

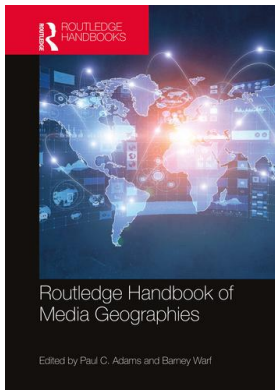
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EUROCENTRISM/ORIENTALISM
IN NEWS MEDIA*Virginie Mamadouh*

News media by definition provide a window on the world beyond the direct reach of our physical body. They expand the scope of the world we are able to perceive, but paradoxically do this in a biased way: feeding our visual (and sometime auditory) systems at the expense of our other senses and producing and circulating biased representations of other places and peoples.

Eurocentrism and Orientalism are practices of ordering, bordering and othering (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen 2002) in knowledge production that shape our geographical imaginations and our geopolitical representations. Both are reinforced by uneven patterns in the media coverage of different places around the world. This chapter first introduces the notions of Eurocentricism, Orientalism and othering and how they pertain to (news) media. It then presents a number of examples from geographical studies. Finally it turns to the recent changes in information and communication technologies and media landscapes and how these impact the production, circulation and consumption of Eurocentric and Orientalist tropes.

Eurocentrism and Orientalism in popular geopolitics

Eurocentrism and Orientalism refer to two common biases in Western media. Eurocentrism points at the Western biases that underpin the selection and the framing of news, with greater attention and nuance for Western places than for places in other parts of the world, while Orientalism pertains to the negative stereotyping of non-Western places and people.

Eurocentrism presents European viewpoints as universal. Orientalism involves more specifically the othering of the Orient as the significant Other of Europe (or the West). Originally a current in 19th century European paintings focused on copying (Middle) Eastern styles and/or depicting (Middle) Eastern tableaux, it was also used to classify novels and travel writings dealing with those parts of the world. Since Edward Said published his seminal book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* in 1978 the term has been widely used in academic discourse to denote the Western gaze on the Orient and has now evolved into a broad movement towards postcolonial and decolonial studies (for geography see Jazeel 2014; 2015; Radcliffe 2017; Radcliffe & Radhuber 2020). Said analyzes how Western commentators (mostly authors of diaries and travel books in English literature) created, through lies,

confusions and/or sweeping generalizations, a stereotypical Orient and Oriental people. He argues that these Orientalist representations and the attitudes towards the Orient (Middle Eastern, Asian and/or North African societies) they convey are telling us much more about Western society than about the Orient they are supposed to describe. Orientalism implies a patronising attitude, portraying the Orient as an essentialized, static and undeveloped society, and legitimizing its subordination to Western imperial powers. For Said, this representation's main function is not to increase European knowledge and understanding of the Orient, but to strengthen the representation of European or Western society as developed, modern, rational, flexible and ultimately superior. As such it legitimates the subordination of the Orient to Europe, of the Orientals to the Europeans.

Orientalism is by definition Eurocentric, as it rests on a Eurocentric gaze on the relations between Europe and its Oriental Other; but Eurocentrism needs not to Orientalize, as it could also coexist with unawareness of the Other. However when translocal relations intensify, Eurocentrism can only be maintained through the active disregard of others' viewpoints. Orientalism is a powerful mechanism justifying and reproducing unequal power relations, especially when those who are Orientalized are exposed to those discourses and for lack of powerful alternative representations have largely interiorized the notion of their own inferiority (Fanon 1952).

In political geography and critical geopolitics, Eurocentrism and Orientalism have been widely acknowledged in the analysis of the geographical imaginations and geopolitical representations articulated and circulated by European/Western actors in general in their encounters with the rest of the world (Gregory 2004). In addition, Orientalism can be observed in othering processes at a smaller scale, between groups more similar to each other, when the Europeaness (or the Westernness) of certain groups and nations at the margins of Europe or the West is disputed (for example in Eastern Europe and Latin America respectively) and within Western societies (for example when descendants of certain groups of migrants are seen as foreign to the national community). There is a strong asymmetry in the binary, with a positive value being assigned to the Western and a negative value to the non-Western. This process fixes and essentializes differences, rejecting the potentialities of hybridity and change. Ordering devices become essentialized as fixed identities and reproduced through processes of social spatialization and spatial socialization (Paasi 1996; 2020); people tend to take many of these labels as natural and permanent. Orientalism also conceals differences among those seen as non-Western, reducing their being to the Western qualities they lack. But it also neglects differences within the West (a critique that can be addressed to Said's own account of Western Orientalism).

Othering processes are more diverse and might be compatible with less unequal relations than Orientalism (such as in the formation of national identities Dijkink 1996). These othering frames often invoke Orientalist tropes of various intensity, like in the nesting Orientalisms in the disintegrating Yugoslavia (Bakić-Hayden 1995). Likewise American Exceptionalism (othering Europe as its Other) could and should be distinguished from American Orientalism proper (about the non-Western Others) (Nayak & Malone 2009).

Finally othering processes such as Occidentalism and other forms of stereotypes based on race, religion or ethnicity could be mentioned here. While they also naturalize and essentialize differences, they differ however from Orientalism because they do not necessarily complement and justify highly unequal power relations. Quite the contrary. Occidentalism (in the Middle East or in East Asia) has frequently been rooted in resentment to the perceived domination by the West (not as a justification of exploitative relations). This does not, however, rule out that it may be used to justify violence in the short term and the intended

submission and exploitation of the West in the long term. In any event, Occidentalism upholds similar processes of simplification, generalization and essentialization as Orientalism, and deserves critique and deconstruction by geographers too (Minca & Ong 2017).

In this chapter we focus on the media as vehicles of Eurocentrism and Orientalism in popular geopolitics and more specifically in news media. Geographers have discussed Orientalist discourses in popular culture drawing on a much wider plurality of sources, placing news media among many other sources such as cartoons, literature, movies, comic books, school books or video games. News media representations are nevertheless particularly important. They are often invoked to frame events in the world or to question those frames. For example attempts to foster class discussion of Said's discussion of Orientalism or of prejudices and stereotypes often engage media representations as familiar entry points (Ashutosh & Winters 2009; Hintermann et al. 2020).

It is nevertheless important to stress that Eurocentric and Orientalist perspectives affect academia at large, including the geographical scholarship we are dwelling on (for ideas about the critique of the Euro-Americanism of academic geography and area studies and ideas to queer Eurocentric geographical knowledge production see Jazeel 2015). Indeed academic representations of world politics also often Orientalize people and places at the margins of the modern state system. Think of the "the gap" as opposed to "the integrated core" in *The Pentagon's Map* (Barnett 2003) or the non-Western civilizations in *The Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington 1996) (see Said 2001). Moreover most of the work of critical geopolitics is Eurocentric too, as it examines mostly Western news media, as if they were the only ones worthy of academic scrutiny. Exceptions will be discussed in the section on new media configurations.

Eurocentrism and Orientalism in news media

While Orientalism can easily be linked to racism (Banaji 2017), Eurocentrism is a more benign phenomenon rooted in a common-sensical expectation: news about nearby places/peoples is expected to matter more. To some extent we could argue that Eurocentrism in news media is an expression of the first law of geography as enunciated by Waldo Tobler (1970): "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things." News media tend to focus on the places where their audiences dwell and to cover things more related to them. The persistence of Eurocentrism in media geographies is an artefact of their focus on geopolitical representations and media in particular places in the world, namely Western (national) media. Most transnational and global media are also largely Western based; they are often owned by Western firms and organized according to a market logic (or to a Western conception of journalism); they are serving primarily an audience in the West and are likely to select primarily news that is perceived as most relevant to that audience, especially when their main aim is to generate more income through the enlargement of their audience. Therefore they can be expected to cover news from Western places more frequently, more intensely and with more details, and to give voice to Western points of view.

Whether this "law" of proximity/distance is ethical or not in news coverage can be debated, but Eurocentrism is definitely problematic and detrimental when proximity/distance to the targeted audience(s) is obviously misrepresented. For example when places and peoples are invisible in the media despite strong interaction, for instance when activities in those places and the labor of these people is fundamental to the survival of the audience. Moreover media targeting audiences outside the West also often give disproportionate attention to events in the West.

This is true also of global media and news agencies monopolizing the exchange of international news (AFP, Associated Press, Reuters, United Press International). In the late 1970s and 1980s this biased political economy was at the center of a debate over media representations of the developing world. After decolonization in Asia and Africa, media concerns voiced by non-aligned nations in the 1970s and calls for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) were followed by the installation of a commission by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It was chaired by the Irish politician and winner of the 1974 Nobel Peace Prize Seán MacBride. In its report *Many Voices, One World* (published in 1980) the McBride Commission made an evaluation of structural imbalances and inequalities in the field of communications and presented 82 recommendations to create a NWICO (see Carlsson 2003). Apart from the agreement on the right to communicate adopted at the UNESCO General Conference of 1983, not much was realized. The report was highly controversial. Western countries led by the USA were hostile to NWICO and critical of what they saw as an infringement of the freedom of press and a bias against private ownership of media and communication. The US even withdrew its UNESCO membership in the 1980s. Despite follow-up actions (the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) launched in 1980, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005) as well as dramatic geopolitical and technological transformations, most of the structural imbalances identified in 1980 are still relevant. Four decades later the MacBride Report remains pertinent since new ICTs and social media are commodified while US transnational corporations are still hegemonic in global news flows and US corporations are still dominating the global information economy's market value, sales, profits and capital assets (Fuchs 2015), hence calls for a digital new world information and communication order (Thussu 2015). Although most of the literature on NWICO focuses on the political economy of communication, the underlying assumption is that these unequal power relations produce unequal geographies of news coverage.

On top of the differences in quantity, media coverage can be qualitatively different. Orientalism then also colors the news coverage and alters the qualities assigned to Western and/or to Orientalized (i.e. non-Western) actors and places, actively reproducing value hierarchies that justify unequal power relations between the West and the non-West. Evidently, such hierarchies also justify the disproportionate attention devoted to Western affairs in the media. In other words Orientalism normalizes Eurocentrism.

No doubt the ground-breaking study of Orientalism in critical geopolitics has been the seminal work of Scottish geographer Jo Sharp regarding the othering of Russia and the Soviet Union in the *Readers' Digest* (Sharp 1993; 1996; 2000). She scrutinizes how the popular general affairs magazine covered the Soviet Union from its inception to its implosion, and how these representations were producing American identity. During the first decades the attitude was ambivalent: some commonalities between Soviet and American values were underlined but American society was primarily portrayed as a classless society where a socialist revolution was redundant. After World War II differences were naturalized and essentialized, and during the Cold War the Soviet Union and communism were portrayed as evils threatening the American way of life: establishing them as America's significant Other.

Considering the post-Cold War period, Ó Tuathail (2002) examines the geopolitical reasoning in the case of the US response to the war in Bosnia in the summer of 1992, based on journalistic reports from leading US newspapers and transcripts of State Department press briefings. He distinguishes two contradictory storylines: "Balkan Vietnam" and "European genocide." Framing the war in Bosnia as a European genocide is underlining the need for an

intervention of the international community including the USA, reactivating their commitment to prevent genocide. By contrast, framing it as a Balkan Vietnam is a warning against a military intervention, activating quagmire anxiety with the memory of the failed and tragic intervention of the USA in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. Seeing Bosnia as a Balkan Vietnam can be said to Orientalize Bosnians (and other former Yugoslavs) much more than the other frame. It is othering Bosnia and Bosnians twice. First as a non-European place similar to Vietnam. Second Balkanism is already a widespread Orientalizing trope in European thought, essentializing interethnic hate and violence in South-Eastern Europe as a permanent and natural state of affairs in that part of the continent.

Robison (2004) finds similar processes at work in her study of the coverage of the Bosnian conflict in the British press, showing how Balkanism as an Orientalist discourse, and the framing of the war as “a humanitarian catastrophe requiring a humanitarian response,” both impacted on policy options. She stresses the importance of geopolitical representations by concluding:

despite a plethora of media coverage between 1992–1995 the international community failed to prevent the destruction of Bosnia as a country. There exists a real need to understand the extent to which representations of place in the media can impact on government responses to a crisis and for this reason any further work on how ideas of place are constructed can only be welcomed.

(Robison 2004, 397)

There has been a sustained flow of publications analyzing geopolitical representations in popular geopolitics and in the media in particular, including visual representations. Maps and more specifically journalistic cartographies are also powerful carriers of Orientalist representations. In her longitudinal study of the cartography of Kurdistan through the analysis of 450 maps published in American quality newspapers and magazines from 1945 to 2002, Karen Culcasi (2006) shows how maps engage with geopolitics discourses and how the cartographic portrayal of the Kurds legitimates the dominant US geopolitical position on ongoing events, oscillating between violent rebel and backward victims, in equally Orientalizing discourses.

Othering can also target specific groups rather than specific places, regions or states. The representation of Muslim women in American media has been extensively researched: Fahmy (2004) studied Associated Press wire photographs of Afghan women during and after the Taliban regime, Falah (2005) studied the visual representation of Arab Women in US newspapers, and Rahman (2014) studied the portrayal of Pakistani women in the news magazine *Time* between 1998 and 2002 showing othering and Orientalizing alongside oversimplifying and decontextualizing. Remarkably, the othering and Orientalizing gaze can also be combined with positive assessment, for example in the news coverage about the Kurdish women fighters of the Women’s Protection Unit, YPJ (Yekîneyên Parastine Jin) fighting Daesh (also known as Islamic State in the Levant) in the mid-2010s (Şimşek & Jongerden 2018). They problematize the portrayal of the Kurdish (feminist) struggle in US popular discourses as Orientalist because it silences the voices of women and decontextualizes their struggle and the politics of Rojava. Through Orientalism and gender stereotypes, the idea of the Middle East as backward and violent is reproduced.

Of the many examples of Orientalism that can be found in media, the portrayal of Africa as a dark, backward continent is probably one of the most enduring. The systematic study of the news coverage of the conflicts in Rwanda and in Bosnia from 1990 to 1994 in six major

American quality newspapers explored differences in the representations of two large-scale and violent ethnic conflicts and the response of the international community—one located in Europe, the other in Africa (Myers et al. 1996). They note a difference in share volume of coverage: more attention to Bosnia than to Rwanda. Moreover they compare the prevalence of the language of civil war, the language of savagery and the language of ethnicity and tribalism, observing that strategies and tactics are reserved for the description of Bosnian politics and savagery and tribalism for that of Rwandan politics. The Rwandan conflict is framed in more essentialist terms than in Bosnia, in terms of perpetual inter-tribal clashes in Sub-Saharan Africa, obscuring both the political dynamics of the ongoing violence and its geopolitical context. The authors also suggest strong connections between news framing and US geopolitics: residual frames from the Cold War (when covering Bosnia), the North–South divide (the Third World in need of help) and African marginality and irrelevance to US geopolitics after the end of the Cold War (when covering Rwanda). Although they acknowledge the othering processes at work in both cases, they conclude that othering is more profound when it comes to Rwanda than when it comes to Bosnia (and the Balkans). The language of tribalism is a key Orientalist trope that reproduces the notion of a savage and primitive Africa, stuck outside modernity.

A decade later David Campbell deals with the press coverage of the events in Darfur, Sudan and more specifically on visuals (Campbell 2007). He focuses on *The Guardian*, allegedly expecting to find there the most extensive and nuanced coverage of Africa in the British press. Nevertheless he also notices that the conflict is framed as placeless and timeless and that it impacts the international community and its inclination to intervene. Pictures have a tremendous influence: their aesthetic and emotional appeal (“a picture is worth a thousand words”) as well as their claim to authenticity (“the camera doesn’t lie”) remain powerful, although often questioned and problematized—since controversies about pictures being staged has always been an issue and even more since technical tools to manipulate pictures have become extremely effective and widely affordable. Visual coverage has become a condition sine qua non to media coverage, up to the point that news media hardly cover events if no pictures or videos are available, and as a result these events are hardly acknowledged.

In his study, Campbell (2007) proposes the notion of visual economy to have a close look at the material circumstances under which photojournalists are working and the actual production of the newspapers. This entails a discussion of issues like access to the field, insurance and other restrictions, as well as whether they are able or not to sell their pictures to international agencies, and the technologies used for the transmission and publication of images. The (non-)availability of pictures constrains the options available at the editorial desk of the newspapers and for example might lead to the use as illustration of pictures taken far away from where the events discussed in the article took place (in this case, refugee camps in Chad rather than in Darfur). Campbell (2007) also stresses how the photographs produce a humanitarian visualization for Darfur, highlighting the victims over the perpetrators, reifying identities into fixed forms, framing the conflict into an eternal war between Arabs and Africans (rather than foregrounding political strategies and tactics) and naturalizing certain policy responses (humanitarian intervention) over others. In short, visibility is central to the production of a particular geographical imagination, not a mere illustration.

Beyond Eurocentrism and Orientalism

Next to these studies exposing Orientalism in Western media, some geographers have tried to address the other side of the story, either by studying media coverage trying to disrupt Orientalist discourses or by analyzing non-Western media.

In one of his many publications about the Bosnian war, Ó Tuathail (1996) also addresses Othering and Balkanism through an analysis of the work of the British journalist Maggie O'Kane reporting from Bosnia and more specifically from besieged Sarajevo between 1992 and 1996 in *The Guardian*. He shows how her work was different from mainstream reporting and how what he calls her anti-geopolitical eye disrupted the hegemonic geopolitical discourse about the Bosnian war, giving a voice to the victims rather than to politicians, and bringing the human consequences of the Bosnian conflict to the readers, shaping proximity and questioning responsibility.

Another issue is the way Orientalizing discourses circulate in media in Orientalized places. In Central Europe (Orientalized as less European than Western Europe) Kuus (2008) discusses how irony and self-deprecating humour were omnipresent in the coverage of the NATO invitation to join the military partnership in major Estonian newspapers in 2002. She stresses the parallel between Estonian attitudes towards joining NATO and Švejkian absurd obedience. This term referred to the 1920s Czech novels about *The Good Soldier Švejk* and his adventures in the Austrian Hungarian army. Švejk has become an emblematic figure of subversive resistance in Central Europe. Kuus' analysis stresses the ambiguous character of Švejk's behavior embodying both essentialist stereotyping of the Czechs (and other Central European nations) and the universal trope of clever individual resistance against the absurdity of bureaucracy.

Comparing the framing of the 2007–2008 global food crisis in Western newspapers and the English language Chinese newspaper *China Daily*, Gong and Le Billon (2014) contrast different blaming narratives. While the main Western newspapers in their sample (major world newspapers according to media database LexisNexis) framed the rising demand for food in China (and to a lesser extent in India) as a security threat, the Chinese newspaper articulates “a narrative built upon unequal power relations between the West and East and North and South” and blames the raise of biofuel.

To decenter the gaze of critical geopolitics, scholars have been reading the US War on Terror in the Arab World (Falah et al. 2006) and the Global South. For Tanzania, Sharp (2011) identifies key themes in the news coverage of the main English language newspaper *The African*: US dominance, nature of the US worldview, global perspectives on US attitudes, impacts on Africa/the Third World, and victimhood (about the victims of war and the importance of human security). She argues that we could speak of a subaltern geopolitics, reflecting back to the dominant geopolitics, decentering the hegemonic (American) geopolitical imagination of the US War on Terror.

For the Philippines, Woon (2014) examines the audience's interpretation of the representation of Mindanao (the southern major island of the Philippines) in national newspapers based in Manila in 2003, centered around the othering of Mindanao as an island plagued by chaos and conflicts and the associated othering of Muslims living mainly in that part of the country, a context marked nationally by heightened mobilizations for the independence of Mindanao and globally by the US War on Terror. Among his respondents he finds both corroborations of an Orientalist portrayal of Muslims and resistances to these frames, linked to readers' different experiences, positionalities and subjectivities. Audience research is indeed particularly important if we want to understand how Orientalist frames are influencing social relations (beyond foreign policy-making).

At the same time, Woon's study highlights that media also (re-)produce and circulate *domestic* geopolitical representations based on othering processes, where subregions and subgroups in the state are othered and even Orientalized vis-à-vis a local center. Eriksson (2008) analyzes the representation of Northern Sweden in Swedish national media, arguing that

Norrand is used as an abstract essentialized geographical category: it represents a backward and traditional rural space and is contrasted to equally essentialized urban areas representing Western modernity. Similarly Nwankwo (2020) reports essentializing discourses in the coverage of the farmer–pastoralist conflicts in Nigerian newspapers and Serrao (2020) draws attention to internal Orientalism in Brazilian social media regarding stereotypes and prejudice against *Nordestinos*, the inhabitants of Northeast Brazil. At the local scale, Qian, Qian and Zhu (2012) show in their analysis of the representation of the city of Guangzhou and of the Cantonese language the Othering of migrants in Guangzhou in local social media during the 2010 protests against a municipal plan to switch to Putonghua (Mandarin) on local television in order to promote a more cosmopolitan city image (the plan was withdrawn). Similar othering is at work in maps of Rio de Janeiro (both in Brazilian newspapers and on Google Maps) regarding the representations of favelas and their residents (Novaes 2014).

New media configurations: Globalization and digitalization

Originally media geographies of othering were looking primarily at conventional media and especially at newspapers. They were particularly important in the emergence of modern territorial states, national identities and standardized national languages. From 1990 onwards, however, globalization and digitalization changed the dynamics of news media through both technological innovations such as cable and satellite dishes, internet, mobile telephony and the rise of the new (social) media, and political processes such as the liberalization of broadcasting and publishing regulations.

Cable news changed the relation between political and media settings. *CNN International* became the emblematic channel for 24/7 news broadcasting in 1990 with its coverage of the Gulf War, creating the so-called “CNN effect.” It has a temporal dimension as well: CNN and other 24/7 news outlets (in contrast to the evening news and broadsheet daily newspapers) force statespersons to react very quickly as news reaches the audience much quicker (almost in real-time). And it has a spatial dimension: CNN International aims at serving transnational audiences, undermining the naturalization of national foreign policy objectives.

Following CNN’s success, other global news channels have been created: France 24, Al Jazeera (Qatar), Telesur (Venezuela), Russia Today and Sputnik (Russia), China Global Television Network CGTN (formerly known as CCTV International) (China) or PressTV (Iran). Most are directly sponsored by a particular state, enjoying dissimilar degrees of press freedom. Some of these were particularly keen to deploy an alternative discourse to the one circulated by CNN as it was perceived as an American (read Eurocentric) sender: TeleSur’s motto *Nuestro Norte es el Sur* (Our North is the South) clearly conveys the ambition to decenter the Eurocentrism of established global media.

Al Jazeera (based in Qatar) was a particularly important initiative, as acknowledged in the expression the “Al Jazeera effect.” It again has two dimensions: a global and a local. First as opposed to CNN as an American (i.e. Western) voice, fighting its Eurocentrism and Orientalism, and giving a voice to non-Western actors. But it also serves as an independent news medium as opposed to national media accountable to autocratic rulers in the Arab World. Different language channels serve different audiences: Al Jazeera English serves the global audience (first effect), and the original Al Jazeera (in Arabic) serves the audiences in the Arab World (second effect). Youmans (2017) has documented the attempts and failures of Al Jazeera to establish itself as a mainstream news channel in the United States, stressing the paradox of such an ambition considering “Al Jazeera’s derivative channels represent the Orient speaking back to its western authors,” while serving an American audience would

imply “de-Orientalizing, or over-Americanizing, its US-centered services” (Youmans 2017, 26).

That these channels offer different takes on the news can be experienced by those fortunate enough to access them and compare coverage, but whether they really differ in terms of Eurocentrism and Orientalism is far from established. In their comparison of four terrorist attacks on television news shows on four (inter)national channels, Gerhards and Schäfer (2014) found more similarities than expected. The few but notable differences were that CNN and Al Jazeera framed the attacks more as a geopolitical conflict (“War on Terror” frame) while the BBC (UK) and ARD (Germany) focused more on the victims (“crimes against humanity” frame), local reactions and rescue operations. Moreover although CNN and Al Jazeera both foregrounded the War on Terror between the USA/West and Islamist terrorists, Al Jazeera paid more attention to the motives of the perpetrators than CNN (Gerhards & Schäfer 2014). Comparing the representation of China and the USA in Africa in Al Jazeera English, the BBC and CNN Paterson and Nothia (2016) did not find significant differences regarding Orientalist tropes. China and the USA were framed differently but these representations were reproducing similarly disempowering stereotypes of Africans.

As part of the Chinese soft power deployment, Chinese television also went global targeting more specifically Latin America and Africa. Marsh (2016) puts to the test the ambition of the Chinese broadcaster CCTV to broadcast “African news from an African viewpoint” with a comparison between their program *Africa Live* and BBC World News’ *Focus on Africa*. She observes the emergence of an alternative to the Western gaze reducing Africa to conflicts and famines, but signals a disproportionate attention to Chinese topics and Chinese interests: is Sinocentrism replacing Eurocentrism? In addition, Li (2017), comparing the coverage of CCTV Africa and Al Jazeera English of the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, reports a different sensibility between the two non-Western global news providers, the former committed to positive news about Africa, the latter to being the voice of the Global South. She concludes that they “have augmented Africa’s voices in the global arena but far from being Africa’s own voices”; she is concerned that their predispositions, “be it source hierarchies or embedded solution-oriented rhetoric frame, can inflict on their representation of African affairs, and possibly feed into the production of a new kind of Africa’s Otherness” (Li 2017, 129).

The impact of new information and communication technologies and new media on the circulation of Eurocentrism and Orientalism is even more difficult to assert than the plurality of voices on global news networks. The affordabilities of the new media (and social media in particular) are different from the conventional mass media, most fundamentally because they enable communication from many to many and blur the line between news producers and audiences, everyone being both.

New media might empower minorities subjected to Orientalist tropes to communicate in their own niche and to develop a common alternative take on ongoing events (for example young Dutch Moroccans on web forums after September 11, see Mamadouh 2001). Humor on Facebook posts can be a way to counter stereotyping and essentialization by exclusive majorities (for example Russian-speaking social media users in Latvia and Estonia in the light of the deterioration of the relations between the EU and Russia, see Juzefovics & Vihalemm 2020). More assertively, the mayor of Florence, Italy launched early in February 2020 the hashtag #Abbracciauncinese (Hug a Chinese) to counter the rise of Orientalizing representations of Chinese residents in mainstream media at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a campaign which sparked many posts on Twitter, Instagram or YouTube.

Social media can however also host niches for exclusionary discourses. In an online ethnography of four Czech language anti-immigrant Facebook pages, Doboš (2020) observes two Orientalist imaginative geographies that in his view frame migrants and their region of origin as Europe's Others: Islam and Muslims, Africa and African savages. He stresses that the fear of migrants' Otherness is complemented by the fear of Central Europeans of being the Other for Western Europeans. He focuses on the temporality of these imaginative geographies, framing difference as temporal difference (Muslims as medieval, African as pre-historic), reproducing the past into the future and ignoring the heterogeneity of temporality and the accidentality of a present event. His study also demonstrates that social media are allowing for bubbles in which Orientalizing discourses can be nurtured, fostered and naturalized, with little resistance, if any. Facebook pages can become places where members can seek validation and further substantiation of their Orientalizing prejudice.

Last but not least social media and conventional (mass) media constantly interact: newspapers and television channels have websites and Twitter feeds, but they also take cues from the new media, reporting on trending topics and rows on Twitter, and engaging sources on the ground through their mobile phones. With the diffusion of mobile internet citizens, journalism expanded (Pinkerton 2013) and social media have become important channels to cover grassroots protests or the effects of oppression and war (Iran in 2009, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Ukraine, Hong Kong...) although generally mediated by conventional media (picking up, selecting and framing these fragments). In detention on Manus from 2013 to 2019 for seeking asylum in Australia, the Iranian Kurd Nehrouz Boochani managed to get articles, poems and even a full length book (*No Friends but the Mountains* published in 2018) out of the country to testify about the horrendous living conditions in the camp in Papua New Guinea and to humanize their representation in Western media. While the representations of such stories in Western media run the risk of reproducing Orientalizing tropes, the authorities' success in suppressing such voices altogether and in preventing victims from getting images and testimony out of the country (e.g. Yemen, but foremost Xinjiang) contributes to the invisibility of many tragedies.

On the other hand, websites and social media borrow stories from more conventional media and amplify their reach (Limonier 2018 for the diffusion of information from Russian news channels Sputnik and RT on news websites in West African countries), and narratives on social media forums and newspapers articles reinforce each other (Klinke 2016 on Russian cyber-bribes in the UK).

More complex and intertwined communicative arrangements

In conclusion, multilevel media analysis is much needed (Gilboa et al. 2016) to enhance our understanding of the circulation of media narratives, their multiplicity and their hybridity in general, and more specifically regarding ordering and othering frames such as Orientalism. Can social media users from the margin impact hegemonic representations produced in the center? Can social media successfully disrupt othering and Orientalizing discourses? Can local media contribute to national macro-regional and global media and successfully counter-balance their tendency to cover events in the political center more, and in a more nuanced way, than events in the peripheries? And foremost, does the plurality of media to which audiences are subjected reinforce or weaken their ability to resist Orientalizing tropes and to access more balanced news coverage? As yet, it seems that social media help in decentralizing Europe and demoting Eurocentric views by multiplying the broadcasted voices, but it is clear that they are used both to undermine and to advance Orientalist frames.

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