of the digital revolution to formerly unconnected rural communities. Most of these efforts were Civil Society Organisation (CSO) driven initiatives in different parts of the country. It was not by accident that most of these initiatives begin at about the same time from the late 1990s, experience growth spurts around 2003 and plateau between 2004 and 2006 before they begin a downward turn courtesy of the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) process. Some notable projects that came up during this period included the Mulonga.com project established in the Zambezi valley along the northern border of Zimbabwe to focus on strengthening the culture and language of the Tonga people by giving them a web presence. The other ones were the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) and the Open Knowledge Network implemented by Southern Alliance For Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE) a local NGO specializing in livelihoods projects based on sustainable management and utilization of natural forest products. They work with rural based small-scale agrarian communities in various parts of the country but mainly in the southeastern parts of Manicaland province. The government on its part had also embarked on an ambitious project of establishing parliamentary constituency information kiosks across the breadth and length of the country. Market driven initiatives remained firmly based in urban centers where the markets for Internet services were viable.

This paper singles out the Open Knowledge Network (OKN) project cited above for a more detailed analysis mainly because of its rural focus. The OKN came to Zimbabwe in 2004 after having been piloted in other countries such as India, Kenya, Senegal ostensibly in a rhizomatic expansion of a network structure linking up community nodes in a horizontal communication loop across the South. The OKN experience in Zimbabwe could provide a microcosmic model of the challenges and pitfalls as well as opportunities associated with attempts at extending the benefits of Internet technology more widely to marginalized communities in rural settings. It points to some preliminary conclusions about possible trajectories a technologised village agora might take.

SOME THEORETICAL POSTULATES ABOUT THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

From Capitalism to Informationalism

In proclaiming the advent of the global village, information society theorists of the technological determinism school may have attributed to new information and communication

technologies (ICTs) more power to reconfigure the social world, yet have underestimated the shaping influence of human agency and ideology. The world's concern with widening and deepening global chasms bear clear testimony to the fact that the ICTs remain far from being ideologically innocent tools for unproblematic social, economic and cultural integration across space and time. Dirlik (2003, p.13) holds a less optimistic view of the globalising influence of the digital revolution and warns that:

The world may be reconfigured, but the reconfiguration takes place under the regime of capitalism which continues to reproduce under new circumstances, and in new forms, the inequalities built into its structuring of the world.

On a world scale the same North/South dichotomies which contemporary capitalism etched still endure and in different localities the rural poor remain excluded, marginalized on the fringes of the global village. In the information society, Castells (2000) theorizes, information rather than capital becomes the key factor of (knowledge) production and access to it and control of information networks defines the new contours of power relations in society. Communications technologies allow for the annihilation of space and act as puvyers of globalization; changes the relationship to space and time. And, while he explains that networks are not a new form of social organization, they have become a 'key feature of social morphology'. The role and function of place-based institutions like the nation state gets transformed in the face of new socio-political agregations and disagregations, new unities and fractures beyond the confines imposed by geography as people acquire new citizenships defined by categories of belonging other than the nation state. While capitalist accumulation and expansion globally posed serious threats to the finite resourses in the biosphere, informationalism as a mode of production is characterised by predatory tendencies on weaker species of an equally limited pool of cultural diversity. Old bases of exploitation and marginalisation and erasure are replaced as whole communities lose more by incorporation than by exclusion.

Guadamuz (2005, p.13) argues for a conceptualization of the digital divide in terms of content more than anything else. He maintains that:

Even if the problem of access to the Internet was miraculously solved tomorrow and large sectors of the world's population were able to get online, some questions would still remain. What awaits the people of the developing world once they connect to the Internet? Is the content relevant to their needs? Who owns the content? And most importantly, will they be able to understand any of it?

To the above list of questions could be added yet other questions. What is the language of the Internet? Will they be permitted to talk back? There are still outstanding obstacles that

remain to be cleared beyond a concern with connectivity and making the hardware accessible. The cost of the advance of the network society is often calculated in terms of the number of what some critics have termed *linguicide*, the mass predation of languages and all the indigenous knowledge systems, and the diverse cultural experiences they represent. The fact that English and few other European languages dominate the internet bodes ill for cultural diversity in the information age. The problem of content is made worse by the predominance of English as the language of choice for content online. According to a study of online content conducted in 2000, more than 68% of all indexable documents were in English and yet only a tiny fraction of the world's population had attained sufficient levels of proficiency in English to be able to benefit from such content. Guadamuz, (2005, p.14). ICT projects that simplistically attempt to address the digital divide by uncritically introducing the internet to local communities have often disingenuously inserted the local into the global resulting in new forms of dependencies and new forms of passive consumerism and the disempowerment and alienation of recipient communities.

Trosow (2002, p.21) posits the view that theorizing the information age has followed two distinctively different trajectories. One school privileges an ontological and epistemological perspective of the post-industrial societal arrangements as a given and an unavoidable consequence of the advances in information and communication technology with no bearing at all with the historical past. The other school of thought argues in the tradition of the critical school and rejects the instrumental theory of technology in favor of the normative theory that views technology as reflective of other social, cultural, economic and political relations. Rather than privilege technology as an independent determinant of other social processes, it is seen as but one of several mutually dependent factors that influence social change. It also rejects the view of the information age as in sharp rupture with the industrial past. Commodification of knowledge is viewed as a reflection of the logic of capitalist relations and as an outgrowth of global restructuring of production with a free market fetishism. ICT projects reflect one or other of these conflicting theoretical pole positions in the manner in which they are structured to operate. The OKN (2004-2006) project in Zimbabwe is discussed here as a case in point of how ICT project configuration and implementation in Africa often bear some unmistakable traces and imprint of either or both of the above theoretical positions.

A Northern Solution in Search of a Southern Problem

The idea behind the OKN can be traced back to the G-8 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit in July 2000 which first launched the Digital Opportunity Taskforce (*dot force*), a collaboration among government, international organizations, industry, and the non-profit sector, to examine concrete steps to integrate the various efforts to bridge the international digital

divide. It is instructive to note at the outset that from its inception the OKN perfectly fits into the old development template involving the North diagnosing the problem of the South, prescribing a suitable technology determined solution package and then exporting it to the South ready made. Of course, it was not before extensive research and consultation had been conducted in selected southern countries between 2000 and 2002. The problem was how to bridge the digital divide that separates the industrially backward and informationally poor Southern countries horizontally from each other and vertically from the industrialized and information rich North. In more specific terms, the problem was how to integrate the South into the emerging information society. ICT projects had to be designed to address different aspects of the digital divide. Some projects focused on increasing the diffusion and penetration of the technology itself particularly the Internet, by improving the 'last mile' connectivity network infrastructure. Other projects focused on helping Southern governments come up with ICT enabling policy frameworks. This has led some development commentators to raise the concern that technology is increasingly determining the solutions sought to development problems. It would appear Rozendal (2003) makes a clear distinction between a top-down and a participatory approach to ICT project formulation and implementation, which to a certain extent characterized the OKN project orientation. Such initiatives, Rozendal (2003, p.5) argues, make the assumption that:

a clearly defined problem and an organizational change require a result-orientated approach. For the design of the new organization, project management has to use universal rules and methods. These methods start by determining a clear objective and the design of abstract models of the future situation. Emphasis is laid on the output of the changing process. The process is mostly coordinated from the top, using centralized and highly formalized decision-making procedures.

In a founding document, *The Open Knowledge Network (OKN) a proposal for local content creation and exchange*, the OKN's architects, Armstrong, Cranston and Holmes (2002) stated its main purpose as that of promoting: 'both the creation and the exchange of local content as widely as possible across the South. Local content development is closely tied to human development, and the ultimate goal of the OKN proposal is the empowerment of local communities.'

The proposal viewed the OKN not as a fixed model, but a suggested approach that could respond in flexible ways to the different information needs of different southern communities. Recognising the diversity and richness of initiatives to collect and disseminate local content which already exist in many parts of the South, the proposal represents an attempt to 'join up the dots', in order to increase the capacity and impact of those efforts which are already in place. It is best thought of as a framework or dynamic to link and support information initiatives among poor and marginalized communities through shared standards

and values: local content, local people, local languages. It is important to note the top-down condescending logic of project design apparent in the way OKN came to be implemented in Zimbabwe as in other Southern countries. The project design was influenced by action research findings conducted elsewhere (India, Kenya, Senegal) where the OKN had been successfully implemented and was running. No prior research had been conducted on the Zimbabwean context. Instead, the baseline survey leading up to the development of the logical framework and monitoring and evaluation instruments was conducted simultaneously as the project was being piloted. Far from strengthening or supporting existing information initiatives, OKN activities on the ground celebrated the new technology as coming to supplant the traditional modes of information sharing. Instead of providing communities with the capacity to engage in deliberation on local issues at a local level the digital technology, the project ruptured the participating communities and orientated them away from the local to the global. From a sociological perspective, Wellman and Hampton (Otis and Johanson, 2004) describe this tendency as a paradigm shift-taking place in our society:

in which people and institutions are no longer connected primarily by geography, but are instead living in networked societies. Nowadays people usually have more friends outside their neighbourhood than within it, and may have kin spread throughout a country, or the world. The advent of the Internet is accelerating a change that has already been set in motion, and is becoming an infrastructure of social networks.

Through the OKN internet platform a Shona speaking communal farmer in Mutambara area gets exposed to useful technical information written in Kiswahili by a small scale farmer in Kenya on pest control and organic farming techniques to increase agricultural yield or to an article written in Hindi by an Indian Market Gardener. He too might contribute valuable content in his own local language but in the absence of a lingua franca the OKN mostly succeeded in celebrating linguistic diversity at the cost of communication and effective networking across language and territorial boundaries.

Glocalisation as a Counterpoint of Globalization

While the idea of globalization is often associated with notions of homogenizing cosmopolitanism, the term glocalisation has been suggested to describe a counterpoint backlash to the negative hegemonic aspects of the concept of globalization. For Sullivan (2006) the contemporary notion and phenomenon of glocalisation does not only conjure up a collapsing of temporal and spatial scales to produce simultaneous experiences and productions of macro and micro. It also combines with a post-dualist imagining that is suggestive of a dynamic situatedness in both the local and the global. She further explains that this is related largely to the fact that the communications technology facilitating the recently

accelerated pace of capital colonization also has made possible an exponential increase in the ability of geographically dispersed local social movements and networks to connect with each other. By facilitating the sharing of ideas and experiences, the planning of events and actions, the generation of independently produced media regarding events and issues, and the reinforcing of psychological strength from the knowledge of not being isolated, technology has played an enormous part in permitting the emergence of a social movement that, while diverse, is indeed global. The OKN ideal of emphasising the creation and sharing of local content both locally and globally on the Internet came closest to interrogating the assumptions of globalism and contributing to glocalisation. Local communities reach out to other communities beyond their spatial and temporal boundaries without losing their own identity in the process by being equal participants in digital conversations which Internet technology makes possible. In its design, the OKN would also provide an antidote to the more negative aspects of informationalism and its implied death of local cultures and mass linguicides as envisioned by pessimistic observers.

OKN – BRIDGING THE CONTENT DIVIDE: LOCAL PEOPLE, LOCAL LANGUAGE, LOCAL CONTENT

As Ballantyne (2002) points out, the worldwide Open Knowledge Network project was informed from the beginning by a realization within the group of eight (G8) most industrialized community of nations that even after crossing the technology divide, Third world populations would still find the content on the World Wide Web alienating. Language issues and contextual relevance and ownership restrictions would present new barriers making the content largely inaccessible to them. There was perceived danger that unmitigated access to 'foreign' globalised knowledge would fast turn people of the South into a consumptariat with an addiction for distant and potentially irrelevant information. More worrying perhaps, developing countries were being 'invaded' by foreign ideas and values with a potential to undermine or overwhelm local cultural heritage and economic livelihoods.

In a seminal study that may well be code named the OKN testament of faith, Ballantyne (2002) arrives at the conclusion that:

If we are serious about the use of ICTs as an empowerment tool – so poor people can shape decisions that affect their lives, so they can grasp economic and social opportunities, and so they can deal with misfortunes and disasters, then this foreign content must be matched by the expression and communication of local knowledge that is relevant to local situations. To a large extent, this means that ICTs need to be conveyors of locally relevant messages and information. They need to provide opportunities for local people to interact and communicate with each other, expressing their own ideas, knowledge and culture in their own languages.

Implicit in the notions of ICTs as tools of empowerment is the idea that content issues matter just as importantly as the technology itself. Such concerns resonate with the issues discussed in the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debates of the 1980s. It awakens architects of digital solutions for development challenges and international development policy experts to the fact that the volume, velocity and direction of the flow of content still matters as much post-digital revolution as they did in the one-to-many mass communication model of the industrial capitalist society of yesteryear. By promoting user-generated content, the OKN as a network can be argued to meet the architectural design to challenge the dominant paradigm of source –receiver relationship between North and South. Much content on the Internet had been hierarchised with the most valuable content originating from the North, packaged mainly in English, commoditised and insulated from free access by proprietary license, (Trosow, 2002). ICT for development orthodoxy emphasized on pushing external content at people living in poverty. Many initiatives offered one-way transfer of information (usually from the global to the local level) but failing to promote genuine two-way knowledge sharing (Talyarkhan, 2004).

Key to addressing the content gap in the information society would be to develop ICT strategies that promote local content generation and dissemination. In short, instead of using ICTs as mere conduits or megaphones for globalising Northern perspectives on Southern realities, they should be used to give voice to local content by local people in local languages, where local content is defined as 'the expression of the locally owned and adapted knowledge of a community – where the community is defined by its location, culture, language, or area of interest', (Ballantyne, 2002).

The bubble-babble on the Internet in foreign languages was pretty much like listening to an oracle or a prophet who spoke riddles about great things to come in tongues without the help of an interpreter. The challenges however, for wider dissemination of local content stem from the very fact of the local nature of local content as defined above. Local content propagated via the OKN Network ended up being so context specific as to render its universal application and appeal to a global audience irrelevant. Documentation of knowledge in local languages also limited its accessibility beyond a small language community, and diminished its use-value to non-speakers of the language. The OKN's focus on local content creation was itself built around the mistaken assumption that local content would be by virtue of being local superior and more preferable to foreign content found on the Internet. Information inequalities between North and South on the Internet was the problem the OKN was designed to address taking the necessity for an Internet technology as a given. Its logic was to reconceptualise Southern development problems in terms of how they fit into a preexisting technology and not vice-versa. Such valorization of Internet technology meant prior research needed only ask the 'how to' technologise local communication spaces and not the 'what for' question. Baseline surveys had to be done to establish the quantitative differences between extant foreign and local content and their comparative value on the Internet before the OKN

intervention. The problem was how the existing traditional place bound and context specific face-to-face communication initiatives could be adapted to the new digital technologies. The Zimbabwean experience with the OKN project discussed below sufficiently demonstrates some of these contradictions and challenges.

THE OKN PROJECT IN ZIMBABWE

The Open Knowledge Network (OKN) was piloted in Zimbabwe by OneWorld Africa through a local implementing partner the Southern Alliance For Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE) a local NGO which specialized in promoting sustainable livelihoods through conservation farming techniques among rural agrarian communities. The project was jointly funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID), Information and Communication for Development (ICD), Catalysing Access to ICT in Africa (CATIA) and OneWorld International. It was initiated at five project sites located in largely rural farming communities. Information Centres called Access Points (APs) were established, equipped with a minimum of two PCs with a dial-up Internet connection, a printer, a notice board and a world space radio receiver for downloading digital content mainly from OKN website and other free channels transmitted via satellite. At the SAFIRE Hub two Knowledge Workers with extensive knowledge and experience in the media and communication sector were employed to coordinate documentation activities at the APs as well as editing, tagging and channeling content from APs via the OKN web page to the Chennai Hub in India which was responsible for content syndication. The project was organized around a multistage network structure. At the coalface were the APs manned by field officers known as community reporters or intermediaries. The field officers provided a vital interface between the information communication technology as a content creation and sharing tool on the one hand and members of the community, most of whom had not used a computer before and would have found it near impossible to participate in local content creation and dissemination via the internet unassisted.

In Zimbabwe however, Community Reporters had to be called by the term, Documentalist Field Assistants (DFAs) to avoid falling foul of the registration requirements of the Media and Information Commission (MIC) which required, in terms of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2002) (AIPPA), that all media houses and practicing journalists need a government license to operate. The OKN project came to Zimbabwe against a backdrop of a political clampdown on media and communication spaces in the whole country. Privately owned independent media houses were being closed, and any communication initiative outside the government-owned and -controlled ones was held in suspicion as meant to further imperialist sponsored regime change agendas. In its architectural design the OKN challenged the traditional notions of a local community as defined by

geographical contiguity. New 'local communities' defined by interest and spanning other categories of belonging and identity were made possible. Local APs were networked with each other through the country Hub and the country Hub was networked to peer Hubs in other centers across the South to form a global OKN community of interconnected micro-communities of Hubs and APs communicating with each other and sharing as partners in the knowledge economy.

The aim of the OKN project, that of seeking to promote both the creation and the exchange of local content as widely as possible across the South, supported by a range of different information and communication technologies (ICTs) fitted well into SAFIRE's own overall framework and goal: 'To empower rural communities to enable them to make more informed choices for a better livelihood' (SAFIRE brochure 2004). The pilot phase of the OKN project ran from May to October 2004. During this phase, five Access Points were set up Nyamazura, Mutambara, Galaupole, Ekowiza and Tongogara Refugee Camp. The important selection criteria used by SAFIRE to grant AP status to a center were convenience of location for public access by community members across age and gender differentials, nearness to electricity and telegraph line supply grids and the condition that SAFIRE had already established its presence in the area and was implementing ongoing livelihoods projects with the target community. Three out of the first five APs were located at rural schools and training institute. The other two were one at a refugee camp and the other in a high-density suburban area. The expansion phase followed from November 2004 to June 2005. Activities undertaken were the finalization of setting up existing APs, continuing to test and implement the OKN software and sustainability strategies as well as diversifying information generation and dissemination strategies. The period beyond June 2006 to the end of that year was the weaning off period when project activities were supposed to be continued without external funding from donor partners. The new focus was supposed to concentrate on up-scaling and mainstreaming the OKN activities into all projects being managed by SAFIRE regional offices and partner organizations in OKN such as EKOWISA (E-Knowledge for Women in Southern Africa), Fambidzanai Permaculture Centre and Seke Rural Home Based Care. However, financial viability challenges dictated serious structural changes in the way the OKN was to be carried forward. Digital documentation of content had to be discontinued altogether by end of 2006. SAFIRE had no budget line to retain DFAs on a full salary as before, so they left and had to be replaced by less experienced volunteers. Although AP Management Committees had been set up, they were not yet adequately resourced to take full responsibility for all operational costs associated with the APs in their communities. To capacitate such local structures for effective takeover would have needed longer incubation periods than were provided for in the quick fix project timelines of project donors.

COMMUNICATION VALUE

Evidence collected through project monitoring and evaluation instruments suggested that communities around APs rated as most important the fact that the OKN platform enabled them to also publish and share their own stories as well as read stories contributed by people who were known to them, people they could relate to and also in their own language. SAFIRE's own project performance appraisal report based on M&E data indicate that by the end of the pilot phase, project output measured in terms of local content contribution on the OKN website though significant in terms of numbers was still a mere drop in the ocean in comparative terms. The range of subjects covered was also limited to covering developmental issues around environment, conservation farming, health and HIV/AIDS issues, local but politically safe news, gender equity issues etc. In fact, there was a standing injunction from SAFIRE management against publishing political content through the OKN. The term political content itself was never explicitly defined and it was left to the discretion of Knowledge Workers to interpret it as they saw fit. The upshot of it was that even at the height of the widely discredited Government programme code named Operation Drive out Trash or Operation Murambatsvina, which resulted in many urban slum dwellers being displaced to rural areas, not a single story was published through the OKN even though people living around APs were equally adversely affected. When asked why they did not write stories about the effects of Operation Murambatsvina on people's livelihoods the DFAs indicated that they thought that was political. This strong aversion by OKN staff to any story that could remotely be interpreted as political need to be considered against the background of political polarization tensions and recrimination within the larger Zimbabwean body politic at the time. No Community Based Organization wanted to attract unnecessary government attention, which any story mildly critical of government policy was bound to do. Thus, instead of providing fodder for discussion on matters of public concern to the AP community, what was often written and published on the OKN bordered on the trivial.

The result was that the project failed to generate a critical mass of interested participants beyond the immediate communities around the APs themselves. It also failed to establish linkages with important sources of locally relevant content like government departments, which continued to sideline the APs and to rely on their traditional channels for information dissemination through mostly word of mouth. An illustrative example was when the District Administrator for Chimanimani District had to drive all the way from his office in Chimanimani town to Mutambara village, a distance of more than 60 kilometers, to personally announce the planned visit to the area by the Vice President of the country. Word had to be sent through the Agricultural Extension Officers of the area for traditional leaders to convene at an agreed venue so the DA could come and address them on the necessary preparations for the Vice President's visit. The DA was aware of the existence of the AP at Gonzoni Primary

School but never once thought of channeling information intended for the community through it. The failure to get government recognition as a credible channel through which to disseminate official information to communities around the AP seriously undermined its importance as a source of valuable information. Official announcements from government is valuable information in that it affects citizens' lives and therefore is by that virtue highly sought after. Throughout the piloting and expansion phases of the project, the OKN in Zimbabwe never once attracted content from government bureaucracies. Is it any wonder then that the AP never established itself as a forum for serious deliberation on matters of common concern for the community members? The kinds of articles published through the OKN were those of a politically harmless nature, the how-to type and recipes on various often very petty agricultural subjects or health matters not suitable as triggers of any serious social conversation.

Another factor that also worked against the AP becoming a true market place of ideas, a technologised village assembly was the fact that Internet content from the OKN website only could be downloaded through the World Space Radio at no additional cost at the AP. This meant that the AP offered a very limited fare of Internet content. Connectivity costs also imposed serious limitations on the possibility of community members using the AP facility in ways that directly responded to their information and communication needs. They could not for example, surf the net or use other search engines to conduct a general information search on the Internet. Members of the community could not open e-mail accounts to enable them to engage in personal communication with kith and kin within or outside the AP community. The donor funded community service project model also constrained the possibility of turning the AP into a commercially viable entity, which resulted in serious sustainability problems beyond the funding period. Thus when donor support ended in 2006 the OKN project had not established alternative sources of financing to support the original idea of generating and disseminating free content through the Internet. Beyond the physical capital in the form of Internet connectivity and the computer equipment at the APs the OKN project left very faint footprints among recipient communities in Zimbabwe.

The time horizons of the project were clearly too brief to allow for successful incubation and consolidation of such a project to have nationwide impact. The local implementing partner organization SAFIRE had hardly completed the setting up of Access Points let alone generating any meaningful volume of local content traffic on the Internet when the six months pilot phase had already elapsed and project evaluation reports were falling due to the project donors. However, major successes of the pilot phase were the translation of the source code for the OKN content management software into the two main local languages, (Shona and Sindebele) to make both the generation of content and interfacing with the computer in local languages possible (see Appendix for OKN News pages in Shona and Sindebele).

CONCLUSION

Cass Sunstein, in his book *Republic.com* (2001), expresses concern about the polarizing effects the Internet might hold. The Internet, as other new technologies, would dramatically increase the possibilities for people to hear 'echoes of their own voices and to wall themselves off from others' (2001, p.49). He fears like-minded will seek the like-minded to talk with online. Likewise, Van Alstyne and Brynjolfsson (1996, p.24) point to the fact that 'Internet users can seek out interactions with like-minded individuals who have similar values, and thus become less likely to trust important decisions to people whose values differ from their own'. The OKN project in Zimbabwe may very well be judged to have achieved very little to avoid the pitfalls alluded to above. By limiting the range of subjects to write on to politically sanitized topics on agriculture and livelihoods the project failed to meet the ideal of a true village agora. It did not even facilitate idle conversation let alone rational deliberation among community members. Beyond a concern with numbers of articles published in local languages, the OKN failed to present a viable alternative to the information avalanche that open unmitigated access to the World Wide Web presents with all its negative effects on cultural diversity. Governments everywhere constitute an important source of official information that affects local lives. The OKN project in Zimbabwe could have done better to engage with the government to gain its recognition and legitimation as a useful channel of information between citizens and their government.

Donor sponsorship of projects while critical and beneficial in kick starting and providing impetus to development initiatives in the South has often justified foisting exogenous agendas completely out of sync with local priorities. Its short-term planning horizon may not recognize or be able to address the multi-dimensional causes of poverty due to a narrow focus on donor objectives (Stoll et al., p. 2001). Trying to implement the OKN as a quick fix technical solution to existing digital divides both at a local and global level, divides that themselves were a result of centuries of cultural economic and political conditioning under colonialism and in the postcolonial era, could very well have been responsible for the serious long term sustainability problems soon after donor funding ended. The idea of an OKN in Zimbabwe held great promise of extending communication rights and a voice to originally marginalized groups. It succeeded in giving an Internet presence though limited to local communities in the South. However, an important lesson that can be drawn from the OKN project in Zimbabwe is that donor funded project is inherently short term and either pays lip-service to or fails to seriously tackle sustainability problems beyond the project plan. There are no inbuilt mechanisms to hold project donors accountable to their implementing partners or recipient communities during the tenure of project sponsorship much less so afterwards and it is often the local implementing partners like SAFIRE who end up with mud on their faces when projects leave white elephants behind.

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MAPS OF DIVERSITY: NEW VISUALIZATION TOOLS FOR ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD AND ITS COMMUNICATION FLOWS

MYRIAM REDONDO

Thirty years ago, our mental image of whatever happened abroad was a direct result of what we were told by mass media. International journalism was a controlled communication circuit, led by world elites (diplomats, politicians, ministers) and performed by foreign correspondents. Nowadays, international journalism has exploded in millions of small transnational circuits and conversations. New technologies facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and boost peripheral voices. But to what extent have they done it? What kinds of new communication maps, flows or domination patterns are being set up? Are they fairer than some decades ago? This paper gathers some new visualization tools that are leading to maps which allow a new point of view in the classic perceptions of the World and its 'others'. It is not a mere compilation of 'apps' and 'gizmos', but a preliminary examination of their potential to complement and renew classic approaches to International Communication. The ultimate intention of the article is to reinforce the idea that data visualization can benefit International Communication by improving the methodological tasks of their researchers, the outcomes of their research, the explanation of their theories to students and the popularization of concerns related to international media accuracy and diversity.

Keywords: data-visualization, International-communication, world-imagery, globalization, media-diversity

Myriam Redondo is communications advisor to the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and Associate Professor of "Journalism in the European Union" at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, UNED, in Madrid, Spain (myriam.redondo@gmail.com).

In the last decades, there have been large concerns with the idea that journalistic representation of the world is neither accurate nor fair. Some countries are literally swept from the map in the usual daily account of events carried out by television channels; Africa has been complaining about its media oblivion for decades. If, as thought very often, more communication means a better world, then the issue of media misrepresentations might not merely be a communication problem but also a severe political/social setback for some countries.

The underlying assumption of those who endorse the idea of media as progress agents is that journalists have the power to improve societies by deepening people's knowledge of public affairs and by acting as watchdogs to governments. In other words, journalistic messages influence citizens' opinion and thus facilitate/complicate the elite's activities (Jáuregui, 1989, pp. 91-115).

Three confluent academic perspectives fuel worries about media bias in an international context, all of them somehow related to movement: connecting/flows, patronizing/stereotypes and balancing/diversity.

WHERE DO INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION FLOWS COME FROM, AND WHERE DO THEY GO?

During the Cold War, and in opposition to the Soviet Union, the US government sponsored freedom of information under the so-called 'theory of free flow'. Its take was that media activities should not be restricted nor highly regulated throughout the World. Information should be treated as a commodity and media messages should cross the planet according only on the mandate of audience markets. But in the 1980s the education arm of the United Nations, UNESCO, realized some unpleasant results of such a proposal: at that moment, most media contents circulating around the world came from (and were related to) highly developed countries, while tended to forget about underdeveloped region's circumstances and needs.

In order to revert the situation, UNESCO hosted debates for a 'New World Information and Communication Order' (NWICO). Even if the concept of 'World Order' sounds outdated in the fast-moving 21st century, echoes of the NWICO remain today. As many studies show, there is an ongoing feeling that information production and distribution is still imbalanced and that media flows and contents are too linked to economic and political status¹.

What is the ultimate result of flows? What patterns or images do they fix in citizens' minds?

Although torrents of information flows circulate the world, they paradoxically tend towards uniformity and generate some static perceptions (or stereotypes) in the public

consciousness. The ultimate consequence of stereotypes is an informative world-system which, in line with the followers of Dependence Theory, privileges some core countries while permanently condemning underdeveloped ones to fail and to become forgotten². The distribution of foreign bureaux and foreign correspondents throughout the world is a clear sign of that imbalance. As Anthony Smith (1980, p.24) states, it reflects geopolitical preferences and reinforces friendly/unfriendly attitudes towards foreign nations inside a country.

Is there any movement or dispersion inside the media universe? Does real media diversity exist?

Media stereotypes and incorrect perceptions of the world can distort public opinion. Years ago, the significant idea was to analyze which countries were behind the strongest international information flows, and thus could impose their geopolitical construction of reality. Nowadays, with national identities diluting and more room for media individualism³, the question might be better reformulated to establish the news sources underlying the mainstream international discourses. What are the political, cultural and economical backgrounds of these sources, and their place on the social hierarchy? Following a Galtungian path: to which extent are they core elites, independent of their nationality? With communication flows exponentially growing globally, are we confronted with a wider arrange of contents and agendas or are we just receiving more messages (higher quantity) of a similar tendency (same quality)?

Many hopes have been placed on the world wide web — and specifically on the blogosphere- as a suitable arena to solve problems related to media flows, stereotypes and diversity. But do the new digital outlets really foster diversity? The issue is so complex that it cannot be summarized here, but some warnings should be taken into account. According to the 2008 Project for Excellence in Journalism report, in fact the news agenda narrows on the web: bloggers, for example, do not have many resources, so they focus on smaller issues and niche news (PRC, 2008, p. 4). As the writer Neil Carlsson graphically puts it when studying race distortions, for diversity to exist in the digital age 'minority groups need access to the hardware, software, and broadband services as well as funding to support recruiting minority bloggers' (Baynes, 2007, pp. 9-10).

How can we confirm that the old distorted flow patterns remain in the current era? Some tools suggest that at least we can approach the problem in a more visual way than some decades ago, making it more easy to understand.

CLASSIC THEORIES REVISITED

How can international flows, stereotypes and diversity be explained in a world where users have become potential producers of the information? The Net -and not the city, the school, nor the pub- is now the meeting place.

Recent theories such as Castells' 'Network Society' or Bauman's 'Liquid life' (Castells, 1996; Bauman, 2005) are insightful attempts to apprehend the complexity of the society we live in (where we always depend on others, where we act under the mandate of permanent change). But when applied to international society and to information flows, such explanations still leave room for a lot of uncertainties.

Some researchers (Mowlana, 1996 and 1997; Downing, 2000; Boyd-Barrett, 2006) have specifically assessed the influence of new technologies in the international communication system, providing shrewd arguments about the question. But we still do not have a definite set of new communication theories that help us explain the totality of present media upheavals. While waiting for new theories to emerge, it is necessary to turn to classic explanations for the international information system while at the same time updating them. And if the theories are at stake, methodologies and objects of study that lead to them are also undergoing a renewal.

A first step has been to adapt classic analysis on information flows to telecommunication flows, whether in the way of international telephone calls or of e-mails (Barnet & Salisbury, 1996; Barnet, 1999, 2001; Guldman, 2004). Another growing research trail consists of applying Social Network Analysis (SNA) to Hyperlink Network Analysis (HNA). In both cases, the common feature is the attention to electrical/digital nodes and the connections among them as identifiers of a social/international communication structure.

Hang Woo Park has done a superb compilation of recent works in the field of HNA (Park, 2003). Naewong Kang and Junho H. Choi followed international patterns of message exchange among users of Usenet (Kang and Choi, 1999); Eszter Hargittai, Alexander Halavais and Stanley D. Brunn and Martin Dodge also have interesting proposals (Hargittai, 1999; Halavais, 2000; Brunn & Dodge, 2001).

Halavais studies geographic borders in the cyberspace according to hyperlinks placed between a website and websites abroad. Brunn and Dodge center their work on ingoing and outgoing top-level domain links (e. g. between a given '.es' site for Spain and an '.fr' site for France). Eszter Hargittai and also G. A. Barnet, B. S. Chon, H. W. Park and D. Rosen study online connections among OECD countries (Barnet, Chon, Park & Rosen, 2001).

Some of these works resemble very much the notion of international flows, and indeed unveil that old patterns of country dominance and elite dominance are reluctant to disappear on the Net, an idea that will be obvious in many of the visualization examples given in this paper. According to Kang and Choi, the leading role of the U.S., United Kingdom and Japan is noticeable in Usenet. According to Eszter Hargittai, who has studied diversity on the Net, there is a huge variety of sources for information online, but people online actions usually resemble off-line media consumption patterns (Hargittai, 2007).

New data visualization tools –based in the combination of powerful computer-assisted data gathering with smooth visualization interfaces- represent another path to update International Communication studies, allowing the achievement of representative models.

Skrede and Ward (2005, p. 66) concede that, like theoretical abstractions, such models may 'leave out many features of the system they represent' but despite their limitations, 'good models have invaluable practical applications'.

Data visualization helps the researcher to take former complex methodologies to the level of non-expert audience, allowing collective intelligence's aid. Now, 'its design can shift from being described as "by experts, for experts" to a new characterization as "for the people"' (Danziger, 2008). In Walk2web (<http://walk2web.com>), the user introduces a URL and can visually browse websites that are linked from it. To observe international communicative links is now as simple as that.

For the purpose of this article, the most appealing methodological choices are those combining data e-gathering with visualization map tools. Following Kristian Skrede and Michael D. Ward, when used to obtain maps, data visualization is an important geographic tool that 'can help reveal spatial patterns in political processes, which in turn can help researchers discover new features of these processes that are not apparent from aggregate analysis and standard representations of the data' (cf. Skrede & Ward, 2005, p. 65).

Maps have been present in history since time immemorial because humanity needs guidance, a certain sense of geographical certainty. If displayed visually in appealing computer environments, they are easy to use and to understand.

According to Evan Ratliff (2007), an animation programmer called Paul Rademacher was the inventor of the 'map mashup'. According to Wikipedia, a mashup is 'a digital media file containing any or all of text, graphics, audio, video, and animation, which recombines and modifies existing digital works to create a derivative work', and thus a mashup map would be a mashup based on a map. In 2004, Rademacher decided to link housing ads to pins he had added to a Google map, and he published a demo on the Net. Thousands of people thanked him immediately; Google hired him. The era of interactive and customizable maps had started.

Mashup tools can be taken as an example of the current revalidation of geography, dismissed in the last decades as a bad angle of research in International Relations. As Skrede and Ward suggest, a return to this spatial focus should help advance the scientific study of world politics (Skrede & Ward, 2005, p. 66). Such a focus was lost in recent years in this discipline, but it should recover given the fact that it is not necessarily linked to imperialism anymore.

It is important to notice that maps were never an unintentional game: they were always political projections, and thus they reflected decisions of political leaders (Klinghoffer, 2006). What can be the effects of current world maps drawn by citizens, and not by politicians? On the one hand, new mashups show constellations of individual wishes, intimate thoughts and dialogues. They do not only represent the countries anymore, but also their people. On the other hand, it is important to stress that map mashups might not be innocent either, so it is necessary to consider their accuracy.

INTERNATIONAL VISUALIZATIONS

Before entering into specific examples of visualization experiments related to international communication, four common features of such exercises will be pointed out:

Colouring: Most new maps are 'Choropleth maps', those ones in which numeric information is provided by any visual mark, for example, with colors. It is difficult for the human eye to distinguish numbers, but much easier to differentiate colors. With colors, distinctions between variables can be made at first sight.

Distortion: There is frequent use of automated computer generated cartograms (maps where regions appear distorted in proportion to a specific parameter, such as population) and treemaps (space-constrained visualizations of hierarchical structures). A growing popular trend is to use physics of diffusion to generate cartograms, imitating the process by which a gas spreads to fill available space and to get uniform density throughout. All of these choices are very effective in showing attributes.

Customization: Gapminder (<http://gapminder.com>) is a company that has become famous by 'providing fun with statistics'. It allows everyone to make bubble graphs of the World (personalized by country or parameter) and to publish them in their own blogs. In Policymap (<http://policymap.com>), the user can create custom maps related to over 4,000 indicators such as demographics, education, energy and so forth. Personalization is an appreciated feature of any chart/map.

Conceptualization: The reader must forget the exclusive geographical meaning of the term 'map' and surrender to an abstraction. Mashups facilitated by new technologies can be maps of relations, of photographs, of news, and not only maps of countries. The idea is to make the viewers question their assumptions. Chris Harrison's maps of confrontational words, which we will see later on, can be taken as an example.

ORIGIN AND LOCATION OF THE FLOWS

The most logical way of upgrading classic international information flows conceptions is paying attention to current telecommunication and electricity distribution patterns. More specifically, it can be of great interest to analyze the structure of Net traffic.

The best collection of early Internet infrastructure maps can be accessed at the book *Atlas of cyberspaces* (Dodge & Kitchin, 2008). It presents visual works created from the mid-1990s by a number of scholars who understood very well the emerging linkages between the world's online connections and those of real life.

The virtual repository of the student Chris Harrison (2007) offers interesting maps as well. One of them displays the distribution of 89,344 interconnections among cities across the globe (by router configuration). The result backs the idea of old patterns coming back.

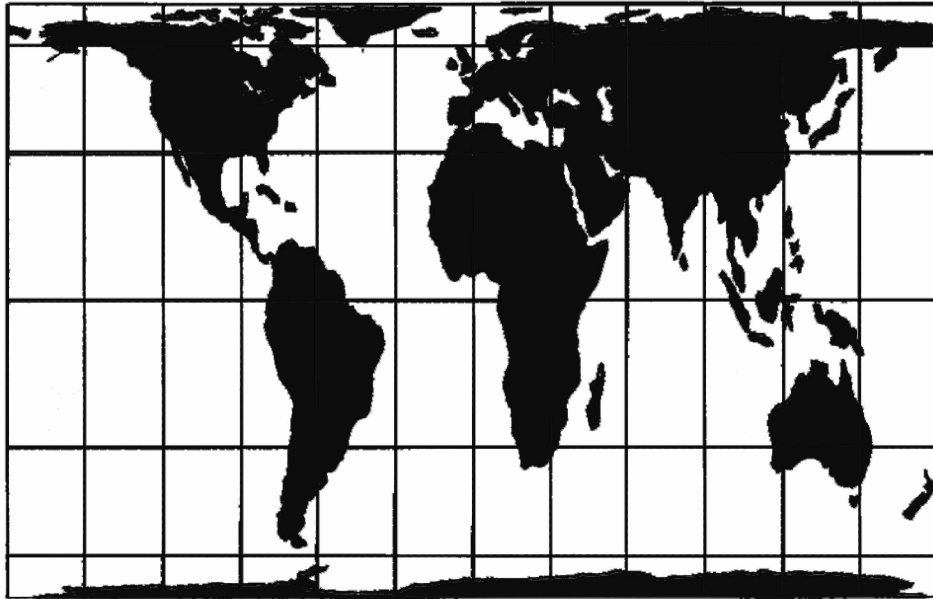


IMAGE 1. Peter's map. Several initiatives have tried to counterbalance Mercator presentation of the World (the map traditionally studied at schools), which is said to privilege developed countries at the expense of the poorest nations. Peter's map is possibly the best example of the trend of maps as political stances. It highlights the importance of the South.

North America, Western Europe and some Asian spots are 'shining Net zones', while South America and Africa tend to shrink in the darkness. This situation reminds very much of Galtung's accusations of center and periphery unfairness (Galtung, 1971). But the author underlines an important point: his works present connection densities, not usage. In Africa, hundreds of people may utilize a single connection.

The company Akamai handles a platform which delivers roughly 20% of World's Internet traffic, and uses the data obtained to generate statistics and comprehensive pictures of what's happening on the Web. Its best known map is maybe the one reflecting who is connected and who is consuming online news when and where. Again, Africa shrinks with the lowest level of peak visitors, in a new demonstration of postcolonial patterns persistence (<http://tinyurl.com/26php7>).

One of the most interesting experiments linked to current maps is centered in the origin of information flows. Using physics of diffusion, a team of researchers led by Michael T.

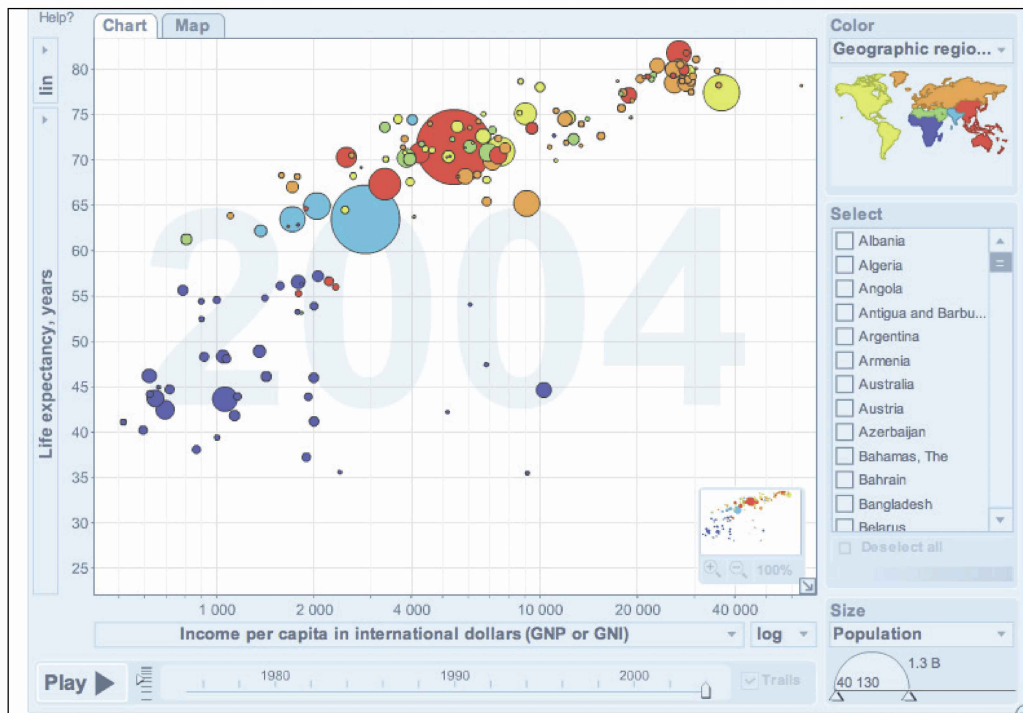


IMAGE 2. Gapminder. Converting time series into moving bubbles, where every bubble is a region or country.

Gastner and Mark E.J. Newman (2004) surveyed, among other topics, the origination and distribution of wire service news stories inside the U.S. The resulting cartograms - which circulated widely through the Net, setting the trend - speak for themselves: World informative core country has its own inner center and peripheries. There is a certain logic, cause the most populated locations in the U.S. generate most of the news stories (they appear excessively inflated); but even taking this into account, there are still some disproportions and overrepresentations (especially the ones of California and New York).

Current mashup tools also allow a better understanding of transnational news, those that according to Furio Colombo affect several countries – such as wars or environmental issues - (Colombo, 1999, p. 126). The Vulcan Project (<http://tinyurl.com/5djlax>) is a NASA funded effort led by Purdue University which quantifies CO₂ emissions at space and time scales much finer than achieved in the past. Vulcan maps show very graphically where greenhouse gases come from and where they go.

Many current cartograms (and media infographies) take advantage of GoogleMaps, which has been providing e-maps to online visitors since 2005, and Google Earth, which offers 3D images of the planet. A lot of data clustering can be made with these two services

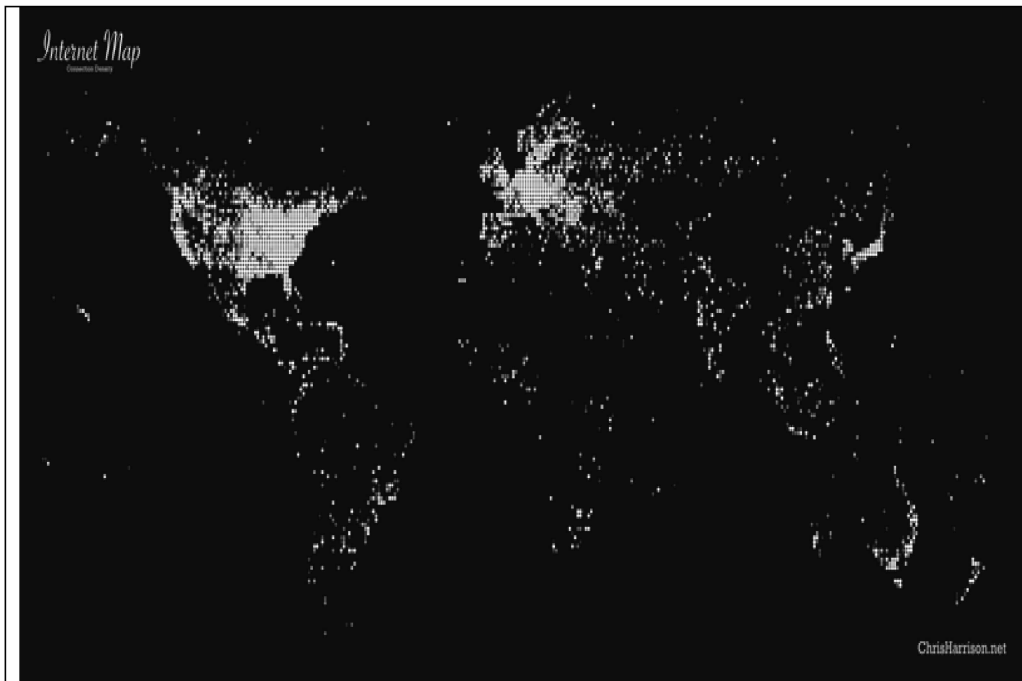


IMAGE 3. Chris Harrison's map of World connection density. The stronger the contrast, the more connectivity.

and a third one, Google News, an automatic aggregator of news coming from more than 4,500 information sources. The tip is to link the news to its geographical origin, something interesting to better understand those events that happen in faraway places or that have geographic causes.

Geographical tools like Google's can be applied to general news or to more specific topics: for example, a global map of terrorist acts (<http://globalincidentmap.com>), or a live piracy map (<http://www.icc-ccs.org/extra/display.php>). Nowadays, many mashup maps offer three options: the satellite image (a photography taken from the space), the map (a draft) and the hybrid of both. This satisfies user's need of getting closer to the scene but hides some limitations. For each news item, the text is not offered by local sources, but by global agencies or elite newspapers (such as Associated Press). So what is the real grade of diversity?

All of the examples given above relate to *places* (of connection, of origin) or to *movement* of the news. But flows can also be understood in a more conceptual way, as predominant informative choices. This leads to the analysis of mainstream currents and stereotypes, which will be scrutinized next. The example of Newsmap (<http://tinyurl.com/ypb67x>) can act as a bridge between the two approaches, flows and

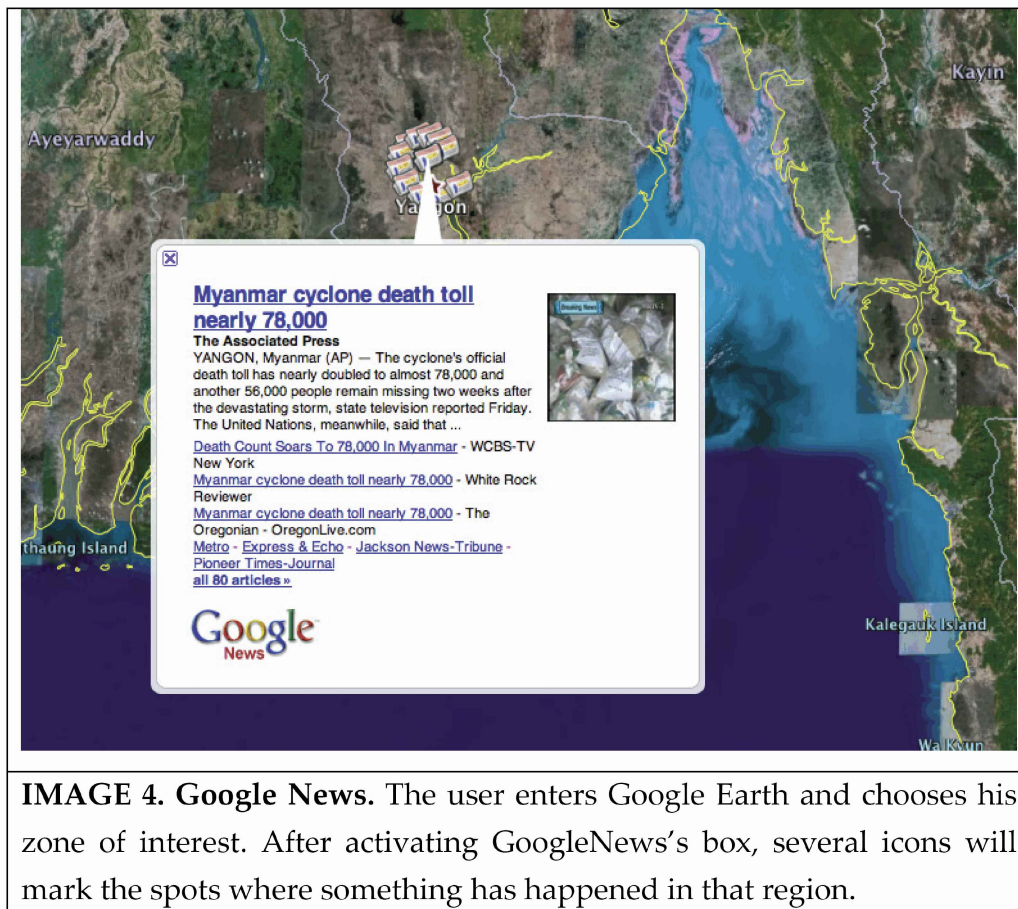


IMAGE 4. Google News. The user enters Google Earth and chooses his zone of interest. After activating GoogleNews's box, several icons will mark the spots where something has happened in that region.

stereotypes. It is a treemap that divides information into recognizable bands and presents them together, revealing underlying patterns in news reports across different countries.

STEREOTYPES AND PATTERNS

According to the NOMIC movement, the media (and especially television channels) either promoted a biased image of the Third World (violent, problematic) or either ignored it, which was even worse. Today, mashups disclose data on demand, so users can start observing nations with more innocent eyes. At the same time, stereotypes are more easily captured through conceptual exercises.

In 2005, the Portuguese magazine *Revista Grande Reportagem* entrusted a campaign to promote its commitment to serious international journalism. The result was the successful

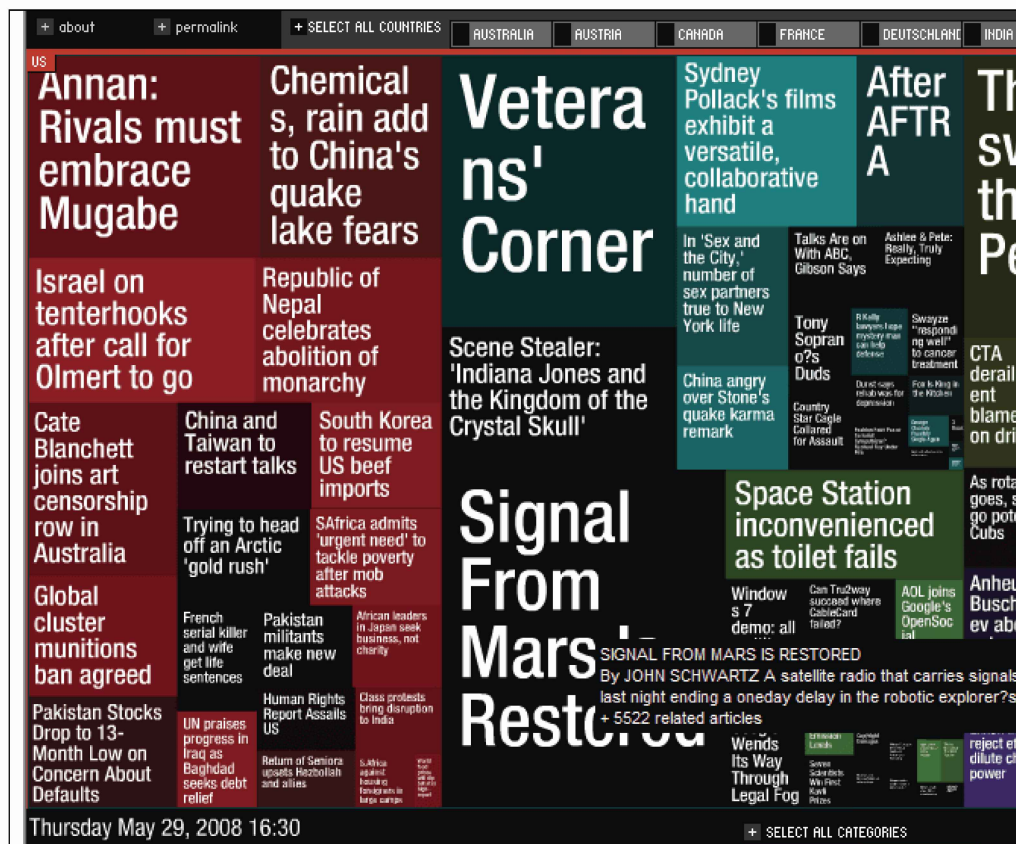


IMAGE 5. Newsmap. Current affairs are presented through a mashup of Google maps and Yahoo news.

e-mail chain 'Meet the World', which circulated widely. The author, Ícaro Doria, combined eight national flags with demographic data of the countries they represented. The result was shocking. This proposal might be disregarded under the excuse of 'spectacularization' or even as simplistic. But the truth is that it was based on real data from Amnesty International and United Nations and that it helped to explain some country realities to students better than many complicated graphs.

The most interesting feature of other conceptual proposals is that they combine current affairs news (as in the case of Newsmap) with personal contents. Digg, for example, is a website that allows users to vote for their favorite reading (<http://labs.digg.com/>). It can be related to a *Times* article but also to the intimate vicissitudes of a blogger, and thus their choice continuously challenges traditional stereotype building.



In visualizing the most promoted issues, researchers can observe core contents and also the people who are promoting them, getting a different perspective about centric and peripheral media concerns. The proposal is quite difficult to read, but entails a very human and democratic conception of news.

Going back to more geographic proposals, in 2003 Ethan Zuckerman presented his first 'Global attention profiles' paper (Zuckerman, 2003), a project to track the frequency of country appearances in newspapers, online outlets and the blogosphere.

The Global attention profiles project is still alive. A set of 1,700 web searches are performed automatically every day in data bases such as Google News or Technorati. Readers can see each coloured region in relation to some correlated demographic statistics (national GDP, population and child mortality are the most common). No surprise: again, some colonialist flow patterns are reflected and, according to Zuckerman, 'every nation's media is parochial' (Zuckerman, 2008, par. 3).

Similarly to Zuckerman's work, a 2007 project called 'the World according to newspapers' shows the Earth through the preferences of the United Kingdom's editors-in-chief. The student Nicholas Kayser-Bril started the exercise as a school dissertation. At the beginning he centered it in the patterns of three newspapers which are representative of different political trends: *The Guardian* (liberal), *The Sun* (tabloid) and *The Daily Mail* (conservative). However, he decided later on to keep track of more newspapers and also to extend the analysis to the blogosphere and to web only outlets such as Slate. The author explains that his purpose is 'to pressure editors into covering more diverse issues' (Kayser-Bril, 2008, par 3).

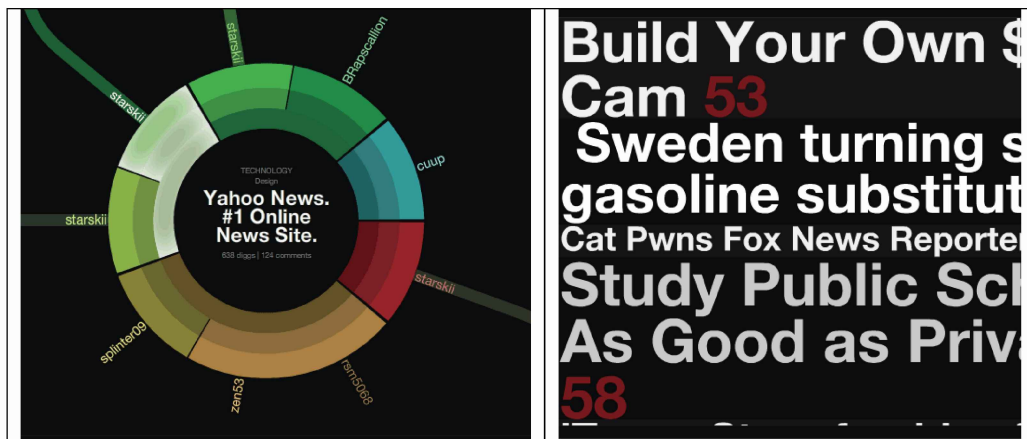


IMAGE 7. Digg visualizations. In Digg Arc, stories with more Diggings make thicker arcs (left). In Digg Big Spy (right) the newest posts are placed at the top and the most dug stories appear in thicker letters, with number of digs in red.

Once again, trends showed by the map would delight NWICO promoters: traditional UK media pay more attention to countries which are: a) bigger, b) more populated, c) closer, d) economically developed, e) strongly governed, f) hosts of national army operations, g) origin of their national foreign minorities (especially of white immigrants, so English newspapers tend to talk about Australia and not that much about South Africa). The unpleasant surprise is that websites' perspectives are not completely different of newspapers'.

Why, if we have more information than ever, do we know less than ever about the World? Alisa Miller stresses that U.S. television networks reduced their foreign bureaux in the last years and restricted their attention to few high-profile topics (Miller, 2008B, par. 2 and 3), following a trend that seems to be global. According to this journalist's cartograms (Miller, 2008), in February 2007, Korea agreed to dismantle nuclear facilities and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued an important report, but ex playmate Anna Nicole Smith's death received ten times more attention than the IPCC item alone in U.S. media.

Miller also underlines that things are not much better on the Internet: 'A recent study analyzed a day's worth of stories on Google News' front page. The 14,000 stories all covered the same 24 news events. Similarly, a study featured in EContent magazine indicates that much of the international news available from leading U.S. news providers consists mainly of recycled stories from the wire services' (Miller, 2008B, par. 4).

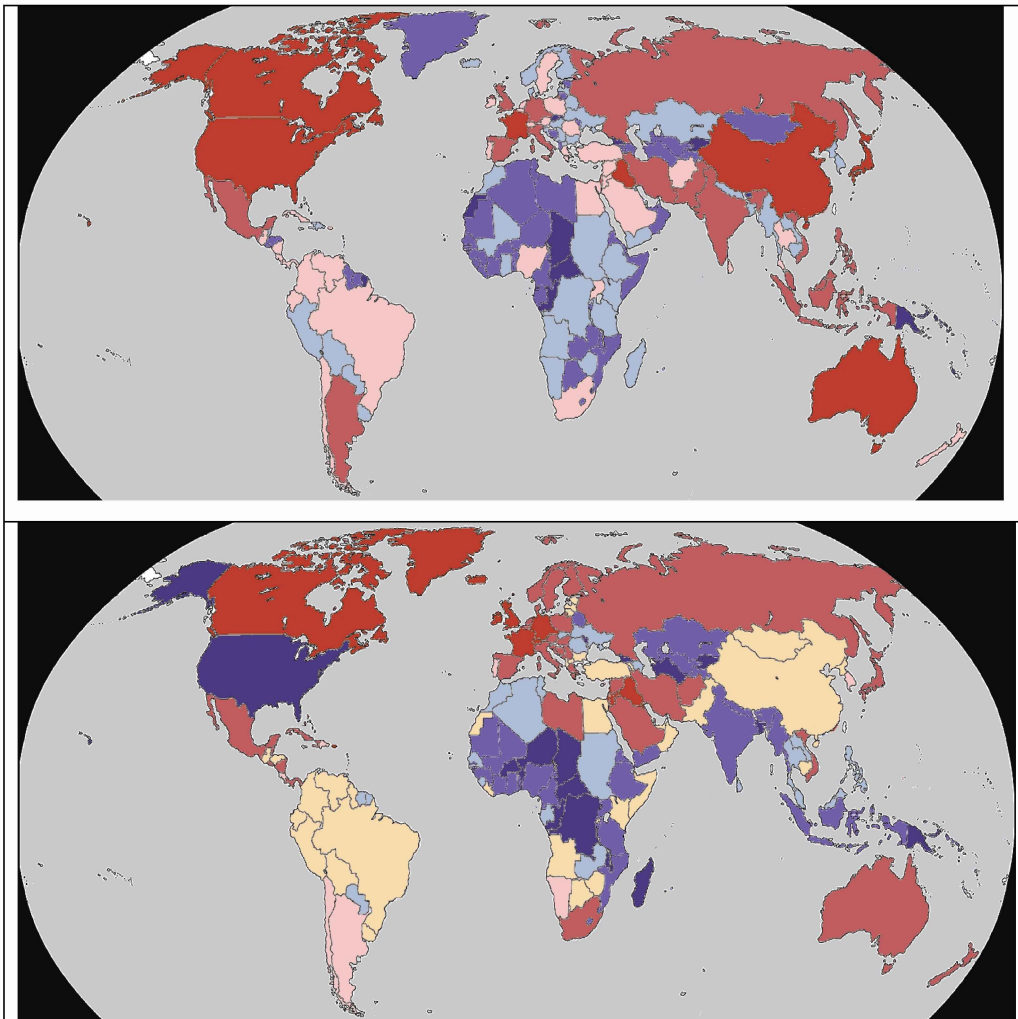
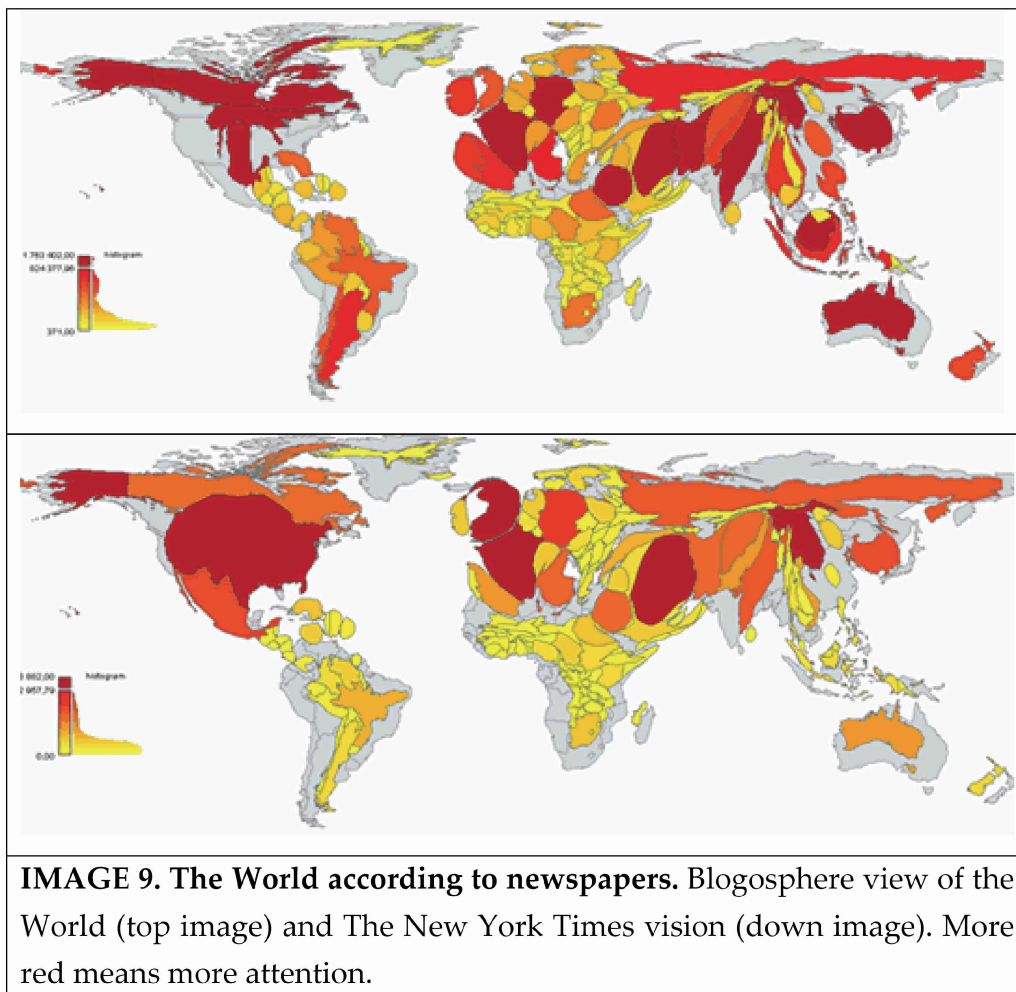


IMAGE 8. GAP Project. Which countries were Google, Technorati A-list blogs and The New York Times paying more attention to on May 25, 2008? The ones in deep red.

DIVERSITY

As we said before, in analyzing current international communication flows, diversity is the crux of the matter. Nobody doubts that communication flows have grown in quantity,



but what about their quality? To know what's inside every message that crosses the world is impossible, and thus it is impossible to measure their communicative value in absolute terms. But we have to question permanently if those messages are balanced and come from different perspectives or if they are just the product of the classic (or the new) elites. Are current online flows as biased as classic international information flows?

A very individual yet at the same time communal way of expressing oneself today is represented by social networks. MySpace and Facebook are the most popular (the second claiming to have exceeded 100 million users already). They allow people to state who they are, what they like and how many friends they have. For international communication researchers, the current boom in social networking is very interesting as long as it steers the debate about World maps to the arena of maps of people. Here, human connections are the

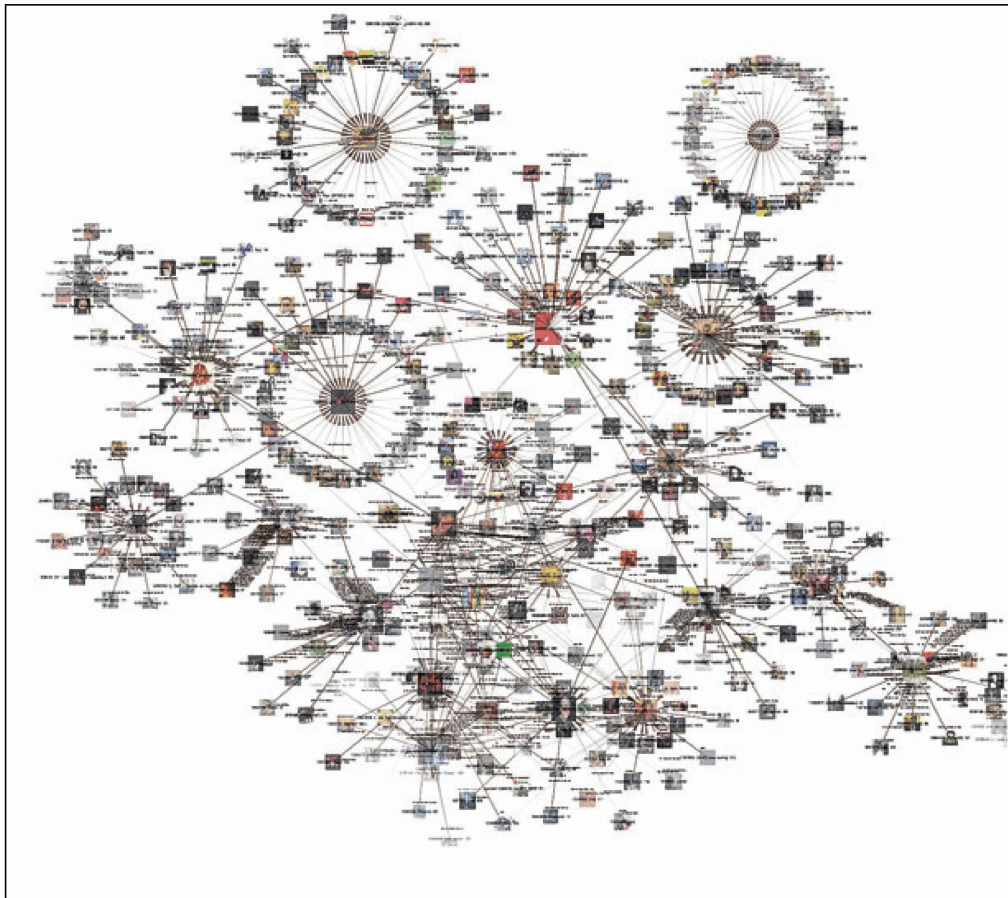
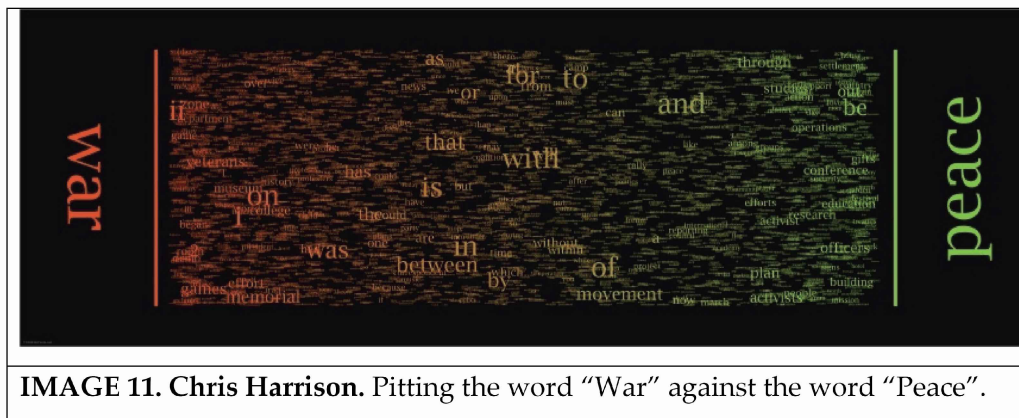


IMAGE 10. Dietmar Offenhuber maps of comment flow. This one includes user's pictures.

important thing against the idea of borders or territories. Social networks give an interesting glimpse of citizens' stances, of social, political and demographic concentrations and dispersions. In many occasions, real political disputes move on to the Net, as in the case of Israel-Palestine hostility, which is very much alive in Facebook (McCarthy, 2008).

Technology Review recently compiled a state of the art social networks maps (Naone, 2008). The examples are graphs and not geographic maps, but as Anthony Townsend points out, with future technical developments it will be possible to see networks graphs embedded into enlightening geographic maps. Then, they will become very useful tools for international communication researchers even if, as the author suspects, such maps 'raise a lot more questions than they answer' (Townsend, 2008, par. 3).



It is impossible to collect every new tool/service for social networks visualization. There are dozens already, and they increase every day. Just as an example, we can take Dietmar Offenhuber's and Judith Donath's maps of comment flow (2008). They track users' habits when expressing in other user's websites (where do they comment?, how often?). As times passes by without message crossings, the specific connection between two users fades.

Some uncertainties accompany social networks maps' successful path. It is not yet predictable to what extent they are something more than appealing visualizations. Besides, each social network itself might not be as plural and balanced as expected, and thus must be studied in combination with others. *Le Monde* once published a map of social network's influence by continent, and the result was a fragmented planet: Russia is a yellow 'LiveJournal' area; United States is a green 'MySpace' one; Brazilians are clearly Orkut users; and Canada is the realm of Facebook (Le Monde, 2008).

There is another constraint (in fact, it is an intrinsic limitation of the Net) related to the languages in use. Ethan Zuckerman reminds of the case of Google's social network, Orkut: as Brazilians and Indians made up the most abundant group (and thus determined the predominant language), English-speakers left the service. Now, the network is a 'Brazilian monopoly' (Morozov, 2007, par. 33).

The importance of language in world politics has been underlined many times. It is not merely a question of signs but of a whole identity system that links people, influences its perception of reality and distinguishes nations from one another (Mowlana, 1996, pp. 103-112). Language is also a well-known weapon for spin and propaganda. As it has been asked before: how do expressions like 'axis of evil' or 'collateral damage' influence public opinion about international affairs? What is the influence of the so called 'warspeak', the sanitized account of military conflicts? (Redondo, 2005, p. 77).

We can ask here: how does language influence international online conversations? How do idiomatic differences constraint transnational dialogue? Probably, nothing will be more

beneficial for the Net in the future as the predictable improvement of automatic translation tools.

Data visualization has entered the realm of words already. In his exercises, Harrison (2008) pits two primary terms against each other. Then, he analyses the use frequency of words that follows these two terms. Each word is then drawn towards its more frequently related term. So, what do we understand by 'War'? What do we understand by 'Peace'? With the objection that some foul language is still present in the exercise (prepositions, conjunctions) Harrison's word pairings are interesting.

In the case of Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvaar (2006), their experiment 'We feel fine'"deepens into users' emotional vocabulary. In the future, it could be of great interest to design visualization tools to analyze the feelings of populations living in conflictive borders or post-conflict zones. And it would be useful to dispose frequently of updated maps portraying citizens' reactions to decisions taken by international institutions.

Numerous adaptations of Harrison, Harris and Kamvar works flourished on the Web during the U.S. 2000 electoral campaign. They were used to analyze Barack Obama and John McCain speeches: the most repeated words were seen as indicators of every candidate's priorities.

The trilogy of data aggregation, social networks and languages is present at Global Voices (<http://www.globalvoicesonline.org>). It is a non-profit project based at Harvard Law School which seeks to diversify and amplify the global conversation online. Its goal, more specifically, is to shine light on places, people and arguments often ignored by mass media. With this purpose, the project counts on a wide team of volunteers who translate comments from one language to the other, making possible a dialogue not hindered by idiomatic restraints.

They also operate like blogosphere gatekeepers, selecting influential opinions and posts from different countries and thus avoiding the feeling of information overload. Nowadays, the blogosphere is giving some of the most valuable visualizations for political researchers (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Kelly & Etling, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES

The intention of this article was to expose the great possibilities offered by the use of data visualization tools in International Communication studies. The international communication system has been traditionally explained in terms of flows patterns, regional stereotypes and, to a certain extent, also diversity/uniformity of voices throughout the world. New visualization and mashup tools suggest complementary ways of approaching traditional concerns. It is not only a question of aesthetic improvements, but of methodological and

educative advantages as well. Sometimes a map can reveal patterns that otherwise would remain hidden through statistical analysis.

As the reader might have noticed, this paper has referred frequently to web-pages (against books) and to students or bloggers (against academics). One of the best features of new e-maps is that they can benefit from collective intelligence, and in fact most mashup maps are user generated maps. Nothing impedes scholars to benefit from those efforts, as nothing restrains online visitors from mashing academic-made maps up again with a permanent purpose of improvement.

From the broadest visualization to the tiniest one, any map seems to be possible now. The recent launching of the section 'Visualization Lab' by *The New York Times* (<http://vizlab.nytimes.com>) is another example of the trend. This section, where every reader can work out his own map, offers some examples of how to use data visualization to analyze an electoral campaign (with useful comparisons between Barack Obama's activities versus John McCain's) or an economic crisis.

But in this field, nothing could be worse than triumphalism. Some disadvantages of the new data visualization approach are noticeable, obliging us to describe it as a field of growing interest that acts as a complement (and not as a substitute) for more classical approaches. At least, it will be so till technological improvements (which might not be so far away) provide us with enhanced models. The examples provided in former paragraphs expose the utility of visualization tools, but it is convenient to signal their limitations:

- Both techniques for producing maps and methodologies for using them in communication researches need to be fine-tuned. Given the fact that perfection is impossible in this field (a map is always a compromise needed to convert the curved surface of the Earth into a two dimensions figure), scholars have to look for 'the better distorted view', keeping a permanent eye on political manipulation of mashup maps.
- It is clear that computers make field work easier, but in data collection automation alone could cause mistakes. There is no complete scientific or mathematic accuracy in many of the mapping tools founded on the Web. In academic attempts, researcher's discretion in the selection of data is needed more than ever to avoid Net information noise and distortion.
- It is necessary to assume that current Net connection levels entail a biased starting point: the physical world is not strictly equivalent to the online world. A strong digital connection does not always imply a deep human relationship, and people do not behave the same in social networks as they do in bars.
- Media diversity, one of the things that the Net claims to improve, is not guaranteed. Some examples in this article have shown that countries that were underrepresented in

the old media landscape use to maintain their position in the Web; minority languages are missing in some mashup tools; and most people participating in the online global conversation have a considerable level of education, income and social class. Therefore, any gross sample is biased. It is necessary to think twice before tracing analogies between the online world and the real world. As Park asks himself in relation to hyperlinks: 'What do centrality measures (such as in/out degree, betweenness, and closeness) tell us? Are they reliable indicators of credibility, reputation, or quality contents?' (Park, 2003, p. 58).

Finally, there is the question of news sources. Some of the news maps shown in the former paragraphs are based on data or news published by international agencies, elite newspapers or mainstream websites. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism's last report on the state of news, newer media has an even narrower peripheral vision than older media (PEJ: 2008, p. 4):

Cable news, talk radio (and also blogs) tend to seize top stories (often polarizing ones) and amplify them. The Internet offers the promise of aggregating ever more sources, but its value still depends on what those original sources are providing. Even as the media world has fragmented into more outlets and options, reporting resources have shrunk.

Despite all of it, we would like to introduce a note of optimism. Even if, as shown in new maps, most Internet users are located in Western Europe and North America, a single new connection for Africa, Latin America or Asia (and there are many in the examples given) means an opportunity for communication empowerment. And improved maps have to be there to tell us.

ENDNOTES

1. An excellent compilation of International information flows studies has been offered by Marcela Pizarro (Pizarro, 2004).

2. Both Johan Galtung's and Immanuelle Wallerstein's works are classic readings in this field. These authors point to the existence of peripheral countries which are exploited by the core, and Galtung reminds specifically that sometimes the exploitation happens by the confluence of interests between core countries' elites and underdeveloped nation's elites (Galtung, 1971; Wallerstein, 1974). George Gerbner and George Marvany applied these notions to the World's press system (Gerbner & Marvany, 1977).

3. As L. Duits reminds us, in this networked World identities are something fragmented and temporary, and thus not linked to professional organizations or countries of origin (Duits, 2007).

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