

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

*American Statecraft for a Global Digital Age: warfare,  
diplomacy and culture in a segregated world*



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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how American power is adapting to a changing post-Cold War global landscape. It is commonly accepted that many of the most visible cultural expressions of globalisation are American. However, contemporary accounts have proven inadequate in assessing how such forces have helped provide the infrastructure for America's global dominance. With growing debate over the decline of American influence, the thesis intends to address how American statecraft is attempting to redefine itself for a digital age.

With the accelerated transmission of information, images and sounds, nation-states are gradually losing the ability to either dictate their official narrative or control their global image. The new info-war that lies at the heart of contemporary American statecraft thus involves the wholesale integration of struggles over information, technology, communication and culture into the conflict itself. The thesis, therefore, investigates how American military and diplomatic efforts are both shaping and being reshaped by modern techno-culture.

The thesis pieces together a contemporary genealogy of American cultural diplomacy in the Middle East from the Cold War through to the "war on terror". This genealogy pays particular attention to both the continued hold of civilisationist discourses and the shifting question of race in American foreign policy – from the instrumentalisation of jazz at the height of the ideological antagonism of the Cold War, to rap music as a soundtrack to American Empire. The attention paid to African American culture aims to highlight the ways in which the radical traditions of struggle for freedom from the underside of the American Empire are transforming our world today for both better and worse.

The thesis concludes by contextualising the evolving relationship between consumption, technology, communication and (national) security, and situating the Occupied Palestinian Territories within these global capital and cultural flows. This takes the form of an analysis of the multiple local and international socio-economic initiatives taking hold in the West Bank – from governmental institutions and NGOs, to the business sector and consumer industries – and their particular attempts at reshaping Palestinian public spheres.

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*All photographs are by Omar El-Khairy unless otherwise noted*

## Preface

This project was first conceived out of my interest in contemporary African American popular culture and its increasing global reach and influence on youth cultures across the world. It grew out of my particular concern for how radical black traditions of struggle from the underbelly of the American Empire have come to transform our world for both better and worse. As my research developed, popular accounts of globalisation proved unsatisfactory in addressing globalisation's relationship to those processes traditionally characterised as Americanisation. The accepted paradigm of hard, soft and smart power in the international realm was being increasingly undermined by the evolving relationship between military and diplomatic efforts in our post-9/11 world. It was becoming clear that this emerging info-war was attempting to integrate struggles over information, technology and communication, and thereby having a significant impact on the global dissemination and consumption of culture. It should be noted that this project is therefore in many ways a response to the post-9/11 climate of fear and anxiety over both the perceived decline of American hegemony and the general weakening of nation-states as dominant actors in the international arena.

The first task was to provide an alternative theoretical framework through which to understand better how American statecraft is adapting to this changing global landscape. The thesis uses the sociological imaginations of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Paul Virilio, Ralph Ellison and Benjamin Barber to reassess how American military and diplomatic efforts are being reshaped by modern techno-culture. However, as well as arguing that this info-war forms a significant break from traditional modes of statecraft, the second task was to situate it within a certain historical legacy. The Cold War is central to this thesis in that it helps contextualise both the conceptual "import-export" of America's contemporary cultural industry and the particular role African American popular culture is playing in attempts to manipulate people's complex and ambivalent feelings towards America. Moreover, it shifts the focus of these discussions to the Third World and the

numerous interventions and ideological rivalries that played out in often ignored parts of the world.

I chose to travel to the United States in order to trace some of these evolving relationships. Three months were spent between Washington D.C. and New York following the new initiatives in the State Department and trawling through records at the National Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Louis Armstrong House and Archives, and a number of other institutions. I also interviewed artists and individuals at various think tanks and cultural organisations. With the thesis focusing on the impact of these diplomatic efforts and economic and social projects on attempts at reshaping the Middle East, a further three months were spent in the Occupied Territories. This not only helped build a clearer and more up-to-date genealogy of the occupation's architecture in a global context, but it also provided a space for honest investigation into a complex and at times contradictory cultural field. I relied on a number of mixed methods, including interviews with government officials and funders, commercial sector employees, cultural organisers, youth surveys, programme evaluations and participant observation at trainings, exhibitions, screenings and concerts. However, my thinking was equally influenced by the time spent with young people outside the formal networks built into structured ethnographic work. There are personal reasons for my choice in focusing on the Middle East and Palestine in particular, but it also offers an opportunity to interrogate fully popular accounts of globalisation and question the extent to which our postcolonial world constitutes a rupture with the past.

Chapter One, *The Digital Stream of the "War on Terror": Technology, Popular Culture and Warfare in the Age of Digital (Re)production*, builds on the work of the Frankfurt School and their critique of the culture industry so as to explore the rupture caused by digital culture. It critically examines the trend towards both audiovisual and virtual public spheres under the conditions of contemporary globalisation. This discussion pays particular attention to both the image phantasmagorias of mass culture and the technoaesthetics at work in today's 24/7 news and entertainment culture. The second part shifts these concerns to the novel role that this technological culture is playing in the new Pentagon and State Department sponsored info-war. This takes the shape of a reappraisal of the various ventures that attempt to blur the line between public and private realms, as well as the distinctions between citizen, civilian and soldier. It concludes with a discussion of the propaganda techniques, technological developments and new ethico-political

dilemmas that such technologies have created by looking at the example of viewer-consumers of Israel's assault on Gaza at the end of 2008.

Chapter Two, *@America: Culture Talk, American Diplomacy and the Shift Towards "Digital Natives"*, assesses how America's diplomatic efforts have evolved in an increasingly networked world. The first half focuses on how technological innovation is changing the conduct of international diplomacy and ushering in a new era of American diplomacy in the Middle East. It focuses on the particular shift from traditional state-centric diplomacy to other channels of communication. The chapter explores how trends in digital technology are being developed and employed by government, military and commercial bodies in order to manipulate the ways in which we receive and exchange information. The idea of "culture talk" is central to its arguments around the manipulation of culture to explain away certain micro and macro situations, as well as its exploitation as a diplomatic tool. I argue that digital culture is not only disrupting the nation-state's hold over its narrative and global image, but also having a marked impact on both the form and style of the traditional art of public diplomacy. The second half expands on these trends to explore critically the continued attempts at reinventing the Orient. By addressing the State Department's new mission statement in the region, it aims to examine this reshaping of the political economy of information in a digital age. The chapter concludes by critically assessing the impact of these evolving processes on American diplomatic efforts in the context of Internet freedom and the spring 2011 uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East.

Chapter Three, *"We Can Crown Kings in Adidas": Selling America Abroad*, attempts a critical re-reading of American public diplomacy from the Cold War through to its place in post-9/11 securitocracy. This genealogy builds on the historical relationship between American commerce, popular culture and finance in selling America abroad. However, where it departs from most literature on the subject is in its attention to the role of race in such policies. Through archival research and interviews, the chapter interrogates the value of jazz music at the height of the Cold War to convey a sense of shared suffering, as well as the conviction that equality could ultimately be gained under the American political system. It concludes by asking whether or not the legacy that such policies have left behind allows for African American popular culture, and hip-hop culture in particular, to play a similarly effective role in the "war on terror".

Chapter Four, *Trading in Blackness: Hip-Hop America and Its Post-Cold War Travels*, discusses the place of black America in the country's changing cultural landscape.

I argue that African American popular cultural production today needs to be (re)contextualised in a number of different ways. Not only has the globally reconfigured relations with the cultural marketplace led to the superseding of commodified authenticity with a new racialised subcultural cachet, but the “war on terror” has also brought with it a novel articulation of the relationship between such racial and cultural formations. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the socio-cultural turn of the post-civil rights generation and the subsequent commodification of black resistance. The second half develops some of these complex arguments by focusing on the socio-political changes in hip-hop culture, and more specifically on how it has come to play as a soundtrack to American cultural imperialism. I argue that contemporary African American popular culture is proving to be one of the most effective tools in America’s diplomatic armoury. It addresses the role of hip-hop in the globalisation of the themes of American social doxa, and thus challenges the ways in which African American styles and ideas are traveling across the globe. The chapter closes by attempting to re-evaluate the transnational nature of the black Atlantic and offer up alternative rebellious soundscapes that are resisting the homogenising forces of contemporary culture industries.

The aim of Chapter Five, *Global Processes and the Question of Palestine: Freedom and the Public Sphere in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, is to place Palestine in the context of the central concerns of the thesis. It attempts to situate the question of Palestine within the globalised networks of contemporary capital and cultural flows. The chapter uses fieldwork in the West Bank to build a clearer and more up-to-date genealogy of the occupation’s architecture; an architecture that has undergone a number of significant changes in recent years. It focuses on foreign governments, international non-governmental actors, private sector initiatives and cultural (consumer) industries, and their attempts to neutralise spaces and populations through economic and social development. The theoretical work in this chapter offers an analytical toolbox that assists new modes of thinking through the three-dimensional spatial networks of the occupation. The first part concentrates on the increase in international donor spending on security, but more specifically on the coinciding attempts to revive the economic and social life in strategically chosen areas in the West Bank. Such processes are drastically reshaping and remapping the central question of Palestinian sovereignty. I argue that the fractious nationalism that has come to dominate Palestinian identity since the Oslo Accords is being eroded and replaced by a virtual nationalism for which there is little precedent. The second half focuses on the global infotainment telesector and its impact on Palestinian youth



culture and emerging public spheres. Through empirical work and ethnographic sketches, it endeavors to evaluate the extent to which such a sphere is able to manipulate and reshape young people's complex and ambivalent outlook on America.

The thesis concludes by asking whether or not digital culture in our networked globe can reconstitute the relationship between popular protest and popular culture; or if it simply aestheticises resistance, making the unbearable bearable for consumption and entertainment. This epilogue explores the potential that emerging digital cultures hold for both subverting the idea of culture as property and disrupting the aesthetics and political economy of contemporary culture industries. By recognising that certain cultural workers are attempting to use some of these formats and aesthetic practices in order to subvert certain cartographic and spatial practices, it questions how popular culture can be resituated within the fragmented history of resistance to colonialism and capital.

It is important to emphasise here that my concerns are heuristic and conclusions only provisional. There are also a number of lines of enquiry that have had to be set aside so as to weave together a coherent yet fragmented genealogy of contemporary American power. Nothing here is therefore definitive. The hope is that by disrupting popular narratives around globalisation and re-mapping the shifting forces in our fractured and uneven world that new modes of thinking will emerge. I am aware that this work holds important implications for international relations and diplomacy, but it also has crucial ramifications for ideas of solidarity and internationalism in an era of the declining nation-state. There is a certain spirit that I hope this thesis represents. Firstly, the hope is that its contents are unified by a stubborn resistance to both the organisation of the nation-state and the constraints of national and ethnic particularity. Crucial, therefore, is both the sustained assault on the stubborn hold of civilisationist discourses and the opening up of radical spaces for a fluid interplay between postcolonial and ultimately postnational life. Secondly, it hopes to stress the urgent need for a serious reappraisal of the nature of contemporary info-war and its violent attempts to blur the line between public and private realms and thus pollute our vibrant cultural lives.

## Acknowledgments

I am outside of history. I wish I had some peanuts, it looks hungry there in its cage. I am outside of history. Its hungrier than I thot.  
- Ishmael Reed (1972)

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to many people who gave up their time and energy to help bring this project to fruition. They know who they are, and I am humbled by their kindness and insight.

Most of all, I would like to thank Professor Paul Gilroy. All errors and failings are my own, but without his generosity, patience and friendship, this project would not be what is. Those meetings in his office will be both greatly missed and fondly remembered.

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Finally, I would like to thank my parents, whose love and unflinching humanity are the very foundations of this thesis.

## **Introduction**

### **A Villa in the Middle of the Jungle**

When it comes to the Arabs, I must admit to an incurable romanticism.  
– Raphael Patai (1973)

#### **A Cultural Sociology of Globalisation for a Segregated World**

British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1999) argues that globalisation has something to do with the idea that we now all inhabit one world. A phenomenon he characterises by fundamental changes in the world economy, the communications revolution and global trade in physical commodities, information and currency. Giddens and others are right to point out that the era of the nation-state is in decline (Ohmae 1995; Castells 1996; Sassen 1996). Under the conditions of contemporary globalisation, states are losing elements of the sovereignty they once took for granted, as well as politicians and officials much of their capacity to influence directly both local constituencies and global events.

Nevertheless, the problem with such characterisations lies in the predominately triumphant tone of the literature, which promises both an alternative and improved global political arrangement. Such a celebratory climate has led some to conclude that globalisation is creating a genuinely democratic global civil society, carried along by a mixture of economic, technological and cultural imperatives (Jess and Massey 1995; Giddens 1999; Kaldor 2003; Stiglitz 2003; Held 2004; Ray 2006; Bhgwati 2007). This “runaway world”, however, cannot be so easily described as a series of uncontrollable changes. Such enthusiastic representations ignore the histories of early modern capitalism, colonialism, imperialism and resistance to globalism that were so crucial to its formation. They thus serve to occlude certain institutionalised processes that continue to carry forward some of these global transformations today.

These sociologies of globalisation are only partial and selective, with complex problems immediately reduced to simple assimilable forms of states, markets and cultures. Consequently, any critical contribution to the cultural sociology of globalisation needs to

undo the historic invisibility of certain processes under contemporary globalisation, and in doing so examine the extent to which our present-day postcolonial world constitutes a rupture with the past. Leslie Sklair (2000) persuasively argues that the latest phase of global capitalism is one that transcends the unit of the nation-state. His work stresses that many contemporary problems cannot be adequately studied simply at the level of inter-state relations, but need to be better theorised in terms of global transnational processes, beyond the level of the nation-state. Alternative periodisations of these developments can also be found in the work of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker (2002), which allows for an understanding of these movements prior to the instantiation of either the nation or the state. Such a radical reconfiguration of geographies allows one to look at space from fundamentally different vantage points. When land markers are dropped one realises that so much is created beyond them.

The hidden histories of resistance to the origins and rise of capitalism that such an approach opens up provide an alternative framework for reconsidering global capitalism and globalisation as ongoing historical processes, rather than as simply new phenomena.<sup>1</sup> What such narratives also importantly acknowledge is the association that exists between the history of the nation-state and that of Empire. Critical reflections on globalisation, the central phenomenon of our epoch, can gain in radicality if they accept that slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism – capitalism’s old and new formations – need to be given serious consideration in their discussions. The plantation, the factory, the colony and now the neo-liberal city and its adjacent slums, are the principal global laboratories in which experiments have been conducted into the destiny of the world that we inhabit in the colonial present (Gregory 2004; Davis 2006, 2007).

Another central issue that stems from these concerns is that popular accounts of contemporary globalisation seem inadequate in addressing the ways in which such processes have more specifically provided the infrastructure for America’s global hegemony. Thomas Friedman’s (2007) idea of globalisation as inducing a “flatter world” is inextricably linked to the perceived trend amongst middle classes across the world of increasingly producing and consuming like Americans. However, what this contentious narrative ignores is that this supposedly new society of complete mobilisation combines in

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker carefully describe the unprecedented expansion of colonialism and trade in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, which launched the first global economy and with it a diverse and landless workforce. Despite the blinding effects of concepts of race, class and nation that have guided many accounts, *The Many-Headed Hydra* brings attention to the fraught national, ethnic and racial boundaries that these workers traversed. It is here that the ordering processes of global capitalism were given birth to, as well as the conditions for resistances that were to hinder the rise of the Atlantic Empire.

productive union the features of the welfare state and the warfare state; a project of global integration as benevolent supremacy. Such an endeavour is not a traditional colonial project, but rather a pursuit of hegemony through policies of modernisation and development. Globalisation can thus be described as submerging the effects of imperialism into economic fatalism or cultural ecumenism, and of making transnational relationships of power appear both neutral and necessary (Appadurai 1986, 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999). In other words, it is the naturalisation of the schemata of neo-liberal thought. The new political economy of information that constitutes this stage of globalisation rests upon the evolving synergy between the various networks of power, particularly those between nation-states, governments, corporate institutions and mass media conglomerates.

For some, particularly in the United States, the September 11 attacks made an overt mockery of the concept of sovereignty, demonstrating that there was no longer any difference between inside and outside, between the domestic and the international. However, what is often forgotten is that the majority of people, particularly those in the Global South whose experiences are predominately characterised by “negative globalisation”, have already learnt that painful lesson (Bauman 1998).<sup>2</sup> Under the logic of the national security state, which has existed formally in the United States since at least 1947, national interest has often been conflated with promoting the idea of the “free world”. Historically, successive American governments have claimed to build universalism and promote democracy on crimes that were justified on the basis of a politics almost exclusively founded on the question of who is my enemy and how to exterminate them. This form of politics rests on a vision of a world divided between friends and enemies, with the enemy constructed as a strictly ontological entity (Schmitt 2003).<sup>3</sup>

The idea of “making the world one” under today’s logic of securitocracy is founded on a politics that seeks to free itself from all constraints. Therefore, in the name of peace

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<sup>2</sup> By this concept Zygmunt Bauman implies a highly selective globalisation of trade and capital, surveillance and information, coercion and weaponry, that all show disdain for state boundaries. For Bauman, it is these processes of “negative globalisation” that have led to the spectre of vulnerability that haunts the liquid modern society. It is worth pointing out here that at the same time as technological diffusion across the Third World is being celebrated for unlocking the democratic potential of civil society, toxic waste from British municipal dumps – televisions, computers and gadgets – is being sent to Africa illegally. For more, see Milmo (2009) ‘Dumped in Africa: Britain’s Toxic Waste’ *The Independent*, 18 February.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt defends the view that all true politics is based on the distinction between friend and enemy. This division, Schmitt elaborates, is essentially public and not private. Individuals may have personal enemies, but personal enmity is not a political phenomenon. Politics thus involves groups that face off as mutual enemies. Two groups will find themselves in a situation of mutual enmity only if there is a possibility of war and mutual killing between them. Therefore, for Schmitt, the utmost degree of association is the willingness to fight and die for and together with other members of one's group, and the ultimate degree of dissociation is the willingness to kill others for the simple reason that they are members of a hostile group.

and security, the global politics of the United States seeks exemption and exception based on a politics of boundless irresponsibility. Giorgio Agamben's work reminds us that, unlike the logic of discipline, which aims to produce order, security can only function within a context of freedom – a freedom of traffic, trade and individual initiative. In this new global arrangement, created by the end of the classical form of war between sovereign states, security finds its end in globalisation. A condition Agamben (2001) describes as an idea of a new planetary order that is the worst of all disorders.

**“America’s lost its groove, but we’re America right!”<sup>4</sup>**

The *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* report, initiated by the U.S. National Intelligence Council, acknowledged that America would remain the single most important actor into 2025. However, it went on to state that American freedom of action would be constricted by the increasingly irregular warfare tactics of others, as well as the proliferation of long-range precision weapons and the growing use of cybernetic warfare (National Intelligence Council 2008). Such observations may seem unsurprising, but most discussions on the subject of American global power continue to be framed within the unsatisfactory paradigm of “hard” and “soft” power (Nye 1990).<sup>5</sup> Within this framework, the relationship between military, financial and cultural power remains constrained by simple linear terms of one-to-one relations. Most discussions on the current global climate question whether or not a decline in America’s previously hegemonic financial and military global standing could be offset by its cultural standing; or if it will simply lead to the dethroning of the United States as the sole global superpower (Nye 1990, 2003, 2011; Ferguson 2005; Fukuyama 2006; Zakaria 2008). However, such deliberations are proving unsatisfactory for better understanding our particular geopolitical nomos and appreciating that states are not simply unitary actors. They have proven incapable of capturing the complexities of contemporary statecraft and its various modalities of power, particularly

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<sup>4</sup> Friedman (2008) ‘Hot, Flat and Crowded’ LSE Public Lecture 14 October.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Nye developed the idea of “soft power” in the context of international relations theory. The term, now widely used in international affairs by academics, analysts and statesmen, refers to the ability to obtain what one wants through co-option and attraction, rather than the hard power of coercion and punishment. The soft power of a nation is seen to centre on three resources: its culture – in places where it is attractive to others, its political values – when it lives up to them at home and abroad, and its foreign policies – when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority. In his most recent book, *The Future of Power*, Nye attempts to build on his earlier work to address how the global information age is increasingly rendering traditional markers of power obsolete and thereby remapping long-established relationships. At a time when many are debating the future of American power, for Nye, the United States is not in absolute decline and will probably remain more powerful than any other state in the coming decades.

those networks that circumvent both the constricted logic of the state and its increasingly weakening boundaries.

What most commentators have yet to address is how the indispensable nation is attempting to negotiate this period in order to more successfully reorientate itself in an increasingly interdependent and networked world. Such work needs to give a far more detailed account of the mixture of economic, military, technological and cultural imperatives that are carrying these processes forward. With the Bush years commonly described as an aberration, it becomes increasingly important to look beyond the epiphenomenal headlines and at longer-term logics of the global changes we are living through. This also makes it possible to see current American policy makers as “heirs of unbroken traditions of global calculation by the U.S. state that go back to the last years of the Second World War” (Anderson 2002, p. 5).

The latest buzzword to come out of American foreign policy circles is that of “smart power”, which is seen as a more synergetic integration of hard power with its softer counterpart.<sup>6</sup> The idea of smart power makes it clear that violence is not only still a viable option, but also a necessary one. What it also attempts to articulate is that the choice of legitimate targets and combatants is no longer simply righteous, but also culturally informed. This strategic readjustment in American foreign policy thinking reminds us that the last words scrawled by Kurtz in his pamphlet on civilising the savages – to “exterminate all the brutes” – are still alive with us today. The horror for the ivory trader at the end of Conrad’s novella is invoked in the increasing realisation amongst American government and military officials that there can ultimately be no military solutions to political wars.

Historian Perry Anderson points to two integrally connected foreign policy goals that have continued to endure. The first to make the world safe for capitalism, and the second being Washington’s determination to ensure uncontested American primacy within world capitalism. With the disappearance of the USSR marking the victory of the United States in the Cold War, the reach of American diplomacy and extension of its global

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<sup>6</sup> In her confirmation hearing as the new Secretary of State in President Obama’s administration, Hillary Clinton stressed that, “we must use what has been called smart power, the full range of tools at our disposal – diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal and cultural – picking the right tool or combination of tools for each situation”. Joseph Nye was the first to promulgate the notion of smart power. For Nye, it involves setting clear and manageable objectives, understanding the resources available within dynamic circumstances, understanding sensibilities of the targets of a country’s objectives, choosing among power strategies and anticipating the success of those strategies. For more, see, Nye (2008) *The Powers to Lead: Soft, Hard, and Smart*. New York: Oxford University Press.

hegemony became greater than ever before. By the late nineties, the United Nations had become virtually as much an arm of the State Department as the IMF was of the Treasury. The aftermath of the Cold War, therefore, allowed for a more comprehensive doctrine that attempted to link free markets to free elections and human rights. This helped create an environment for a military humanism that could be the “jimmy in the door of national sovereignty” (Anderson 2002, p. 9). Where the rhetoric of the Clinton administration chose to speak of the cause of international justice and the construction of a democratic peace, the Bush regime spoke in terms of an international alliance in the “war on terror” and a global freedom agenda. What is important to stress here is that these are not incompatible motifs, but rather that the order of emphasis assigned to each has changed. The result simply being a “sharp contrast of atmospherics” (Anderson 2002, pg. 13).

The slippage between the plates of consent and force within the system of American hegemony that became possible with the end of the Cold War has become ever more prescient today. The post-Cold War landscape is seen to have brought with it two major shifts that appeal to American grand strategists. The first concerns political and military dynamics. The bipolar international system has expired, and the world is perceived as having returned to a loose, multipolar, balance-of-power system, with the potential for American dominance in key military areas. Since this shift is largely seen as an issue of inter-state relations, it has aroused practitioners of *realpolitik*. The second shift is mainly economic, with the enormous growth of liberal market systems woven together by global trade and investment flows. Its particular dynamics appeal to the liberal-internationalist or global-interdependence schools of strategy. Contrary to realists and neo-realists, proponents of these schools of thought argue that statist dynamics matter less than in the past, and that the prospects for peace depend on multilateral cooperation through international regimes that transcend the state. The result of such shifts is not only a changing world, but also a continuing interplay between America’s two main schools of grand strategy: *realpolitik* and liberal internationalism.

Meanwhile, a third, and more interesting shift has also emerged. The intensification of the information revolution, with its global interconnectivity and knowledge diffusing to non-state actors, is generating a new fabric for an information world order. Many strategists do not seem to know what to make of these changes. Some view it as spelling a significant paradigm shift, but most attempt to make it fit into either of the paradigms of



realpolitik and internationalism.<sup>7</sup> However, the idea of America as a post-imperial example of a state dominating global networks is also beginning to take hold. Following on from the work of Hardt and Negri, who themselves do not deal particularly convincingly with this question of America's place in contemporary globalisation, Empire is now taken as a new kind of global power that looks to the United States like a network model. Moreover, such a system is seen as neither coerced nor aggressively dominated by it. The United States can thus be said to be the lynchpin of this democratic capitalist Empire (Hardt and Negri 2001). However, the most lucid theorists of American imperialism are fully conscious of the fact that American primacy and a worldwide liberal civilisation are not logically interdependent. As Anderson argues, "they contemplate, calmly and explicitly, the passing of the first as such as it has accomplished its mission of seeing the second" (2007, p. 11).

### **Americanisation and the Social Life of Consumption**

Antonio Gramsci's writings on Fordism and Americanism offer an important insight into both the political and cultural significance of contemporary globalisation and its relationship to those processes characterised as Americanisation. Gramsci called attention to the "long process" of socio-political change through which Fordist capitalism might achieve some measure of institutional stability. The ideological and institutional legitimacy of this new ultra-modern form of production and of working methods would be embodied in cultural practices and social relations far beyond the workplace (Gramsci 1971, p. 280). Domestically, Cold War ideology played a crucial role in the stabilisation of Fordist institutions in the United States. A coalition of social forces, with deradicalised industrial labour unions incorporated as junior partners, worked to rebuild the "free world" along liberal capitalist lines so as to resist the threat of a presumed communist menace.

This institutionalised Fordism, in turn, had far-reaching geopolitical consequences. It enabled the United States to provide the economic dynamism necessary to spark the

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<sup>7</sup> American policy circles are increasingly accepting that the structures and dynamics of the world order are changing so deeply that neither realpolitik nor internationalism suits these new realities. Therefore, any attempt to better exploit the information age needs to build a new paradigm. Such a shift in theory and praxis necessitates that militaries adapt from a hierarchical structure to a more networked one. American military researchers John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt have coined the term "noopolitiks" in an attempt to capture the essence of today's info-war. Their thesis stresses the centrality of civil society actors and speaks of a "global noosphere" taking shape. For them, such a space is created through cyberspace and developed further by information technologies. For more, see Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1999) *The Emergency of Noopolitik: Toward an American Information Strategy*. Washington, D.C.: RAND.

reconstruction of the postwar years along with the spread of its military industrial complex. This proved particularly effective as the Cold War acted to legitimate American interventions that protected and extended transnational business interests under the guise of protecting the “free world” from communism and promoting an ideology of free choice and consumer sovereignty. Importantly, the value system appropriate for the successful transition to capitalist modernisation was the culture-ideology of consumerism. This is where the nexus between Americanisation, capitalist consumerism and globalisation can be articulated – at the “vanishing point of modernity” (Anderson 2002, p. 24).<sup>8</sup> Not only has the American dream been central to the project of global capitalism, but as Leslie Sklair (1991) argues, the reformation of capitalism can also be seen as the Americanisation of capitalism with the culture-ideology of consumerism as its rationale. This nexus is how the cultural ideological sphere, particularly since the “communications revolution” of the 1980s, is now conspiring with the logics of political imperialism and economic neo-imperialism.

Contemporary postmodern consumer capitalism, and in particular the globalisation of American lifestyle choices, fits into the logic of high-tech info-war. This form of warfare aims to take advantage of an increasingly networked world that is reducing the monopolistic grip of the nation-state over the production and diffusion of information. While today’s cultural campaigns increasingly attempt to create the world in their own image, allowing Apple Inc. and the like to redefine political and social reality. This branded form of edutainment attempts to combine various public and private interests so as to individualise and personalise its products for informed consumers and drive their aspirational values. This is also reflected in the new target demographic of this info-war. The intended audience of such warfare is no longer the educated elite or business and professional echelons of society, but rather youth across the globe. Through the medium of popular technology, the construction of this demographic set attempts to cut across racial, class and other socio-economic differences. Jared Cohen, the former young rising star within the U.S. State Department and newly appointed Director of Google Ideas, highlights

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<sup>8</sup> In his editorial piece *Force and Consent*, Perry Anderson argues that, “the American direction, as opposed to domination, of the globe does not, of course, rest simply on an ideological creed. Historically, it has been the attractive power of U.S. models of production and culture that has extended the reach of this hegemony. The two have over time become increasingly unified in the sphere of consumption, to offer a single way of life as a pattern to the world. But analytically they should be kept distinct [...] so long as this economic lead was maintained America could figure in a world-wide imaginary as the vanishing point of modernity: in the eyes of millions of people overseas, the form of life that traced an ideal shape of their own future. This image was, and is, a function of technological advance”.

this unity between public and private interests by stating that, “the civil liberties young people have found online for organising a good time have become the same freedoms that they now leverage for dissent and action” (Cohen 2008).<sup>9</sup>

Arjun Appadurai rightly points out that the globalisation of culture is not the same as its homogenisation:

The central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalise one another and thus proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular. (Appadurai 1996, p. 43)

With this, both the dissemination of information and the production of mediascapes help blur the line between realistic and fictional landscapes. It further provides large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ethnoscapas to viewers across a world in which commodities, the news and politics are profoundly mixed. This political-economic project is driven by both the symbolic and material violence of the globalisation of the themes of American social doxa. All the carriers and importers of American cultural products can thus be seen as facilitating the actual globalisation of American problems. The work of Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant (1999) highlights the particular conceptual “import-export” of America’s contemporary cultural industries. Under such conditions, complex and controversial realities of a particular historical society become tacitly constituted as a model for every other and a yardstick for all things.

### **Why Do They Hate Us? Between McWorld and McJihad**

Today’s post-9/11 landscape has encouraged renewed debate on the particular place of public diplomacy, and more specifically a new cultural diplomacy, in this developing environment of “human security”. The underlying assumption is that with this security agenda the resulting policies will be diametrically opposed to the projection of soft power.

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<sup>9</sup> In 2010, Jared Cohen left the Policy Planning staff at the U.S. Department of State to set up a new division at Google. In the same way that Policy Planning works to bring together a number of stakeholders across different sectors, Google Ideas aims to achieve something similar. Its focuses include everything from counter-terrorism, counter-radicalisation and non-proliferation, as well as more typical development and citizen empowerment initiatives. In an interview with *Foreign Policy* regarding his new position, Cohen said that he was particularly interested in “the SWAT-team model” of building teams of stakeholders with different resources and perspectives to troubleshoot challenges. As Cohen argues, “the reason I say it’s a think/do tank is you need a comprehensive approach to think about and tackle challenges in different kinds of ways. In government, we used to refer to a ‘whole of government’ approach, meaning work with multiple agencies to leverage ideas and resources; Google Ideas will take a ‘whole of society’ approach”. For more, see Larson (2010) ‘State Department Innovator Goes to Google’ *Foreign Policy*, 7 September.

However, what such discussions fail to recognise is that culture has always been central to the long-term success and stability of colonial projects. One of the late Edward Said's most decisive contributions was to show that colonial projects are not reducible to a simple military-economic system, but are actually predicated upon a discursive infrastructure and whole system of knowledge whose violence is as much epistemic as it is physical. As Said (1998) argues, colonial prose, that is to say the symbolic forms and representations underpinning the imperial project, has always attempted to reify the mind and culture of its subjects in order to justify its actions. Since the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, civilisationalist and culturalist interpretations to explain away politics have taken on a new lease of life. This can be seen in the enthusiastic revival of Samuel Huntington's thesis on the "clash of civilisations" (1993). Huntington opened his original essay by saying that world politics was entering a new phase. Whereas in the recent past world conflicts have been confined to strict ideological camps, the new style of politics he discerned would be between different civilisations. For Huntington, therefore, "the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. The clash of civilisations will dominate global politics".<sup>10</sup>

Culture has remained reified in much of the literature that attempts to make sense of the political developments in our post-Cold War world (Fukuyama 1992; Lewis 1993, 2002; Kepel 2004; Buruma and Margalit 2005). Within this framework, terrorists and their sympathisers are both constructed as extremists motivated by a pre-modern irrational zeal and pursuing agendas untranslatable by any modern paradigm. The world, therefore, continues to be imagined in Manichean terms of mullahs and malls, and religious absolutism and market determinism. In such a world, only two possible political futures can be imagined. The first is one characterised as a Jihad of sorts; a "retribalisation" of large parts of the planet by war and bloodshed, and in which culture is pitted against culture. The second is what Benjamin Barber calls "McWorld", which is borne in on us by integration and uniformity that, "mesmerises the world with fast music, fast computers and fast food, pressing nations into one commercially homogenous global network" (2003, p. 4). The tendencies of the forces of Jihad and the forces of McWorld are also seen to operate with equal strength and in strictly opposite directions. The one driven by parochial hatreds that recreate ancient subnational and ethnic borders from within, the other by universalising markets that attempt to make national borders porous from without. For

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<sup>10</sup> By 1996, Huntington had dropped the question mark from the original *Foreign Affairs* essay and expanded his thesis into the international bestseller, *The Clash of Civilizations: And the Remaking of World Order*.

Barber and others, this is global democracy's crucial moment to seek out indigenous democratic impulses. As Barber puts it:

There is always a desire for self-government, always some expression of participation, accountability, consent and representation, even in traditional hierarchical societies. These need to be identified, tapped, modified and incorporated into new democratic practices with an indigenous flavour. (Barber 1992)

Speaking on Huntington's work, Edward Said highlighted that:

Much of the tremendous interest subsequently taken in Huntington's essay I think derives from its timing, rather than exclusively from what it says [...] There have been several intellectual and political attempts since the end of the Cold War to map the emerging world situation. And this includes Francis Fukayama's thesis on the end of history, which no-one talks about. So, the end of Fukayama really. And the thesis put about during the later days of the Bush administration, the theory of the so-called New World order. (Said 1996)<sup>11</sup>

In his lecture, Said noted Huntington's reliance on the thinking of orientalists, particularly that of Bernard Lewis. In his infamous article *Roots of Muslim Rage*, Lewis argues that:

It should by now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement in Islam far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilisations – the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both. (Lewis 1990)

For Said, such thinking was intended as a manual in the art of maintaining a wartime status in the minds of Americans and others.

More generally, Mahmoud Mamdani's idea of "culture talk" not only helps to unpack some of the aforementioned processes, but also places them in a clear historical framework. For Mamdani (2005), culture talk involves a double claim. The first is that pre-modern peoples possess an ahistorical and unchanging culture – like a badge they wear or a collective twitch from which they suffer. The second is that their politics can be decoded as a necessary and direct effect of this unchanging culture. Central to Mamdani's thinking is the necessity to carefully separate cultural identity from political identity. This is particularly pertinent in an era in which the claim that cultural communities should be self-determining is considered obvious and normal, and therefore something that does not

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<sup>11</sup> Said (1996) 'The Myth of the Clash of Civilisations' University of Massachusetts Public Lecture.

require an explanation. It is important to recognise that the raw material of political identities may be taken from the cultural sphere, but once these identities are crafted into political identities, enforced within a territorial state and reproduced through the mechanism of the law, then they become rather more complicated. Therefore, cultural identity is not only multiple, but also cumulative. Moreover, it is most importantly not territorial; something rarely, or if so, uncomfortably acknowledged.

The inner workings of this culture talk can be seen in the resurrection of the syntax of the “Arab mind” in the “war on terror”. Raphael Patai’s 1976 book *The Arab Mind* has received a pseudo-intellectual revival in both diplomatic and military circles as the basis of cultural instruction.<sup>12</sup> Central to the thesis are violence and sex(uality). Arabs are constructed as a people who only understand force and whose biggest weaknesses are shame and (sexual) humiliation. Contemporary applications of such thinking can be found in the writings of both neo-orientalists and neo-liberal Arab intellectuals such as Fouad Ajami and Kanan Makiya. In a Guardian opinion piece, *Extremism: the loser's revenge*, published in 2006, author Ian Buruma opens by asking, “does masturbation lead to suicide bombing?” Buruma argues that there may be a legitimate connection between sexual inadequacy, frustration and deprivation, and the pull towards violent Islamic extremism. The “loser’s revenge”, for Buruma (2006), lies in the “tantalising prospect of having one’s pick of the loveliest virgins in paradise”.

However disreputable such thinking may seem, its relevance cannot be downplayed and its consequences have been both real and deadly. Edward Said’s work (1994, 1995, 2003) serves to continually remind us that scholarship on the East itself has become a means of serving and legitimating imperial dominance of the Oriental Other. From Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo Bay, sexual torture has played a notorious role in the recent history of American interventions into the Arab world. To subjugate Iraqis, the American military had to “feminise” them – another example of colonialism’s cultural mechanism of coupling imperial power to sexual conquest. Moreover, these techniques have also been officially justified as an effective tool for interrogating Arabs, who are perceived as repressed and especially susceptible to sexual coercion (Massad 2007).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The Arab Mind* was revived by Hather-Leigh Press in 2002 and reprinted with an enthusiastic introduction by Norvell De Atkine, former U.S. army colonel and head of Middle East Studies at Fort Bragg. It is one of the most popular and widely read books in the American military. At one time, the training departments at the State Department gave away free copies to officials who were to be posted to American embassies in the Middle East. It is also used as a textbook for officers at the JFK Special Warfare School in Fort Bragg.

<sup>13</sup> In *Desiring Arabs*, Joseph Massad uncovers the roots of such attitudes and analyses the impact of Western ideas on the last two hundred years of Arab intellectual thought. Sexual desire has long played a key role in

## “Digital Natives” & Screen Life

It is important to emphasise that although cultural diplomacy is not a new paradigm in international politics, it has taken on a new mission statement and reconstituted its publics to better suit this increasingly networked world. It has become increasingly crucial to acknowledge the digital divide so as to better understand how this new politics is unfolding. Digital culture is beginning to be embraced within policy circles that believe that, with the unprecedented global interest, more citizens of the world now have “digital box seats to watch, hear, and feel the democratic experience” (Glassman 2009). In a world increasingly connected through user-generated software – Facebook statuses, Twitter updates and YouTube video uploads – the U.S. Department of State believes that it is in a position to reinvigorate its “democratic vision”. As James Glassman, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, argues:

This new virtual world is democratic. It is an agora. It is not a place for a death cult that counts on keeping its ideology sealed off from criticism. The new world is a marketplace of ideas and it is no coincidence that al-Qaeda blows up marketplaces. (Glassman 2008)<sup>14</sup>

So, those on the “wrong side of history” will now be characterised as those on the wrong side of this digital divide.

The democratic imperative ushered in by this interactive digital culture is having a considerable impact on the shifts in technologies that are associated with this new form of diplomacy. These techniques are no longer interested in the purely passive practices traditionally associated with listening to official government messages through radios and television sets, but rather the user-generated production and consumption of Facebook groups, Twitter hashtags, YouTube videos, VBlogs and short videos and music on the portable devices of today’s digital natives. The rate at which gadgets, features and services are being incorporated into mobile phones has drastically increased over the last ten years.<sup>15</sup> This only reinforces the idea that mobile phones are no longer simply devices for

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Western judgments about Arab civilisation. He points out that in the past Westerners viewed the Arab world as licentious, and Western intolerance of sex consequently led them to brand Arabs as decadent. However, as Western society became more sexually open over time, supposedly prudish Arabs soon became viewed as backward and illiberal.

<sup>14</sup> Glassman (2008) ‘Public Diplomacy 2.0’ New America Foundation, Washington D.C. 12 December.

<sup>15</sup> The first smartphone, the IBM Simon, was designed in 1992 and released to the general public the following year. For more on the changes in the smartphone market, see, Telecoms Market Research (2011)

us to speak to each other, but rather a central component in the mediation of experience and social life through “m-commerce” – the unification of information flows with multimedia entertainment. As Toni Sormunen, Director of the Smart Home project at the Nokia Research centre points out, “people have been sending text messages for more than ten years [...] Now we are also seeing people who, when asked, are saying they would like to communicate with their homes, not only their friends and relatives” (The Independent 2009). Therefore, in this mobile age, American cultural diplomacy can be seen as shifting its information, aesthetics and tempo to fit the reorientation from 24/7 news cycles to the instantaneousness of Facebook updates and Twitter timelines.

Mass media in general is coming to dominate and transform political communication. Modern technology has undoubtedly made many borders illusory and altered the traditional status quo. However, while assembling the world as a smaller place, states and state systems have also become larger. The capabilities of contemporary society are thus immeasurably greater, but the scope of society’s domination over the individual is also greater (Marcuse 2002). As Hardt and Negri argue, Empire is constructed by communications industries and the globalising biopolitical production of order. They highlight both the power of the virtual and the high-tech machine that forms this particular leviathan. For them, the source of imperial normativity – the new economic-industrial-communicative machine – is the hidden history of industrial management and the political use of technology (Hardt, et al. 2001). The political aspects of the prevailing technological rationality thus lie in democratic unfreedom as a token of technical progress (Rose 1999).<sup>16</sup> However, in this networked world these technological controls appear to be the very embodiment of Reason for the benefit of all social groups and interest.

### **“After Smart Weapons, Smart Soldiers”<sup>17</sup>**

The relationship between cultural identities and technological progress takes on a particularly disturbing form in the context of the “war on terror”, especially in its attempts at (re)producing the Orient. The Human Terrain System (HTS) is a programme run by the

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‘Global Mobile Phone & Smartphone Market (2010-2015)’. For more on global youth mobile trends and usage, see, Nielsen (2010) ‘Mobile Youth Around the World’.

<sup>16</sup> Nikolas Rose argues that liberal freedom is in fact a form of unfreedom. Liberal polities imbue subjects with the capacity for self-reliance, self-government and self-control. Therefore, for Rose, this form of freedom is in actuality a technique of control. This mode of governance works to gain purchase on its citizens and makes conduct the subject of governmentality: family and work structures, sexuality and belief systems. These assemblages, once under the authority of the sovereign, become subject “only to the limits of the law”.

<sup>17</sup>The Economist (2007) ‘Irregular Warfare: After smart weapons, smart soldiers’ 25 October.



U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and aimed at improving the military's ability to understand the complex local socio-cultural environment in areas where they are deployed. David Kilcullen (2009), one of the architects of the HTS programme who also served as the Special Adviser for Counterinsurgency to the U.S Secretary of State during the 2007 Iraq war surge, questions the relevance of classical insurgency theory to "modern, non-linear and unpredictable conflict".<sup>18</sup> In the long-term, the system hopes to assist the American government in understanding foreign countries and regions prior to any engagement. HTS was more specifically developed in response to identified gaps in commanders' and staffs' understanding of the local population and culture, as well as poor transfer of specific socio-cultural knowledge to follow-on units during the second Gulf War. Its core philosophy is "to place the expertise and experience of social scientists and regional experts, coupled with reach-back, open-source research, directly in support of deployed units engaging in full-spectrum operations".<sup>19</sup> The programme is the first time that both social science research and "conflict ethnography" have been conducted systematically on a large scale, especially at the brigade level.

In terms of the Pentagon's Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), the programme forms part of the attempted revolution in perfecting and extending the Powell doctrine of creating "warfare without warfare".<sup>20</sup> HTS and other such techno-cultural investments have resurrected the ultimate colonial fantasy of the clean war. These heavily technologically deterministic projects highlight the increasing tension between the old practice of face-to-face combat and a newfound high-tech warfare-at-a-distance, armed with both warrior scholars and culturally considerate citizen-soldiers on the ground. This

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<sup>18</sup> David Kilcullen argues that there is an urgent need to re-imagine the contemporary conflict environment as a "global insurgency". This needs to be seen as a radical break with the "small wars" theories of the 1940s. For Kilcullen, who described the 2003 invasion of Iraq as "an extremely serious strategic error", the West has approached modern conflicts, and violent Islamism more specifically, with the wrong attitudes and methods. These enemies are seen to be practicing a new form of "hybrid warfare", while responses have remained framed by old-fashioned conventional warfare epitomised by the Second World War. Of all the reconceptualisations needed to successfully fight this new kind of war, the most crucial for Killcullen is the shift from the notion of "enemy-centric warfare" to "population-centric security". Effective counterinsurgency thus provides human security and full-spectrum assistance to a population and their society. This, not destroying the enemy, is the central task for Killcullen. It demands the continuous presence of security forces, local alliances with community leaders, the creation of self-defending populations and the operation of small-unit ground forces in tandem with local security forces.

<sup>19</sup> For more, see the Human Terrain System's official website [www.humanterrainsystem.army.mil/](http://www.humanterrainsystem.army.mil/)

<sup>20</sup> The Revolution in Military Affairs is a theory of the future of warfare connected to technological and organisational recommendations that are usually tied to modern information, communications and space technology. There has been renewed interest in RMA theory and practice after what many saw as an overwhelmingly one-sided victory by the United States in the 1991 Gulf War. American dominance through superior satellite, weapons-guiding and communications technology emphasised the enormous relative power of the United States through technological advances.

late-modern security apparatus is not only geopolitical, but also profoundly biopolitical. Its particular cultural turn is based on the premise that there can ultimately be no military solution to political wars, and therefore attempts to reposition the American military as a culturally informed and ethically sensitive bystander. This form of culture-centric warfare is presented as a means of finding common ground between occupation and counterinsurgency, with an emphasis on protecting civilian populations and non-kinetic procedures that are seen as therapeutic interventions rather than simply combat operations. However, what this actually occludes is the intensification of kinetic strategies and military violence. In what Derek Gregory (2008) calls “a new hermeneutics of counterinsurgency”, cultural knowledge becomes not only a substitute for killing, but also a prerequisite for its refinement. The classic colonial gesture of *terra nullius*, where a skeletal landscape is visualised, hollowed out and emptied of human life, is in the process of being replaced by a human cartography whose contours and textures are characterised by a predominately cultural landscape.<sup>21</sup>

### **“Everything that happened, happened here first in rehearsal”<sup>22</sup>**

The West Bank and Gaza Strip are some of the most intensely monitored, surveyed and analysed places on the planet. After the 1967 Six-Day War, these territories became some of the most photographed terrains in the world; a site for which 3D stereoscopic images were constructed using special double lens aerial cameras.<sup>23</sup> Today, the Occupied Palestinian Territories have been turned into a laboratory, functioning as a model space for the refinement of a new global policy of urban warfare. The fact that it has garnered so much international attention helped promote its role as a testing laboratory where patterns

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<sup>21</sup> The final version of the U.S. Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM 3-24) was released in 2006. It shows that some of these ideas had clearly breached at least the outer wall of the Pentagon. The civilian has been placed at the centre of counterinsurgency (COIN), and to that end the Manual insisted on the importance of “cultural knowledge”. This hermeneutics of counterinsurgency can be seen in the following quote from the Manual – “American ideas of what is ‘normal’ or ‘rational’ are not universal. To the contrary, members of other societies often have different notions of rationality, appropriate behaviour, level of religious devotion and norms concerning gender. Thus, what may appear abnormal or strange to an external observer may appear as self-evidently normal to a group member”.

<sup>22</sup> Broomberg and Chanarin (2007) *Chicago*. London: SteidlMACK.

<sup>23</sup> In *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, Paul Virilio speaks of the logistics of perception beginning by encompassing immediate perception. The logistics of perception was from the start the geographic logistics of domination from an elevated site. For Virilio, the battlefield is at first local, then it becomes worldwide, which is to say expanded to the level of orbit with the invention of video reconnaissance satellites. Thus we have a development of the battlefield corresponding to the development of the field of perception made possible by technical advancements of geometrical optics: that of the telescope, of wave-optics, of electro-optics and of computer graphics. Henceforth, the battlefield is no longer worldwide in the sense of the First or Second World Wars. It has become global in the sense of the planet.

are mimicked and reproduced across the globe, giving life to terms such as the “Palestinisation of Iraq” and the “Shiite Intifada” (Graham 2010). However, if resistance movements are perceived as being “Palestinised”, then the American military on the frontline of this global insurgency can be said to have been similarly “Israelised”.<sup>24</sup> The Israeli Defense Force’s (IDF) Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 was keenly observed by foreign militaries and became a blueprint as they prepared to invade Iraq.<sup>25</sup> Such tactical and strategic cooperation shows how the Third World city is increasingly conceived of as the key battlespace of the future, with the Pentagon as the global slumlord. In 1996, the Army War College’s journal warned that, “the future of warfare lies in the streets, sewers, high-rise buildings and sprawl of houses that form the broken cities of the world” (Davis 2006, p. 203).

This question of Palestine reveals the complex processes at work under contemporary globalisation, and in particular the geostrategic framework for urban warfare.<sup>26</sup> It helps formulate a critique of the idea that there is a one-to-one relationship between state ideology and practices with facts on the ground. The ecology of the conflict is therefore the relationship between various kinds of organisations and their conflicting interests and various co-dependencies.<sup>27</sup> Almost every one of Israel’s major military tactics

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<sup>24</sup> The convergence of military tactics and strategic doctrines between the United States and Israel has accelerated under the “war on terror”. This new paradigm stresses the need to acquire new precision weaponry and airborne warfare technologies, and develop a tactical emphasis on urban warfare in the new asymmetrical battle space. Since the American military’s 2007 adoption of a new counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq, there has been a surge in the construction of walls, barriers and checkpoints in neighbourhoods and cities. In other words, a crucial part of this new geostrategy is the globalisation of gated communities in the archipelago of exceptions. For more on the proliferation of nation-state walls in a time of intensifying transnational powers, see Brown (2010) Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.

<sup>25</sup> Israeli commandos and intelligence units also work closely with their American counterparts at Special Forces training bases at Fort Bragg.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to stress the geostrategic, as opposed to geopolitical, nature of this warfighting. Virilio elegantly articulates this distinction where the geopolitical is dependent upon geography and is older than the geostrategic. For Virilio, in order for there to be geostrategy, a technological means must be developed. The geopolitical is Julius Caesar and the war of the Gauls, the Peloponnesian war and Thucydides. As Virilio argues, “it is a war of territory, the conquest of sites, of cities. The domination of territory is a determining element of the battle. The war in Yugoslavia is still tied to territory. It is for this reason that the West is afraid of it. They fear having an Afghanistan or a Vietnam in Europe. Something inextricable. And Yugoslavia was the first to implement a strategy of popular self-defense. The geography does not allow for a very developed geopolitical war. On the other hand, the Iraqi desert permits a very developed geostrategical war because the territory is like billiards, like the sea”.

<sup>27</sup> The idea of an archipelago of exceptions creates a new cartographic image of the world. It projects the metaphor of the archipelago to help describe a geographical order that is no longer exclusively based on the nation-state with its continuous borders, but rather one fragmented into a multiplicity of both territorial and extraterritorial zones. For Eyal Weizman, the metaphor of the archipelago describes a multiplicity of discrete zones, the spatial expression of a series of states of emergency, or states of exception that are either created through the process of law – through which the law is in fact severely undermined or annulled – or that appear de facto within them. These zones are thus often spaces of legal exception where sovereignty is in

in the Middle East over the past three decades was performed in advance in Chicago, a staged Arab town built by the IDF in the middle of the Negev, and suitably named in homage to another bullet-ridden city.<sup>28</sup> The visual critique offered up by the work of Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin traces this set of urban combat training where nothing is as it seems – a watermelon revealed to be suicide bomb, a tranquil forest transformed into a site for forensic investigation or a pastoral landscape becoming a warzone. They note that walking through Chicago is:

Like visiting a decommissioned film set, the props and furnishings stripped away to reveal its most basic components [...] and it is here, in this parallel world that the occupation of the Palestinian territories is played out by generations of Israeli soldiers, over and over again. (Broomberg and Chanarin 2006)<sup>29</sup>

This parallel universe is integral to the real world. Organised through surveillance posts, concrete bunkers and settlements – the fortresses which have become the eyes and ears of the civilian occupation – this fragmented and militarised vision of the land attempts to transform the entire panorama into a potential battlefield. This reorganisation of the global urban terrain, through a series of micro tactical actions, strives to re-imagine the city not only as the site, but also the very medium of warfare.<sup>30</sup>

The quintessential Arab town has also become a military motif for the United States government, particularly at a number of key army training sites in California and Louisiana.<sup>31</sup> The techno-cultural form of this new disjuncture – of translating from images,

question. Reminiscent of the capitulations system of the colonial era, where “backward” societies were penetrated by advanced ones, contemporary extraterritorial spaces are embodied today by humanitarian zones, refugee and internment camps, manufacturing enclaves, military bases and gated communities.

<sup>28</sup> In order to create this ghost town with its alternative universe, Palestinian architecture was carefully scrutinised. Roads and alleyways were constructed to mimic the layout of towns like Ramallah and Nablus. Such violent spaces were filled with sand, burned-out vehicles and even Arabic graffiti.

<sup>29</sup> In his accompanying essay, Eyal Weizman highlights that in similar mock-up sites, simulations have been designed by fun-fair, theme-park and film-set designers. He goes on to note that, “action film directors are brought in to help military planners think up possible scenarios for complex urban fights. Soldiers, actors, civilians – and sometimes prisoners – simulate urban crowds. Special effects and ‘cold-fire’ systems, recordings of urban life, the sounds of planes, tanks and gunfire, and the revolting combination of smells from cooking, decomposing bodies, sewage and stagnant water are released throughout this and other mock-up cities, to give military forces a ‘taste’ of the ‘urban mayhem’ of refugee camps and urban slums”.

<sup>30</sup> This new urban syntax includes the concept of “walking through walls”, where reorganising and moving through such spaces becomes the strategic predicament, rather than simply occupying them.

<sup>31</sup> California is home to the University of South California’s Institute for Creative Technologies, Forterra Systems, Tactical Iraqi and Fort Irwin, while Louisiana is home to Fort Polk. One third of the American troops stationed in Iraq in 2009 have been through these programmes, and entire brigades — each with 4,000 soldiers – are processed there every month. It is seen as a marriage of military technology and Hollywood fakery; over 350 Arabic-speaking Iraqi-Americans and plainclothes Nevada National Guardsman live there almost year-round to offer American trainees “a vortex of chaos”. The insurgents even get acting lessons from Carl Weathers, best known for his portrayal of the boxer Apollo Creed in the *Rocky* films.

through data, to legitimate targets – makes the experience of war less corporal than calculative. An interesting distinction between the Israeli and American approaches to such rehearsal exercises is that the American towns are “populated”, or at least inhabited. This interactive realism thus introduces both civilian and military role players to the Other by populating these Pentagon financed cyber-cities (Der Derian 2009).<sup>32</sup> The construction of the Orient, as what Edward Said called a “living tableau of queerness”, has been ripped from the pages of Goethe, Flaubert and Renan, and is now presented through a mixture of global and interactive popular culture. The opacity of the Other and its alien spaces are now rendered transparent, and their complexities reduced to a series of digital subject-objects in a purely visual plane. As Derek Gregory points out, this new virtual citizen-soldier is a hybrid that blurs the distinction between the political role of the citizen and the apolitical role of the soldier to both depoliticise public spheres and aid the securitisation of civil society. Moreover, this cultural turn is wholly consistent with the neo-liberal armature of late modern war and its particular desire to open up new opportunities for the private sector.<sup>33</sup>

A photo spread in men’s magazine *Maxim* featured a roster of Israeli models, all ex-soldiers, photographed this time in a matching mixture of swimwear and military paraphernalia. Initiated by Israel's New York consulate and headlined “Women of the Israel Defense Forces”, the magazine stated that:

Maxim was approached by the Israeli consulate to be a part of reshaping Israel's public image, specifically because of our unmatched mainstream reach to men aged 18 to 35. We are pleased with the result of our work together. (Maxim 2007)<sup>34</sup>

In the magazine, one of the women describes how she enjoyed firing her M16 rifle before she entered the military intelligence corps. This is not, however, the first time that Israel has used sex to sell itself abroad.<sup>35</sup> Considering the centrality of violence and sex(uality), or lack thereof, in the construction of the Orient, the choice of Israeli model-soldiers seems

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<sup>32</sup> In *Virtuous War*, James Der Derian maps out how technological innovation has given rise to a global form of virtual violence. With “virtuous war”, the lines between TV warfare and Hollywood movies blur, military actions and computer games blend, while mock disasters and virtual cities collide with real events. For Der Derian, this collapse produces a new configuration of virtual power – the military-industrial-media-entertainment network. However, the interests in this thesis extend beyond simply mapping the emergence of this high-tech warfare to interrogate its impact on human interaction and quotidian culture.

<sup>33</sup> The United States Army and a number of institutions of higher learning are developing projects with corporations such as Forterra Systems and Flatworld.

<sup>34</sup> See [www.maxim.com/amg/girls/articles/56699/israelidenseforces.html](http://www.maxim.com/amg/girls/articles/56699/israelidenseforces.html)

<sup>35</sup> In 2005, The Israeli ministry of tourism signed a two-year advertising contract with Arsenal FC to promote Israel, which also featured women in swimsuits.

to be particularly apt. However, this is far from the only way in which civilians and digital natives are being encouraged to partake in not only the (re)production of the Orient, but also in its virtual penetration. *Blood on the Sand*, the sequel to *50 Cent: Bulletproof*, is the latest product to be released by rapper and business mogul 50 Cent. In the computer game, players can choose from a number of G-Unit members, each specialising in different combat techniques and riding in an array of vehicles that include a driver-and-turret-gunner Humvee.<sup>36</sup> However, what makes this game fascinating is that it is set in a fictional Middle Eastern country. The plot centres on 50 Cent and his G-Unit crew who have just completed a tour of shows in the Middle East. Rather than receiving \$10 million cash for their work, G-Unit is offered a diamond-embedded skull of legends – an idea Fity himself got whilst visiting Dubai. However, the skull is stolen, and 50 Cent, feeling “disrespected” by this, will do whatever it takes to get it back. Players are rewarded for causing military style havoc, while an exclusive hip-hop soundtrack by 50 Cent, Ice Cube and T-Pain cuts a suitable accompaniment.

The increasingly seductive use of theoretical and technological discourse by military institutions to describe urban warfare seeks to portray such endeavors as intellectual, precise and even exciting. Walter Benjamin warned that:

Never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. (Benjamin 2009, p. 84)

Therefore, the paradox of incommunicability today is that in our much-celebrated age of communication, struggles have become all but incommunicable. Technical progress creates forms of life – and of power – that appear to reconcile the forces opposing the system, and defeat or refute all protest in the name of the historical prospects of freedom from toil and domination. With the sensual conditions of modernity, Giddens may celebrate the “television revolutions” of 1989, but the lure of these multiple pornographic visuals also help to create the uncritical gaze – or stare – of the consumer. However, as Susan Buck-Morss argues, the proffering of pornographically titillating images asks us to stare at the world as though it were a naked body for collection and possession, as well as the hollow fascination evoked by such images. The image phantasmagorias of this mass culture are also technoaesthetics, through which the intoxication of phantasmagoria itself becomes the social norm. The sensory addiction to this compensatory reality thus becomes

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<sup>36</sup> See the trailer for *50 Cent: Blood on the Sand* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1J9TMwXvSA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1J9TMwXvSA)

one of the means of social control – what Buck-Morss (1992) calls the “aestheticisation of politics”. Nuanced investigations into this phantasmagoria, or new culture industry, thus need to be able to comprehend the ways in which the visual is being betrayed in our current videology.

With the reliance of our digital culture on this audiovisual realm, there is also an increasing strength to what the shock of the unintelligible can communicate to humanity. Herbert Marcuse (1979) noted that aesthetics is the only form of expression that can take up where religion and philosophy failed, and thereby serve as a last refuge of two-dimensional criticism in a one-dimensional society. In a time where regions and populations are increasingly being visually framed, either through the crosshairs of American soldiers training in Fort Irwin, California, or the cockpit videos of Israeli drones posted on YouTube, there is an urgent need to break the existing relationship between those who produce culture and those who are prisoners of it. Paul Virilio argues that we are reaching a condition of “technical essentialism”, so just as there is religious essentialism, there is a technical essentialism through technological fundamentalism. For Virilio:

Modern man, who killed the Judaeo-Christian god, the one of transcendence, invented a god machine, a *deus ex machina*. It is necessary to be an atheist of technology! This is not simply anti-technology. I am an amateur of technology. (Virilio 1998, p. 20)

However, there is also potential for today’s global multi-ethnic motleys crew to disrupt this logic and thereby undo certain fixed political realities through digital culture’s ability to uncouple cultures both spatially and temporally.<sup>37</sup> Some artists and cultural workers are attempting to use certain aesthetic practices – what some have termed electrobricolage or digital mash-ups – to subvert certain cartographic and spatial practices, particularly those created in times of war. These are not simply critical aesthetic practices, but equally subversive in terms of the alternative conditions of production and political economies they imagine and attempt to realise.

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<sup>37</sup> The term is borrowed from Linebaugh and Rediker who use it to characterise a motley crew of sailors, slaves, pirates, labourers and indentured servants who, long before the American Revolution and the Deceleration of the Rights of Man, had ideas of freedom and equality that were to change the world.

## Chapter 1

### The Digital Stream of the “War on Terror”: Technology, Popular Culture and Warfare in the Age of Digital (Re)production

The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society [...] Imperialistic war is a rebellion of technology which collects, in the form of ‘human material’, the claims to which society has denied its natural material. Instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities; and through gas warfare the aura is abolished in a new way.

– Walter Benjamin – *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936)

The nature of sedentarity and nomadism has changed. The sedentary type is someone who’s at home everywhere, with his mobile and his laptop, be it in a lift, in a plane or on a high-speed train. That’s being sedentary, whereas a nomad is a person who’s not at home anywhere.

– Paul Virilio – *Terre Natale, Ailleurs Commence Ici (Native Land, Elsewhere Starts Here)* Exhibition (Paris, 2009)

The Palestinians are completely transparent to us [...] It feels like hunting season has begun. Sometimes it reminds me of a PlayStation [computer] game. You hear cheers in the war room after you see on the screens that the missile hit a target, as if it were a soccer game.

– Israeli reservist posted in the Gaza Strip during Operation Cast Lead (April 2009)

To better understand how we have reached a point where cultural forms seem to have been subsumed in a virtual technopoly requires a return to the Frankfurt School and their work on the culture industry.<sup>1</sup> This, of course, is not intended to imply that what one sees today is simply the final triumphant expression of mass-produced culture and its standardised products that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer theorised. Rather, it is to assist in constructing a language and framework to reflect critically on today’s evolving cultural industries, as well as to help imagine alternative political and cultural formations outside of their insidious logic. The celebration of the social changes ushered in by this latest

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Postman defines technopoly as a society which believes that, “the primary, if not the only, goal of human labour and thought is efficiency, that technical calculation is in all respects superior to human judgment [...] and that the affairs of citizens are best guided and conducted by experts”.



technological revolution is not only thriving, but also being embraced within influential policy circles. Today's enthusiasts stress the falling prices of digital technology, as well as the plethora of user-generated content that it has helped initiate. Therefore, the democratisation of the public realm, or more specifically the creation of a new digital interactive sphere, is seen by many to have broken the monopoly over the production and transfer of public information (Wilhelm 2000; Boler 2008). Such thinking, however, relies on a number of unquestioned assumptions around who constitutes this public sphere, who can speak, and most importantly, who has access. This digital revolution has undoubtedly shaken up traditional relationships between the production, dissemination and consumption of mass culture, but that does not necessarily equate to the democratisation of our public spheres. This chapter, therefore, aims to complicate the perceived democratisation of new media and popular culture.

Adorno and Horkheimer's primary concerns revolved around what becomes of human beings and their capacity for perception when they are fully exposed to the conditions of monopoly capitalism. In the late 1930s, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno engaged in a conversation over their essays, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) and "The Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938) respectively. Benjamin noted in one of his letters to Adorno that:

I see more and more clearly that the launching of the sound film must be regarded as an operation of the film industry designed to break the revolutionary primacy of the silent film, which had produced reactions that were difficult to control and hence dangerous politically. (Lonitz 1999, p. 295)

The insight opened up by the work of the Frankfurt School forces contemporary work on the mass media and popular culture to think more carefully about the relationship that these spheres create between consumer capitalism, the transfer of information and the organised amusement of individuals through cultural goods. As Adorno points out in his essay, entertainment inhabits the moments of silence that develop between people moulded by anxiety, work and undemanding docility.

### **Beyond the Frankfurt School: Contemporary Culture Industries and the Post-Modern Consumer**

Despite this, the critique offered by the Frankfurt School, of a popular culture that they saw as akin to a factory producing standardised cultural goods, fails to capture the rapid

changes one now witnesses in the production and consumption of mass culture. In a series of essays written on the form of the gramophone, “speaking machines” and phonograph records, Adorno shows how the transition from artisanal to industrial production transformed not only the technology of distribution, but also that which is distributed.<sup>2</sup> However, his critique of the transformation of the piano from a musical instrument into a piece of bourgeois furniture does not accommodate the radical individualisation characteristic of digital technology. It is equally insufficient in addressing contemporary technology’s revolutionising of the relationships between our bodies and their sensoria with human interaction and social spaces. This particular rupture has shifted the eye’s focus from the live performer to the camera phone, the body’s gyrations on the dance floor to the seat in front of the screen and the hand’s interactions to the touch of an iPad. It is thus insufficient to critique today’s culture industry simply on the grounds of the bourgeois family that gathers around the gramophone in order to enjoy the music that it itself is unable to perform.

In light of the different set of technological possibilities that now exist, there is need for a serious reappraisal of the socio-political shape of this culture. The technoaesthetics of contemporary mass culture have brought with them a radical shift in the way people’s lives and experiences are mediated.<sup>3</sup> These new sets of cultural habits are instigated by the predominately visual shape of this technological culture. What is of particular interest here are attempts to build on both the more humanistic aspects of the Frankfurt School’s work and their concern for the increasing inability of technologically dominated culture to either shock and disturb, and thereby communicate our shared experiences. In one of his most powerful essays, “Music in the Background” (1932), Adorno reassesses the relationship between culture and its place in our public spheres. For Adorno, there is no longer a place for music in our immediate life:

Anyone who, by himself, wanted to sing out loud in the street could run the risk of being arrested as a disturber of the peace. If you hum under your breath, abstracted from external things, you may run into a car at any moment. (Adorno 2002, p. 506)

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<sup>2</sup> See in particular his essays, ‘The Curves of the Needle’ (1928) and ‘The Form of the Phonograph Record’ (1934).

<sup>3</sup> For Susan Buck-Morss, technoaesthetics anaesthetise us from the very real and dramatic changes in our world, and thus further fragment and confuse us. They create a false sense of community beyond the exigencies of history, and its ideology, therefore, must erase all that threatens to disrupt its totality. For more, see Buck-Morss (1992) ‘Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's artwork essay reconsidered’ October 62.

It has been said that one of the West's greatest undertakings is the commercialisation of the whole world, the hitching of the fate of everything to the fate of the commodity (Baudrillard 2003, p. 16). However, as Jean Baudrillard elegantly argues, such a monumental undertaking may well turn out to have been the attempted aetheticisation of the whole world. This system can thus be seen as running less on the surplus value of the commodity than on the aesthetic surplus value of the sign. Its goods are as much images as material, an aesthetic as well as product line, in which videology comes to replace ideology (Stewart 2000).<sup>4</sup> The engine behind this new culture industry is the infotainment telesector – a realm tied together by communications, information, entertainment and commerce – which is further driven by a “universal tribe of digital consumers” that this space helps construct (Barber 2003). Distraction in the form of mass entertainment has often been described as the non-productive correlate of capitalism. Its tunes may lull the listener to inattention, but the intervention of digital technology has undoubtedly created a different set of circumstances and relationships around interactive communication.

### **A Digital Conspiracy: A Lifestyle Choice of Storing Culture as Data**

Imagine finding a phone that belongs to somebody else; filled with personal text messages, contacts, diary entries, photos, voice mails and private video clips. Would you look through it?

This seemingly innocent question is the starting point for a recent Nokia advertisement.<sup>5</sup> The elaborate “Somebody Else’s Phone” campaign highlights the phantasmagorias of today’s mass media culture.<sup>6</sup> Nokia’s new market strategy aims to create a mix of scripted content and real life audience interaction. Those who participate are therefore able to learn

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<sup>4</sup> Videology is what Garrett Stewart terms as the emphasis on the mechanics of visualisation that reveals the close collusion between cinematic illusionism and futuristic fantasy.

<sup>5</sup> Inspired by the evolving role mobile phones play in our lives, the audience is invited to explore the lives of three characters – Anna, Jade and Luca – in intimate detail and in real time through their Nokia handsets. The campaign follows these characters’ evolving storylines across three time zones and through a 24/7 live feed of content. For more, see [www.somebodyelsesphone.com](http://www.somebodyelsesphone.com)

<sup>6</sup> Usually used to depict a fantastic sequence of associative imagery, as seen in dreams, Susan Buck-Morss borrows the term image phantasmagoria from the work of Walter Benjamin. Benjamin himself focused on the phantasmagoria of nineteenth-century Paris in his analysis of the condition. The original phantasmagoria took the form of the private fantasy worlds of bourgeois interiors. The principle then extended to the shop windows of the arcades, and then to the panoramas that engulfed the viewer in a simulated total environment-in-miniature, and finally to the world’s fairs which expanded this phantasmagoric principle to areas the size of small cities. Susan Buck-Morss’ work further extended the principle of the image phantasmagoria to the sensory bombardment of technoaesthetic culture industries.

about the characters through their text messages, photos, music, videos and voicemail on the website. This attempted endocolonisation is complemented by the ability of participants to sign up to the characters' Facebook pages and discover their phone numbers to call or text them directly.<sup>7</sup> The final crescendo sees this mediated audience being given the opportunity to influence the storylines themselves and thereby fashion a user-generated dynamic to the campaign. What the Nokia campaign brings to attention is the modern conspiracy between audio and visual realms, and more specifically how they are digitally conspiring to create the necessary conditions for our contemporary videology.

Digital culture has reached a point where Downloadable Sounds (DLS) and Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) have been adopted as an industry-wide standard. This means people using different platforms are beginning to have a common listening experience.<sup>8</sup> The mediation of social experience initiated by this technology is crucial to understanding how digitisation is aiding attempts to manipulate people's relations to culture and therefore their relationships to one another. Taking music as an example, both the act of "musicking" and its broader function in human life and relations are being radically transformed (Small 1998).<sup>9</sup> The digitisation of culture has intensified the shift towards an audiovisual mediation of both our private and public lives; a distinction which itself is being blurred by these very changes. The cassette and CD player are now deemed to be both technologically and socially obsolete in our brave new world of iPods, iPhones, BlackBerrys and PS Vitas – all with their ever-increasing capacity to store AVI, MPEG, MP3 and WAV files. The latest technologies have allowed these audio and visual formats to help the reorganisation of many aspects of human experience, in most cases becoming both the score and film to our lives.<sup>10</sup> This trend progresses not only by

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<sup>7</sup> The term endocolonisation is borrowed from Paul Virilio, who used it to describe a war spirit, which finally liberated of any political or religious limit, colonises time, the city, history itself and bodies.

<sup>8</sup> DLS is a family of standardised file formats for digital musical instrument sound banks and virtual musical instrument programmes. While MIDI is an industry-standard protocol that enables electronic musical instruments such as keyboard controllers, computers and other electronic equipment to communicate, control and synchronise with one another. A standard wavetable instrument file format has now been adopted by all software synthesisers, sound cards and even some hardware synthesisers, only serving to cement the sameness of all ported sounds and images.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Small suggests we view music as an act as opposed to a thing. By looking at music in this way, it becomes possible to understand the broader relationships that exist between music, people, history and the larger culture.

<sup>10</sup> The first ever music video shown on MTV was Buggles' *Video Killed the Radio Star*. The 1979 release painted a nostalgic picture of technological change, a period in which the radio was at the centre of people's everyday experiences. However, with the intrusion of TVs and VCRs into people's lives, "pictures came and broke [our] hearts", leaving artists at the mercy of their image. An example of the centrality of today's image phantasmagoria is R&B singer Rihanna's music video, *Disturbia*. The trend of contemporary music video aesthetics mimicking short motion pictures is not particularly new. However, what makes Rihanna's David LaChapelle directed video stand out is that the concept for the video seems to have been constructed before

filling those silent moments between work and leisure that Adorno spoke of, but more crucially through the restructuring of people's social lives.

Other contemporary examples further illustrate both the speed and extent to which this technoculture has come to dictate the rhythm of cultural life. In September 2007, rapper Soulja Boy's track *Crank That (Soulja Boy)* became the first single to reach the number one spot on the Billboard Hot 100 solely through the Internet via video-sharing sites and ringtone download charts.<sup>11</sup> However, his success is in many ways unsurprising considering the current trends in contemporary rap music, particularly the growth of "ringtone rap". Much has been made of the impact of peer-to-peer music sharing and its repercussions on album sales and the entertainment industry as a whole.<sup>12</sup> What is more interesting, however, is how the various culture industries are trying to negotiate the technological changes that are increasingly slipping out of their control. For example, the single, which had successfully replaced the album as the main moneymaker for the music industry since the late 1950s, has lost both its aura and ability to dictate customers' tastes and consumption patterns. As attempts to replicate peer-to-peer music sharing with legal sites have thus far proven unsuccessful, ringtones are increasingly becoming one of the most sustainable forms of income for artists and record labels.<sup>13</sup> The requirement for artists to construct a few hit singles is nothing new, but in today's technocultural climate, artists are now making music with this type of hyper-disposability in mind – with repetitiveness and immediate recognition at its heart. As record executives eyes and radio DJs hands concentrate on the newly formed ringtone charts, artists are beginning to construct records with the mobile phone as the master of their imagination.

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the track itself was conceived. The song itself was not on the original album, but was one of the new tracks that were included on the repackaged LP *Good Girl Gone Bad: Reloaded* (2008), which also features a bonus DVD of one of Rihanna's live concerts.

<sup>11</sup> It was following this success and the release of the single's low budget video, with its "Superman dance" phenomenon, that Soulja Boy eventually signed a major record deal with Interscope Records.

<sup>12</sup> Sales of albums in the United States dropped by 14 percent in 2008, but overall figures rose thanks to a surge in digital purchases. Although it was the seventh time in eight years that album sales had dropped, it was the first year that digital purchases broke the billion mark, rising by 32 percent.

<sup>13</sup> The Billboard Hot Ringtones chart, launched in 2004, was established in order to both recognise the significant impact of the nascent \$300 million mobile music market in America and further its growth as the rest of the industry realised the relationship between mobile downloads and new music sales. According to John Kilcullen, Billboard Publisher and VNU Music and Literary Group President, "our team has been working closely with major ringtone distributors, wireless carriers and influential industry associations and leaders to debut this chart [...] Billboard charts have long held an independent and authoritative role in influencing sales of recorded music, whether it be a physical or digital format. The Billboard Hot Ringtones chart is yet another example of our commitment to extend our leadership position in this area and to help recognise a distribution channel and digital lifestyle that holds huge promise".

The last few years have brought with them a real acceleration in the realisation of a world of genius bars and application download stores. With the success of flash based Walkmans and Sony Erickson's music phone, we are now seeing a synergy between multinational software corporations and their platforms and formats. In this world, films, albums, photos and your personal information are all reduced to data. Universal Records, EMI and Warner Music have all hinted that the future of the music industry lies in Universal Serial Bus (USB) memory sticks and ScanDisk slotMusic. With the increased pressure put on the industry by illegal downloading, they are hoping that music fans will be willing to pay more because of the extra storage capacity on a USB. Furthermore, with the introduction of Musical Video Interactive (MVI) – a DVD-based format that combines music and video – they hope that the use of USBs will also allow for the addition of videos and other multimedia formats (The Times 2007). MySpace, the fledgling social media website, has suggested that the company is intending to bring out its own music player to rival the iPod. This comes off the back of the early yet unfulfilled success of the MySpace Music website, which lets users stream, download or buy tracks online.

The extraordinary commercialisation of portable audiovisual technologies is partly down to their representation of reality and appearance in kit form. They are increasingly used not just to watch films or listen to music, but rather to “add vision and soundtracks, to make us directors of our own reality” (Virilio 1989, p. 66). For example, Apple now identifies itself as far more than just another company; it imagines itself as a lifestyle choice sold as genuine liberation from past technological conformity and dullness. After its slump in the early 1990s, which coincided with the increased dominance of IBM, Apple eventually bounced back, primarily through innovative product design and the success of the iPod. Much of this reinvention was down to the company's former CEO, Steve Jobs, and its Chief Designer, Johnathan Ive. Both Jobs and Ive understood the overpowering tactile quality that their aesthetic could create, with the integration of hardware and software as their ultimate technological dream. The imagination and ability to create products with “machine faces”, which people would gain equal pleasure from stroking as using, is at the heart of their incredible success.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, their grasp of the changes in

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<sup>14</sup> When asked about his thoughts on Microsoft, Jobs is famously quoted as saying, “they have absolutely no taste. In the sense that they don't think of original ideas and they don't bring much culture into their projects”. For the full interview, see, *The Triumph of the Nerds: The Rise of the Accidental Empires* (1996). Oregon Public Broadcasting.

postmodern consumer capitalism is equally evident in Job's decision to turn Apple into a large music company with a small computer operation attached.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that the Internet is a crucial component in the shaping of this burgeoning digital realm. 2008 ended with Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer claiming that, "we are in the process today of building out a services platform in the cloud".<sup>16</sup> Microsoft's ambitious, but increasingly achievable vision will require a new computational model, a new storage model and most importantly a new virtualisation model. The "cloud-centric" approach of the new *Windows Live* realises that most information, data and applications are "on the edge". Or as Brian Hall, General Manager of *Windows Live* puts it, "they are on the PCs. They are on the Xboxes. They are on the phones". The endgame of Microsoft's new strategy is to play a similar role on the Internet as it did with the desktop; a "what is ours is yours" philosophy of providing the underlying plumbing and tools that developers and users end up needing to function.

However, developments in this virtual public sphere are putting increased pressure on the more traditional relationships and structures of contemporary culture industries. This can be seen in the video-sharing website YouTube, acquired by Google, and its negotiations with major studios as it prepares to launch its own online movie service.<sup>17</sup> This decision to link with the film industry is driven by a shift in this virtual world in which the Internet is increasingly shaped around moving images and thus slowly replacing the hegemony of television. Websites are already starting to show full-length films and high-quality TV; the BBC's iPlayer, Lovefilm, Netflix, NBC and Fox's Hulu, as well as Amazon's IMDb services, are only a few examples of the shift towards on-demand viewing rather than traditional scheduling.

This change in viewers' patterns of consumption is usually characterised as a reflection of the increased power that viewer-consumers now have. It is often noted that both the music and film industries have been facing intense pressure from the increased choice of Internet users to download, rip, or stream songs and films almost instantaneously. They are thus characterised as scrambling to catch up with these ever-accelerating trends in an attempt to regain their control over the production and

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<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of 2008, it was reported that Jay-Z was seriously considering opening a new record label under Apple Inc.

<sup>16</sup> Steve Ballmer (2008) 'Microsoft Worldwide Partner Conference' Texas, 9 July.

<sup>17</sup> This represents a continuation of recent developments at YouTube; a drive that now allows contributors to run advertising over their videos or add links to music and DVD sales from iTunes and Amazon. A planned movie deal would also build on a recent agreement with the TV network CBS where the broadcaster's shows will be screened online, with advertising, in return for a share of the revenue.

dissemination of popular culture. However, what this occludes is not so much the reorientation of the means of production in today's culture industries, but rather its new and equally hegemonic digital make-up. Therefore, the tendency of the culture industry to convert listeners, and now viewers, along their line of least resistance into the acquiescent purchaser still holds sway. The old structures of cultural production may have been ruptured, but the insidious logic of product exchange is still at the heart of this technological revolution.

### **The Virtual World: Touch Me, Tease Me**

Another central phenomenon of this digitisation of culture that also needs to be addressed is that of virtual reality. Slavoj Žižek sees the defining moment of the twentieth century in the direct experience of the “Real” as opposed to everyday social reality (2002, p. 5).<sup>18</sup> Virtual reality, the processes of offering a product deprived of its substance, is now aiding the production of reality itself deprived of its substance. At the end of this process of virtualisation, we begin to experience “real reality” itself as a virtual entity (2002, p. 11). Jeremy Bentham believed that reality is the best appearance of itself, but the problem that one encounters in today's technologically driven world is an inversion – a confusion of reality with fiction. The issue at hand does not simply revolve around the technology itself, but more specifically the types of social imaginations, or lack thereof, that it helps create.<sup>19</sup> It is no longer clear where the line between social relations on alternative online worlds and those in real life now goes.<sup>20</sup> Addressing the impact of digital (re)production on direct social experiences – the live event – helps expand on these trends in the virtualisation of social life. Once the technology for entertainment systems became affordable enough to allow for the phenomenon of home entertainment systems, the corresponding trend became one of replicating the aura of a cinema or concert hall in the comfort and privacy of one's own living room. However, we are now witnessing the very inverse. Instead of the aura of

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<sup>18</sup> Drawing on Lacanian categories, particularly his critique of ideology, Žižek claims in *Plague of Fantasies* that today's virtual reality is “not virtual enough”. It is not virtual enough because of the many transgressive and exotic options it offers to subjects to enjoy. Virtual reality thus leaves nothing to the imagination, or – in Žižek's Lacanian terms – to fantasy and the stuff of imagination.

<sup>19</sup> The idea of social imaginations is borrowed from Charles Taylor, who saw the long march to modernity as a historically unprecedented amalgam of practices and institutional forms of new ways of living and of new forms of malaise. This definition gives Taylor a starting point for explaining the emergence of the moral order that legitimises these new practices and institutions and makes our way of living, though haunted by a distinctive malaise, seem like the only possible way of living. See Taylor (2004), *Modern Social Imaginaries*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.

<sup>20</sup> We now see couples divorce for “Second Life flings”, as well as a Japanese woman face trial for an “online murder”.



the concert hall being replicated in the living room, we now see the desire for the comfort and privacy of the living room to be reproduced in the concert hall. This has had the direct effect of turning the live experience into a spectacle.

Returning to Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994) can help analyse how today's infotainment telesector has impacted this aspect of public life. Despite their differences, there is much in common between the works of the Frankfurt School and the Situationists. Both saw the relations between commodities as having supplanted relations between people, with passive identification replacing genuine activity. However, the reason why Debord is relevant here is his particular focus on the role of the image in contemporary social relations. His work traces the development of a modern society in which authentic social life has been replaced with its representation. Live events now highlight how the spectacle uses the image to convey what people need and must have. For Debord, the spectacle is not a collection of images. Rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated through images. Placing the infotainment sector into Debord's history of social life helps see the latest phase in the decline of being into having, and having into merely appearing.

Live concerts today underscore the hegemony of our virtual-visual technopoly and the particular technoaesthetics at work. Even before entering the venue people are no longer distracted by fly posters or flyers, but rather politely asked by an usher if they would like to download upcoming shows and the latest advertisements via Bluetooth – to which all one has to do is surrender their mobile phone for a few seconds.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, intimate venues themselves are increasingly being replaced by stadiums. Such evenings are always coordinated and perfectly choreographed; even moments of improvisation have been fully accounted for. The penetrating nature of this process leaves very little to the audience's imagination. The techniques of the new culture industries are thus seeping beyond the purely private sphere and blurring the line between private and public experiences. It has become increasingly common for audiences at gigs to desire that which they have come to expect of the home entertainment experience. People are disappointed

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<sup>21</sup> Poken is the latest technology craze that utilises Near Field Communication technology to allow the exchange of online social networking data between two USB keychain accessories. The Poken advertisement campaign states that, "we're not another social network. You've already got that. We've thought bigger to let you instantly bridge the gap between the people you meet in the real world and those you stay connected to online". To connect to a friend, one simply has to "high-four" with the two Poken keychain's little hands. The data communication lasts about one second, and they are then able to view all their social interactions in a timeline. The Poken "high-four" thus becomes a new digital greeting. People can then also keep track of when and how often they and their friends hang out. For more, see [www.doyoupoken.com/PokenWeb/corporate/welcome.jsf](http://www.doyoupoken.com/PokenWeb/corporate/welcome.jsf)

when artists' live performances do not replicate that of their album. They increasingly lose patience with each other if overenthusiastic members of the audience drown out the sound from the stage. While, if someone is obstructing the recording from an audience member's camera phone, it is not uncommon to ask them to move or sit down.

Kanye West's 2008 *Glow in the Dark* tour reflects the extent of this endocolonisation. The concert is turned into a complete show with a fully enveloped plot in which Mr. West's spaceship crashes into the venue, imagined as another planet, from which he attempts to find his way home as he punctuates the storyline with enough hit-songs to satisfy the crowd. The matching set design perfectly captures the extent of culture's surrender to technology. Kanye performs the majority of his set in a three-dimensional virtual stage made up a series of LCD screens above, below and behind him; an environment not too dissimilar to the green-screen studios where blockbuster special effects are shot. Since this set is built on a supporting structure above them, the full backing orchestra is only partially visible. Kanye is literally performing on top of them. The interludes are also perfectly timed to allow for the audience's eyes to be distracted by the large screens, which give out a number to text so as to download the latest tracks instantaneously. Set designs and screen angles become the hallmarks of such experiences. A stadium in which audience's relationship to each other, the performers and their music are all mediated through mobile phones, cameras and big screens, thus replacing the shared experience of the intimate live venue.

The Kanye tour exemplifies the "terroristic hyperrealism of our world"; a world in which a real event can only occur in a vacuum, stripped of its content and visible only from afar, televisually (Baudrillard 2003).<sup>22</sup> In the future, therefore, no one will have to directly experience the actual course of live events, but everyone will be able to receive an image or film clip of them. As Baudrillard points out, the more technique is perfected, the more the tension between the finished project and everyday life is diminished. Such a stylised barbarity of the culture industry has been discussed in the works of Adorno and Horkheimer. However, what digital culture has accentuated is the focus on technical detail over the work itself, the predominance of effect, to borrow from Adorno. Not only does

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<sup>22</sup> Jean Baudrillard makes a similar point by using the example of the 1987 European Cup match between Real Madrid and Naples. Due to a ban imposed on Madrid, the match took place at night in a completely empty stadium without any spectators. The match was still relayed via television. For Baudrillard, this opens up the possibility of a future where events will become so minimal that they need not take place at all, as long as they're accompanied with their maximal enlargement on screens. For more, see Baudrillard's essay 'Zerex and Infinity' in Baudrillard (2003) *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*. London: Verso.

this greatly affect the work itself, but it also reduces the scope left to the imagination of both artist and (participatory) audience. They begin to react automatically and thus come to expect the automatic.

### **Game Play: A Matter of Life and Death**

The recent cultural phenomenon of music video games highlights this changing relationship between technique and participatory audience. The Guitar Hero and Rock Band franchises both allow players to use musical instrument peripherals to simulate the playing of live music.<sup>23</sup> They both provide players with the ability to play three different peripherals modeled after musical instruments – a guitar peripheral for lead guitar and bass guitar gameplay, a drum peripheral and a USB microphone. However, what is important is not only the deskilling involved in this increasingly democratic cultural realm, but how it also fits into the broader consumer logic of post-industrial cultural industries. 76 percent of Guitar Hero users are reported to have bought the music they heard in the game. While both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 support downloadable content, allowing players instant access to hundreds of downloadable songs (Miller 2009).

This example, however, only scratches the surface of the new social arrangements that are being ushered in by the predominance of digital culture in everyday life. It is important to raise the new relationships at work and play that digital technology in one hand, and post-industrial capitalism in the other, are creating. The Nintendo Wii represents one example of the new synergies of this culture industry. The distinguishing feature of the console is its wireless controller, the Wii Remote, which can be used as a handheld pointing device and detects movement in three dimensions. The other distinctive feature of the console is WiiConnect24, which enables it to receive messages and updates over the Internet. The console uses a combination of built-in accelerometers and infrared detection to sense its position in 3D space when pointed at the LEDs within the sensor bar. This design allows users to control games using physical gestures as well as traditional button presses.<sup>24</sup>

More specifically, the Nintendo DS' Brain Training from Dr Kawashima and Nintendo's Wii Fit further exemplify the evolving relationships between work and play

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<sup>23</sup> Guitar Hero uses a plastic guitar-shaped peripheral to simulate this playing, which is represented by on-screen coloured notes that correspond to the five coloured "fret buttons" and a "strum bar" on the controller. While Rock Band goes even further by allowing players to perform in a virtual band.

<sup>24</sup> The controller connects to the console using Bluetooth and features rumble as well as an internal speaker.

that are being introduced by the new frontiers of technological innovation.<sup>25</sup> By blurring our body's relationship with itself and its virtual, as well its real surroundings, technology is rupturing practices of the everyday. Through a combination of fitness and fun, Nintendo's Wii Fit claims to help individuals and families reach personal goals of better health and fitness.<sup>26</sup> The Wii Balance Board, another accessory or peripheral like the guitar, drum machine or USB microphone, is more than just a scale. It reads one's real-life and real-time movements and brings them to life on the screen. So, through the relationship between the Wii Balance Board and the screen, one can simulate the practice of soccer heading, ski slaloms, cross country runs and the like at the touch of a button and without having to leave the living room. However, what is important here is that as long as the end goal of losing weight or improving one's fitness is achieved, or in Nintendo language one's "Wii Fit Age" is lowered, the reality of the body's relationship to the outdoors is no longer deemed to be of much significance.

The tagline for the Atari game *Iron Soldier*, released in 1995, pronounced that, "war is hell, unless you're a 40 ft. robot with a rocket launcher (then it's kinda cool)" (Gray 1997). In the epilogue to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin discusses efforts to introduce aesthetics into political life. For Benjamin, all such techniques culminate in only one thing – war. To remind readers of this devastating consequence he quotes Felippo Marinetti – "poets and artists of Futurism! [...] Remember these principles of an aesthetics of war so that your struggle for a new literature and a new graphic art [...] may be illumined by them!" This brings to attention the other related dimension to the new info war – the militarisation of these emerging

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<sup>25</sup> Derek Robertson, national advisor for emerging technologies and learning at Learning Teaching Scotland, has introduced an initiative using the Nintendo DS with 600 pupils in 32 schools across the country. Maths problem-solving games are used for 20 minutes every day to try and improve maths performance to a significant degree. The results of the test found that both the test and control groups had improved their scores, but those who used the games had improved by a further 50 percent. Robertson claims to be engaging in real research that is aimed at improving children's and teacher's experience with technology. For Robertson, "there is academic rigour behind what we do and we can make claim for a general rise in ability with our results". However, what is even more interesting are the other findings of the test, which claim even more benefits. Teachers were reported as noticing marked improvements in the behaviour, class morale, time-keeping and even handwriting of students. One of the students involved in the test group said, "I've moved up a group and my writing's improved because you've got to write stuff down in the screen. I used to be all bad and cheeky, but the Nintendo DS has helped me settle down and helped my brain a lot". For more see, Cairns (2008), 'Brain Boxes: How Digital Technology Can Improve Maths Scores' *The Independent*, 6 November.

<sup>26</sup> After choosing a Mii – a virtual caricature unique to Wii – to represent oneself, the Wii Balance board measures your centre of balance, Body Mass Index and body control, all in order to determine one's "Wii Fit Age". Then, through a number of training modes – ranging from yoga and balance games, to strength training and aerobics. The aim of the game is to improve one's "Wii Fit Age". For more, see [www.nintendo.com/wiifit/launch/](http://www.nintendo.com/wiifit/launch/)

public spheres. Paul Virilio's concern with the connection between warfare, cinematic substitution and the logistics of perception – the beaming in of images and information on film to soldiers on the frontline and the beaming back of images of war to central command and global audiences watching on their laptops – adds a more sinister twist to such trends. Shifts in the performance of warfare were central features of the wars in the Persian Gulf and Kosovo.<sup>27</sup> These new styles of combat have been initiated by this technological regime, creating a scenario in which the visual field is increasingly reduced to the line of a sighting device. In a post-industrial age, the culmination of this is a logistics of perception in which “the world disappears in war, and war as a phenomenon disappears from the eyes of the world” (Virilio 2001, p. 66).

Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, author of *On Killing*, portrays the history of warfare as a history of increasingly more effective mechanisms for enabling and conditioning men to overcome their innate resistance to killing fellow human beings (1998). The central question for Grossman is, what has enabled the non-firing rate of between 75 percent to 80 percent soldiers in World War II decrease so drastically to only five percent for those who served in Vietnam?<sup>28</sup> A lot of attention has been paid to the violence enabling characteristics of electronic multimedia. Particular emphasis has been placed on how the process of interactive violence in video games replicates conditioning used to enable killing in soldiers and law enforcement officers.<sup>29</sup> A look at the history of the development of computers, mobile phones and video games shows that they have moved away from needing to be an expert. However, Grossman's central point is that the increasingly impersonal nature of most killing in modern war, mediated in large part by the

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<sup>27</sup> In these new forms of conflict, not only are settled topographical arrangements made to disappear in battle, but so too does the architecture of war.

<sup>28</sup> For Grossman, when it comes to attempts at reducing the percentage of non-firing soldiers in combat, conditioning is the most important aspect of modern military training. He notes that during the American Civil War, when faced with an enemy as opposed to a target, many soldiers reverted to a posture mode in which they fire over their enemy's head. However, Grossman reveals a transition in United States military training during the Vietnam War that conditioned troops to kill at a rate never seen before. The key was to eliminate personal responsibility involved with killing, dehumanise the enemy and normalise violence in the life of a soldier.

<sup>29</sup> *Grand Theft Auto* is one of the games that has courted much controversy. Since the release of the first game in the series in 1997, debates have raged over the extent to which it has contributed to real acts of violence, or whether it actually explores the social ambiguity of violence. The interest here is not so much around whether or not playing such games actually generates real violence. The system is far more complex than the eternal fear of liberals that if one plays these games, then they are likely to go out and replicate violent, criminal or misogynistic acts. As Žižek argues in an interview about the ideological underpinnings of violence, “if anything, playing *Grand Theft Auto* is more of a superstition. In order not to do something in reality, you play it virtually. I think it functions much more on that level”.

mechanical assistance of screens and virtual crosshairs, has been a central feature in the denial of the humanity of the victim and the ease of aggression on the part of the soldier.

Although not explicitly teased out by Grossman, the interesting point is not simply the similarity between the replication of techniques in video games and military training conditions, but also the various aesthetics at play – what Grossman calls “the target attractiveness of victims”. Much has been made of the tactical and technological advantages of modern warfare, but it is the aesthetics of this new form of combat that bears most relevance to the militarisation of social life today. It is often noted that the modern soldier does not have to look into one's eyes when killing, but it is what he is looking through and what has replaced the eyes of the victim that is equally relevant (Grossman 1998). Today's soldier fires through night sights and thermal-imagery devices, where multicoloured blobs replace enemy eyes. This shift in perception produces a kind of isolation in the violence of war that allows for policy makers to start seeing the dropping of iPods instead of bombs as a serious military strategy.

### **Nintendo Warfare to TiVo Warfare: From Your TV Screen to Your Laptop**

Today's predominance of digital technology has fundamentally shaken up the idea that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is simply the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Adorno's notion of the power of the object to overpower consumers can now be reimagined as the power of technological form itself to overpower them. Traditionally, the test of a great power was its strength for war, but over the centuries, particularly as technologies evolved, the sources of power have also shifted. The move towards info-war can no longer be understood simply in terms of traditional warfare. It is a style of warfare in which the disparity between the images of battle and the actual battles is derealised. This war of images is attempting to blur the distinctions between civilian perceptions and those in the military. The battlefield is no longer a space to be occupied solely by soldiers, but increasingly one where every citizen can play a role, as well as a price. This is important to note since it highlights info-war's dependence on cultural developments, particularly those associated with the “vision machine”, or more specifically the industrialisation of the non-gaze (Virilio 1994). For technological substitutions have allowed this emerging battlefield to develop new aesthetics of disappearance that are registering the instrumental splitting of modes of perception and representation, and thereby the waning of reality itself.

In 1988, the American government issued a report on its long-term military strategy. It foresaw two crucial strategic concerns that needed to be addressed.<sup>30</sup> Firstly, it stressed the need for “discriminate deterrence”; a strategy that deemed massive deterrence as no longer credible in a potentially global combat zone in which the United States will face “a broader range of challenges in the Third World”. Secondly, new developments in military technology had created a “microelectronic revolution” for military planning.<sup>31</sup> The much greater precision, range and destructiveness of weapons could “extend war across a much wider geographic area, make war much more rapid and intense and require entirely new modes of operation” (Gray 1997). Such developments in technological culture are at the forefront of the Pentagon’s RMA, and in particular its attempt at global information dominance. The Kosovo War may have been considered a failure for both Europe and NATO, but it was an undoubted success in terms of America’s opportunity to experiment and test its new informational and cybernetic tools.<sup>32</sup> Such a revolution in American military affairs can be seen as an attempt to perfect and extend the Powell doctrine. Precision bombing with “smart” bombs has become a central tenet of this postmodern warfare.<sup>33</sup> Such a newfound ability to distinguish the government building from the school, the chemist from the chemical plant, or an unknown name from a mobile phone, leaves a false impression on onlookers who are connected to the war through a network of command control, virtual communication and mass media.

This new form of high-tech warfare-at-a-distance, which severs practices of face-to-face combat by polluting the natural scale of things, has the dissemination and occlusion of (mis)information at its heart. Within such a scenario, rather than being destructive, war

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<sup>30</sup> The Co-Chairs of the Report of the Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy, ‘Discriminate Deterrence’, were retired U.S. Under Secretary of Defence Fred Ikle and Albert Wohlstetter, a one-time RAND analyst. The panel also included former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former National Security advisor Zbigniew Brezinski, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General John Vasey, former NATO Commander General Andrew Goodpaster and academic Samuel Huntington.

<sup>31</sup> Lt Gen Keith Alexander, the head of America’s National Security Agency and the Pentagon’s new Cyber Command, recently called on the United States to build a digital warfare force for the future. In his report for the House Armed Services subcommittee, Alexander states that the United States needs to reorganise its offensive and defensive cyber operations.

<sup>32</sup> This was also the case with the American invasion of Iraq in 1991. The Desert Shield and Desert Storm operations provided little danger for American forces. These interventions were gamed and simulated for years. A specific plan for liberating Kuwait was practised in General Schwarzkopf’s Central Command two years before the Iraq invasion. During the war, such gaming and simulations also continued. It has also been noted that it was more dangerous for a young man in America, with its motor accidents and urban murders, than for an American soldier serving in Desert Storm.

<sup>33</sup> Of all the services, the U.S. Air Force has had the greatest interest in predicting the technological future because it sees air power as being integrally linked to science. Its dream of “optical kill mechanisms” – lethal lasers to blind and kill both sensors – and people on the battleground comes from its primary mission of rapid, reliable and affordable access to space.

is presented as selective, civilised and even constructive at times, only affecting the guilty or potentially guilty. Thus, such technological developments only serve to resurrect the ultimate colonial fantasy of the clean war. However, the tension between traditional forms of warfare and occupation, and the increasing cases of domination by extraterritorial technologies does not disappear, but only gets refined. In today's managerial governmentality, the structural homology between this new form of war is one where the soldier (or a computer specialist):

Pushes buttons hundreds of miles away, and the decisions of managerial bodies which affect millions (IMF specialists dictating the conditions a Third World country has to meet in order to deserve financial aid.). (Zizek 2002, p. 36)

What is crucial is that the link between these structural decisions and their consequences are both discursively and representationally severed.

Although focused on the mechanics of distance, Grossman's study also reveals the reconfiguration in duration, dispersion and depth of the battlefield. Through the development of various social networks between soldiers and the command floor, as well as the immersive qualities of these new technologies, the relationship between distance, particularly understood as the distance from screens, and intimacy within battlefields has become increasingly complicated. Distance, therefore, can no longer be seen as simply calibrated in terms of miles. What used to be battles between two usually equally matched armies in theatres of operation during the two World Wars, has slowly encroached into civilian territories and civilian life itself. With the increasing disparity in technology and techniques between armies, warfare has naturally begun to shift to spaces where the fight could be levelled.

The first Gulf War, referred to by some as "Nintendo Warfare", enabled soldiers to fire more lethal weapons more accurately to longer ranges. Their enemy increasingly became "an anonymous figure encircled by a gunsight, glowing on a thermal image, or shrouded in armoured plate" (Grossman 1998, p. 169). Weapons are no longer simply tools of destruction, but also of perception. As Virilio argues, "they are stimulants that affect human reactions and even perceptual identification and differentiation of objects" (Virilio 2001, p. 6). This form of postmodern warfare is predicated on constant technological change and future wars that it conceives of as more important than fighting in the present. The manipulation of reality may provide us with exciting computer games and entertainment, but the military now mobilises science fiction writers, blockbuster movie



directors, computer game programmers and other futurologists to plan for the wars of tomorrow, just as they consciously recruit video game playing adolescents to fight today's conflicts (Gregory 2006; Weizman 2007; Graham 2010).<sup>34</sup>

What has gone unnoticed, however, have been the attempts at altering the relation of the soldier to these new forms of combat. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (2001), two leading military analysts for the RAND corporation, argue that advances in networking technologies are making it increasingly possible to think of people, as well as databases and processors, as resources on a network. Thus, when integrated with machines, "mechanical and computer skills become more important attributes than protruding genitalia" (Gray 1997, p. 188). Anne Norton points out that each soldier would be dressed in lightweight gear enabling that soldier to operate independently and yet remain part of the force:

The soldier's vital organs would be monitored so that the soldier could be deployed more effectively – more locally – with an eye to particular conditions. The soldier would be able to communicate with the force, transmitting more-precise information. The soldier would be linked to the force in a vast network of control and surveillance. In a very practical sense, the soldier would operate as an army of one, for each soldier would be a link to the army as a whole, and bring that army with him. (Norton 2005, p. 151)<sup>35</sup>

The connection between war and technoscience continues to develop. Within five years the U.S. military intends to have its soldiers go into battle with autonomous robots

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the recent collaboration between Combat Film Productions and Quest Pictures. For the introduction to their training game, see [www.questpictures.com/INVISM/ARMY360/index.html](http://www.questpictures.com/INVISM/ARMY360/index.html)

<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the U.S. military is now considering issuing smartphones to soldiers in an attempt to further redefine the battlefield. Lt. Col. Greg Motes of the Army Signal Centre at Fort Gordon believes that smartphones could eventually be used to control fighter jets, tanks, missiles and machine guns, as well as for facial recognition and fingerprinting. Field tests have shown that popular consumer mobile phones, such as the iPhone and Android, are durable enough to withstand the rigors of combat. The trend is becoming so popular that there is talk of issuing a smartphone to each soldier at enlistment. The biggest hurdle for soldiers is not the pervasiveness of the phones, but rather harnessing the existing technology. To combat this, the military has started creating custom applications. Commercial contractors have already begun adding app development to their portfolios. Raytheon is just one of those contractors. The Boston-based company has been an Army contractor for a half-century and has begun building the Raytheon Advanced Tactical System, complete with 12 apps and room to add more. One of the apps lets soldiers track the locations of their friends, while another lets them share cameras with other soldiers to relay intelligence information. Contractors are already deploying travelling wireless networks that attach to road vehicles and aircraft, and provide connectivity in desolate regions that would otherwise be without Internet access. It is the same technology commercial carriers like Verizon and AT&T use in their towers. In July 2010, the U.S. Army deployed the first batch of Rucksack Enhanced Portable Power Systems to Afghanistan. The 62-watt solar panel feeds off energy from the sun or even a light bulb, and then repackages it to give the phone a boost. For more see, Devaney (2011) 'Soldiers on Battlefield Turn Apps into Arms' *The Washington Times*, 24 January.

close behind them, with the final goal of having them one day fighting side by side.<sup>36</sup> With the dramatic increase in high-risk missions in urban environments, the U.S. Department of Defence completed its design review for a Future Combat Systems Programme at the beginning of 2009.<sup>37</sup> Recent U.S. military field manuals note that with the leveling of the playing field by the rise of urban warfare, troops are beginning to lose their high-tech superiority. They therefore argue that an armed ground robot could serve as the perfect point man.<sup>38</sup> According to the 2001 Defence Authorisation Act, one third of all operation ground vehicles are supposed to be unmanned by 2015. The human to robot ratio index is seen as the latest strategic concern for the U.S. military. At least 6,000 robots are currently in use by the Army and Marine Corps in Iraq and Afghanistan, whilst 2007 saw the Army deploy the first ever armed Unmanned Ground Vehicle (UGV).<sup>39</sup>

This success in attempts to restructure the military by automating its actions and humanising its technical movements is beginning to create a political, as well as ethical dilemma for the military. While unmanned aerial vehicles, like the armed Predator drone, have been loaded with missiles since 2001, the arming of ground robots is relatively uncharted territory. The developments in military technology now allow UGVs with “behavioral cues” to make life-or-death decisions. John Pike, Director of Global Security, argues that, “part of the process of creating soldiers is disinhibiting people from killing. Robots have no such inhibition. They will kill without pity” (Popular Science 2005). Although the opinion remains that there will always be a human in this loop, there is an increased eagerness within some circles to put more faith in machines that can increasingly differentiate between not only wispy and solid, living and inanimate, but also between friend and foe (Singer 2009).<sup>40</sup> As David Verhoff, Executive Vice-President of Technology at Oshkosh Corporation, enthusiastically argues, “if it’s a child, you want to stop, if it’s a guy with a RPG-7 you want to run him over” (The Times 2009).

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<sup>36</sup> The Robotics Programme Office at the Army Research Laboratory and General Dynamics Robotic Systems are attempting to anthropomorphise their latest robots. This includes the XUV 12 experimental unmanned vehicle, which navigates autonomously with nearly one million lines of coding running through it and four onboard computers defining the algorithms that consider thousands of routes ten times per second. It also has both sensor pads and radar systems that paint 3D images of the world directly around it.

<sup>37</sup> Most of these robots are tested and refined through races in city streets in the annual DARPA Urban Challenge funded by the Pentagon.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, the *U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2007) and the *U.S. Army Stability Operations Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-07* (2009).

<sup>39</sup> The Special Weapons Observation Remote Direction System Robots (SWORDS) is loaded with a M249 light machine gun. The U.S. Army recently ordered more than 1700 for 15 brigades and is aiming for a potential human-to-robot ratio of 29:1 by 2014.

<sup>40</sup> The U.S. Navy’s Office of Naval Research recently released the first serious work of its kind on military robot ethics. For more see, Lewis (2009) ‘Military killer robots must learn warrior code’ *The Times*, 16 February.

The shifts in warfare that have been facilitated by these technological developments have drastically impacted conventional ideas of the battlefield, urban spaces and obviously the relationship between citizens and soldiers. Virilio's work constantly reminds us to consider the growth of popular technocultural industries in the post-war era together with the birth of the military industrial complex as constituting a general trend of militarisation of society. For Virilio (1986, 2002), it is no longer exocolonisation, the age of extending conquest, but the age of intensiveness and endocolonisation. It has often been noted that technological innovations, which have become staples in our everyday lives, emerged out of military necessities. The Internet, as a network of networks that consists of millions of private and public networks of local to global scope, developed out of the United States' Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) in the late 1950's. The ARPA was created as part of a larger attempt to regain a technological lead over the USSR, who had only recently launched the first Sputnik satellite and developed its programme of networking countrywide radar systems together. Furthermore, the opening up of the network to the general public came through commercial incentives.<sup>41</sup>

It is these tensions that governments, institutions and corporations are attempting to control and exploit today. Google Earth, a virtual globe programme that maps the earth by the superimposition of images obtained from satellite imagery, aerial photography and GIS 3D globe, is an example that brings some of these tensions to light.<sup>42</sup> The public release of Google Earth in 2006 has helped naturalise global public interest in geospatial technologies and applications, but over time the software has also come to be criticised by a number of special interest groups and national officials, as posing a threat to national security.<sup>43</sup> American, Israeli, Indian and Moroccan officials have all raised issues over the availability of high-resolution pictures of sensitive locations. While it has also been revealed that Google Earth is used both to map out underground tunnels to bring supplies into Gaza during the embargo, as well as for the preparation of rocket attacks on Israel (Haaretz 2007).

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<sup>41</sup> In 1988, the U.S. Federal Networking Council approved the interconnection of the National Science Foundation Network to the commercial MCI Mail. A similar genealogy can also be constructed for the developments in Global Positioning Systems. GPS technology was developed by the U.S. Department of Defence, and first successfully tested by the U.S. Navy in the late 1960s. Ironically, it was in 1983, when a Korean Airlines flight was shot down after straying into USSR's prohibited airspace that President Ronald Reagan issued a directive making GPS freely available for civilian use as a common good.

<sup>42</sup> Initially created by Keyhole Inc. and called Earth Viewer, the company was acquired by Google in 2004.

<sup>43</sup> At the beginning of 2009, Google announced a new application called Latitude. Using mobile phone towers or GPS tracking, this service is a new location-tracking feature of Google Maps that allows one to share their current location with friends and family.

## Gaza and the Instantaneous Porn of War

The Israeli attacks on Gaza under Operation Cast Lead in 2008 serve as a painful example of these shifts from traditional organisation of war to this new form of post-industrial warfare. As the bombing raids and ground assaults on Gaza intensified, so did the Israeli Defence Force's (IDF) online propaganda campaign.<sup>44</sup> Despite the banning of foreign correspondents from the area, the IDF uploaded several cockpit and gun camera videos, as well as Vlogs from Israeli military commanders and public relations officers, to their YouTube channel that was created during the assaults.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to the real destruction and carnage waged against a predominately civilian population in the most densely populated region of the world, the IDF YouTube page and its videos aimed to create a different reality. "By bringing our message to the word with exclusive footage", the IDF attempted to highlight a more humane action alongside great military operational successes.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the Israeli Consulate in New York launched a Twitter account to both feed continuous news updates on military operations, as well as solicit questions from users for virtual press conferences.<sup>47</sup>

This virtual technovisual assault on millions of viewers around the globe connected to this war on their laptops, iPods and mobile phones, has created a decisive break from its technocultural predecessor, the CNN effect of the Gulf War.<sup>48</sup> Our interactive globalisation is partly premised on the futurism of the instant – an increasingly uninhabitable instant. Its political economy of speed thrives on the madness of these images that create a visual cyclone. This particular relationship is thus predicated on a political economy that has shifted the 24-hour international new cycles of the past to an instantaneous Twitter cycle of the ever-present. However, what becomes particularly important to explore in this new

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<sup>44</sup> Following the failed Israeli military campaign in Lebanon in 2006, a new body, the National Information Directorate, was set up to manage media relations regarding military affairs. In January 2010, an Internet and New Media department was established and made responsible for coordinating internet flows across government branches and ministries with the aim of improving "public relations advocacy". By the end of the year the Prime Minister's office had launched its own YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Flickr accounts, and Benjamin Netanyahu became only the third world leader – after Barack Obama and David Cameron – to be interviewed live on YouTube.

<sup>45</sup> See IDF Official YouTube Channel [www.youtube.com/user/idfnadesk](http://www.youtube.com/user/idfnadesk)

<sup>46</sup> Just two days after its launch the channel already had 16 videos posted and 5,600 subscribers. It also attracted more than 30,000 views.

<sup>47</sup> During December 2008, the month of the attacks on Gaza, the Israeli Twitter feed received over 2,000 followers.

<sup>48</sup> Following the impact of CNN during the Gulf War, seen by many as the first media war, the CNN effect has come to describe the impact 24/7 live news cable channels have on government decisions and public opinion.

media war is how audiences, who now have far greater access to such information, are viewing, shaping and remixing such audiovisual news through these interactive and user-generated formats. The growing popularity of these violent videos, together with the lower viewership of the channel's only two videos that purport to show the IDF's humanitarian side, is particularly disturbing.<sup>49</sup>

War itself has often been highly sexualised, but technology itself has never been so intensely eroticised and politicised as it has been under postmodern warfare. Chris Hables Gray (1997) stresses that the potent emotional seduction of technophilia in postmodern warfare, and the regime of truth it creates through this, is being disguised as rational, particularly to its most ardent admirers. However, it is the relationship between the (eroticised) image and the medium that is changing under these new formats. In 2005, an amateur porn website was forced to adopt a novel business model whereby U.S. military personnel, unable to use credit cards because their point of sales were located in high-risk regions, could gain access to the site's content by proof of military employment for free memberships. The site, which focused on user-contributed images and film clips, used trophy photos from Iraq and Afghanistan as suitable proof for military personnel stationed abroad. However, these soldiers, who began posting benign images of themselves standing by their Hummers, quickly turned to uploading more violent and graphic images. The huge popularity of these images, by members who were there essentially to watch porn, led to the site's "body of porn" section having more hits than any other sections (The Nation 2005). The posting of graphic battlefield photos by soldiers armed with digital cameras on a website in return for free access to pornography is problematic enough, but it is the confluence of pornographic and violent images by viewers connected on their laptops that is particularly disturbing. As Susan Sontag argues in her essay on the images of torture that came out of Abu Ghraib, the horror of what is shown in the photographs cannot be separated from the horror that the photographs were taken. With incessant home videoing as a central characteristic of our technoculture, "an erotic life is, for more and more people, that which can be captured in digital photographs and on video" (Sontag 2004).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> These violent clips, which were also shown free on demand cable television, were the fourth most popular videos on YouTube during the month of December 2008. The two other videos attempt to highlight the IDF's humanitarian concerns during Operation Cast Lead by focusing on the goods and gas transferred to Gaza via the Kerem Shalom border crossing. They also claim that Palestinian officials, responsible for placing orders for the Palestinian population, did not maximise the crossing's weekly capacity.

<sup>50</sup> The torture photographs from Abu Ghraib, themselves sexually themed, were interleaved with pornographic images of American soldiers having sex with one another.

Whilst discussing the virtual real, Slavoj Žižek spoke of a new kind of hardcore pornography where audiences are exposed to penetration through the lens of a camera attached to the tip of the penis.<sup>51</sup> This search for and pleasure in the real in our technocentric world can also be seen in the YouTube images of destruction in Gaza. Now that projectiles have awakened and opened up their many eyes, video-cameras attached to the tip of “smart bombs” can now relay what they see to not only pilots and ground-controllers at their consoles, but also audiences, who can connect to today’s wars on their laptop from anywhere in the world with their favourite music serving as its soundtrack. With the confusion, and even collusion, between the functions of these weapons and the eye – the projectile’s image and the image’s projectile – such viewers now face an acute politico-ethical dilemma. With the aesthetic of the electronic battlefield, the military conquest of space is intrinsically linked the conquest of its image. The danger, as raised by Virilio, is that with these new composites, “the world disappears in war, and war as a phenomenon disappears from the eyes of the world” (Virilio 1989, p. 45).

The systematic use of visual techniques in the conflicts of the twentieth century has fundamentally changed the veritable logistics of military perception, in which a supply of images would become the equivalent of an ammunition supply.<sup>52</sup> After the Second World War, alongside the U.S. army’s traditional film department, responsible for directing propaganda to the civilian population, a military images department was created in order to take charge of all tactical and strategic representations of warfare for the soldier, the tank or aircraft pilot (Virilio 1989, p. 2). By 1967, the U.S. Air Force had the whole of South-East Asia cover, and pilotless aircraft flew over Laos sending their data back to IBM centres in Thailand and South Vietnam.<sup>53</sup> The idea of direct vision was now a thing of the past, with two-dimensional imagery slowly replaced by three-dimensional identity. This drive for an electro-optical confrontation forms a substantial part of the desire to devise a “general system of illumination” that will allow everything to be seen and known at every moment and every place. However, what the new cybernetic strategies of the IDF

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<sup>51</sup> “Masterclass on Jacques Lacan” Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities 2006.

<sup>52</sup> As Paul Virilio describes in *War and Cinema*, the strategic and tactical necessities of cartography were known long ago, and in the line from the emergence of military photography in the American Civil War to today’s video surveillance of the battlefield, the intensive use of film sequences in aerial reconnaissance was already developing during World War I. In a more recent case, while the TV watching world was being dazzled by the mass media Gulf war, the Pentagon contracted with National Football league films to make the Department of Defence’s official version of the war.

<sup>53</sup> It is important to note that these technologically driven strategies are also easily replicated and transferred to different situations. The McNamara Line, an electronic field of acoustic and seismic detectors spread along Laos’s access routes, was later transferred to South of the American border with Mexico to detect illegal immigrants.

highlights is that postmodern war consists not so much of scoring territorial, economic or material victories as appropriating the “immateriality of perceptual fields” (Virilio 1989, p. 7).<sup>54</sup> The new perceptual arsenal no longer consists simply of newspapers, magazines and films, but just as crucially video-sharing websites and popular social networking sites, which serve as instantaneous virtual windows into the urban streets that have been turned into permanent film-set for army cameras, tourist reporters and digital voyeurs. Therefore, in an age of digital war trophies, there is an urgent need for us to reconsider what kind of screensavers we are creating for the sake of posterity.

Alongside this, an uncritical culture of mimicking politically and socially effective technical features has also developed. Not only is this digital world now rife with “YouTube battle of videos” and “Google bombs”, but also Facebook statuses that can be “donated” to various campaigns and organisation who can subsequently use your profile as an electronic platform for their various campaigns.<sup>55</sup> However, repressed underneath the many layers of this form of warfare, from the wet dreams of electronic battlefields – the beauty of explosions, eroticism of the speed and sounds of war – lies its bloody reality. The critical task, therefore, lies in exposing this denial, a claim that war is mere spectacle and simulation and an accompanying language that attempts to normalise its unspeakable horror.

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<sup>54</sup> In February 2011, Israeli military spokesman Avi Benayahu announced that \$1.6 million would be invested to train more than a hundred Israeli “media warriors”. They would be entrusted to use social media tools to disseminate Israeli propaganda to audiences around the world. “We need to ensure the confidence of the public, and assist the minister of foreign affairs to obtain that legitimisation which is required for an army like ours to effect a military operation”, said Benayahu during the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Herzliya security conference. Speaking on the panel ‘New Media as a Strategic Weapon’, Benayahu spoke of how Israeli soldiers are now forced to be more aware of the fact that new media users can be documenting their actions at all times. “There is an unprecedented responsibility to the commanders”, he said. “They have to think if the civilian across from them or the child on the second floor above them is a combatant or a new generation media person”.

<sup>55</sup> “Google bombs” are organised attempts to skew Google search returns, information and news, toward links that favour a certain perspective by inundating the blogosphere to links of a particular site or message. During the Israeli offensive on Gaza, activists on both sides of the political divide began Facebook campaigns, which included to possibility of users to donate their status. Pro-Israeli statuses recorded and updated the number of Kassam rockets that landed in the South of Israel, while Pro-Palestinian activists recounted the Palestinian death toll. It is important to note that this particular strategy was taken from Obama’s Facebook strategy during his Presidential election campaign, where supporters could update Obama’s public speaking appearances and latest poll results.

## Chapter 2

### @America:

#### Culture Talk, American Diplomacy and the Age of “Digital Natives”

That tall man in the flowing robe you are going to see soon, with the whiskers and the long hair, is a first class fighting man, highly skilled in guerrilla warfare. Few fighters in any country, in fact, excel him in that kind of situation. If he is your friend, he can be a staunch and valuable ally. If he should happen to be your enemy – look out! Remember Lawrence of Arabia? Well, it was with men like these that he wrote history in the First World War.

– A Short Guide to Iraq [Instruction Manual for American Servicemen in Iraq during World War II] (1943)

**Superman** [...] which is why I intend to speak before the United Nations tomorrow and inform them that I am renouncing my U.S. citizenship.

**The President’s National Security Advisor** What?

**Superman** I’m tired of having my actions construed as instruments of U.S. policy. “Truth, justice, and the American way” ... it’s not enough anymore. The world’s too small, too connected.

– Superman (Action Comics, #900 May 2011)

It's not a Twitter or Facebook revolution. The revolution is in the streets, and it smells of blood.

– Anthony Shadid's Twitter feed (March 2011)

The post-Cold War landscape that America now faces is one in which:

The whole international system – as constructed following World War I – will be revolutionised. Not only will new players – Brazil, Russia, India and China – have a seat at the international high table, they will bring new stakes and rules of the game. (United States National Intelligence Council 2008)

The National Intelligence Council’s report (2008) goes on to state that shrinking economic and military capabilities may force the United States into a difficult set of trade-offs between domestic versus foreign policy priorities. Although the United States is likely to remain the single most powerful global actor, its relative strength is set to decline, with American leverage becoming more constrained. Moreover, the annual Pew Global Attitudes Survey highlights that anti-Americanism in Europe, the Middle East and Asia,



which surged as a result of the war in Iraq, shows modest signs of abating. The United States remains broadly disliked in most of the countries surveyed, particularly in the Muslim world. However, the reports also reveal that many Muslims see the United States as supporting democracy in their countries, while those who are optimistic about the prospects for democracy in the Middle East give at least some credit to American policies in the region.<sup>1</sup>

It is under these circumstances that the U.S. army's latest *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2007) speaks in terms of a new kind of war, "not just thinking man's warfare [but] the graduate level of war".<sup>2</sup> The ruptures caused by the "war on terror" are not disputed here, but it is important to put its strategies and techniques into some form of historical context. Contemporary post-9/11 culture talk has its historical roots in Cold War and post-Cold War American domestic and international policy, particularly in the numerous strategic shifts between containment, rollback and low intensity conflict.<sup>3</sup> The Cold War may have put propaganda to the direct service of political ideas in a struggle for hearts and minds, but McWorld's war proceeds by circumventing hearts and minds in favour of viscera and the five senses.<sup>4</sup> It attempts to seduce people with the siren call of self-interest and desire, where the self is defined wholly by wants, wishes and the capacity to consume, and with the predominant target audience being youth the world over.<sup>5</sup>

### **Culture Talk and American Public Diplomacy**

Mahmood Madani's distinction between cultural or religious identities and political identities is crucial in understanding questions of nation and culture in our post-Cold War

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<sup>1</sup> For more, see [www.pewglobal.org/](http://www.pewglobal.org/)

<sup>2</sup> Also, see the U.S. government's recent interagency *Counterinsurgency Guide* (U.S. Department of State 2009).

<sup>3</sup> For Mahmood Mamdani, culture talk assumes that some cultures have a tangible essence that define them, and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence. In terms of framing the problems of the "war on terror", it assumes that culture was made only at the beginning of creation, as some extraordinary, prophetic act. As Mamdani notes, "after that, it seems Muslims just conformed to culture. According to some, our culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates, so that all Muslims are just plain bad. According to others, there is a history, a politics, even debates, and there are good Muslims and bad Muslims. In both versions, history seems to have petrified into a lifeless custom of an antique people who inhabit antique lands".

<sup>4</sup> For Benjamin Barber, McWorld is a product of popular culture, driven by expansionist commerce of contemporary globalisation. It is thus a product of commodification, with the infotainment telesector as the medium through which it is spread. Its template is American and its form style. While its goods are as much images as material, an aesthetic as well as an endless product line.

<sup>5</sup> Our contemporary technoscape is formed from the odd distribution of technologies that are increasingly driven, not by the obvious economies of scale, political control or market rationality, but of increasingly complex relationships between money flows, political possibilities and the availability of both low and high skilled labour.

political landscape. The idea of culture talk not only helps unpack some of the aforementioned processes, but also places them in a clear historical framework. For Mamdani, it involves a double claim. The first being that pre-modern peoples possess an ahistorical and unchanging culture, like a badge they wear or a collective affliction from which they suffer. With the second being that their politics can be decoded as a necessary and direct effect of this unchanging culture. Central to Mamdani's thinking is the necessity to separate carefully cultural identity from political identity. This is particularly pertinent in an era where the claim that cultural communities should be self-determining is considered obvious and normal, and thus something that does not require explanation.

When Samuel Huntington (1993), the Cold War Warrior and ardent supporter of the war in Vietnam, dropped the question mark from his original article, it marked a radical discursive and ideological shift. Since the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, civilisationalist and culturalist approaches to explain away politics have taken on a new lease of life. Huntington opened the essay by saying that world politics was entering a new phase. Whereas in the recent past world conflicts had been between clear ideological camps, the new style of politics he discerned would be between different civilisations. For Huntington (1993), "the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. The clash of civilisations will dominate global politics".

Today's post-9/11 talk also resonates with earlier colonialist thinking that also saw the world as divided in two – modern and pre-modern. The key difference between the two groups being that modern people make their culture. They are presented as being able to distinguish between the good and the bad in culture, and therefore progress by building on the good. They are thus seen as historical in this sense. Pre-moderns, on the other hand, are depicted as being born into a culture, and are therefore constructed as its victims. Moreover, it is pre-modern people whose politics can be read through culture, while modern people cannot because their politics is characterised as distinct from their customs, based rather on issues. The only way pre-modern people can be salvaged is from the outside, through a mix of philanthropic and military interventions. Government officials, think tanks and the mainstream media now remind us that if one wants to understand the politics of Muslims, particularly the bad ones, the entry point has to be their culture.<sup>6</sup> The central recurring theme in today's military field manuals is that:

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<sup>6</sup> For example, after 9/11, culture talk qualified and explained the practice of terrorism as "Islamic". As Mamdani notes, Islamic terrorism is thus offered as both description and explanation of the events of

We all enter Iraq both as a soldier and as an individual. That is our strength – if we are smart enough to use it [...] as a soldier your duties are laid out for you. As an individual it is what you do on your own that counts – and it may count for more a lot more than you think. (A Short Guide to Iraq 2007, p. 1)

The new skills of this citizen-soldier thus extend beyond rifle marksmanship and artillery coordination. During the Second World War, American servicemen were deployed to Iraq with a pocket manual in their kit bags. This cultural handbook (1943) was intended to help soldiers build trust across culture, customs and language with the local population. The 48-page introduction to the “Arab mind” contained everything from practical advice – maps, currency conversion tables and common Arabic phrases – to tips on how to manipulate tribal and religious leaders. One of the most telling remarks in the handbook is its final reminder that every American soldier is an unofficial ambassador of goodwill. Although this manual is important in its historical context, it is just as revealing in our post-Cold War condition. Reprinted by Chicago University Press in 2007, it has become essential reading within diplomatic, military, academic and civilian sections of American society in an attempt to understand and successfully negotiate America’s newly constituted Others.<sup>7</sup>

The Barnes & Nobles “highly recommended read 2007” also contains a forward from Lieutenant Colonel John Nagal. It is a lament of sorts for what was left unknown to him when he was deployed in Iraq in 2003. A resigned Lieutenant Nagal says:

It is almost impossible, when reading this guide, not to slap oneself on the forehead in despair that the army knew so much of Arabic culture and customs, and of the importance of that knowledge for achieving military success in Iraq, six decades ago – and forgot almost all those lessons in the intervening years. (Nagal 2007, p. v)

He goes on to stress how much he would have appreciated knowing that:

Muslim tempers are very short during this month [Ramadan] as yours would be under similar circumstances – and perhaps I would have been better prepared for the surge of violence that marked this celebration in our sector. (Nagal 2007, p. v)

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September 11. It is no longer the market, nor the state, but culture that is said to be the dividing line between those in favour of peaceful existence and those inclined to terror.

<sup>7</sup> For example, listen to NPR (2007) ‘Advice to WWII Soldiers in Iraq Relevant Today’ [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12637899](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12637899)

This seemingly absurd observation sheds light on a culturalist return to colonial and civilisationist representations of our world, and at the same time serves as a reminder of how far such thinking has evolved in the context of the “war on terror”.<sup>8</sup>

“This is the first time since World War II that the world has changed”, he said. This statement is taken from a Senior CIA official during the end of the Cold War (The Washington Post 1990). However, it was only after September 11 and its aftermath that commentators began questioning whether the slashing of cultural diplomacy since the waning of the communist threat after 1991 was prudent. In 2002, The New York Times ran a piece entitled “Showing The Flag of Culture (Or Not)”, which questioned why the United States had been reluctant to use art to communicate American objectives overseas at a time of broad American reach. It argued that the global scope of satellite broadcasting and the Internet today had helped the United States attain not only vast new political power, but also an increasingly dominating cultural influence that popular culture, as a potent weapon in the American arsenal, could exploit (The New York Times 2002).

Karen Hughes’ resignation in October 2007, after a difficult two years as Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, seemed to epitomise the widely held belief that the Bush administration had nothing but contempt for softer approaches to managing international relations. However, what is of particular interest is not whether Ms. Hughes failed or not, or if the Bush administration really believed in the efficacy of public diplomacy, but rather the new strategic choice of repositioning cultural diplomacy in a post-9/11 landscape. In her final appearance, with Condoleezza Rice by her side, Ms. Hughes said, “I feel that I’ve done what Secretary Rice and President Bush asked me to do by transforming public diplomacy and making it a national security priority central to everything we do in government” (Financial Times 2007).

### **The Information Marketplace: Between Bombs and Bytes**

This realignment in American foreign policy is an acknowledgment of the central problem all nation states now face in a global information age. As technological innovation has

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<sup>8</sup> *The Times* recently revealed that experts had made recommendations to Scotland Yard on how to reduce tensions between (anti-terrorism) police and Muslims during the London Olympics because of growing concerns about the Games clashing with the holy month of Ramadan. Edward Kessler, Executive Director of the Woolfe Institute, which deals with inter-faith dialogue, said that police needed to have a “minimum level of faith literacy” to help them deal with religious issues during the London Games. Dr. Kessler went on to say that, “during Ramadan you’re going to have a lot of tired, hungry, less evenly tempered people because they haven’t eaten for 18 hours”. For more see, *The Times* (2008) 27 October.

drastically reduced the cost of finding, reproducing, creating and transmitting information, even the most powerful states have found it increasingly difficult to manage the emerging information marketplace. Individuals and organisations have been empowered by the developments in mass technology, while the international arena is clearly no longer the sole province of governments. The United States and other powerful states have thus become increasingly fearful of losing control over the direction of international affairs. However, narratives from across the political spectrum that have signalled the waning of the nation-state and the beginning of the end of the American empire fail to appreciate how traditional networks of power are adapting to this changing international landscape (Vidal 1992; Hansen 1993; Guéhenno 1995; Held 1995, 2004; Ohmae 1996; Wallerstein 2003). It is becoming increasingly difficult to measure the balance of power in such a fluid environment. In an information age, the ability to mobilise the networks of others will be as important as mobilising one's own. Despite the global stage becoming both increasingly crowded and more unpredictable, states are likely to remain the dominant actor.

Making information resonate globally in an age of the great planetary market has begun to resemble the practice of military intelligence, the aesthetic of political propaganda and the form of global popular culture. The environment ushered in by technological culture has drastically changed both the function and conduct of American public diplomacy. Traditionally seen as official communication aimed at foreign publics, public diplomacy in the United States is taking on a new mission statement within the wider sphere of diplomatic practice. With both the changing nature of international relations and the sovereignty of the state as no longer given, contiguity today is less a matter of geographic distance than of dissemination and access to the infotainment telesector. With this new high ground for both the military and telecommunications industries, the terms of human existence are increasingly being shaped by techniques of governmentality and biopower in novel ways. This radical shift in American cultural diplomacy has set its sites on a new public, that of "digital natives" – the first generation to come of age beyond the digital divide and be socialised in an era of hyper-connectivity. Therefore, the question now being raised within policy circles and think tanks is whether or not America would now be in a better strategic position had it "dropped iPods instead of bombs in Iraq".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Author's interview with Andras Szanto, Deputy Director of the National Arts Journalism Programme at Columbia University & Co-Organiser of 'Arts & Minds: A Conference on Cultural Diplomacy Amid Global Tensions' Columbia University 2003, New York, 17 December 2007.

## The Age of Obama

It is important to stress that the current trends in public diplomacy are still in their infancy, and it would therefore be counterproductive to overstate their impact. However, despite that fact that this new cultural realm cannot be characterised in terms of a clear policy approach, it is becoming increasingly likely that it will be the new direction in American public diplomacy. The use of these technologies in Barack Obama's successful presidential campaign only goes to highlight the changes that are in sight. Many have begun to comment that Obama's enthusiasm to embrace new ways of communicating is comparable to John F. Kennedy's mastery of the then relatively new medium of television. It also means that he can bypass the traditional political media in ways no other President before him was able to.<sup>10</sup> The President's first response to George W. Bush's weekly radio address did not consist of just the traditional microphone, but also a video camera. The resulting four-minute clip was also posted as a YouTube link on his transition website. In a statement on the website, the transition team explain that, "no president-elect or president has ever turned the radio address into a multimedia opportunity before".<sup>11</sup>

This was all made to fit neatly into Obama's election pledges of communicating with the American people and making the White House and the political process more transparent and democratic. He vowed on numerous occasions during his campaign trail to make broadband connections as common as telephone lines. Therefore, the process of modernising government and democratising its techniques are seen to be closely intertwined with the departure into online video worlds. Steve Grove, YouTube's head of news and politics, believes that the Obama team has "written the playbook" on how to use YouTube for political campaigns (Guardian 2008). Moreover, it was reported that President Obama seriously considered creating a new post that has not existed in the American government before, that of Chief Technology Officer (Observer 2008).<sup>12</sup>

The technological developments in these new media forms have drastically reshaped our socio-political culture and the role of democratic propaganda. The 2008 U.S. Presidential election brought the highest turn out in history, and most of this has been attributed to Barack Obama's campaign strategy of engaging young voters. So, aside from

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<sup>10</sup> Jared Cohen believes that Barack Obama's election victory highlights the prescriptive values it has for winning the hearts and minds of youth around the world.

<sup>11</sup> See [www.change.gov](http://www.change.gov)

<sup>12</sup> See the White House Official YouTube Channel [www.youtube.com/user/whitehouse](http://www.youtube.com/user/whitehouse)

the use of social networking sites, Barack Obama also became the first presidential candidate to buy advertisement space inside computer games. The advertisements, which appear on billboards and other signage in nine games from Electronic Arts Inc., reminds players that early voting had begun and plugs the campaign website. EA spokeswoman Holly Rockwood commented, “what we're trying to do is offer ads in games where we're simulating a real-world environment, so our racing games, our sports games lend themselves to that” (Associated Press 2008).

A similar logic is starting to take hold under seemingly different circumstances. Military practice in fields of operation has drastically changed, with technological developments underlining a new dependence on technology. However, this dependence is no longer simply a matter of creating “cleaner” ways of destroying the enemy, but equally in the more complicated battle of winning hearts and minds. The technological imperatives of the “war on terror” serve to show how technology and culture are being manipulated in a war that is still seen by many as a clash, or at best a tension, between civilisations. The example of the plans of the British government to counter growing Taliban propaganda in Afghanistan serves to highlight this point. With six million mobile phones in circulation and over half a million Internet users, the programme aims to use new media formats to empower ordinary Afghans and deprive the Taliban of its virtual monopoly on propaganda (BBC News 2008).<sup>13</sup> The Taliban, however, have had a great amount of success in damaging the coalition’s reputation by distributing anti-Western films. Moreover, ordinary citizens have distributed mobile phone footage of bodies of dozens of Afghani civilians killed in American-led raids. What is equally important to note is that the introduction of such technology and methods into war zones and urban environments fundamentally restructures the relationships between citizens and soldiers on the ground, as well as governments, non-governmental organisations and corporate interests. This programme, devised by outside consultants, intends to use non-governmental organisations to distribute

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<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in 2009 the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced support from the United States for the first Pakistani mobile phone-based social network. While most Pakistanis have no access to the Internet, mobile phone use is widespread, with over 95 million active accounts. Humari Awaz [Our Voice] aims to leverage SMS technology to allow Pakistanis to communicate on themes and subjects of their choice using their mobile phones. The platform allows users to register unique group themes or keywords and from communities via SMS subscription. A press release from the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad states that, “Pakistanis of all ages and backgrounds will be able to form communities of interest around cultural, civic, or economic issues via the SMS social network, Humari Awaz. In addition to linking friends and families, the network will help anyone who needs to share information, from farmers and resellers who want to share market prices to businesses that wish to communicate with their staff on the road, to news outlets that want to share information with targeted groups”.

the mobile phones to Afghans and help them film and edit their own video diaries to circulate amongst fellow citizens.

Another example of this trend is TroopTube. This new website is powered by Military OneSource, an authorised U.S. Department of Defence programme. Both conceptually and aesthetically identical to YouTube, it is an online video site designed to help military families connect and keep in touch while miles apart. Furthermore, the site aims for, “ease of use, so you can quickly upload videos and share the simple joys of each day with each other, either privately or with the whole world”.<sup>14</sup> The context for the launch of this website is the military’s increasing inability to cope with a new generation of young soldiers who use social networking tools to share uncensored records of their life at war. Over the last year it has emerged that the Pentagon has attempted to block access to a number of websites, including MySpace and YouTube, as well as other networking sites.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, aside from the image of increased transparency that the initiative attempts to portray, it can equally be understood as the latest scheme to control communication with various publics and prevent certain material from leaking onto the Internet.

## **Diplomacy Version 2.0**

The U.S. government’s attempts to control and manufacture America’s image abroad have become a significant political problem in this increasingly networked world. In order to better understand how such struggles over America’s self-image have developed over time, it is necessary to investigate how modern technology is restructuring how we interact and communicate with one another in society. Despite the impact of military technologies on civilian life, there has been little investigation into the effect that such a technoculture is having on everyday life. The centrality of information to postmodern war is not limited to the battle space. The relationship itself between military and civilian technology has undoubtedly become far more fluid. Thus, the ability of culture to attract and reflect is increasingly related to technologies ability to threaten or punish militarily. Paul Virilio’s theorisation of the “integral accident” highlights the centrality of the military-scientific complex in the post-Cold War age.<sup>16</sup> The shift in American cultural diplomacy today is

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.trooptube.tv/](http://www.trooptube.tv/)

<sup>15</sup> See [www.thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/05/14/pentagon-blocks-myspace-and-youtube/](http://www.thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/05/14/pentagon-blocks-myspace-and-youtube/)

<sup>16</sup> For Virilio, in the foreseeable future it will no longer be war that is the continuation of politics by other means, it will be the integral accident that is the continuation of politics by other means. For technology cannot exist without the potential for accidents. He thus sees it as a rather negative growth of social positivism and scientific progress. In his most recent article on Hurricane Katrina, Virilio writes, “oh yeah,



attempting to exploit this very relationship between the transfer of information and the hegemony of today's technoaesthetic culture. The virtual real connects this tribe through a network of mobile phones, digital cameras, Youtube videos and Twitter, Facebook and MySpace pages.

The global explosion of this virtual sphere, which includes all the formats shaped around digital text and moving images, is crucial if this strategy is to achieve any notable success. Furthermore, the virtual publics that are being constructing are increasingly seen as spaces in which all young people can act as diplomats through "dormroom diplomacy" to influence communities around them, as well as those they have little or no contact with. This goes to show how American public diplomacy, increasingly characterised as an open communication forum, is being opened up by global mass media and technology. Policy circles are realising that other institutions and online forums circulate as America with more authority than state agencies. As James Glassman, the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, puts it, "the best way to sell American values is to let others do it for us" (Newsweek 2009). However, what this chooses to ignore is the fact that the political aspects of today's prevailing technological rationality lie in democratic unfreedom as a token of technical progress (Rose 1999). In contemporary society, these technological controls appear to be the very embodiment of Reason for the benefit of all social groups and interests.

Despite the increased access to information that YouTube, MySpace and other video and music sharing sites have created, they are far from free of the fingerprints of officialdom. Not only have record and film companies set up their own official channels and accounts to offer better quality clips, as well as a new forum for advertisements, but governments have also begun to see the potential of reaching vast audiences without the backdrop of propaganda that would have been tagged to the same initiatives had they been attempted through more traditional state mechanisms. So, from Queen Rania of Jordan's popular YouTube channel to President Obama's extremely effective use of social networking sites, ways of communicating to publics has been drastically changed. More specifically, the social networking phenomenon is fast becoming a central battleground for governments, institutions and corporations and their fight for virtual advertising space, new

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that nasty wind, wind that blows, blows. The whole world is watching, it's on every station; it's the programme the world is talking about. And it's so, so soggy, down there".

markets and ultimately users' attention.<sup>17</sup> Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, has promised to continue expanding his company around the world. At the Web 2.0 summit 2008, Zuckerberg suggested that:

The challenge that we have is to bring people along the whole path, first bring people along to Facebook, and make people comfortable with sharing information online. We got people through this really big hurdle of wanting to put up their full name, picture – their mobile phone number in many cases. (Guardian 2008)

Zuckerberg also believed that the future for social networking technology was limitless. The crucial next step for such sites was the chance to take social networking truly mobile, and thereby take advantage of increasingly popular phone technology.<sup>18</sup>

Jared Cohen is beginning to hold increasing sway on more traditional circles that until now have dictated policy prescriptions. For Cohen:

The one-sided web 1.0 approach of violent extremists is no match from a web 2.0 (interactive and user-generated) inclined youth demographic keen on expanding their social networks and exploring new media. (Cohen 2008a)

Cohen is attempting to placate more conservative policy makers' fears by highlighting that unlike the impact of radio and cassette tapes across the developing world in the 1970s, today's media environment is both interactive and user-generated.<sup>19</sup> This digital media, which comes with "rules and regulations that are imposed by companies who will not allow their platforms to be used to kill or to terrorise", is seen to be replacing the more politically unstable cassette tape (Cohen 2008a). Therefore, for Cohen, the diplomatic

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<sup>17</sup> Facebook has an estimated 161 million members – with a substantial growth in the last 12 months, from 50 million users at the start of 2008 to the 161 million users today. Myspace also boasts 118 million users (ComScore 2009).

<sup>18</sup> A recent United Nations report reveals that more than half the global population now pay to use a mobile phone. With the drastic expansion in the mobile services available, from instant money transfers to public health advice and Internet access, the end of 2008 saw 4.1 billion mobile subscriptions (1 billion in 2002). Furthermore, nearly a quarter of the world's 6.7 billion people now use the Internet (11 percent in 2002 and 23 percent in 2008). What is particularly important to stress is that these developments are all the more sharp in developing countries, with the fastest growth in the Middle East and Africa. Developing countries now account for about 2/3 of the mobile phones in use (less than half in 2002). The report also notes that over 100,000 phone masts are erected each year, with the number of places with no signal dwindling fast. More than 90 percent of the global population now has some form of access. It is interesting that these trends coincide with the increasing rush for Coltan – essential in the manufacture of electrical components in mobile phones – that is creating widespread conflict across Africa, particularly in the DRC.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the disagreements and conflicts that took place during U.S. Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs James Glassman and Jared Cohen, Office of Policy Planning, announcement of the Alliance for Youth Movements Summit in December 3-5, 2008. See [www.archives.uruguay.usembassy.gov/usaweb/2008/08-535bEN.shtml](http://www.archives.uruguay.usembassy.gov/usaweb/2008/08-535bEN.shtml)

potential for this new digital realm relies heavily on the private sector's continued economic incentive in putting information technology into the public domain.<sup>20</sup>

In 2009, in a meeting room located in Baghdad's Green Zone, Scott Heiferman, chief executive of Meetup.com, and Jason Liebman, chief executive of user-generated video site Howcast, met with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih. Heiferman and Liebman formed part of a delegation of Silicon Valley and New York-based technology executives, which included Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey, Blue State Digital's David Nassar, WordPress's Raanan Bar-Cohen, as well as representatives from YouTube, Google and AT&T. The first U.S. State Department "New Media Technology Delegation" was sent to Iraq to survey the state of technology in the country and to help formulate ideas on how to build its infrastructure from scratch. During the four-day trip, the executives met with General Nasier Abadi, Iraqi Armed Forces' vice chief of staff; Marc Wall, coordinator for economic transition in Iraq; and Ralph Steen, officer in charge of the national fiber network installation project. They also organised roundtables with students from the University of Technology and the University of Baghdad to discuss how they use Facebook and videos they upload or view on YouTube. For the delegation, the point of the trip was not aimed at bringing "some American Internet brand into the country", but rather about "the raw piping for how people connect with each other in ways that just literally do not compute if you have been in the Saddam dark ages for a bunch of decades". In the press conference, Mr. Heiferman continued by saying that, "this is not bringing McDonald's to Iraq. It is bringing some of the rawest ideas of how technology helps them be more themselves" (The New York Observer 2009).

What this latest effort in post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes highlights, is a sharp ideological break from the narrowly conceived political and economic efforts of the past. The long-term aim of the delegation is to explore trends and explore the new opportunities that such technological developments hold for achieving American objectives in Iraq. As Mr. Heiferman said:

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<sup>20</sup> The most recent example of this was the Alliance of Youth Movements Summit in New York 2008. The summit brought together leaders of youth movements and other prominent government, business, NGO, philanthropist and celebrity figures "to learn, share and discuss how to change the world by building powerful grassroots movement". This concoction included strategists of Obama's Presidential Campaign, the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, the Co-Founder of Facebook and Whoopi Goldberg, as well as non-violent youth organisations from Columbia, Burma, Egypt and Cuba. Moreover, the summit was sponsored by Howcast, a company founded by veterans of Google and YouTube that aims to show consumers "engaging, useful how-to videos and guides wherever, whenever they need to learn how". For more, see [www.youthmovements.howcast.com/](http://www.youthmovements.howcast.com/)

Our whole purpose here is to try to understand the possibilities of investing in Internet infrastructure and having a discussion of the needs that people have. We tried to explain the basic notion of having a private sector, the basic notion of being a democracy, and that the Internet will be increasingly vital if they are going to participate in the larger world. (The New York Observer 2009)

### **Penetrating Native Spaces: dropping iPods on “digital natives”**

What distinguishes contemporary American cultural diplomacy from its Cold War past is its attempt, particularly in the Muslim and Arab world, to manipulate the relationship between peoples’ social and recreational activities and their “ideological enterprises”. Such initiatives hope to stem the growing anti-Americanism across the region through the perceived desire amongst youth to “forget about the society they are living in so long as the music blasts, the fashion is displayed and the interactions are flirtatious” (Cohen 2008b). This is seen to be particularly pertinent to Middle Eastern youth culture, where young people are attempting “to put history behind them” and “continue to break the patterns of violence of their parent’s generation” (Cohen 2008b). With a narrowed target audience/demographic of the “emerging markets of Arab youth”, urban culture along with mass consumer technology and communication have become the latest lifestyle weapons of the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and its current counter-radicalisation agenda of “breaking the shackles of tradition” across the Muslim and Arab world.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, it is within this latest phase of American cultural diplomacy that Jared Cohen was put in charge of counter-radicalisation, youth and education, public diplomacy, Muslim world outreach and North Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Such consumer technological innovations, along with unprecedented access to the outside world, have supposedly given these young people not only sources of entertainment and means for communication that their parents never enjoyed, but more importantly it has further allowed them to embrace connectivity that transcends politics, religion and extremism (Cohen 2008b). Cohen and others hope the civil liberties that this technoliterate class of youth have found online for organising good time has become the same freedoms that they are now able to leverage for dissent and action. However, what is interesting to note in much of this thinking is that the definition of “liberated Arab youth” is predominately defined along the lines of neo-liberal values of individual freedom and

<sup>21</sup> For more on the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, see [www.state.gov/r/](http://www.state.gov/r/)

<sup>22</sup> See [www.state.gov/s/p/72899.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/p/72899.htm)

Western conceptualisations of what it means to be modern, rather than in terms of the strict ideological camps of the past. For American cultural diplomacy, the winning of hearts and minds is now intricately intertwined with the phenomenon that has become characterised as the age of “digital freedom”, where the Internet in and of itself constitutes their democratic society and the satellite dish may be “the biggest anti-propaganda tool” (Cohen 2008b). It is now primarily in a virtual sphere, and through digital means, that the youth of the region are to be emancipated from the rest of the population. Autonomy and freedom, be it from American occupation or the internal oppression of police states, are to be achieved through a democratic mass-communications revolution.<sup>23</sup>

The “Facebook Age” has brought with it a modern battle over technology. For architects of America’s global cultural offensive and proponents of modern technology, its liberating potential supposedly lies in its ability to give Middle Eastern youth the access to know what they are missing out on and what they now see they have been deprived of.<sup>24</sup> Within such a scenario technology provides disenfranchised youth the ability to dream of another world and another life. Such arguments make tenuous links between global technological diffusion, global civil society and democracy, with its citizens armed with a new modern identity. For such modern initiatives access is evidently no longer a hurdle – satellite television is one of the most prevalent technologies in the Middle East. The issue now lies in changing their preferences, which will be a far more difficult task. The United States Information Agency (USIA) has always been in the export business of telling American’s story to the world through various means. George Creel, a renowned American

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<sup>23</sup> 2009 saw the official launch of Muxlim Pal, which is the first virtual world aimed at the Muslim community. Based on Second Life, Muxlim’s online world “reaches from the prayer mat to the shopping centre”. Mohamed El-Fatraty, founder of Muxlim Pal, says, “we are not a religious site, we are a site that is focused on the lifestyle”. Already boasting 1.5 million monthly users, El-Fatraty’s market research reveals that the site aims to enhance the “Muslim lifestyle” through virtual beach bars and shopping malls. Muxlim Pal’s founder is equally keen to stress that, unlike The Sims, sociality is at the core of the site and thereby hopes to foster understanding among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. For more, see [www.pal.muxlim.com/](http://www.pal.muxlim.com/)

<sup>24</sup> In 2011, the United States Central Command (Centcom), which oversees American operations in the Middle East and Central Asia, began developing software that will allow it to secretly manipulate social media using fake online avatars designed specifically to influence internet conversations and spread pro-American propaganda. Centcom awarded a \$2.76m contract to Ntrepid, a newly formed corporation registered in Los Angeles, to develop what it has described as an “online persona management service” that will enable one serviceperson to control up to ten separate identities at once. Utilising “virtual private servers” and “traffic mixing”, the software would allow American service personnel in one location, to respond to emerging online conversations with any number of co-ordinated blogposts, tweets, re-tweets, and other interventions. This multiple persona contract is part of the Operation Earnest Voice (OEV), which was developed in Iraq as a psychological weapon against the online presence of al-Qaida supporters and others. Since 2009, OEV has expanded into a \$200m programme and expanded its presence to Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Middle East. General David Petraeus, the former commander of Centcom, described OEV as an effort to “counter extremist ideology and propaganda and to ensure that credible voices in the region are heard”.

journalist and eventual head of the U.S. Committee on Public Information (CPI), described such processes as “a plain publicity proposition, a vast enterprise in salesmanship, the world’s greatest adventure in advertising” (Snow 1998, p. 16).

What American cultural diplomacy in the Middle East is now attempting to achieve is the transformation, and to a large extent the de-politicisation, of a new generation. Social justice is not part of this lexicon. In their view, what is most promising is the fact that “Palestinian youth are two generations removed from the days when they lived in their homeland” (Cohen 2008b). Orientalist discourses of the “Arab street” are nothing new, but this street has taken on a very different and dangerous global form in the eyes of the United States government. The demographic target audience, within the Arab world as well as the diaspora, is the under twenty-five age bracket. The fact that well over half the populations of Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq are under twenty-five years old is often cited by the U.S. government, think-tanks and international commercial sources.<sup>25</sup>

It is primarily through this new technological potential that the U.S. Department of State is beginning to believe that it can now engage all Arab youth with one seductive, yet unrelenting swoop.<sup>26</sup> However, such an approach to culture as hermetically sealed and dehistoricised leads Cohen and the like to see it as a continuing “puzzling paradox” that:

They [young Hezbollah supporters that he interviewed during his travels] were religious extremists, committed to the establishment of an Islamic republic, the destruction of Israel, and attacks on America. On the other hand, they were typical Lebanese youth: clubbers, bar-hoppers, and lovers of American fast food (Cohen 2008b)

However, culture and cultural exchange cannot be treated in such a reductive manner. Former U.S. Undersecretary of State Charlotte Beers stated on numerous occasions that, “a 30 percent conversion rate for Muslims would represent a sales curve any corporation would envy” (Time 2001). What the State Department and other interested actors are now asking is whether or not this new approach to cultural diplomacy will succeed, or if such projects will merely end up as relics of another failed imperial mission.

## **C21st Statecraft and the “Arab Spring”**

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<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed breakdown, see the International Programmes Centre at the Census Bureau [www.census.gov/population/international/](http://www.census.gov/population/international/)

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, U.S. Under Secretary of State James Glassman Briefing on ‘U.S. Public Diplomacy and the War of Ideas at the Washington Foreign Press Center’ 15 July 2008.

Since the demonstrations, protests and uprisings across the Arab world in 2011, it has become increasingly commonplace to characterise popular revolts in the region as either Facebook or Twitter revolutions.<sup>27</sup> Not only have discussions tended to lead to false binaries between digital evangelists and techno-pragmatists, but they have also lacked a critical reading of the historical and socio-political conditions that led to the revolts in the first place.<sup>28</sup> Although social media has been the focus of much of the commentary, what is of particular interest here is not so much the extent to which technology has empowered such movements, but rather the increased attention states, and in particular the United States, are paying to these technologies as both diplomatic and counterinsurgency tools.<sup>29</sup>

Although attention to the innovative use of new media and social networking is growing, it has tended to concentrate on either its revolutionary potential to empower poor people across the developing world, or on how autocratic regimes are manipulating its power to further entrench their control over their people. There is no doubt that new communication technologies can bolster democratic activism, but it is equally true that they can be used to both sustain government control and to enable international corporations to organise financial, production and distribution activities around the world. With most discussions still framed in terms of how the West needs to fight the twin evils of authoritarianism and fundamentalism, even techno-pragmatists have failed to appreciate the equally problematic relationship that is emerging between democratic polities and the use of technological innovation (Morozov 2011).<sup>30</sup> So, although Malcolm Gladwell, Evgeny Morozov and others are right to dispel the myth of Internet freedom in the context

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<sup>27</sup> For an extensive empirical study into the use of Twitter and other social media platforms during the uprisings see, [www.dfreelon.org/2011/05/19/the-mena-protests-on-twitter-some-empirical-data/](http://www.dfreelon.org/2011/05/19/the-mena-protests-on-twitter-some-empirical-data/) What the study highlights is that Twitter was overwhelmingly a platform for outsiders to discuss important breaking news and thus rides the same news wave as everything else, only more intimately.

<sup>28</sup> This is most notable in the series of well-rehearsed arguments and counter-arguments between Malcolm Gladwell and Clay Shirky around the revolutionary potential of social media in *The New Yorker* and *Foreign Affairs* respectively.

<sup>29</sup> The first notable incident came in 2009, when Jared Cohen and the U.S. State Department contacted Twitter to ask it to delay a planned upgrade that would have cut daytime services to Iranians who were protesting the Republic's election result. Although the Obama administration sought to avoid suggestions that it was meddling in Iran's internal affairs, Twitter announced that it delayed a planned upgrade because of its role as an important communication tool in Iran. U.S. State Department spokesman Ian Kelly rejected that contacts to Twitter amounted to meddling in Iranian internal affairs, saying, "this is about giving their voices a chance to be heard. One of the ways that their voices are heard is through new media".

<sup>30</sup> *The Net Delusion*, Evgeny Morozov's flawed yet insightful book, has been much praised as an astute critique of the popular narrative around the Internet, technological innovation and democracy. For Morozov, contemporary cyber-utopianism "stems from the starry-eyed digital fervour of the 1990s, when former hippies, by this time ensconced in some of the most prestigious universities in the world, went on an argumentative spree to prove that the Internet could deliver what the 1960s couldn't". Morozov, however, is right to note that Internet freedom is a deeply flawed concept and that in many cases the Internet has served authoritarian regimes in their attempts to stifle dissent and further entrench both state censorship and propaganda.

of closed societies, they have missed how this narrative is also part of a distorted political discourse in the West, which hopes to use such technologies to influence and manage global events in an increasingly fragmented and unpredictable international environment.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, while Google chairman Eric Schmidt praised the way protestors used social networking sites to organise rallies and communicate amid tight state restrictions, he failed to acknowledge how Western governments and militaries are attempting to use such technologies to stay ahead of the curve of events unfolding on new media platforms and thus manipulate such networks to their benefit. Senior U.S. military officers have spoken of the need to better track unrest revealed in social networks and to create ways to shape outcomes in the Arab world through Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms. Following the uprising across the region, the US military's high-tech research arm, the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), put out a call for experts to address "a new science of social networks" that would attempt to get ahead of the new media curve. For the US military, events of strategic and tactical importance are increasingly seen to be taking place in this social media space.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, there was no mention of how certain Western firms and mobile network operators had offered to supply software to Arab governments during the uprisings so they could monitor and target

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<sup>31</sup> In the wake of the London riots in 2011, two men were given four-year sentences for unsuccessfully inciting violence on Facebook, and commentators were quick to blame Research in Motion's (RIM) BlackBerry Messenger service for providing the communication tool of choice for rioters. Despite the fact that analysis of riot-related tweets by *The Guardian* showed that the majority of communication was between citizens reacting to the riots, David Cameron still sought to ban the use of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook in any future disturbances. For more on the preliminary study, timing trends and graphics, see [www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/24/twitter-study-post-riot-plans](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/24/twitter-study-post-riot-plans) The Prime Minister told government that, "everyone watching these horrific actions will be struck by how they were organised via social media. Free flow of information can be used for good. But it can also be used for ill. When people are using social media for violence we need to stop them. So we are working with the police, the intelligence services and industry to look at whether it would be right to stop people communicating via these websites and services when we know they are plotting violence, disorder and criminality". Cameron went on to state that, "police were facing a new circumstance where rioters were using the BlackBerry Messenger service, a closed network, to organise riots. We've got to examine that and work out how to get ahead of them". The Home Secretary, Theresa May, also held meetings with Facebook, Twitter and RIM to discuss their responsibilities. In a brief statement from the Home Office, the government concluded that it would pursue the idea that in future law enforcement agencies can "crack down on the networks being used for criminal activities". For more, see the Home Office statement [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/constructive-meeting](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/constructive-meeting)

<sup>32</sup> DARPA predicted that social networks would have a groundbreaking effect on warfare saying, "changes to the nature of conflict resulting from the use of social media are likely to be as profound as those resulting from previous communications revolutions". The programme's goal is to track "purposeful or deceptive messaging and misinformation in social networks and to pursue counter messaging of detected adversary influence operations". DARPA plans to spend \$42 million on the Social Media in Strategic Communication (SMISC) programme, with prospective contractors asked to test algorithms through experiments with social media. For more see, *The Telegraph* (2011) 'Pentagon Looks to Social Media as New Battlefield' 21 July.



activists and dissidents.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, the new fear is still seen in terms of how some authoritarian governments would try to regulate the Internet the way they regulated television in the past. As Schmitt argues, "if you look at television in most of these countries, television is highly regulated because the leaders, partial dictators, half dictators or whatever you want to call them understand the power of television imagery to keep their citizenry in some bucket" (BBC News 2011).

As lawyers for civil rights organisations appeared before a judge in Virginia to fight a U.S. government order to disclose the details of private Twitter accounts in the WikiLeaks row, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton extolled the role of Twitter, Facebook and other social networks had played in the uprisings. For Clinton:

The Internet has become the public space of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the world's town square, classroom, marketplace, coffeehouse, and nightclub. We all shape and are shaped by what happens there, all 2 billion of us and counting. And that presents a challenge. To maintain an internet that delivers the greatest possible benefits to the world, we need to have a serious conversation about the principles that will guide us, what rules exist and should not exist and why, what behaviors should be encouraged or discouraged and how. (Clinton 2011)<sup>34</sup>

It is no coincidence that this narrative has focused on the Middle East. For the U.S. government, a connection to global information networks is seen as an "on-ramp to modernity". The potential and right to connect has become an increasingly central tenet of American foreign policy (Clinton 2010).<sup>35</sup> The attempt by the State Department to

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<sup>33</sup> Hampshire-based Gamma International UK is reported to have offered to supply software used by the Egyptian authorities to track activists. The Finfisher programme is described as a toolkit used by many global security and intelligence services for gaining access to people's computers. The files from the Egyptian secret police's Electronic Penetration Division described Gamma's product as the only security system in the world capable of bugging Skype phone conversations and penetrating secure systems which access email boxes of Hotmail, Yahoo and Gmail networks. In the past, Siemens has also sold Bahrain a monitoring centre, which is thought to have allowed the regime to secretly track and bug its citizens' phones. While French and South African technology firms have helped monitor mobile phones and the Internet for Libya's Col. Muammar Gaddafi.

<sup>34</sup> Hillary Clinton 'Internet Rights and Wrongs: Choices and Challenges in a Networked World' George Washington University, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2011. In an earlier speech on Internet freedom, Clinton stated that, "on their own, new technologies do not take sides in the struggle for freedom and progress, but the United States does. We stand for a single Internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas. And we recognise that the world's information infrastructure will become what we and others make of it. Now, this challenge may be new, but our responsibility to help ensure the free exchange of ideas goes back to the birth of our republic". 'Remarks on Internet Freedom' The Newseum Washington D.C. 21 January 2010.

<sup>35</sup> During the uprising in Egypt, Wael Ghonim, the Head of Marketing of Google Middle East and North Africa was detained by Egyptian authorities after taking part in the protests and quickly became an international figurehead and spokesman for the pro-democracy movement. What is of interest here is not so much the particular role Ghonim played in the uprisings, but rather how both Western policy makers and the international media imagined and presented him as a neo-Orientalist fantasy figure for a new secular and

maximise its opportunities and seize upon the potential of connection technologies has thus led it devoting increased diplomatic, economic and technological resources to such initiatives.<sup>36</sup>

This evolving grand strategy comes under what the U.S. State Department has termed C21<sup>st</sup> Statecraft. Under the directorship of Anne-Marie Slaughter, the U.S. State Department's Policy Planning has concentrated on bringing together non-traditional partners to do "multi-stakeholder initiatives". The aim is to think of the department as the Secretary of State's "personal start-up", as a venture capital firm that looks for and enables ideas by building connections. As Jared Cohen puts it:

Of course we still do negotiations; we still do representation; we still do government-to-government exchanges. But it's all about using new tools and working with new kinds of stakeholders. The technology delegations are a great example. (Cohen 2010)

The traditional framework has always revolved around traditional diplomats and government-to-government interaction. However, the new U.S. State Department strategy is to broaden the practice of statecraft so as to enable government-to-people and people-to-people networks. It aims to bring in new voices and build connections between state and non-state actors. Seen as non-partisan work, C21<sup>st</sup> statecraft is very much based on the assumption that technology is breaking down traditional barriers of age, gender, race and socioeconomic status, and thus providing non-traditional and dynamic leaders. For Cohen:

There are two common misperceptions about the technology aspect of C21<sup>st</sup> statecraft. The first is that the technology side of C21<sup>st</sup> statecraft is just about State Department officials using Twitter and blogging more – in other words, that embracing technology is just about more effectively and innovatively communicating and advocating our policy. I think technology is a valuable tool for that,

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technoliterate Middle East. For example, for Fouad Ajami, "no turbaned ayatollah had stepped forth to summon the crowd. This was not Iran in 1979. A young Google executive, Wael Ghonim, had energised this protest when it might have lost heart, when it could have succumbed to the belief that this regime and its leader were a big, immovable object. Mr. Ghonim was a man of the modern world. He was not driven by piety. The condition of his country – the abject poverty, the crony economy of plunder and corruption, the cruelties and slights handed out to Egyptians in all walks of life by a police state that the people had outgrown and despaired of – had given this young man and others like him their historical warrant".

<sup>36</sup> In 2009, during a state visit to Morocco, Hillary Clinton announced the launch of 'Civil Society 2.0'. The initiative was aimed at assisting non-governmental and civil society organisations in using new digital tools and technologies to increase the reach and impact of their work. The U.S. State Department convened a number of leading technologists, and in November 2010, it launched its first application at TechCamp in Santiago, Chile. Global and regional technology and social media experts worked with regional civil society representative to determine specific needs and build practical applications. For the State Department, the goal remains, "increasing regional civil society organisations' digital literacy, sharing information, building networks and matchmaking like-minded individuals to organisations".

but to me that's public diplomacy 2.0. When I think about C21<sup>st</sup> statecraft, I think about technology being used as a tool to empower citizens, to promote greater accountability and transparency, to do capacity building. At its core, what technology does is it connects people to information, which is new media; it connects people to each other, which is social media; and then there's a far more exciting path that we're going down now, which is that technology is a tool to connect people to actual resources -- like mobile banking or mobile money transfers or telemedicine. (Cohen 2010)

In 2010, Google hosted a conversation between Eric Schmidt, Jared Cohen and Alec Ross.<sup>37</sup> Schmidt, who introduced the two young State Department officials as “the future of American politics at its best”, was keen to understand the practicalities of how technological innovation can be mutually beneficial for private enterprises and American foreign policy concerns. Both Cohen and Ross were quick to stress that, in our increasingly networked world, the solutions to foreign policy challenges now resided in the private sector. Not only could Silicon Valley serve at the heart of America’s post-industrial economy, but it could be equally useful in getting information about America out to the world more effectively than traditional diplomats. This is about both seeing and engaging with the world differently, and using the American people and American private sector differently – a new crowd sourcing foreign policy. It is therefore of little surprise that in President Obama’s main speech on the Middle East since the uprisings there was increased talk of the role of technology in bringing security and prosperity to the region:

The greatest untapped resource in the Middle East and North Africa is the talent of its people. In the recent protests, we see that talent on display, as people harness technology to move the world. It's no coincidence that one of the leaders of Tahrir Square was an executive for Google. That energy now needs to be channeled, in country after country, so that economic growth can solidify the accomplishments of the street. (Obama 2011)

It is still too early to judge what, if any, long-term implications the uprisings will have on American influence in the region. However, what is evident is that American

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<sup>37</sup> Alec Ross was appointed as Senior Advisor for Innovation in the Office of Secretary of State by Hillary Clinton in 2009. He is tasked with maximising the potential of technology in service of America’s diplomatic and development goals. Prior to his service at the U.S. State Department, Alec worked on the Obama-Biden Presidential Transition Team and served as Convener for Obama for America's Technology, Media & Telecommunications Policy Committee.

cultural diplomatic efforts have learnt from the failures of their earlier formalised processes of “cultural diffusion” and are starting to invest more time and money in these new techniques and technologies. They have understood that Arab audiences cannot be simply conceived of as passive consumers and objects of American desire. Therefore, with youth as the new demographic target, there is an increased effort to manipulate their participation as independent agents in this globalised consumer capitalist culture. Rather than stressing the obvious failures of officially sponsored programmes such as Al-Hurra or Radio Sawa, one should be more concerned with the more fluid and ambivalent exporters of America’s culture industries and social doxa that will undoubtedly be more successful than its predecessors.

## Chapter 3

### “We Can Crown Kings in Adidas”: Selling America Abroad

I believe I could warm up them cats. They ain't so cold but we couldn't bruise them with the happy music.

– Louis Armstrong (1955)<sup>1</sup>

I ain't afraid of your mess no more, babe / I ain't afraid no more / After a while, your cheap talk don't even cause me pain / So let your bullets fly like rain / 'Cause I know all the time you're wrong baby / And you'll be going just the same / Yeah, machine gun / Tearing my family apart / Yeah, yeah, alright / Tearing my family apart / (Don't you shoot him down) / (He's 'bout to leave here) / (Don't you shoot him down) / (He's got to stay here) / (He ain't going nowhere) / (He's been shot down to the ground) / (Oh where he can't survive, no, no) / Yeah, that's what we don't wanna hear anymore, alright? / (No bullets) / At least here, huh huh / (No guns, no bombs) / Huh huh / (No nothin', just let's all live and live) / (You know, instead of killin') / May this be love or just confusion / Born out of frustration wracked feelings / Of not being able / To make true physical love / To the universal gypsy Queen / True, free expressed music / Darling guitar please rest / Amen  
– Jimi Hendrix – Machine Gun (1969)

I'm about to show you how a hustler's life (this is life man) / And a soldier's life parallel / And the one thing they got in common is pain (forget about me for a second) / Picture split screen / On one side we got a hustler getting ready for the block (human beings) / Other side you got the soldier getting ready for boot camp (soldiers) / They're both at war (this is life) / Stay with us / Off to Bootcamp, the world's facing terror / Bin Laden been happenin' in Manhattan / Crack was anthrax back then, back when / Police was Al-Qaeda to black men / While I was out there hustling sinning with no religion / He was off the wall killing for a living

– Jay-Z – A Ballad for the Fallen Soldier (2002)

[Once] upon a time there was the marvelous art form where the Negro could finally say in public whatever was on his mind or her mind in rhyme and how the Negro hip-hop artist, staring down minimum wage slavery, Iraq, or the freedom of the incarcerated chose to take his emancipated motor mouth and stuck it up a stripper's ass because it turned out there really was gold in them thar hills.

– Greg Tate (2004)

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking about the disappointment of the Big Four Geneva Conference and Russia's response to the peace negotiations. *Ebony* (1959).

With the failures in Iraq and the ongoing problems in Afghanistan, a return to find America's international swagger has become a central concern for the Obama administration. This chapter asserts that the legacy of the Cold War has not been clearly understood in terms of its impact on the "war on terror" today. The Cold War legacies of the militarisation of American society and the international harnessing of the media and popular culture have only recently been explored (Snow 2003, 2010; McAlister 2005).<sup>2</sup> However, what remains unsatisfactorily examined are the residual elements of the colonial and post-colonial encounters that took place during this period. This chapter, therefore, focuses on a historical journey through the worlds of Louis Armstrong and the U.S. State Department international jazz tours at the height of the Cold War, to Michael Jordan, Jay-Z and the global reach of American sport and hip-hop culture in the post-Cold War environment. This historical outline not only repositions culture as a central paradigm to the Cold War rivalries, but also shifts its locus to the Third World, thus connecting the Cold War to questions of imperialism and anti-colonialism. Moreover, this approach also addresses a number of fundamental concerns of contemporary political sociology. It reveals how a number of public personalities, social movements and trends outside of the formal institutions of political power came to affect the socio-political struggles during the Cold War and have gone on to shape the international post-Cold War landscape.<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledging these cultural processes allows for a reinterpretation of the global American Cold War project, and more specifically how it has impacted on questions of cultural and political identities abroad. As experts in the use of culture as a tool of political persuasion, the Soviets did much in the early years of the Cold War to establish its central paradigm as a cultural one. Lacking the economic power of the United States, and without nuclear capability until the late 1950s, they concentrated on winning the battle for hearts and minds. America, despite a massive marshalling of the arts in the New Deal period, was

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<sup>2</sup> Melani McAlister's work, in particular, explores how popular culture has shaped American interests in the Middle East from the mid-1940s. In *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, McAlister shows how American foreign policy, while grounded in economic and military realities, has also developed in a cultural context. For McAlister, American understandings of the region are thus framed by multiple narratives that draw on religious belief, news media and popular culture.

<sup>3</sup> Faisal Devji's work on global Jihad highlights the significance of the Cold War to our modern history. For Devji, the Cold War was the moment from which the globe became both a political object and the primary site of its project. The formation of this new global landscape has not only clear resonances with the terms of thinking about global politics today, but has also informed the actions of numerous global non-governmental organisations, global movements and non-state actors. In both his books, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (2005) and *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (2008), Devji shows how traditional ideologies and nation-states are ultimately being transcended. The behaviour of non-state actors today is thus being increasingly fueled by the desire to become historical actors on this global stage.

far less skilled in the practice of international Kulturkampf (Caute 2003). However, such innocence was soon forfeited in what high-level American strategists were already calling the greatest polarisation of power on earth. “We have to show the outside world that we have a cultural life and that we care something about it”, the diplomat George Kennan told an audience at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1955. He went on to say that he would “willingly trade the entire remaining inventory of political propaganda for the results that could be achieved by this” (Guardian 2008).<sup>4</sup>

### **The Cultural Legacy of the Cold War**

The USIA, which existed from 1953 to 1999, was the main U.S governmental agency devoted to public diplomacy. Its first mission statement was “to understand, inform and influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interest, and to broaden the dialogue between Americans and U.S. institutions, and their counterparts abroad.”<sup>5</sup> Although established in August 1953, the core cultural and educational exchange functions remained in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the Department of State until 1978, when they were shifted to the USIA. During this crucial period there were two basic statutes authorising the programmes of the Agency. The first was the Smith-Mundt Act, which authorised information programmes, including Voice of America, originally broadcasting during the Second World War, as well as the Radio and TV Martí broadcasts to Cuba. Other programmes that were supported by the U.S. Government at this time included Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, which were both established with the specific intent of counteracting Soviet propaganda. The second core statute that authorised USIA's activities was the Fulbright-Hays Act, which aided the international cultural and educational exchanges in close alliance with the U.S. higher education system. The thinking behind these acts was to increase cooperation between governmental, educational and commercial sectors with the aim of improving America's image abroad. The USIA's primary role, therefore, was to both arbitrate and facilitate the increased dialogue between the United States and citizens of foreign countries.

At a time when the USIA was starting to find its footing, a number of advisory committees on cultural information spoke of the necessary changes needed in order to

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<sup>4</sup> The article was part of a discussion on the Victoria & Albert Museum's exhibition *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* V&A London, 25 September 2008 – 11 January 2009.

<sup>5</sup> The USIA's strategic plans can be found at [www.dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/abtusia/stratplan/pland.htm](http://www.dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/abtusia/stratplan/pland.htm)

effectively deal with Soviet propaganda. Mr. Bradford, Deputy Director of the Office of Plans, pointed out that:

The only part of the Agency's work that was really valid now was the long-range or the cultural, that which leaves a residual effect in the minds of people overseas [...] At present the Agency is swinging away from the short propaganda-type of activities and moving toward the long-range and the cultural. (National Archives 1958)<sup>6</sup>

However, during the 1940s and '50s there was considerable tension between elements within the arts world and the American government over what was seen as a period of increasing governmental censorship and political or aesthetically partisan dictatorship.

In 1944, the American Federation of Arts issued a statement on artistic freedom stating that, "this fundamental right exists irrespective of the artist's political or social opinions, affiliations or activities". The Federation went on to show its patriotic credentials by saying that, "we believe that such freedom and diversity are the most effective answers to totalitarian thought control and uniformity, and the most effective proof of the strength of democracy" (National Archives 1958).<sup>7</sup> President Eisenhower responded positively by stating that, "my friends, how different it is in tyranny. When artists are made the slaves and the tools of the state, when artists become chief propagandists of a cause progress is arrested and creation and genius are destroyed" (National Archives 1954).<sup>8</sup>

However, this impossible task of sealing culture and its multiple meanings both institutionally and nationally, continued to give the government headaches in the early period of the USIA. An example of this came in 1956 when the Agency cancelled plans to send overseas a modern art exhibition that incurred subversive charges. Seen as one of the most important exhibitions of American paintings ever to be sent abroad, the exhibit "Sport in Art" was co-sponsored by Sports Illustrated magazine. Shortly before a scheduled appearance at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, the exhibit was denounced by a number of local organisations, most notably the Dallas Patriotic Council. The root of the problem was four paintings by artists deemed to be either communist or communist sympathisers (Dallas Times Herald 1956). A USIA operating committee memorandum, entitled "Artists Who Might Cause Public Relations Problems", concluded that the work of

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<sup>6</sup> 'Advisory Committee on Cultural Information' Ninth Meeting Minutes, 25 April 1958 (National Archives, Washington D.C.).

<sup>7</sup> The American Federation of Arts (1954) 'Statement of Artistic Freedom' 22 October (National Archives, Washington D.C.).

<sup>8</sup> Eisenhower (1954) 'Freedom of the Arts Statement' October 1954 (National Archives, Washington D.C.).



the four artists should be removed from the exhibit before the Agency sends it to Australia for the Olympic Games the following year. The memorandum also suggested that, “a national agency name check should be instituted on all artists who are to be used in future exhibitions sponsored by the Agency” (Smithsonian Institution 1956).<sup>9</sup> In the same year, the USIA also raised objections to an art collection from American university and college galleries that was going overseas because it included a picture by Pablo Picasso, a then member of the French Communist Party (New York Times 1956).

However, the election of President Kennedy in 1960 brought about a rethinking of the mission of the Agency. In a White House memorandum to Director Edward Murrow, President Kennedy stated that the USIA had to improve its work to help achieve United States foreign policy objectives. This was to be achieved by influencing public attitudes in other nations, and advising the President, his representatives abroad and the various agencies on the implication of foreign opinions for present and contemplated United States policies. Furthermore, the influencing of attitudes was to be carried out by overt use of the various techniques of communication – personal contact, radio broadcasting, libraries, book publication and distribution, press, motion pictures, television, exhibits and English – language instruction and education. In the memo President Kennedy stressed that:

All activities should emphasise the ways in which United States policies harmonise with those of other peoples and governments, and those aspects of American life and culture which facilitate sympathetic understanding of United States policy. (USIA correspondence 1963)<sup>10</sup>

The USIA and philanthropic organisations such as the Rockefeller Foundation, Smithsonian Institution, and later the Ford Foundation have always been involved in getting more exposure for American arts and artists through tours, festivals and exhibitions abroad (Whitfield 1996). However, the correspondence between the USIA, the Smithsonian Institution and Rockefeller Foundation regarding their International Art Programme during the mid and late 1960s, highlights their increasingly close working relationship. In one of the memos, David Scott from the Smithsonian notes that:

During the three years of its operation under Smithsonian aegis, the International Art Programme (IAP) has worked closely with both USIA and State, has assimilated advice, requests and suggestions

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<sup>9</sup> USIA Operating Committee (1956) ‘Artist Who Might Cause Public Relations Problems’ 14 March (Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.).

<sup>10</sup> USIA Correspondent (1963) ‘Agency Mission Redefined by President Kennedy’ November (Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.).

gleaned from both agencies, and has delivered exhibitions and supplemental programmes of acknowledged quality which has been used not only by the U.S. Information Services abroad, but by museums on a direct museum-to-museum arrangement. While IAP recognises the importance of providing the cultural programmes at the U.S. missions with exhibitions to strengthen and enhance their activities, it is continually looking for new ways of presenting cultural exhibitions of distinction to broader audience cross-sections without obvious attachment to U.S. political or propaganda activities. (Smithsonian Institute 1969)<sup>11</sup>

This shift was instigated by the successful political propaganda that Khrushchev had intensified during President Eisenhower's stay in office. The characterisation of America and American influence abroad as capitalist and imperialistic had proven powerful. Soviet propaganda was seen as successfully undercutting and expropriating America's own ideas and positions. Liberty, the independence of states, anti-colonialism, the rights of man and democracy were all catchwords successfully deployed by Soviet propaganda against the United States. Writing in *The Washington Herald News*, Edward Readorn recounts a story of a number of American officials who visited the Soviet Union in the early 1960s. Readorn was especially impressed by the tremendous amount of propaganda they found prevalent throughout the country. He felt a similar approach was necessary if the United States was to prevail:

I asked myself why couldn't we, as a free people, display a little propaganda of our own, as we ably did during World War II? Why not begin a campaign all over America – in our factories, our theatres, our schools, on our transportation systems, on radio and television – reminding Americans of our great heritage, our goals, our ambitions for freedom and peace for all peoples and nations, our need to get ahead and stay ahead? (Washington Herald News 1961)

### **Reframing the Cold War: American Racial Democracy and the Decolonising World**

The works of Frances Stonor Saunders and David Caute carefully portray the cultural dimensions that were central to the Cold War (Saunders 2000, 2001; Caute 2005).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 'Re: Mr. Challinor Memo' 19<sup>th</sup> February 1969 & 10<sup>th</sup> March 1969 (National Archives, Washington D.C).

<sup>12</sup> Saunder's *Who Paid the Piper? CIA and the Cultural Cold War* focuses on the post-war period and the cultural propaganda programmes that were to be absorbed into the recently established Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Sauder's work chronicles how the CIA eventually found itself committing a vast amount of its financial resources, often by way of an array of supposedly independent charitable foundations, to this particular aspect of the Cold War. Her other book on the subject, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, centres on the history of the covert Congress for Cultural Freedom and Michael

However, most writing on this aspect of the ideological competition of the Cold War ignores the complex questions that were being asked and assertively answered in the colonised and decolonising parts of the globe. Ignoring the colonial and postcolonial backdrop to the Cold War, much of this work still has the Soviet Union, and Europe more generally, at its heart. Therefore, in this writing, the cultural life constructed by the two superpowers as they vied with each other to score propaganda points, is presented as only occurring in the bombed-out European cities. Not only does this representation privilege the role of high art and culture at the time, but it also ignores central questions of imperialism in this struggle.

In 1958, Edward Bernays, considered by many as the originator of modern public relations and then Chairman of the National Committee for an Adequate Overseas United States Information Programme, wrote a letter to the New York Times simply entitled “Funds for USIA”.<sup>13</sup> In an urgent tone, Bernays stated that:

Our prestige throughout the world has worsened. Among non-white and white peoples alike suspicion of us prevails. Among non-white peoples Communists have distorted our past actions, carried out for other reasons, and twisted them to appear as those of a white racist imperialistic country [...] Our attitudes toward the American Negro and those of many American civilian and Government employes overseas to coloured people are criticised. (The New York Times 1958).

The context for this letter was the request by the USIA for \$105,000,000 for that fiscal year; an amount Bernays felt was inadequate to reach “the world’s people”. The money was primarily to be spent on radio facilities in the Middle East where the Russians and Egyptians outvoiced the United States.

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Josselson, the principal figure in the operations. Saunders also demonstrates how the CIA courted individuals from the Left in an effort to turn the intelligentsia away from communism and towards an acceptance of ‘the American way’. In a similar vein, David Caute’s book, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War*, helps construct a more complex representation of the shifting nature of the culture conflicts of the post-war era and the particular struggles for cultural supremacy. For both Saunders and Caute, the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West was simultaneously a traditional political-military confrontation between empires, and at the same time an ideological and cultural contest on a global scale and without historical precedent.

<sup>13</sup> Combining ideas on crowd psychology with the psychoanalytical ideas of his uncle Sigmund Freud, Edward Bernays was one of the first to attempt to manipulate public opinion using the subconscious. His techniques for manipulating public opinion centered on the indirect use of “third party authorities” to plead his clients’ causes, or promote commodities for the benefit of commerce. For Bernays, the engineering of consent was the very essence of the democratic process, the freedom to persuade and suggest. Therefore, In addition to famous corporate clients, he worked on behalf of many non-profit institutions and organisations, as well as the U.S. government. Bernay's most extreme political propaganda activities were conducted on behalf of the multinational corporation United Fruit Company and the U.S. government to facilitate the successful overthrow of the democratically elected president of Guatemala, Jacobo Arhenz Guzman, in 1954.

At the height of the ideological antagonism of the Cold War, the U.S. Department of State unleashed an unexpected tool in its battle against communism – jazz. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., the United States representative from Harlem, was instrumental in convincing the State Department to shift the focus of its international tours from symphony orchestras and ballet companies to jazz bands. The Columbia University graduate, who during the Depression years became a prominent civil rights leader in Harlem, saw the jazz bands as the solution to America’s increasing image problems at the time. The African American novelist Ralph Ellison spoke of jazz as an artistic counterpart to the American political system. For Ellison (2002), the soloist can play anything he wants as long as he stays within the tempo and the chord changes – just as in a democracy, where the individual can say or do whatever he wants as long as he obeys the law. For Powell, these jazz bands would let the world experience what he called “real Americana” (The New York Times 2008). As a 1955 headline in *The New York Times* proclaimed, jazz was to become the country’s “secret sonic weapon”. However, this was also a highly contradictory strategy in which black artists were employed as American goodwill ambassadors during the height of Jim Crow. Furthermore, it attempted to negotiate this through the universal, race-transcending quality of jazz, while at the same time depending on the blackness of the musicians to legitimate America’s global agendas.

“Coming from the American station in Berlin, Germany, and this is Louis Armstrong here in his hotel suite”, went the introduction on Armed Forces Radio in 1952. To which Louis Armstrong coolly replied, “they call me the Ambassador of goodwill! It’s that old show business”. The radio proved a core exponent of this secret sonic weapon. One of Voice of America’s most successful radio broadcast was Willis Conover’s jazz programming. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1958, Louis Armstrong, a regular on the show, read Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address; a speech that was famous for invoking the principles of human equality espoused by the Declaration of Independence. It also helped redefine the Civil War as a struggle not merely for the Union, but as a “new birth of freedom” that would bring true equality to all of its citizens, as well as create a unified nation in which states’ rights were no longer dominant.

The jazz tours and radio addresses were enthusiastically endorsed and supported by Presidents, Ambassadors, J.R. Poppele, the Director of Voice of America, and Nelson Rockefeller, a New York Governor at the time. Of his Voice of America interviews and addresses, Poppele felt that, “these are just the sorts of messages we want to get abroad”

(USIA correspondence 1955).<sup>14</sup> While Nelson Rockefeller, in a letter to Satchmo, stressed that, “one of the more positive dimensions open to government as far as I am concerned is the fostering of the arts that give pleasure and meaning to our lives”.<sup>15</sup> With this Americanised form of music, Armstrong believed that, “cats are the same everywhere – all over the world. They all talk the same language. They all dig me and my horn.” However, when questioned about the dubious politics of his tours Satchmo replied in the same manner each time. “I don’t have no time for politics. I just blow my horn. I just go to try and give people some pleasure” (Arkansas Democrat 1961).

Beginning in March 1956, Powell arranged for his close friends Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong to make the U.S. State Department’s first goodwill jazz tours with an 18-piece band and travel all across Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. The end of the year brought the first American government sponsored jazz tour of the Middle East. During his tours of the Middle East, Louis Armstrong’s hosts in the region included USIS officers – Zygmunt Nagorski and John Esterline in Cairo and Marshall Berg in Alexandria – as well as Al-Ahram Editors – Kamel El-Mallakh and Hamdi Fuad.<sup>16</sup> However, the band’s last stop was in Athens, where students had recently stoned the local headquarters of the USIA in protest of Washington’s support for Greece’s right-wing dictatorship. It is reported that despite this, many of those same students greeted Gillespie with cheers, lifting him on their shoulders, throwing their jackets in the air and shouting: “Dizzy! Dizzy!” While during Satchmo’s historic 1960 Africa tour, the international press reported back home that a big banner in the cavalcade of automobiles said, “the black man from overseas is at home in the Congo” (Associated Press 1960).

Despite these undoubted successes, the tensions and inability to pin down either the culture or its exporters to serve specific national ends was also evident. It is important to note that these seemingly contradictory trends were not mutually exclusive, and at times even ended up serving contradictory ends. To a certain extent, the jazz stars were content to play their part in this pageant for hearts and minds, but not as puppets. After his Middle East tour, Gillespie said with pride that it had been “powerfully effective against Red propaganda” (The New York Times 2008). However, when the U.S. State Department tried to brief him beforehand on how to answer questions about American race relations,

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<sup>14</sup> USIA Letter (1955), ‘J.R. Poppele to Louis Armstrong’ Washington, 28 June (Louis Armstrong House and Archives, Queens College, CUNY).

<sup>15</sup> Letter (1971), ‘Nelson Rockefeller to Louis Armstrong’ State of NY Executive Chamber, 28 July (Louis Armstrong House and Archives, Queens College, CUNY).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

he said, “I’ve got 300 years of briefing. I know what they’ve done to us, and I’m not going to make any excuses” (The New York Times 2008). This was a common experience amongst the African American stars of the jazz tours.

However, the tensions of this delicate piece of cultural rearrangement and projection came to a head when Louis Armstrong cancelled a trip to Moscow after President Dwight D. Eisenhower refused to send federal troops to Little Rock Arkansas to enforce school-integration laws. “The way they are treating my people in the South, the government can go to hell”, he said. “It’s getting so bad, a colored man hasn’t got any country” (The New York Times 2008). Fearing that this would trigger a diplomatic disaster, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles told Attorney General Herbert Brownell that the situation in Arkansas was ruining our foreign policy. Two weeks later, facing pressure from many quarters, Eisenhower sent the National Guard to Arkansas. Armstrong praised the move and subsequently agreed to go on a concert tour of South America. The jazzmen’s independence made some officials nervous, but the shrewder diplomats knew that on balance it helped their cause. The idea was to demonstrate the superiority of the United States over the Soviet Union and freedom over communism. The episode was sold as an example of Americans’ – especially black Americans’ – freedom to criticise their government and not be punished. What the Little Rock Arkansas affair further highlights is that the nation-state could not contain some of the forces that were emerging, particularly at time when domestic and foreign policy were becoming increasingly intertwined – far more than the U.S. government would have liked to see.

However, a dimension of these jazz tours that often goes ignored is the increased cooperation that was beginning to take place between commercial-corporate and governmental interests, and especially the role of black celebrities as their official face (Eschen 2006).<sup>17</sup> Louis Armstrong and his All-Stars tour of West Africa was co-sponsored by Pepsi-Cola International, and the six concerts he gave as part of the tour all took place in cities where Pepsi had just opened new bottling plants. “The Man, it’s the most!” advertisements, splashed with a typically smiling and bow-tied Satchmo holding a Pepsi-Cola bottle, were plastered all over Ghana and Nigeria. One of Robin Chandler Lynn’s press releases at the time stated that, “Satchmo gave concerts throughout the area and

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<sup>17</sup> Penny Von Eschen’s *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* is the first thorough exploration into the significance of jazz as an American propaganda tool during the Cold War era. Von Eschen also looks at how this phenomenon was reflected in the domestic civil rights movement. Using Louis Armstrong as its discursive drive, the book recounts the privately sponsored international tours that provoked tensions and debates within the U.S. State Department.

introduced Pepsi and American jazz to the populace”.<sup>18</sup> This seemingly effortless elision hints at some of the trends we are seeing in our contemporary postmodern consumer culture, through which the relationship between commerce, communication, culture and politics is constantly shifting to reassert itself.

In 1966, following the success of the first international jazz tours, a United States Committee for the First World Festival of Negro Arts was established. Under the auspices of the then first lady, Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, and the National Collection of Fine Arts at the Smithsonian Institution, ten “Negro artists” were put together to take part in the festival in Dakar, Senegal. In their programme, Mrs. Virginia Inness-Brown, the Chairman of the committee wrote that:

It was with great pride and a corresponding sense of responsibility that the United States is participating in the Festival, for the American programme makes clear the impetus and vital contribution the Negro has given to civilization both at home and abroad [...] The opportunity is offered to other nations to observe an important cross-section of American culture. The United States of America is deeply grateful to this World Festival for providing the occasion to demonstrate significantly the dramatic contribution of the Negro to our life and times.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the Chairman, Hale Woodruff, also Professor of Art and Art Education at New York University, realised that this was a crucial time to intervene culturally in the decolonising world. “The Festival is being held at a time in history when the cultural consciousness and social aspirations of the Negro everywhere are being raised in the arts, as well as in other areas of human endeavor”.<sup>20</sup> In his Forward to the programme, Woodruff dissected the work of the ten artists and stressed their power in representing the American experience to a foreign and predominately non-white audience:

There are notable instances in which true and impressive achievements of artistic dialect have been realised by Negro artists. Some of them have undoubtedly been characterised by a kind of ‘racial quality’ – at least they show indications of reaction and interpretation involving the experience of being part of a culture in which Negroes are a minority. For the greater part, however, the foundations upon which the Negro American has constructed his artistic language and been those which are rooted in the larger body

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<sup>18</sup> Pepsi-Cola International Press Release (1956) (Louis Armstrong House and Archives, Queens College, CUNY).

<sup>19</sup> First World Festival of Negro Arts Programme (1966), ‘Ten Negro Artists from the United States’ Dakar, Senegal (Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

of art itself, perhaps because they see in this larger body the opportunity for a totally free ‘universality’ of artistic expression.<sup>21</sup>

It is this very tension that the exhibitors intended to exploit. Is there a single thread that serves either as a racial or esthetic bond to link these works in a unified purpose?

Woodruff’s answer was that, “the works are faits accomplis. They speak for themselves. And they augur well for the future”.<sup>22</sup>

### **Speaking to the Nation: The Revolution May Not Be Televised, but the Whole World is Watching**

At the same time as the First World Festival of Negro Arts was taking place in Dakar, the chant of anti-war protestors could be heard in the streets of Chicago. Those who turned up at the 1968 Democratic National Convention to rally against Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic Presidential Nominee, encapsulated far more than just a response to the outpouring of police brutality in front of the Hilton Hotel on that oppressively hot and humid August in Chicago. Those seventeen minutes of footage, from what came to be dubbed the “Battle for Michigan Avenue”, highlight the various tensions over how nation-states attempt to maintain control over who speaks on their behalf. The impact of these events stretched well beyond the shores of the American homeland. The new communications media that characterised the Cold War period transmitted these black and white images of resistance to global publics.

It is thus important to address the extent to which the struggles of African Americans for full recognition overlapped with the struggles between the two superpowers. As the Cold War began to heat up, the Mississippi lynching of fourteen-year old Emmett Till led to a widely publicised trial. It was also a period in which Rosa Parks refused to yield her bus seat, triggering a yearlong boycott that eventually resulted in the desegregation of public buses. This was ultimately a time in which racial discrimination was finally becoming a political issue. During the early 1960s, the movement against racial discrimination took a drastically new direction. In 1960, lunch counter sit-ins, organised by the new and energetic Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee spread across the South. In 1961, on the Freedom Rides, many young people faced violence as they fought to end segregation in interstate bus travel below the Mason-Dixon Line. While in

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



Birmingham Alabama, school children marched against the spray of fire hoses and were jailed as a result.

The triumphant 1963 March on Washington broadened national support and began to capture worldwide attention, and by the mid and late 1960s a synchronisation between movements within the United States and those struggling against colonial oppression began to take shape. This newly forming intercommunalism not only gave an alternative to official representations of American democracy, but also helped create a modern and shared language of struggle to a newly decolonising generation. What is equally important to point out about these developing relationships are the shared commitments they fostered. This Cold War environment fed both a shared moral and political commitment across the Atlantic, as well as visions of human relationships that went beyond the narrow confines of categories such as race and the nation-state. It was during this period that the unrestricted frames of reference and internationalism of artists, exemplified by Jimi Hendrix and the anti-war movement, began to take shape.

“One doesn’t get overawed in my business. You can’t afford to [...] I’ve made a prediction repeatedly. A black American will win this fight”, proudly hailed the U.S. Ambassador to Zaire at George Foreman’s final training session before the facing Muhammad Ali in their “Rumble in the Jungle”. When pressed further by a BBC reporter about Ali’s fraught relationship to his country of birth, he went on to say that:

I represent the United States and I can’t have a favourite amongst two of our citizens [...] I have also heard him say very fine things about the United States. And there are times I guess when we all have things to criticise. (BBC Four 2007)<sup>23</sup>

Ali had already spent three and a half years in boxing exile following his suspension from the sport in 1967 for refusing the draft to fight in Vietnam, as well as having his heavyweight titles stripped. Following his defeat to Joe Frazier in 1971, in one of boxing’s most memorable fights, Ali began the long process of fighting contenders in the hope of a new title shot. Unlike George Foreman, Ali endeared himself to the people of Zaire. Just as Ali had painted Frazier as the outsider in his own land, he did the same to Foreman in Africa. Those chants of “Ali bomaye” that filled the Mai 20 Stadium in Kinshasa resonated far beyond the borders of Zaire.

The complicated vectors of black America and its travels across Zaire did not end with the fighters. Don King, in one of his first ventures as a boxing promoter, managed to

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<sup>23</sup> BBC Storyville (2007) *The Greatest*. See [www.uk.youtube.com/watch?v=6sYO3wkVbI4](http://www.uk.youtube.com/watch?v=6sYO3wkVbI4)

raise a purse of ten million dollars from the president of Zaire, Joseph Mobutu, who saw the event as a great international publicity stunt. Unable to raise the necessary funds for the fight to take place in America, King began looking for another country to sponsor the event. Along with Mobutu, King pulled together a consortium consisting of a Panamanian multinational investment company, a British film company and a series of individual backers in the United States. Although Mobutu's relationship with the United States drastically deteriorated as Cold War tensions began to draw to a close, the dictator had built close relations with the White House from Nixon and Reagan, to George H.W. Bush and Carter. Regarding the change in American attitudes to his regime, Mobutu bitterly remarked, "I am the latest victim of the Cold War, no longer needed by the U.S. The lesson is that my support for American policy counts for nothing" (Time 2001). Lest we forget this was a man President Ronald Regan once praised as "a voice of good sense and goodwill".

Early that year, before his famous victory in Zaire, Muhammad Ali had made a visit to Ain el-Helweh, a Palestinian refugee camp in Sidon, South Lebanon. It is these moments of black internationalism and outernationalist solidarity that are crucial to understanding not only the tensions over America's image abroad, but also the multiple interventions into its representation from both within and without its borders. In July 1964, Malcolm X attended the second meeting of the Organization of African Unity, which had been formed in 1963 to bring about joint action by the independent African governments. At the OAU conference, held in Cairo, Malcolm X appealed to the delegates of the thirty-four African nations to bring the cause of the twenty-two million black people in the United States before the United Nations.

When asked by a reporter what his purpose at the conference was he replied by saying:

Well, my purpose here is to remind the African heads of state that there are twenty-two million of us in America who are also of African descent, and to remind them also that we are the victims of America's colonialism or American imperialism, and that our problem is not an American problem, it's a human problem. It's not a Negro problem; it's a problem of humanity. It's not a problem of civil rights, but a problem of human rights [...] many of them [African leaders] have been misinformed by the American government into thinking that black people in America don't identify with Africa. Therefore, they've restrained themselves from voicing their interests in our problems. So, I pressed upon them that

our problem is their problem, as well as their problems are our problems.<sup>24</sup>

In his introduction to Malcolm X's autobiography Paul Gilroy notes that:

The book catches the spirit of the world-wide movement against colonialism to which black America's battles for freedom and citizenship were increasingly being tied. The moral authority and credibility of western civilisation were judged to be at stake in the handling of 'Negro' demands for political equality and human rights. This conflict irrevocably changed the way in which the USA was seen by the rest of the world. (2001)

As the introduction importantly emphasises, the anti-racist humanism that Malcolm invoked was able to invest precious universality in the parochial image of the Negro.

A fascinating correspondence in the early 1970s between Stokley Carmichael, Bayard Rustin, the Chairman of the Black Americans to Support Israel Committee, and Martin Williams, the then Director of Jazz Programming at the Smithsonian Institute, reveals the complex tensions that have run through this chapter. In a letter to Williams, Rustin wrote:

It is important to me because I have been oppressed, as have been my people, and you only eliminate oppression as democracy advances. Therefore, I am very much in favour of the state of Israel, because democracy is there, and I must support democracy wherever it is [...] If the people of the United States lets Israel go down the drain in the name of some Third World mythology, which is all it is, then we are going to have trouble here ourselves, because you cannot refuse to defend democracy by choice. It is of a pattern. It must be done everywhere by everybody so there is a deep connection between the defence of democracy around the world and here.<sup>25</sup>

Carmichael, however, chose a different set of vectors to highlight his very different form of moral and political commitments. In one of his interventions Carmichael wrote:

Zionism is the major enemy of Africa and the Arab peoples, and it is fairly well entrenched. Zionists that exploit us and take this money from our communities, from Harlem, from South side of Chicago, from Watts, and sending this money to Israel, but also our

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<sup>24</sup> Malcolm X was admitted as an observer to the second meeting of the Organisation of African Unity, held in Cairo in July 1964. He delivered his memorandum on the conditions of African Americans in the United States on 17 July 1964.

<sup>25</sup> Louis Armstrong House and Archives (Queens College, CUNY).

tax dollars are also sent to Israel. So black people here have a double exploitation<sup>26</sup>

### **American Dreamin': Corporate Multiculturalism and the Geopolitics of American Culture in a Post-Cold War Landscape**

By the 1980s, America was no longer interested in simply exporting commodities or capital, but developed similar aspirations to its Cold War rival of exporting entire social systems. During this period America began using multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF, to export social models around the world. In this new war for hearts and minds, President Harold Truman's "Campaign of Truth" had evolved into what could be described as a "Global Campaign of Freedom". It also included the intensification of both the commercialisation of information and various marketing techniques employed to sell America to the world. As the jazz tours highlight, this was in essence nothing new.<sup>27</sup> Even at that time American propaganda efforts aimed to merge with democratic capitalist ideas. However, as Victoria de Grazia describes this new post-Cold War environment:

Publicity, with private sector support, was the handmaiden of a government that presented itself as opposed to heavy-handed involvement abroad and sought to circumvent autocratic leaders to get the humane, rational message of the American people directly to peoples with similar aspirations. (The New York Times 2002)

The universality found in the image of the Negro was also to be invested in another equally parochial relationship – that of American capitalism and American (racial) democracy. Therefore, the image of the black celebrity-entertainer can be used to build an alternative reading of the relationship between the U.S. government, American popular culture and finance in selling America abroad. This branded celebrity illuminates a late-capitalist configuration defined by the increasing convergence between corporate and media interests. The figure of Michael Jordan came to represent more than just one of the most elegant fall away jump shots and arguably the greatest player to grace those hardwood floors. In *Michael Jordan, Inc.*, Andrew uses his image as a vehicle for viewing the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> In 1985, General Electric, one of the largest military arms merchants, acquired NBC, a trade that at the time raised concerns about NBC's ability to provide objective news coverage on any subject in which GE might have an interest. Furthermore, Westinghouse, another arms merchant, previously owned CBS until it was eventually sold to Viacom, who also currently owns MTV. While ABC is owned by Disney and CNN by Times Warner. Nancy Snow highlights that, "both Disney and Warner Brothers were long cooperative partners with the government during World War II, producing domestic propaganda in the guise of entertainment for the masses".

broader social, economic, political and technological concerns that framed post-Cold War popular culture (Andrew 2001). Analysing Michael Jordan's aggressively commodified body and image excavates the cultural politics imbued within the racialised and sexualised nature of Jordan's identity. It also demonstrates the global reach and influence that accompanied the concerted commodification of brand Jordan by transnational corporations.

As basketball slowly erodes football's dominance as the world's favourite game, its impact will be far greater than simply basketball's expansion into foreign markets in an era of global capitalism (The Guardian 2008). It is important to remember here that the earlier globalisation of certain sports was a direct by-product of imperialism (Bairner 2001).<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the spread of balls, bats and rackets came along with the gunboats, opium and mangoes. The talk of expanding global brands in our present-day era of globalisation has a clear resonance with earlier forms of exploitation. The ability of (nationally) branded products to cross unwilling borders thus has clear political implications today.

An independent poll carried out by market research company *TNS Sport* found that nearly 12 percent of the urban Chinese population are now playing basketball, twice the number playing football (The Guardian 2008). In October 2008, the NBA announced plans to design and develop twelve new arenas in partnership with the stadium builder Anschutz Entertainment group. The convergence of corporate, media and entertainment interests can be seen in the fine print of this particular deal. NBA China, along with investment from a Disney-owned sports network and four Chinese banks and trade group, formed the core of the deal.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the Chinese government declared its intention to transform the country's landscape by building a basketball court in every one of China's 800,000 villages. The success of basketball in China is now being hailed as one of the most stunning marketing coups of our time. It is important, however, to put such developments in historical context. The increasing pace of cultural exchange is undoubtedly a central feature of today's globalisation, but it should be remembered that the dominance of basketball in China began over twenty years ago. It could be argued that it began in 1987, when the NBA commissioner, David Stern, managed to strike up a revenue share-deal with Chinese state television to broadcast NBA games and split the revenue from advertising.

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<sup>28</sup> See, also, C.L.R. James' memoir *Beyond a Boundary*. James found in cricket both the order of the English public school code and the harsh facts of British imperialism, in particular the forms of social stratification and racial categorisations that it fostered in the West Indies.

<sup>29</sup> Tim Chen, the CEO of Microsoft in China, was also lured away in order to the head the new \$2.3bn company.

As is the nature of global transmission today, the impact of the NBA's spread will not rest at the out-of-bounds lines of those hardwood courts. "People want the authentic stuff [...] There are 100 million middle-class families out there and they all have one child", says Tim Chen. Sales have risen 40 percent in the two NBA stores over 2008, with 1,000 more stores planned across China. Nike also reached one billion dollars in revenue in the same year, a year ahead of projection, and is also planning 6,000 stores in total. Furthermore, considering the official political tensions that currently exist between the United States and China, such success can be seen in more than just simply marketing terms. The strengthening of a corporate-media logic may be the ideal partner to George W. Bush's call at the Beijing Olympics that the people of China deserve the fundamental liberty that is the natural right of all human beings (The Telegraph 2008). The shift from Michael Jordan to Yao Ming as the face of the NBA's global dominance highlights the ironies of corporate multiculturalism – both the strengths of American capitalism and its ability to continually evolve its national brand, but also its eventual decline as the sole global hegemonic force.

This is particularly pertinent in an age where the likes of Apple and Google have attempted to repackage their branding of corporate multiculturalism. At a time when Microsoft has fallen victim to its old identity, an advertising campaign attempted to reposition it in the continuing conquest, and re-conquest, of cool (Frank 1998).<sup>30</sup> In the *I'm A PC* campaign, a stereotypically square-headed computer enthusiast says, "[H]ello. I'm a PC and I've been made into a stereotype". In the following frames a black woman appears saying, "I'm a PC and I wear a suit", another black man in a NASA hanger says, "I'm a PC and I wear an airtight suit", while a scruffy long-haired Microsoft employee turns up to say, "I'm a PC and I don't wear tweed". Such images continue at a rapid pace ending with an ironically stereotypical Indian gentleman in a textile shop saying, "I'm a PC and I wear headbands". This not only attempts to convey a new hipness to today's young multicultural entrepreneurial classes, but also tries to undermine traditional capitalist notions of work

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* addresses the ways in which Madison Avenue co-opted the language and symbols of youthful 1960s rebellion. As Frank puts it, "it is the story of the bohemian cultural style's trajectory from adversarial to hegemonic; the story of hip's mutation from native language of the alienated to that of advertising". The book goes on to show how such appropriation has deeply transformed both our popular culture and today's forms of "hip consumerism" that took shape in the early 1990s. Frank goes on to describe how counterculture and business culture influenced one another. In fact, he writes, the counterculture's critique of mass society mimicked earlier developments in business itself, when a new generation of executives attacked the stultified and hierarchical nature of corporate life. Counterculture and business culture evolved together over time, where they have now become essentially the same thing.

and leisure. The advertisement continues with a graffiti artist tagging and saying, “I’m a PC, and this is my office”, while hip-hop producer Pharrell of N.E.R.D ends one of the sequences saying, “I’m a PC, just like B.G”, as it cuts to Bill Gates.

However, the increased cooperation between cultural and corporate interests is also being drawn upon for diplomatic ends. For example, both governments and non-governmental organisations are attempting to capitalise on the power of celebrity. Since the late nineties the United Nations has appointed “Messengers of Peace” and “Goodwill Ambassadors” to most of their organisations.<sup>31</sup> To this end, the United Nations has a tradition of enlisting the volunteer services and support of prominent individuals to highlight international issues of importance and raise awareness of United Nations activities. As the Director of Americans for the Arts says:

There’s a lot of recent interest in culture from a governmental and non-governmental standpoint. But there’s an interesting gap between believing that is a good thing and investing in it in a philanthropic way, and believing in it and investing in it in a strategic way to promote cultural understanding and general broad initiatives. It almost seems like in some ways many public and private organisations do it, but they don’t incorporate its benefits into their larger structures.<sup>32</sup>

### **MTV Arabia, “Shake Your Money Maker” and the “War on Terror”**

Richard Kurin, the Director of the Smithsonian Centre for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, asks, “what kind of cultural diplomacy should be pursued? And what role should cultural organisations like the Center play?” Kurin makes clear his concerns of recent surveys and reports that indicate people around the world have increasingly negative opinions about the United States. However, he also stresses that there is a considerably ambivalent opinion of America held amongst the young denizens of the world. He argues that:

Things have changed quite a bit from the Cold War; the older approach to cultural diplomacy is probably out of date [...] We now live in a multipolar world, operating with what may be called a ‘diversity model’. Nowadays, people from different cultures are prouder of their own ways, values, arts and heritage and are less convinced that they must adopt American mores or see them as superior to their own. (Kurin 2007)

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<sup>31</sup> The United Nations Messengers of Peace Terms of Reference (2007) states that, “the Department of Public Information’s mission is to help fulfill the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the organisation to achieve the greatest public impact”.

<sup>32</sup> Author’s interview with Americans for the Arts, New York, 10 December 2007.

What is particularly revealing in the interview is the Director's tone, which suggests that non-governmental cultural diplomacy today is no longer a cynical act. It is now characterised as a benevolent mutual process that pertains to the logic of NGOs, humanitarian assistance and the work of global civil society. Furthermore, his solutions, to what is portrayed as a postcolonial conundrum, are revealing. In what Kurin calls the "Aretha Franklin view of cultural diplomacy", because it is all about "respect", the export of music, books, movies, artists, teachers and volunteers is still central. However, Kurin argues that, "we have to do a better job of projecting to the world a United States that is much more diverse, nuanced and connected to the rest of the world than the one we have heretofore presented." He thus ends by saying that any successful approach to cultural diplomacy in today's world must offer a "real two-way exchange" and must go beyond the most elite of arts and culture to the grass roots in the United States and other nations. For Kurin, artists of all types must represent all society and reach all audiences. This seems to open up the possibility for black America – from America's internal denizens locked up in its prison industry complex to those industry CEOs of "Black Wall Street" – to reinvigorate images of American democracy abroad, just as those musicians who fell victim to Jim Crow did before them.

The desire to reinvigorate this outreach work was evident in the then U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's appearance on MTV in 2002, in which he defended the American campaign against terrorism before a worldwide audience of young people.<sup>33</sup> Karen Brooks Hopkins, President of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, notes the value of this cultural component to the logic of securitocracy that has framed the conduct of international politics since 9/11. She states that, "since September 11, people are more conscious of the fact that we live in one world and that culture can help bridge our differences". In September 2007, Mike Macey, the cultural attaché of the U.S. Embassy in London screened the documentary, *The Hip Hop Project*, followed by a panel discussion with Dr. Eithne Quinn, author of *Nuthin' but a 'G' Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap*, Pardeep Sall, Editor of Trace magazine, and British hip hop producer, Fusion. Armed with the Embassy's popcorn in the cinema at the basement of the gated fortress in Grosvenor Square London, a predominately multiethnic motley crew of state school students filled the seats. Robert Holmes, the U.S. Ambassador, introduced the event and spoke of hip-hop culture's birth in the United States, particularly amongst marginalised

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<sup>33</sup> For more, see [www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1822126.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1822126.stm)



youth in New York. He went on to emphasize its nature as “message orientated” and “very much at the heart of the American Dream”.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, in a Foreign Policy article entitled “It’s a Hip-Hop World”, Jeff Chang (2007) effectively highlights how hip-hop’s message, boosted by the commercialisation of the music industry, has proven its appeal to youth all around the world. However, this “evolving and truly global art of communication”, historically the voice of marginalised communities across the globe, is now becoming the lexicon, style and aesthetic of choice of governments.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, the legacy of the jazz tours, in which African American culture was valued and exploited for its ability to convey a sense of shared suffering, as well as the conviction that equality could be gained under the American political system, is being resuscitated today. Extending this into our colonial present, however, raises difficult questions about the political and social capital of contemporary African American culture. Highlighting jazz music’s potential as a Cold War weapon thus exposes the potential role for hip-hop culture as a weapon in the “war on terror”. A similar process whereby a hitherto disreputable music suddenly becomes America’s music; an art form which serves the American way of life by acting as a trope of (American) freedom.<sup>36</sup> Dizzy Gillespie once said that the language of diplomacy ought to be translated into the score for a bop trumpet. This could easily be assigned to music’s ocean of circumscribed possibilities, and in particular in the ability of hip-hop, as a form of cultural politics, to subvert the hyphen that links the nation to the state.

“You have to go where the target audience is”, says Col. Thomas Nickerson, Director of Strategic Outreach for the U.S. Army Accessions Command:

Our research tells us that hip-hop and urban culture is a powerful influence in the lives of young Americans. We try to develop a bond with that audience. I want them to say, ‘hey, the Army was here – the Army is cool!’ (Salon 2003)

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<sup>34</sup> ‘The Hip Hop Project’ U.S. Embassy Screening, London, 15 September 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Jeff Chang was one of the first commentators to acknowledge hip-hop’s potential as a diplomatic tool. For Chang, “hip hop is a lingua franca that binds young people all around the world, while giving them the chance to alter it with their own national flavor [...] But one thing about hip hop has remained consistent across cultures: a vital progressive agenda that challenges the status quo”. However, it is both American rap music’s history of resistance to authority and its current hyper-capitalist commercialisation that is particularly appealing to governments in their attempts to engage marginalised youth populations at home and abroad.

<sup>36</sup> One of the leading public/private initiatives is Hip Hop Diplomacy. Its co-creators, Joshua Asen and Jennifer Needleman, aim to use hip-hop music as a cultural diplomacy tool for government, corporate and non-profit partners to reach young audiences in target regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa. Their pilot programme, ‘I Love Hip-Hop in Morocco’, launched the first hip-hop festival in Morocco in 2005. It consisted of a three-city concert series featuring Moroccan rap and breadance groups. For more, see [www.hiphopdiplomacy.org/](http://www.hiphopdiplomacy.org/)

This is certainly not just an American phenomenon with Bhavneet Singh, head of emerging markets for MTV Networks International saying, “this is a music genre that is bubbling underneath the surface here [Middle East], and we want to claim it as our own” (Business Week 2007). Furthermore, Marvette Perez, curator at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History in Washington, notes that, “hip-hop tells the story of music but also of urban America and its style”. She goes on to state that, “there is no way to ignore that hip-hop is a way of walking and talking, or that it’s influence both musically and culturally is global. The technique resonates throughout the United States and the world”.<sup>37</sup> However, Perez makes the common error of naturally eliding the American with the global, and ignoring the crucial distinctions that exist between rap music as the soundtrack to American cultural imperialism and hip-hop culture as a transnational attempt at creating alternative social spaces.

Today, the U.S. Department of State’s sponsored tours continue under the Rhythm Road (Music Abroad Programme) spearheaded by the Lincoln Centre. The mission statement of these cultural initiatives stresses the central tenet of sharing American’s unique contribution to the world of music.<sup>38</sup> Wynton Marsalis, the celebrated African American trumpeter and composer, as well as Musical Director of Jazz at the Lincoln Centre, puts it like this:

As a cultural ambassador a philosophy that we all started to adapt and tell ourselves, and even announce during our concerts is we're not politicians we're musicians. We're here to share our culture. We're here to share our art form. We're here to share what we find beautiful in life. (Jazz at Lincoln Centre radio programme 2007)

Following in the tradition of the Voice of America, the U.S. government has sponsored Arabic radio and television stations across the Middle East. These channels aim to use American popular music, particularly hip-hop, as another front for their influence in the region. Al-Hurra was set up in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, while Radio Sawa has been broadcasting across the Middle East since 2002. Most interestingly, particularly in terms of both the continued as well as shifting political capital of African American culture in the region, the U.S. Department of State has created the position of a roving Hip-Hop

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in ‘Hip-Hop Culture Crosses Social Barriers’ (Washington File, U.S. Department of State, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2006).

<sup>38</sup> For more on such programmes, see [www.jalc.org/TheRoad/](http://www.jalc.org/TheRoad/) Such tours continue to this day, including the groundbreaking Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis (JLCO) residency in Havana in October 2010, which received both the permission and support of the Obama administration.

Ambassador, currently held by Toni Blackman.<sup>39</sup> In a USINFO Webchat she argues that hip-hop could definitely be used as an effective tool for diplomacy. When asked as to why American hip-hop culture was immune to being characterised as another example of the attempted Americanisation of other environments, she goes on to say that:

Hip-hop and rap tend to be immune because of its roots. Its roots are pure; it was created by youth who created this cultural phenomenon while in the midst of merely trying to express themselves. Arts programmes and public school funding were being cut, many of the youth came from working class families and struggle and partly because of its birth hip-hop still maintains a sort of 'relatedness' to all. I think it's also because hip-hop as a culture of music and art speaks to the soul.<sup>40</sup>

“It’s only entertainment!” yells Jay-Z defiantly on his track *Ignorant Shit*. The cut, taken from *American Gangster*, attempts to question the disproportionate level of criticism hip-hop receives for society’s ills:

I missed the part where it stopped being about Imus / What do my lyrics got to do with this shit? Scarface the movie did more than Scarface the rapper to me / Still that ain't to blame for all the shit that's happened to me. (Jay-Z 2007)<sup>41</sup>

Every track on Jay-Z’s first concept album is based on scenes from the film. The album can be characterised as an ode to Ridley Scott’s film about Frank Lucas, the real-life drug-lord from Harlem who built his empire smuggling heroin into the United States on American service planes during the Vietnam War. Despite the film being severely criticised by the likes of Chuck D, as well as grassroots community activists in Harlem, Jay-Z saw it as speaking to his experiences growing up in Brooklyn’s Marcy housing projects:

Those were the things that I would take. I would press pause on them, and then I would explain it. Explain the emotions behind it [...] That’s why I was really excited about the movie. Because it took me back to a place that I hadn’t been for a minute. It just sparked all these ideas, and all these thoughts, and all these emotions that I hadn’t been dealing with while I was over there living my life having a great time.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Toni Blackman is a Brooklyn born MC. She is a self-proclaimed “musical ambassador, performer, writer, artist development diva and consultant”. She was the first person to hold the U.S. Department of State position of hip-hop ambassador, a role she continues to perform until now. For more, see [www.toniblackman.com](http://www.toniblackman.com)

<sup>40</sup> See [www.usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/Aug/01-973885.html](http://www.usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/Aug/01-973885.html)

<sup>41</sup> Jay-Z (2007) *American Gangster*, Roc-A-Fella.

<sup>42</sup> See [www.blacktree.tv](http://www.blacktree.tv)

This is, however, the same Jay-Z who became implicated in a five billion dollar lawsuit for slavery reparations. In 2008, Brooklyn activist Clive Campbell filed a claim of lien in property records against Jay-Z, real estate developer Bruce Ratner and Barclays bank. Jay-Z is connected to both Ratner and Barclays through mutual interests in the development of a four billion dollar Atlantic Yards project in Brooklyn in which plans are in place to build over 6,000 apartments and a new arena for Jay-Z's NBA franchise the New Jersey Nets at the site. Although Barclay's has denied previous accusations of their role in the African slave trade, in his claim Campbell states that Mr. Ratner and Jay-Z worked "in concert" with Barclays, and:

Profited from the African Slave Trade and continue to profit from these gains, through a conspiracy dating back hundreds of years and continue to date to oppress black people, enslave them, [and] unlawfully deport them to all corners of the Earth. (Baller Status 2008)

Moreover, this is also the same Jay-Z who was made U.N. Ambassador to a number of water development projects in Africa in 2008, and who's R&B diva wife, Beyonce Knowles, performed at Barack Obama's presidential inauguration in 2009.<sup>43</sup>

Most importantly, however, this is the artist who, as Chris "Kazi" Rolle, whose hip-hop outreach programme was the basis of the *Hip Hop Project* documentary shown at the U.S. Embassy, says is "today's black leader".<sup>44</sup> The reason Jay-Z and the increasingly evident tensions in African American cultural production closes this chapter, is to underline the historical routes and contemporary trajectories of American cultural diplomacy. It is the global transmission and representations of black America that has proven to be a central tension. This is not only in relation to America's understanding of itself as a nation, but also in the relationship of those in the developing world, as well as denizens of the over-developed world, to the most powerful country in the world. A nation that, despite the scars it has left, still holds so much hope for them.

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<sup>43</sup> Beyonce chose to cover an Etta James classic, while her husband organised one of a number of official after-parties to celebrate the occasion. Etta James response to the ceremony, and in particular Beyonce's choice to cover her song, highlights the growing tensions between the generations. During a show at Seattle's Paramount Theatre, James told the crowd, "I tell you that woman he had singing for him, singing my song, she gonna get her ass whipped. The great Beyonce. Now like I said, she ain't mine. I can't stand Beyonce! She had no business up there singing. Singing on a big ole, big ole president day and going be singing my song that I've been singing forever".

<sup>44</sup> Author's interview with Chris "Kazi" Rolle, New York, 5 November 2007.

On one of the interludes on his *The Black Album*, Jay-Z proudly proclaims, “fellow Americans, it is with the utmost pride and sincerity that I present this recording as a testament and recollection of history in the making during our generation” (Jay-Z 2003).<sup>45</sup> Leaving analysis of African American popular culture within the hermeneutically sealed vessels of the urban black ghetto complex and the suburban white middle class home not only serves to remove its shifts and influences from the vectors of time and space, but also ignores its central place in understanding the tension at the heart of American democracy both at home and abroad. The need to look more closely at African American popular cultural production in the context of both edutainment and infotainment is important to understanding the cultural workings of today’s infowar.

Until now, the Obamas, Condoleezza Rices, Oprahs and Jay-Zs of this world are at best depicted as spooks who are sitting by the mat, or more commonly represented as hustling white America at its own game. However, they are rarely seen as constitutive of that very game America plays with both a domestic and international audience. Moreover, in light of the post-9/11 racial formations, which have shifted the markers of America’s internal and external Others, there is a need for a decisive break from such thinking. Samuel Huntington’s most recent work, *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, argues that nations come and go, and a strong sense of national consciousness is crucial to America's success or failure. For Huntington, along with a shared sense of community and common mores, the most important component of this identity is that of a single, shared religion. Therefore, threats to this culture come from overly fertile immigrants as the single most immediate and serious challenge to America’s traditional identity (Huntington 2005). So, as Gilroy (2006) points out, “the conflict between legals and illegals, between citizens and denizens, is endowed with strong cultural flavours deployed to obscure the lingering aftertaste of brutal racial hierarchy”. Thus, a paradigm shift that neither ignores nor downplays the contours of American racism around its black subjects – from the Plantation and Jim Crow to today’s prison industry complexes – but rather attempts to see how these contours are changing in the context of the “war on terror” has become increasingly necessary.

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<sup>45</sup> Jay-Z (2003) *The Black Album*, Roc-A-Fella.

## Chapter 4

### Trading in Blackness: Hip-Hop America and Its Post-Cold War Travels

I thought the ghetto was the worst that could happen to me / I'm glad I listen when my father was rapping to me / 'Cause back in the days, they lived in caves / Exiled from the original man, a straight way / Now that's what I call hard times / I rather be here to exercise the mind / Then I take a thought around the world twice / From knowledge to born back to knowledge precise / Across the desert, that's as hot as the Arabian / But they couldn't cave me in 'cause I'm the Asian / Reaching fro the city, a Mecca, visit Medina / Visions of Nefertiti then I seen her / Mind keeps traveling, I'll be back after I / Stop and think about the brothers and sisters in Africa / Return the thought through the eye of the needle / For miles I thought and I just fought the people / Under the dark skies on a dark side / Not only there but right here's an apartheid / So now is the time for us to react / Take a trip through the mind and when you get back / Understand your third eye seen all of that / It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at / Even the (ghetto)

– Eric B. & Rakim – *In The Ghetto* (1990)

Who the fuck knocked our buildings down? / Who the man behind the World Trade massacres, step up now / Where the four planes at huh, is you insane bitch? / Fly that shit over my hood and get blown to bits! / No disrespect, that's where I rest my head / I understand you gotta rest yours true, nigga my people's dead / America, together we stand, divided we fall / Mr. Bush sit down, I'm in charge of the war!

– Wu-Tang Clan – *Rules* (2001)

Sit and come relax, riddle of the mac, it's the patch / Imma soldier in the middle of Iraq / Well say about noonish, comin' out the whip / And lookin' at me curious, a young Iraqi kid (awww) / Carrying laundry, what's wrong G? Hungry? / No, gimme oil get fuck out my country / And in Arabian barkin' other stuff / Till his mums come grab him and they walk off in a rush / I'm like, surely hope that we can fix our differences soon (bye!) / Buying apples I'm breakin' on / Brooklyn take everything why not just take the damn food like / I don't understand it, on another planet? / 51 of this stuff how I'm gonna manage? / And increasing the sentiment gentlemen / gettin' down on their Middle Eastern instruments / Realised trappin' is crap / Walk over kicked one of my fabulous raps (la dee da dee) / Arab jaws drop / They well wished, they glad wrapped / Now the kid considered like an Elvis of Baghdad

– Mos Def (Feat. Slick Rick) – *Auditorium* (2009)

The central concern of this chapter is how relationships between race, culture and nationhood are being reconstituted under the conditions of contemporary globalisation. Not

only have the globally reconfigured relations with the cultural marketplace led to the superseding of commodified authenticity with a racialised subcultural cachet, but the “war on terror” has also brought with it a novel articulation of the relationship between these racial and cultural formations. The racial hierarchies and ordering of our world, which were established during the nineteenth century, have thus evolved. Such processes now attempt to integrate national (security) interests with cultural and business objectives, thereby investing considerable cultural capital in black America. The chapter, therefore, asserts that both the production and global consumption of African American popular culture need to be re-contextualised within the changing shape of America’s political and cultural landscape.

Placing black America at the centre of the changing relationships that emerged in the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent global “war on terror” opens up a number of important avenues of investigation. It allows for a timely re-evaluation of the global impact of black internationalism, the socio-cultural turn of the post-civil rights movement and the resulting commodification of black resistance. By complicating some of the popularly held views of African American popular culture, it aims to re-evaluate the transnational nature of the black Atlantic and thereby challenge some of the ways in which these styles and ideas are now traveling across the globe.<sup>1</sup> The second half of the chapter develops some of these complex arguments by focusing on the contemporary music of the black Atlantic, in particular the socio-political impact of hip-hop culture. This section not only addresses the role of hip-hop culture in the globalisation of the themes of American social doxa, but also explores how some of the cultural and technological appendages of contemporary globalisation have opened up a number of radical alternatives. It concludes by exploring an emphatically non-national archive of the development of the music of the black diaspora, an account which has remained pending to black politics since the Cold War. In the context of the “war on terror” and the discourse of the clash of civilisations that promoted it, the fluidity of the black Atlantic and its resistance to the disciplinary power of nation-

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<sup>1</sup> The modern political and cultural formation of the black Atlantic can be defined by the desire to transcend both the structures of the nation-state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. This has always sat uneasily alongside the strategic choices forced on black movements embedded in national and political cultures and nation states in the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe. Since the publication of Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: modernity and double consciousness*, only a handful of studies have attempted to expand upon the sonic fictions and future histories of the musics of the black Atlantic. Although addressing very different concerns, both Richard Iton’s *In Search of the Black Fantastic* and Steve Goodman’s *Sonic Warfare Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* stand out in their understanding of the black Atlantic as a culture that should trouble aesthetic and political boundaries, as well as exceed the boundaries of the nation-state. This chapter, therefore, intends to stay faithful to this experience to address both the current state of such soundscapes and some of their potentially transgressive future trajectories.

states takes on particular urgency. The alternative conceptions of culture that it promotes help break the insidious ties of territorial sovereignty in ways that are consistent with the rebellious history of the African diaspora in the Western hemisphere.<sup>2</sup>

By reconsidering the significance of the modern nation-state as a relevant socio-political unit for understanding the black Atlantic today, it also intends to question the extent to which political and economic structures are still simply co-extensive with national borders. A new generation of transnational cultural workers is attempting to break the dominant dualistic and state-centric relationships that have thus far remained dominant. In doing so, they are also creating a convivial multiculturalism that updates the political, social and moral fabric of the black Atlantic for our postcolonial condition. This cultural work has helped create a discussion of black political culture beyond the simple binary opposition between national and diasporic perspectives that has thus far dominated thinking. However, recognising such conviviality does not necessarily signify the absence of racism, but rather appreciates that it is now articulated together with the ambivalent mainstreaming of black culture and that the means of defeating racism's contemporary manifestations have thus also evolved.

### **Black America, Double Consciousness and the “War on Terror”**

Old civilisationist and imperialist discourses have not only returned under the banner of the “war on terror”, but they have also had a considerable impact on the political and cultural formations of the black Atlantic. This complex set of conditions has increasingly called on the commitment of racial minorities in the United States to aid their country's imperial projects. Such comforting imaginings of monoculture invoke tendentious assumptions that solidarity and diversity cannot co-exist. Thus the tradition of dissent on which the black Atlantic has rested on now asks something different of African Americans. As Paul Gilroy asserts:

They may even be asked to comprehend ‘race’, culture and their distinctive political logics differently as a result of the demands of a planetary perspective. Unipolarity and the overarching military power of the United States have placed them disproportionately in the firing line. (Gilroy 2005, p. 442)

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<sup>2</sup> One of the most innovative elements of Iton's *In Search of the Black Fantastic* is its approach to black popular culture. Rather than relying on the familiar framework of configuring the diaspora as a dialectic between desiring and disowning Africa, Iton configures the black diaspora as a complex set of strategies of resistance. Iton shows how the transnational character of black culture opens up a radical flexible space for a fluid interplay of postcolonial and ultimately postnational political life.



It is important to recognise how black Atlantic political culture changed as it moved out of the early periods that had been dominated by the need to escape slavery and the numerous attempts to achieve formal citizenship in post-emancipation societies. Even before the changes in the racial and cultural American landscape brought about by the “war on terror”, the challenge for African Americans has been to build on the continuities between their present day predicament and the horrors of their past, and thus connect their suffering with the racial subordination inflicted on other people across the globe. This raises an important geopolitical distinction between the historic link of the development of African American culture and anti-colonial politics and today’s dominant allure of ethnic sameness, which has only served as a stubborn obstacle to living with difference. For conflict in the politics of tomorrow will not be focused on the colour line, but rather the borders which increasingly separate the overdeveloped regions of the world from the poverty in the world’s archipelagos of exception (Gilroy 2005).

The fact that some of the most celebrated African American figures of our day have also been some of the most prominent prosecutors of the “war on terror” points to this political shift. The iconic figures of Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice and Barack Obama do not seem to be burdened by any inner doubleness. Each of them has played a particular role in the evolving character of an American society in which corporate sponsored multiculturalism can safely coexist with mass incarceration and growing inequality. In these and other cases, it cannot be said that the modern world has been redeemed or positively transformed by the truth that emerges from black America’s historic suffering. The struggle for civil and political rights brought with it complex and at times contradictory responses to the lingering stain of racial slavery, but it is clearly distinct from contemporary African American politics. That movement conceived of and projected ideas of human freedom that were neither compatible with racial hierarchy nor containable within national borders. It was a universal movement that countered the freedom to consume that the capitalist market had afforded slave decedents by way of distraction from and compensation for a wider inequality. This was a crucial period in which decolonisation and the era of Black Power was synchronised. The idea of liberation depended on building transnational relationships across imperial domination and exploitation. For a time these ideas allowed for both African Americans to imagine their experience as a variety of internal colonialism and for a significant international solidarity movement to be created.

What W.E.B. Du Bois foresaw was to a large extent proven to be accurate; African American consciousness became a world historic force inspiring large parts of the world with new conceptions of justice and freedom. These ideas continue to be packaged and exported on a planetary scale, altering the political, cultural and moral landscape of the globe. However, African Americans now face a wholly different set of choices around where they belong and what they intend to be in our changing world. The erosion of these forms of outernational solidarities has created a radical moment where blackness can be seen less as a marker of suffering, resistance or solidarity in face of both symbolic and real violence, than simply one more American consumer lifestyle choice. Many have come to see the “war on terror” just as Du Bois viewed the First World War; as a welcome means of acquiring the full benefits of formal citizenship that had previously been denied to them. With this shift, African Americans have been seen to be moving away from an idea of black politics that was characterised by an East-West opposition into a new geometry of power that is defined instead by an axis of geopolitical conflict that runs from North to South (Gilroy 2010). The point of highlighting these shifts is to stress that it would be wrong to safely assume that black America is an inherently dissident force and that the idea of elevating black figures to positions of power – from the White House and Wall Street to the infotainment telesector of Times Square and Hollywood – would necessary translate into progressive change.

### **Post-Emancipation and the Ownership of a Legacy**

Despite the global success of HBO Def Comedy Jam, black stand-up comedy has historically been a decidedly in-group context that afforded opportunities for honest deliberations around race, notions of authenticity and the state of nation (Watkins 1995).<sup>3</sup> It thus presents an honest stage on which to gauge popularly held responses to September 11 and the “war on terror”. Lanita Jacobs-Huey’s (2006) ethnographic studies of African American stand-up comics in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks help complicate these issues of unity and patriotism in America. New York native Frantz Cassius jokes that:

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<sup>3</sup> Despite receiving widespread criticism for its negative stereotyping of black America, Def Comedy Jam proved to be a huge commercial success and launched the career of a number of African American stand-up comedians in the 1990s. Following its success, Russell Simmons also produced a similarly formatted Def Poetry Jam. Mark Smith, the founder of the Poetry Slam movement, decries the recent intense commercialisation of the poetry slam, and refers to Def Poetry as, “an exploitive entertainment programme diminished the value and aesthetic of performance poetry”.

There's one good thing that came from the terrorist attacks. For a good while the police left black people alone. [Recently] the police stopped me. I had some weed in my hand and some cocaine in the trunk. They asked me if I'd seen anything out of the ordinary. I told them (puffs an imaginary blunt), 'I just saw two Arabs walking down the street, and they looked suspicious. You may want to go check 'em out!' (Jacobs-Huey 2006, p. 60)

What Jacobs-Huey's work shows is that the events of 9/11 did not relieve black people from continued racial profiling so much as recast them as potential allies in the nation's fight against international terrorism. As comedian Ian Edwards jokes saying:

Black people, we have been delivered. Finally. We got a new nigger. The Middle Easterner is the new nigger," an African American audience member responded by saying, "finally" (Jacobs-Huey 2006, p. 60).

The ambivalent patriotism that has developed within some sections of the African American community can be seen in the popular framing of the September 11 attacks as a great equaliser; a new day where other communities are now equally vulnerable to indiscriminate searches and police harassment. Comic Courtney Gee jokes that:

Everyone, including the most privileged and questionably American is subject to heightened scrutiny under new airport security laws: [Now] white men get to be suspects too. They get to see what it feels like. (Jacob-Huey 2006, p. 61)

This sardonic celebration of seemingly newfound privileges at the expense of the curtailment of Muslim and Arab American freedoms repudiates simplistic invocations of double consciousness. As comedian Evan Lionel remarks:

We all love this country, but a lot of folks think that blacks don't support the war on terrorism. That's bullshit. It's just hard for me to get behind the war on terrorism over there when we haven't done it here. Can we stop off in Alabama and hunt the terrorists there before [we go to] Afghanistan?! (Jacobs-Huey 2006, p.63)

What is interesting about this position is that it consciously elides concerns with the continued racial violence towards African American communities with the logic of American national security. This occurs at the expense of seeing America as nothing more than another postcolonial state where race-lore, ethnic absolutism and segregation govern the operations of an increasingly fracturing economy and a broken polity. Such a representation would allow for an understanding of the racial hierarchies that are central to

the working of the “war on terror”, and thus link the state-sanctioned racial violence within America’s borders to its imperial adventures across the Muslim world and beyond.

The debates that surrounded the 2006 immigration reform protests further exemplify some of these disconcerting trends. The protests began in response to proposed legislation known as H.R.4427, which intended to raise penalties for illegal immigration and classify illegal immigrants and anyone who helped them enter or remain in the United States as felons. Campaigners not only sought a rejection of the bill, but also a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants. Many black leaders chose to march alongside those protesters and undocumented workers invoking the importance of solidarity. For them, blacks and Latinos are exploited by the same economic forces.

However, another discourse also emerged from the debates over these reforms in immigration legislation. A coalition of economists, educators and community leaders called Choose Black America (CBA) lobbied Congress to reject any legislation they believed would only flood the American labour market with even more low-wage immigrants.<sup>4</sup> For Fran Moms, chair of Choose Black America and President of the Tacoma branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) during the 1960s, “this issue is not new; this preference for immigrant workers over native African American workers is historical” (The Seattle Times 2006). Some African Americans who joined the demonstrations against illegal immigration also joined with the Minuteman Project, a racist vigilante border-watch group that reports illegal crossings from Mexico into the United States. For Moms and others, the civil rights movement belonged to black people and those fighting H.R.4427 were simply hijacking the movement and coat-tailing on the sacrifices and gains of black people that they themselves had not directly sacrificed anything for.<sup>5</sup> These trends go to show that double consciousness should be excluded from the ways in which we approach the pressing issues that are redefining contemporary racial politics – (national) security, citizenship, migration, war and human rights.

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<sup>4</sup> CBA is a project of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). It believes that, “mass illegal immigration has been the single greatest impediment to black advancement in this country over the past 25 years”. Their mission statement is, “defending our country, our rights, our families, our jobs. Blacks, in particular, have lost economic opportunities, seen their kids schools flooded with non-English speaking students, and felt the socio-economic damage of illegal immigration more acutely than any other group”. The group’s website is no longer operational and was last indexed by the Internet Archive in August 2007.

<sup>5</sup> The silence from mainstream civil rights groups and the Congressional Black Caucus’ modest support for immigrant rights is a radical departure from the past. During the 1980s, when immigration was not the burning issue it is today, the Caucus staunchly opposed tougher immigration proposals, voted against employer sanctions for hiring illegal immigrants and opposed an English language requirement to attain legalisation.

### **Hip-Hop in the Academy: “Hip-hop is Like Black Semen. Anything It Connects With Becomes Black”<sup>6</sup>**

Hip-hop culture has predominately been framed as an African American cultural expression in modern urban settings. Therefore, much of the literature has thus concentrated on questions of cultural ownership and appropriation (Rose 1994; Perkins 1995; Dyson 1997; George 1999; Boyd 2002; Perry 2004; Watkins 2005). Tricia Rose, for example, argues that, “the drawing power of rap is precisely its musical and narrative commitment to black youth and cultural resistance” (Rose 1994, p. 19). This obsession over ownership, which has to be understood in terms of the cynical and exploitative appropriation of earlier forms of African American culture, has led much of the literature to present a false dichotomy between rap’s black cultural address and its focus on marginal identities. With its crossover appeal for people from different ethnic groups and social positions, the question of authenticity has never been far from discussions on hip-hop.<sup>7</sup> However, the movement towards incorporation or recuperation by dominant culture, and the tensions between commercial exploitation and creativity, are further burdened by the question of race – the politics of “keepin’ it real”. Hip-hop’s routes undoubtedly owe much to African American cultural traditions, but as Prince Be from P.M. Dawn states, “my music is based in hip-hop, but I can take a Led Zeppelin drum loop, put a Lou Donaldson horn on it, add a Joni Mitchell guitar, then get a Crosby Stills and Nash vocal riff” (Rose 1994). However, for such commentators, this radical unsettling of authenticity is nothing more than the distortion of an assumedly inherent Afro-diasporic purity.

Critical dialogue on the current state of hip-hop culture has thus been hindered by the nostalgic hold of African American freedom struggles of the past. Hip-hop’s stories are automatically placed in a continuum with the shifting terms of black marginality in American culture. The failures to place hip-hop squarely at the heart of contemporary

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<sup>6</sup> Kanye West speaking at the screening of the video for *Runway* in London on 7 October 2011.

<sup>7</sup> In an attempt to interrogate the political economy of contemporary black music, Norman Kelley contends that black music operates within a “structure of stealing” that dates back to the time when the ancestors of today’s African Americans began arriving as slaves. For Kelley, “Blacks served as commodities – objects purchased, controlled, and sold by others – while their labour was valued as an instrument in the production of cotton and other goods and services. Their heritage and transforming culture, however, were either ignored or exploited with impunity – or ridiculed, as in the case of black-faced minstrel music performed by whites in the middle of the nineteenth century. Needless to say, the dominant race would imbue greater value in the music of its own European heritage, while deriving ample enjoyment from the zany antics of the ‘others’: Zip Coon, Sambo, and Beulah”.

culture have naturally led such discussions into a cul-de-sac. This blind spot has allowed for both rap music to be seen as the simple inheritor of post-civil rights black America and talk of a new loosely defined “hip-hop generation” (Kitwana 2002).<sup>8</sup> Most of these problems with the dominant literature on hip-hop come down to their simple misrepresentation of the origins of the art form and wider culture. As David Toop argues, “before myth there was reality, and before reality there was myth. Hip-hop’s origins are wrapped in mystery”. Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa helped create a new music that, within the reference frame of the music industry, copyright law and received morality, did not belong to them. Fab Five Freddy, one of hip-hop’s pioneers, stresses, “hip-hop was all about developing a new style nobody can deal with” (Shapiro, ed. 2000).<sup>9</sup>

Considering the hollows of deindustrialisation from which hip-hop emerged, the culture was very much about imaging alternative identity formations and social status in communities where older local support networks had been all but demolished. Out of this urban wreckage artists from these diasporic communities manipulated and re-imagined the tools of obsolete industrial technology so as to negotiate the crossroads of lack and desire in their new and increasingly precarious environment. As the legendary Grandmaster Flash says:

You can buy turntables, needles and mixers that are equipped to do whatever. But at that particular time, I had to build it. I had to take microphone mixers and turn them into turntable mixers. I was taking speakers out of abandoned cars and using people’s thrown-away stereos. (Watkins 2005)

This reminds us of both hip-hop’s assault on conventional musical practice and form, as well as the desire to reinvent the future that lies at the heart of the culture.<sup>10</sup> Not only were the stealing of electricity and house and block parties central to the spirit of the culture, but the fundamental role of scratching and producing mixtapes also marked the beginnings of this subversive alternative economy.<sup>11</sup> However, the radically transformative and utopian

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Hip Hop Generation*, Baraki Kitwana burdens hip-hop culture with the responsibility to contribute to the centuries-long African American struggle for liberation. Interestingly enough, he characterises this challenge as one of integration and the need to capture control and autonomy over economic development.

<sup>9</sup> As David Toop argues, “scratching represents a virtuosity of the imagination, a device for simultaneously disrupting and maintaining hip-hop’s peculiarly retro vision of a now constructed from slivers of the past”.

<sup>10</sup> Hip-hop’s active use of the record turntable as a recycling agent and transforming tool has been one of the most innovative abuses of electronic technology in music history.

<sup>11</sup> Discussing the transformation of the record turntable and use of vinyl, David Toop notes that, “they activated vinyl – switched it on. Before that, all people did was put the vinyl on the record player and listen to it. Suddenly, the turntable became a musical instrument in its own right. Vinyl became a kind of useful

vision that lies at the heart of the culture has been all but ignored by the dominant narrative with the American academy.<sup>12</sup>

### **Dead At 35?**

With hip-hop slowly reaching middle age, followers of the culture have been split. There have been numerous testimonials and tributes celebrating hip-hop's intrinsic ingenuity and mainstream success, but many have equally questioned its Faustian pact – “its marriage of heaven and hell, of New World African ingenuity and that trick of the devil known as global hyper-capitalism” (Tate 2004). There have been numerous retellings of hip-hop's evolution over the past thirty-five years, but there are a number of key periodisations that are important to point out. The first generation, which lasted from 1973 to 1982, was shaped by the likes of Afrika Bambaataa, Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash and closely associated with hip-hop's four core elements – break dancing, graffiti writing, MCing and DJing. Originating as a folk culture, hip-hop was defined by its isolation from mainstream society. As Greg Tate notes, it is significant that hip-hop came out of New York at the time that it did, because hip-hop is “Black America's Ellis Island”:

It's our Delancy Street and our Fulton Fish Market and garment district and Hollywood ethnic enclave/empowerment zone that has served as a foothold for the poorest among us to get a grip on the land of the prosperous. (Tate 2004)

The second generation, however, from 1982 to 1988, marked the beginning of its transition into mainstream music. With the success of the Sugar Hill Gang following the release of their platinum selling first single *Rapper's Delight*, hip-hop as folk culture began to morph into an American entertainment industry sideshow.<sup>13</sup> From 1988 to the mid-1990s, the era of the third generation, this trend solidified as the album became emblematic of artistic achievement. Most significantly, in 1989, *Yo! MTV Raps* made its network debut with host Fab 5 Freddy. For the first time, with a new national and international platform to showcase the latest music videos, record labels were able to create rap superstars. Hip-hop

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archive, not just the commodity that you bought and listened to and then put back. It became something that you could use to build a new sonic composition of your own”.

<sup>12</sup> For a substantive history of hip-hop, see, Chang (2005) *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip Hop Generation*. New York: Martins Press. Chang covers the cultural landscape of hip-hop, from its Jamaican roots in the late 1960s to its birth in the Bronx, to its eventual explosion from the underground to American mainstream. The book distinguishes itself from other works by also examining how hip-hop has come to shape not only the American popular musical landscape, but also the country's history and culture over the past 30 years.

<sup>13</sup> The Sugarhill Gang (1980) *Sugarhill Gang*, Sugarhill Records.

thus became a seller's market in which tastemakers were strictly defined by the interests of the boardroom. Ironically, this was also the height of the Afrocentric dream of hip-hop culture serving as an agent of social change and transatlantic mass-Black link of information and communication. However, from the late 1990s, artists began to focus more on album sales than the quality of their records. This shift was in large part down to the increasing influence of sales tracking systems such as Nielsen SoundScan.

With the selling power of the black vernacular fully realised, and the turnaround from the late '90s towards flat, toneless music, hip-hop lost much of the vulnerability and strength of previous generations. Although hip-hop artists have been marking the art form's death on record since 2001, it was Nas' 2006 release, *Hip Hop Is Dead*, which engendered the most intense response (OutKast 2001; Nas 2006).<sup>14</sup> Most interestingly, this period of regression overlapped with hip-hop's position as the face of Black America and common vernacular for young people across the world. However, hip-hop was not born in a vacuum and its decline is reflected in the current state of African American populist politics; a virtual landscape in which the only black culture that matters is the one that can be streamed or downloaded. Many questioned how a culture that was now a worldwide phenomenon that generated billions of dollars could be considered dead. Equally, given that hip-hop culture has become inseparable from the hip-hop industry, there are those who claim that there is nothing to celebrate. Many artists and commentators have attempted to hold these two seemingly disparate poles together – to call for hip-hop's demise so that poor black communities can begin contesting the reality of their life opportunities and surroundings, while still maintaining its remaining radical, revolutionary enterprise:

[Its] rendering people of African descent anything but invisible, forgettable, and dismissible in the consensual hallucination-simulacrum twilight zone of digitized mass distractions we call our lives in the matrixized, conservative-Christianized, Goebbelized-by-Fox 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Tate 2004)

The complex and at times contradictory shifts in contemporary hip-hop culture have tended to be played down by cultural purists, dismissed by others as simply a consequence or circumstance of history, or reified in simplistic and narrow terms within academic circles. The continued state of poverty amongst a vast segment of the African American population, as well as the technologies of racism and entrenched forms of state incarceration, cannot be ignored when discussing either the changes in African American

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<sup>14</sup> OutKast (2001) *Big Boi and Dre Present ... OutKast*, Arista; Nas (2006) *Hip Hop Is Dead*, Def Jam.



culture or its complicated relationship to broader American popular culture. However, some of the regressive shifts that have seen the communal responses to the Rodney King beating in 1991 dissolve into a lack of a coherent reaction to the NYPD murders of both Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo in 1991 and Queen's resident Sean Bell in 2006 should not go ignored. Moreover, noting such shifts should not be seen as diminishing arguments that stress the continued impact of racial discrimination experienced by the majority of African Americans.

In the same week as an unarmed Sean Bell was killed in a hail of bullets on his stag night, Lil' Wayne's single *Lollipop* went to number one on the national charts. As the five detectives involved in the shooting were acquitted on charges ranging from manslaughter to reckless endangerment, Lil' Wayne's fifth studio album *Tha Carter III* found its own fortunes. With opening day sales figures of approximately 423,000 units, *Tha Carter III* became not only the first album since 50 Cent's *The Massacre* in 2005 to reach the million sales mark in one week, but it also went on to sell 2.88 million copies and become the highest selling album the following year.<sup>15</sup> It is also worth noting that the fourth single off the album, *Mrs. Officer*, transforms the ritualised police violence into one rich black man's fantasy of "fucking a lady cop". Lil' Wayne's sexual fantasy imagines her "wearing nothing but handcuffs and heals" and "beating it like a cop". He goes so far as to attempt to connect these irreconcilable images, "Rodney King baby yeah I beat it like a cop / Ha ha beat it like a cop / Rodney King baby said beat it like a cop" (Lil' Wayne 2008).<sup>16</sup>

Artist Saul Williams has argued that many American MCs are, "Republicans calling themselves soldiers, and that's exactly what they are, soldiers for the Man". He goes on to state that, "hip-hop used to be the language of rebellion, but is no longer a threat". For Williams, "everyone is talking about doggy dog capitalism, I'm going to get mine [...] these cats aren't rebelling, they're posing with photos with Donald Trump because they love the system, they are the system".<sup>17</sup> Saul William's argument may seem like a blanket judgment on a culture that cannot be simply homogenised, but it importantly stresses that hip-hop artists and activists need to take responsibility for the direction that

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<sup>15</sup> Figures retrieved from Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). Available at [www.riaa.com/index.php](http://www.riaa.com/index.php)

<sup>16</sup> Lil' Wayne (2008) *Tha Carter III*, Cash Money/Universal Motown.

<sup>17</sup> Full interview available at [www.wakeupshow.com](http://www.wakeupshow.com)

American hip-hop is taking. Considering its present hold on American popular culture, it is no longer sufficient to simply blame record companies and cultural outsiders.<sup>18</sup>

The day after the September 2001 terrorist attacks, Clear Channel programme directors, the number one radio station owner in the United States, issued a list of “potentially offensive songs” that it suggested stations not play. The list included tracks by Rage Against the Machine and John Lennon, but in terms of hip-hop, only Public Enemy was included.<sup>19</sup> What is important to stress here is that American hip-hop post-9/11 has yet to produce anti-war music of note. Both the unparalleled commercial success of the genre and this new political landscape only seem to highlight the fact that a number of conscious rappers were never clear about their political positions in the first place, with September 11 revealing their basic lack of depth. With the increasing commercial cache of conscious rap, it is becoming ever present that the lifestyles it promotes is inconsistent with a position severed from the politics of American imperialism.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the self-professed committed art of conscious MCs is in a precarious position, particularly when one of the most geopolitically astute tracks to be released since the “war on terror” came from gangsta rapper Ice Cube.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> As well as stating that he would have voted for George W. Bush in the 2004 elections had he not been prevented from doing so by his prior felony charges, 50 Cent also publicly defended the then President against mounting criticism of his handling of the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. While in 2009, the successful hip-hop entrepreneur co-authored *The 50<sup>th</sup> Law* with renowned business strategist Robert Greene. A staple in the hip-hop world, Greene’s first book, *The 48 Laws of Power*, shares thematic elements with Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, and uses anecdotes from figures such as Louis XIV, Otto von Bismarck, Mao Zedong and Haile Selassie, to illustrate the successful application of social and political power. Growing out of the friendship and mutual admiration between Greene and 50 Cent, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Law* attempts to elaborate on Greene’s ideas of power in the context of the life of 50 Cent. Featuring Greene’s style of illustrating universal laws through historical figures, the book includes stories from Malcolm X, Miles Davis, Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Thucydides. With chapter headings such as “Make Everything Your Own”, “Turn Shit Into Gold” and “Know When To Be Bad”, the book aims to incorporate the struggles of urban life as a fresh source to inspire personal success. For Greene maintains that Fifty personifies the renaissance of the pioneer spirit that made America great.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the 2001 Clear Channel memorandum and the resulting debate, see the collection of articles on [www.freemuse.org/sw6621.asp](http://www.freemuse.org/sw6621.asp)

<sup>20</sup> The ambiguities and contradictions of conscious rap remind one of Adorno’s outspoken scepticism of political art. For Adorno, there is a responsibility of art to address human suffering, but in politically committed art, he saw both the tendency towards bad artwork and its devolution into propaganda. Adorno makes the distinction between art that is autonomous and art that is committed. Autonomous art is that which does not carry an overtly political message in service of an ideal. However, the autonomous art object is not apolitical, he believes, but one that is not partisan or shortsighted in its approach. In his essay ‘On Commitment’ (1962), he argues that artworks exercise practical effect not by “haranguing by the scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness”.

<sup>21</sup> The 2008 release, *Gangsta Rap Made Me Do It*, sees Ice Cube turn his harsh tone and slick flow to examine the post-9/11 American landscape. The music video envisages America’s future as one not too dissimilar to Nazi Germany, with the steady flow of imagery, from Hurricane Katrina to the case of the Jena Six, showing up the hypocrisy of America’s racial contract. The relationship between Ice Cube’s seemingly brash lyrics and the visuals of American corporate scandals, police brutality and consumer excesses form an interesting counterpoint – at times forming a disturbing harmony and at others creating a rather radical

When it comes to hip-hop studies, the preoccupation with lyrical content and iconography has obscured a more nuanced critique of supposedly more politically engaged and militant artists. A number of academics, commentators and music critics have been quick to counteract any ridicule or criticism of more commercial or unsavory elements of the scene by directing attention to the lyrics and revolutionary posturing of conscious rappers. However, examining lyrics alone does not help answer central questions of politics and power. Not only has it obscured a more nuanced discussion on the current state of hip-hop, but it has also hindered any criticism of such acts for their banal and unsatisfactory rehashing of previous black struggles for their simple consumption by a younger and increasingly international audience.<sup>22</sup> If one accepts that hip-hop, and by extension issues of social exclusion, have been appropriated as brands, then their engagement have been reduced to no more than sound bites and slogans. Such trends have therefore only served to hinder young people from describing and re-imagining their experiences in meaningful ways.

### **Hip-Hop America as the Soundtrack to American Imperialism**

Chris Rock noted in his now famous sketch that he loves rap music, but is tired of defending it. He joked about how it used to be easy to defend it intellectually and explain why Grandmaster Flash, RUN D.M.C. and Houdini were art, but that it was hard to defend, “I’ve got hoes in different area codes” (2004).<sup>23</sup> Such criticisms have become a common refrain in discussions on the current state of hip-hop culture. However, it is precisely where Chris Rock ends his critique that a more nuanced reading of the current state of hip-hop needs to be articulated. In a post-9/11 America, it has become important to see the re-articulation and appropriation of particular aspects of hip-hop culture as a new American soundscape in the “war on terror”. By interrogating the socio-political transformations of hip-hop culture in our current state of national and global securitocracy, an alternative

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dissonance. However, what makes Ice Cube’s track stand out is the attempt to link such policies to America’s imperial ambitions, from the Iran-Contra affair and President Clinton’s indiscriminate bombing of the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory to images of torture from Abu Ghraib and Israeli’s aerial bombing of Gaza. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzeZhCt5PVA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzeZhCt5PVA)

<sup>22</sup> Artists such as Immortal Technique, Dead Prez and Talib Kweli are often praised for their militarised revolutionary masquerading. The harsh critique of American domestic and foreign policy present in their music should be understood as part of a larger counter-culture. However, what is often occluded in such discussions is that, as well as the international hip-hop superstars who garner international success and celebrity status, it is also the music of these unruly artists which transport unknowingly the accursed portion of American racial and cultural politics, and thus create a far more complicated image of contemporary American cultural imperialism.

<sup>23</sup> Chris Rock (2004) ‘Never Scared’ Warner Home Video.

genealogy of the culture emerges, both in terms of its current place in American culture as well as its global impact. In little over thirty years, hip-hop has traveled from its routes in the South Bronx to adorn Times Square's longest serving billboard – Diddy sporting a Mohawk and black power fist – and influence policymakers in the U.S. Army and State Department.

The problem with much of the literature on hip-hop culture is the lens through which it is being articulated. Despite acknowledging hip-hop's global reach, the assumption that the culture needs to be analysed primarily through its routes in the urban landscape of the South Bronx and Brooklyn at the peak of Reaganomics still holds. However, no culture can be hermetically sealed and tidily separated off from others. Black political culture needs to be understood to have changed in this new global commercial environment. Racialised subjects – both within and increasingly beyond the United States – are discovering their identities and enacting their agency through their social life as consumers and the lifestyles this confers, rather than as simply citizens. Moreover, the extent of American hip-hop's internationalism today can be seen in Jay-Z throwing Euros – as opposed to Dollar bills – in the video for his single *Blue Magic*, Akon buying a diamond mine in South Africa and Nelly launching his own brand of energy drink *Pimp Juice* across the African continent.<sup>24</sup>

Hip-hop culture can thus be said to be simultaneously puncturing and being manipulated by these new hegemonic cultural and commercial forces. Important questions now revolve around what our contemporary soundtrack of globalisation sounds like, as well as the place of those lost tapes of freedom that directed previous generations. If the militarisation of experience and the marching of African American soldiers during the First World War were the conduits for jazz into the life of Europe – not forgetting the range of unfreedoms that circulated when these things became mass cultures – then hip-hop culture today must face a similar interrogation (Raphael Hernandez 2003). When George H. W. Bush sent troops into Kuwait in 1991, rappers such as Ice Cube and Paris sharpened their verbal assault on the White House in *I Wanna Kill Sam* and *Bush Killa*. While in 2001, as the Congress debated the Patriot Act and air strikes left Afghan cities in ruins and untold innocents dead, Jay-Z and Nas also declared their own dirty war over the pockets of young

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<sup>24</sup> In an interview with *The Independent*, Akon tried to justify his acquisition by saying that, “diamonds are always going to be selling, people are always going to get married, black people will always want to shine and bling-bling”. For more, see Egere-Cooper (2007) ‘Akon: So What if I Own a Diamond Mine?’ *The Independent*, 16 February. While the launch of *Pimp Juice* across Africa in 2007 also paved the way for the launch of Nelly's Vokal and Applebottom clothing labels in 2008.

consumers. Moreover, Jay-Z's disc record, *The Takeover*, was based on a sample from the Doors' *Five to One*, an anti-Vietnam War song released during 1968's long hot summer and whose title alluded to a demographic menace – five times as many people under the age of 21 as over. Released on September 11, Jay-Z sixth studio album, *The Blueprint*, went on to sell 465,000 copies.<sup>25</sup>

When the presiding President of the United States of America prides himself on having Jay-Z and Kanye West on his iPod in numerous interviews in the run up to the 2008 presidential elections, it is clear that both the impression and influence of hip-hop culture has evolved significantly.<sup>26</sup> African American popular culture can thus be seen to be making a significant contribution to the value of American geopolitical interests. On September 11 2009, to mark the 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragic events that took place in New York and Virginia, Jay-Z organised an Answer the Call benefit concert in Madison Square Garden. The proceeds of the sold out gig went to the New York Police and Fire Widows' and Children's Benefit Fund.<sup>27</sup> The all-black dress code for the night served as both a mark of respect, as well as Jay-Z's latest fashion statement of wearing "all black for a year straight". The evening began with the Pledge for Allegiance and a concordant guitar rendition of The Star-Spangled Banner that neither attempted to unhinge the patriotic musical rhythm of an imperial nation, nor held any of the ballistic resonance of Hendrix's solo improvisation at Woodstock in 1969. Furthermore, this was a strictly hip-hop affair with guest appearances from the likes of Kanye West, Diddy and Rihanna. This important addition to the cultural armory of American power – a culture that did so much to unsettle the democratic myth of America – has now acquired new significance in this era of perceived cultural conflict.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Figures retrieved from RIAA.

<sup>26</sup>In an interview with BET presenter Jeff Johnson in 2008, President Obama spoke of his admiration for the music of Jay-Z – in particular *American Gangster* – and Kanye West. He went on to point out the potential for hip-hop culture and its most popular artists to help bridge the gap between government and communities. Full interview available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFSVG7jRp\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFSVG7jRp_g)

<sup>27</sup>See Answer the Call Press Release.

<sup>28</sup>The transformative power of the figure of Jay-Z – part crack dealer, part MC, part business mogul and part ambassador – can be seen in two of his most recent incarnations. In September 2010, Steve Forbes organised an interview with Jay-Z and the investment guru Warren Buffett. In a slightly surreal setting in Omaha, the two entrepreneurs spoke about how they started out, the lessons they learnt in managing successful businesses, and the fruits of their philanthropy. Describing hip-hop as one of the most competitive businesses around, Steve Forbes managed to find a shared ground for Buffett and Jay to rap about their particular "habits of success". In a polished performance in which he papered over the reality of his earlier life, Jay-Z spoke of the role of any successful recording artist as being not too dissimilar to that of a businessman. Full interview available at [www.video.forbes.com/fvn/forbes400-10/jay-z-buffett-forbes-success-giving](http://www.video.forbes.com/fvn/forbes400-10/jay-z-buffett-forbes-success-giving) For more on his entrepreneurial activity and the shift of hip-hop business into the mainstream, see, Greenburg (2011) *Empire State of Mind: How Jay-Z Went from Street Corner to Corner Office*. New York: Portfolio. While in November, organised to coincide with the release of his memoir *Decoded*, the famed Live from New York

The incorporation of hip-hop as an important cultural force at the end of the Cold War was conferred by both American and European statesmen during the official events to mark the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. On November 9<sup>th</sup> 2009, Jay-Z, the hip-hop mogul who has President Obama on speed dial, performed alongside U2 at the Brandenburg Gate.<sup>29</sup> With Jay-Z set to headline the MTV European Music Awards the following night, his collaboration with U2 on *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* included a calculated rendition of Bob Marley's *Get Up, Stand Up*. Jay-Z's choice of The Wailer's classic is telling in terms of the recent changes in the cultures of the black Atlantic. The song was originally adopted by Amnesty International as the anthem for their worldwide tour in support of the programme outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, unlike the global influence of either the United Nations or Jay-Z – himself a U.N. Goodwill Ambassador to Africa – Bob Marley's life represents more positive forms of global interconnections founded on universal struggles for justice and human rights. As Paul Gilroy has argued:

His music has been pirated into Eastern Europe long before the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain fell. It became intertwined with the longing for freedom and rights that was evident in every variety of regime. Captured on cassettes and vinyl, that rebel music traveled far from its original sources and discovered new constituencies particularly among indigenous and colonised peoples. (Gilroy 2010, p. 96)

This contemporary realignment, whereby blackness ceased to be the primary cultural property of African Americans, allowed for it to operate on a different geo-political axis. Furthermore, as the language and ideas of human rights became increasingly popular and hegemonic, the official genealogy of the political idea of human rights

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Public Library invited Jay-Z in conversation with Cornel West. In this slightly hipper, but still institutionalised setting, Jay-Z spoke of how hip-hop has created a way to take a very specific and powerful experience and turn it into a story that everyone in the world could feel and relate to. However, it was Cornel West's interventions that proved most revealing. For even West's usually uncompromising voice seemed to be silenced by Jay-Z's charms. Describing Jay's "genius" and "humanity", he went on to make a number of unimaginable leaps in faith – most notably placing Jay-Z within a "black musical tradition of anti-terrorist activity" against the violence perpetrated against black people. Not only did West argue that Jay-Z was keeping such a prophetic tradition alive, highlighting links between Jay-Z and the likes of Harry Belafonte and Paul Robeson, but also placed him in a continuum that connects the "pusherman" with the "freedom fighter". For West, there is no distinction to be made between Jay-Z's "art of the hustle" and Curtis Mayfield's voice of the "pusherman". Acknowledging the particular power of hip-hop culture in American society today, West is right to point out that, "America will not make it without black America". However, the central concern of this chapter still remains – the ways in which the radical traditions of struggle for freedom from the underside of the American Empire are transforming our world today. Full interview available at [www.nypl.org/audiovideo/jay-z-conversation-cornel-west-and-paul-holdengr%C3%A4ber](http://www.nypl.org/audiovideo/jay-z-conversation-cornel-west-and-paul-holdengr%C3%A4ber)

<sup>29</sup> For footage from the concert, see [www.nme.com/news/u2/48243](http://www.nme.com/news/u2/48243)

acquired a narrow historical trajectory. As critics of institutionally sponsored rights talk rightly point out, the history of Europe's colonial crimes and systematically applied racial logic cannot be separated from this dominant discourse of human rights (Douzinas 2007; Mamdani 2009). However, the example of Bob Marley not only serves as a critique of this dominant logic, but also activates a counter-history that enables the Global North and Global South to communicate in novel ways and imagine a common culture that both shifts away from American centric discourses on blackness and is less bound up with corporate-consumer culture.

### **Hip-Hop and the Globalisation of the Themes of American Social Doxa**

So as not to simply tarnish the whole culture with being complicit in American cultural imperialism, a representation of American hip-hop which takes into account the processes of contemporary globalisation needs to be constructed. The now fashionable arguments put forth by Patrick Neate and others that hip-hop is a globalised medium that is locally adapted to articulate local concerns, have to be unpacked and further complicated. Such a representation highlights the political and economic project that is driven by the symbolic, as well as material violence of the globalisation of the themes of American social doxa. As Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant highlight, the conceptual "import-export" of America's cultural industry is based on "those mystified mystifiers who can transport unknowingly the hidden, and often accursed, portion of the cultural products which they put into circulation" (1999, p. 47).<sup>30</sup>

Although this literature notes that hip-hop has changed the very nature and disposition of the world we inhabit, only a handful of studies have gone beyond this to contextualise its transnational appeal and espousal of an itinerant culture (Neate 2004; Basu and Lemelle 2006; Condry 2006). Although this literature escapes many of the trappings of the dominant narrative and attempts to engage the culture's global appeal and influence, it remains hindered by the logic of the nation-state, and thus fails to understand hip-hop and the black Atlantic more generally as outernational counter-cultures of modernity. Ian Condry's ethnography of Japan's vibrant hip-hop scene attempts a different

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<sup>30</sup> For Bourdieu and Wacquant, cultural imperialism has always rested on the power to universalise particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be misrecognised. Complex and controversial realities of a particular historical society now become tacitly constituted as a model for every other and a yardstick for all things. All the carriers and importers of cultural products can thus be seen as facilitating the actual globalisation of American problems.

conceptualisation of how cultural settings and flows interact, but it still sets out hip-hop culture as developing along local, national and global trajectories. He claims that:

The work of scholars and critics who describe hip-hop in terms of the deep and enduring connections between African American struggles and aesthetics is political in the sense that it disrupts the too-easy assumption of many privileged white fans that by listening to hip-hop they are getting close to black people. (Condry 2006, p. 32)

Thus Condry still remains trapped by assumed national borders and racial markers.

With the logic of the nation-state dominating, hip-hop culture remains locked in simplistic discussions over the national and regional appropriations within different social, cultural and ethnic contexts. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. astutely notes, signifyin(g) is a principle of language use and is not in any way the exclusive province of black people, although blacks named the terms and invented its rituals (1989, p. 90). An art form born of transnational upheaval and grounded in innovation and improvisation cannot be contained by one nation alone. Lawrence Levine notes in his discussion on consciousness that it is not necessary for a people to originate or invent all or even most of the elements of their culture:

Forms of black consciousness have spanned the division of colonial development and spoken in different but complementary ways to dispersed and remote populations, synchronising their consciousness and their own divergent analyses of their local experiences with what sounded like the universal poetics of sufferation and of hope. (Levine 1990)

The symbolic domination and influence exercised by America today works through a stylised market which is uniquely American yet potentially global. Ironically, this branded Pax Americana is often dominated by images of black ghetto life – sometimes portrayed as hip and cool, and crime-ridden and squalid at other times. Corporate America thus uses an indiscriminate selection of African American heroes to capture global markets, raising difficult questions about cultural authenticity (Quinn 2005). Living on the edge is part of what makes American ghetto culture so sellable to outside observers, a tool in shifting units and opening up new markets, but at an equally safe distance in a commodified and/or virtual realm. The exportation of a racialised American dream has not only proven commercially lucrative, but it has also brought with it a hegemonic understanding of freedom to other global contexts and thus helped re-shape people's ambivalent outlook on America – playing on both our attraction and repulsion. The



exportation of African American popular culture is thus part of a larger geopolitical project that attempts to govern global youth through a dangerous conceptualisation of freedom that mixes post-emancipation and civil rights freedoms along with a steady dose of consumer freedom based on the purchasing power of individuals. The complex and ambivalent relationship to America and America popular culture that exists today across many parts of the globe, bares much relevance to how one intends to articulate and create a genuinely counter-hegemonic and eventually alternative social space.

Hardly any commercial hip-hop contains any distinction, except in beat and tone, to a Chrysler advert. This highlights a crucial issue around the residual elements of hip-hop culture that are currently having just as much influence in the exportation of racial technologies and today's hegemonic understanding of freedom. No sector or market has been left untouched by the hip-hop soundtrack of American imperialism – from clothes, fragrances, laptops, mobile phones, videogames, pornography and SUVs.<sup>31</sup> The mimetic value of such visual narratives depends not simply on the facts it marshals but also on the narrative frame through which it situates, organises and (re)presents those facts. Contemporary questions about hip-hop should therefore not revolve around outdated debates of cultural authenticity, but rather concentrate on unpacking its current cultural position as the voice of disenfranchised urban youth across the globe, as well as being the biggest selling musical form and worldwide soundtrack of the most powerful country on the planet.

Despite the criticism hip-hop receives for promoting a narrow ghetto state of mind, as well as hegemonic pre-packaged models of global relationships and marketisation of human life, elements of this now global phenomenon work to undermine such insidious logic. Beyond the virtual landscape of American hip-hop, there are a number of progressive musical soundscapes taking shape that challenge this seditious trend in public-private partnerships in the global arena. With the belief in the transnational community that the culture embodies, it can be argued that hip-hop culture is attempting to create transnational networks that connect denizens in global spaces of exception. These transnational multi-ethnic pirates can thus be seen as attempting to navigate the powerful currents of African American popular culture. Despite this, however, the increasingly global nature of the political economy of contemporary African American culture has not

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<sup>31</sup> This includes clothing lines such as Phat Farm, Sean John, Rocawear and G-Unit clothing; fragrances such as Diddy's *Unforgivable* and Beyonce's *Heat*; 50 Cent's *Bulletproof* video game; and Snoop Dogg's *Doggystyle* pornographic videos. This list excludes the numerous long-standing fashion houses and established corporations that call on hip-hop stars to promote their products.

fostered sustained interest in the machinations of the capitalist system or the particular networks in the spread of these black cultural forms. The success of mainstream hip-hop can thus be said to be depriving the excluded of the choice to express themselves beyond the appropriated exclusion that has become a bizarre kind of norm. For many outside America looking in, hip-hop today seems to be further alienating the very people who once used the form to express their alienation; a form of cultural capital that now no longer seems to translate into power, at least for those with the most at stake.

### **American Cultural Imperialism and the Music of the Black Atlantic**

The productive destabilisation caused by the tight rhymes and classic trickster figure of Eminem has proven to be a recurrent preoccupation within American hip-hop circles.<sup>32</sup> Although Craig Watkins feels uncomfortable calling Eminem “a culture stealer”, he and others are still preoccupied by American hip-hop’s assumed racial borders. For Watkins still maintains that, “white rappers had neither the skills nor the requisite perspective gained from life on society’s margins to truly be down with hip hop” (2005, p. 91). This discourse dominated by talk of “wiggas”, “white chocolate” and the apparent “afro-Americanisation of white youth”, reminds one of another figure, that of Ali G and his playful rupture of the anxieties around blackness and commodified authenticity. As Paul Gilroy argues:

[It] is significant that the central unifying joke underpinning all Ali G’s work is supplied by an antipathy towards the stultifying US styles and habits that have all but crushed local forms of the black vernacular in the UK and replaced them with the standardised and uniform global products of hip hop consumer culture. Likeable Ali shows that the globalised American thug life is ridiculously inappropriate to the life of marginal young Brits. He makes the sad commitment to ghetto fabulous tastes and behaviours appear absurd. Britain had better find another way to go. (Gilroy 2004)<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In probably the most incisive discussion on the whole Eminem affair, Rakim, one of hip-hop’s finest lyricists, spoke saying, “I don’t care what colour he is. I don’t care about none of that. Real artists respect real artists. You can’t take nothing away from his thoughts and his pen [...] With the talents that he has, if he would have been black he would have been just as good because some black rappers have gimmicks with them, and the gimmicks get them over more than the rap. Em’s lyrics speak for themselves, so if he would have came he maybe wouldn’t have sold as many records as he sells, but I still think he would have been nasty black or white”. Full interview available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=I53vWm8dJGk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I53vWm8dJGk)

<sup>33</sup> Fortunately London and other postcolonial urban settings have created other ways to go. The multicultural motley crews – be it the Bow and Limehouse estates that brought together members of the Roll Deep collective or the Seine-Saint-Denis departement that gave birth to Supreme NTM – have not been distracted by American race talk.

Despite this, it is still the case that much of American popular and academic discourse still unquestioningly situates today's black culture industries as the product and singular continuation of a specific vibrant and radical cultural tradition. Daphne Brooks, for example, argues that:

Beyonce is part of a tradition of black women's musical expressions of personal and political dissent ranging from singers Nina Simone and Odetta to MCs Lauryn Hill and Jean Grae to the brilliant new artist Keisha Cole, who has released one of the most brutally visceral, emotionally assertive and convincingly combative R&B records of the decade. (Brooks 2007)

Brooks goes on to assert that Beyonce's significance goes beyond musical expression by saying that:

Knowles' album of hard militarized beats marches in defiance of a long history of public women, from Sojourner to Superbowl Janet, who have been stripped and stressed and displaced and denied. (Brooks 2007)

The history and international significance of black popular counter-culture is not being questioned here, but rather how Brooks' problematic representation of its contemporary forms serves to banalise and simplify both the aesthetic qualities and political gains made by some of the artists she mentions. Moreover, it also acts to occlude the important changing socio-political landscape under which African American cultural production is being created, packaged and sold to both domestic and international audiences. The simplistic socio-political bridge that Brooks imagines between Sojourner and the likes of Janet Jackson and Beyonce is premised on the idea of some African or black essence that can magically connect all black people. The problem with this discourse, particularly in today's climate, is that it inhibits thinking seriously about divisions in the imagined communities of race, as well as the means to overcome them.

There is another important corollary to this populist discourse, which revolves around the idea of culture as copyright. In another piece by Daphne Brooks, "Amy Winehouse and the (Black) Art of Appropriation" (2008), she argues that, "Winehouse has built her stardom on recycling the looks and sounds – the Wurlitzer, hand-claps, and upright bass – of Freedom-Ride-era pop music to sell her tale of rapidly unfolding decline". For Brooks, this cultural borrowing is nothing more than "a caricature of Amos 'n' Andy meets Billie Holliday on heroin", and based on "a known style that's a hundred years old, rooted in a tradition of female minstrelsy". By eliding African American with

black, Brooks' hermeneutically sealed, safe and racially stable representation of black popular culture ignores a whole tradition of convivial black British culture. A culture that infused a young Amy Winehouse, from her early love for Jazz that led to her forming a rap group called *Sweet 'n' Sour* whilst growing up in North London, to her self-professed love for Donny Hathaway and Sam Cooke later on in her career.<sup>34</sup> There is no doubt that versions of Colonel Tom Parker's white chocolate dream live on amongst some in the cultural industry. The early buzz surrounding Joss Stone and the popular press labeling her the "white Aretha Franklin" testifies to this continuing trend (The Guardian 2003).

However, what Brooks and others fail to realise is that not only has the racial contract of corporate multiculturalism evolved and progressed, particularly in the age of Obama, but that such strategies stubbornly protect African American artists from any substantial criticism. Brooks is troubled by Winehouse's "Cleopatra eyeliner", which she sees as historically affirming black dignity and humanity amid the battle to end American apartheid, but seems untroubled by the acts of black artists turned industry moguls in today's America. Brook's work is symptomatic of the tendency of the American worldview to impose itself as a universal point of view, especially when it comes to issues of race where the particularity of the American situation is particularly flagrant and far from being exemplarily. Such views impoverish contemporary black cultural history because they fail to recognise that the transnational structures, which brought the black Atlantic into being, have themselves morphed and now articulate its myriad forms in a system of global communications.

The image and powerful contralto vocals of Amy Winehouse are helpful in complicating and further disrupting this representation of the black cultural formations between the two sides of the Atlantic. With the return of civilisationist discourses under the seemingly intractable "war on terror", the simplistic binaries of race, culture and nationhood have traveled beyond the biometrically fortified borders of the United States and proven popular amongst communities across the globe who also question why they are still so black and blue. It is understandable that such language is reassuring within these communities, particularly at a time when they are being misrepresented, misappropriated and violently attacked. However, such a position can at best be nothing more than a shortsighted tactic.

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<sup>34</sup> Amy Winehouse's dub infused cover of Sam Cooke's *Cupid*, on her second studio album *Back to Black* (2006), is not only an elegant reinterpretation of a classic track, but also exhibits an astute understanding of the musics of the black Atlantic.

The public comments made by British R&B singer Estelle at the height of both Duffy's and Adele's chart success highlight how America's peculiar and particular racial thinking has been embraced by some black Britains and others so as to articulate and convey their own frustrations at the structures of racism they face. Speaking on the success of an array of white artists singing soul and R&B music in Britain, Estelle told *The Guardian* newspaper that:

I'm just wondering, how the hell is there not a single black person in the press singing soul? Adele ain't soul. She sounds like she heard some Aretha records once and she's soul. [...] I'm like: you're telling *me* this is *my* music? Fuck that! They keep trying to tell me in the media what soul music is, stop fucking around with us! You're taking the piss out of every black person in the country! And then they say, 'oh don't bring race into it. (The Guardian 2008a)

The idea of tradition has always had a mesmeric power in black political discourse, but as Richard Wright (1937) taught us over a half-century ago, tradition should no longer be a guide for the creative aspiration of black artists. Estelle's comments convey the increasing discomfort caused by witnessing the fluidity with which the cultures of the black Atlantic has always travelled. What is interesting in Estelle's comments is not so much the debate over whether or not Adele's music can or should be characterised as soul, but rather its unspoken race talk. Rather than seeing the music of the black Atlantic as coherent along national or racial lines, it is precisely the very malleability – the pulling apart and multiple reconstitutions of its lyrics, melodies and beats – that makes it both so powerful and rebellious.

Estelle is a particularly interesting example because not only did she consciously re-imagine herself in order to swim more comfortably within the currents of today's black Atlantic, but she also made the decision to move to the United States to put her career back on track. Although her breakthrough single *1980* broke the U.K. Top 20 in 2004, and her first album received both critical acclaim and a MOBO for Best Newcomer, Estelle was disappointed with the lack of mainstream success. Speaking on her decision to leave for New York, Estelle said, "Americans have their issues with skin colour, even within the black community, with light and dark skin, it's crazy, but no-one's oblivious to it. Here everyone pretends it doesn't happen" (The Guardian 2008a)<sup>35</sup>. Aside from Estelle's

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<sup>35</sup> The trappings of this kind of race talk can also be seen in Kelis' more recent outburst after an apparent altercation with a UK passport control official at Gatwick airport. The American singer claimed that, as she was going through passport control, she was taunted by racial abuse from an Englishman for jumping the

misreading of the cultural history of the black Atlantic, her intentions also work to occlude a black British musical heritage that played an important role in facilitating the transition of diverse settlers to a distinct mode of lived blackness. The irony is that in order to achieve the kind of mainstream commercial success she desired, and replace Duffy's *Mercy* at the top of the U.K. singles chart, Estelle had to move to the United States and release *American Boy* featuring Kanye West as her first single. Some British commentators have described her lucrative journey from West London to New York and her subsequent return as a popstar, as the "Americanisation of Estelle" (The Guardian 2008b). What is of interest, however, is not the cultural competition between the Old and New Worlds, but rather how black America's cultural capital has been invested in a talented black British songstress to add both authenticity and increase her purchasing power on both sides of the Atlantic.

Contemporary black cultural production here is not judged so much on the sonic, social and moral grounds of its predecessors, but rather on its commercial viability and success. Estelle's 2008 release on *HomeSchool* – the label of American R&B singer John Legend – may have considerably outsold her debut album, but such commercial success has set a damaging precedent for other aspiring black artists who, instead of building on an already rich history, are increasingly imagining the mainstreaming of black America's popular culture as the only game in town.<sup>36</sup> Artists may have historically looked at breaking the American market as financially important, but the blueprint Estelle has set for urban acts goes beyond that by offering a teleology that imagines America as the only viable image of Britain's political and cultural future.

The example of Dizzee Rascal, whose route from Bow in the East End of London to America and back, took a very different trajectory to that of Estelle. Dizzee Rascal, who began experimenting with sounds and beats on school computers in Tower Hamlets, shot to critical acclaim with his first solo album *Boy in da Corner*. As well as being awarded the prestigious Mercury Prize for the best album of 2003, the album went on to garner mainstream success. The album's harsh aesthetics and brash lyrics testified to Dizzee

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queue. Kelis reacted to the incident by tweeting, "I am in London all the time and today I'm gonna say that the racial issues in the UK are disgusting. It's racially decades behind progression because everything is swept under the rug. People don't talk about it. People don't fight about it". However, when the London mayor Boris Johnson promised to investigate the claims, Kelis later confirmed that the incident actually took place in Spain.

<sup>36</sup> Although the grime scene has stood out as particularly resistant to the lure of American hip-hop grammar and aesthetics, the recent chart success and subsequent mainstreaming of this stubborn soundscape has seen Skepta collaborate with Diddy and Chipmunk with Chris Brown. Most recently, Tine Tempah has been tagged as the latest U.K. act likely to break the American market.

Rascals's desire to "stay true to his grammar". Unlike Estelle, Dizzee's commercial success, without having to compromise his sound and style, meant that he could attempt to cross the Atlantic on his own terms. He made his American debut in 2004 at Volume in New York, but was on the whole unable to convince an oversaturated and unimaginative scene.<sup>37</sup> His second album release, *Showtime*, attempted to cater more to an American audience, with a clear shift from grime to more standardised hip-hop styles and sounds. Although unable to crack the American market, Dizzee was content to further his success in the U.K. and Europe, with *Showtime* eclipsing the peak of his debut album by entering the U.K. Albums Charts at number eight.<sup>38</sup> Unlike Estelle, what is interesting about Dizzee's transatlantic journey is that rather than Americanising his craft Dizzee chose strategically to embrace both the dance and indie scenes in the U.K. in order to further his commercial success. The more he moved away from the grime scene, by collaborating with the likes of Beck, The Klaxtons and Arctic Monkeys on his third album *Maths + English*, the more he became embraced in mainstream British pop culture, culminating in him being heralded a national treasure by the Daily Telegraph and appearing in advertisements for The Sun earlier this year (The Telegraph 2010).

What these tensions reveal is that the musical culture of black peoples in the overdeveloped world breaches the framework of national and ethnocentric analysis. The openly hybrid character of these black Atlantic cultures continually confounds any simplistic understanding of the relationship between racial identity between folk cultural authenticity and pop cultural betrayal. They show that talking seriously about the aesthetics, politics and ethics of black vernacular cultures necessitates a confrontation with substantive outernational and interracial differences.

### **Melting Microphones: The "Not Yet" of the Black Atlantic and the Search for the Convivial<sup>39</sup>**

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<sup>37</sup> Although giving his debut album four stars, Slant magazine concluded that "the unfettered patois may prove to be too exotic for American listeners".

<sup>38</sup> This came to a head in his video for the single *Stand Up Tall* which sees Dizzee kiting out a London taxi and exotify classic British iconography – dancers dressed as the Queen's guard or wearing micro union jack skirts – and mixing it with the increasingly standardised format of an American hip-hop video with its heady dose of cars and scantily clad girls. Available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HMogp86cl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3HMogp86cl)

<sup>39</sup> Inspired by Ernst Bloch's theses on hope and utopianism, the chapter hopes to take his spirit of the "not yet" and imagine something different from the current hegemonic position of African American popular culture within the realm of the musics of the black Atlantic. Edward Said persuasively argues in *Musical Elaborations* that technology and administration have triumphed over new music under late capitalism. However, there still remains the potential for cultural workers to not only push its aesthetic boundaries, but also radically re-imagine our social worlds and the relationships between public space and private-domestic

Despite the considerable global impact of consumer capitalism and the digital hyper-connectivity that shapes contemporary globalisation, the worldwide cultural impact of such trends should not be so easily characterised as all consuming. In terms of today's culture industries, the commercial success and impact of corporate induced international crossovers cannot be overlooked. Snoop Dogg's single *Snoop Dogg Millionaire* not only attempted to capitalise on the international success of Danny Boyle's film *Slumdog Millionaire*, but also added "ghetto" and "Asian" flavoured authenticity by featuring West Coast gangsta rappers Hustle Boyz and Tanvi Singh, the hugely popular Indian playback singer. This cynical vision of seeing creative collaboration and cultural internationalism as a way of expanding and opening up international markets is also captured in the record's timely use of an unimaginative electronic-dance beat – the commercially lucrative and signature soundscape of London producers Chase & Status. Diversity means much more than just the simple reproduction of general particularisms imagined in the hope that their ritual and formal inclusion will generate reciprocal gestures. Racial difference has become integral to this process of advertising and selling cultural products. They help mark and fix these various products in an elaborate system of racialised symbols; objects invested with the commercial power to identify, communicate and produce the particularity of racialised groups.

The incredible success of the Broadway musical *Fela!* based on the life and times of Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti, best encapsulates the tensions in the contemporary cultural formations of the black Atlantic. The production's sudden and unexpected commercial success enticed Jay-Z and Will Smith to come onboard as producers. This translation of Fela Kuti's life from Afrika Shine – the nightclub he set up in Empire Hotel in Lagos – to the flashing lights of Broadway is clearly distinct from the modern political and cultural formations of the black Atlantic that transcend both the structures of the nation-state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. Fela's actual journey – from Abekouta to Trinity College of Music in London, and later from those recording sessions in Los Angeles in 1969 back to the Kalakuta Republic commune he formed in Lagos – sits uneasily alongside the strategic choices forced on movements and individuals embedded in national and political cultures and nation-states in America, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe. Such travels and influences of the black Atlantic work in a transnational frame that

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realms. Both the humanistic and transgressive elements of music, particularly those of the black Atlantic, can help disrupt the hold of civilisationist discourses on our post-9/11 cultural field.



precludes any superficial association with their country of origin. Examining his route from the particular to the general, from Africa to Europe and America, gets us out of a position where we are forced to choose between the unsatisfactory alternatives of Eurocentrism and black nationalism.

The political, ethical and aesthetic standards that Fela Kuti set, as well as his particularly complex relationship with the United States – collaborative, mutual and yet ambivalent – can help describe an ongoing process of travel and exchange across the Atlantic and beyond that works outside the powerful currents of today’s heady mix of global consumer capitalism and the militarisation of everyday life. In this global age of extraordinary rendition, a genuinely counter-cultural “not yet”, produced and shared outside the matrix of the “war on terror”, can be articulated. Such precious narratives of liberation from racial hierarchy show the transnational scale of the black Atlantic, thereby breaking the pattern in which North American contingencies become understood as intrinsic to the general workings of division.

Despite the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina being beamed across the world in real-time – once again revealing the routine features of America’s racial nomos – it has not adequately disrupted the image of America as the land of our potential future. Although political leaders are still caught out by their inability to articulate a future for racial politics that is not deduced from American history, some of the motley crews in council estates, banlieues, fevelas and refugee camps in and between the Global North and Global South are helping re-imagine our political futures and racial destinies. Such a re-articulation of contemporary globalisation owes its spirit to the lost, or rather obfuscated, history of multinational, multiracial and multicultural revolutionary classes that through co-operation and a combination of strange bedfellows, was essential to the rise of capitalism and the modern global economy (Linebaugh, et al. 2002).

Today’s multi-ethnic motley crews are thriving in postcolonial metropolitan centres and embody a far more organic and mutually collaborative relationship with those in the Global South (Goodman 2009).<sup>40</sup> They are inspired by hip-hop culture’s free form and

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<sup>40</sup> The new styles of the Global South, from Rio funk to South African kwaito, all share the impulse of being radically synthetic counter cultures to world music. A number of DJs and writers have tried to aggregate these soundscapes under the flexible banner of “global ghettotech”. Despite its limitations, what is most interesting about this aggregation is the attempt to capture a radically reflexive counter-culture that is not only conscious of contemporary geopolitics, but also feeds into the ever-intensifying networking between first and third worlds – a reciprocity that makes binary modes of thinking ever more difficult to maintain. Such a move is obviously not immune to indulging in exotica, but it nevertheless both transgresses the end point of old world music and refutes simply being recuperated as a mute commodity.

democratic principles, epitomised by its stealing of electricity in its hay day of block parties. Remembering hip-hop's truth – a story told by kidnapped Africans, with Japanese technology, on stolen land, sent out to poor and rich youth all over the world and disguised as American products – such elements construct legitimate counter public spheres that break the simple poles of “crack music” and conscious hip-hop's romanticised militarism and commodified resistance, thus opening up a multitude of new possibilities. By making racial differences appear banal, such convivial interactions has disseminated everyday virtues that enliven our cities and enhance our struggling democracy so that it resists pressure to operate in colour coded forms.

Hip-hop culture has served as a prime example of multicultural urban France and its pluriethnic society in stark contrast to ghettoised American inner cities, as well as to what is often described as the assimilationist models of French nationhood (Durand 2002; Mitchell 2005). Similar configurations can also be found in the multi-ethnic motley crews in the U.K. grime and funky house scenes which, to borrow from Toni Morrison (1993), “never gives you the whole. It slaps and embraces, it slaps and embraces”. The webbed pathway of grime – through former U.K. music scenes from jungle and garage to other musics of the black Atlantic, particularly ragga and dancehall – has created a soundscape that is not only able to convey today's shock of the unintelligible, but also resist the homogenising and neutralising forces of today's culture industries. Similar networks of multicultural conviviality are also being nurtured in the far more vibrant and disruptive post-WOMAD world music of groups such as Magic System and The Very Best. Magic System, famous for their Zouglou dance craze in France, is a group from Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. As well as selling over 1.5 million records across Africa, they have become one of the most popular and successful African groups in France, courting the likes of Rai singer Khaled.<sup>41</sup> While The Very Best are a truly organic multicultural band with members from France, Sweden and Malawi. Their coming together was the fruit of accidental collision between three different nationalities in a down-at-heel corner of Clapton, East London. Their first album release, *Warm Heart of Africa*, is an organic mix of hip-hop, dance and Afropop. As the group's Malawian singer Easu Mwamwaya says, “it's not a fusion or any of those kinds of words people use – we're just sharing” (Observer 2009).

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<sup>41</sup> Not only does *Meme Pas Fatigue* escape the nullifying categorisation of World Music and exemplify a playful lived conviviality, but through the figure of Frank Ribery it also serves to highlight the transformative potential of such a culture. Available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=e31ALJkTtew](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e31ALJkTtew)

The complex and unpredictable nature of this counter-history of cultural relations and influences moves beyond the disabling scripts of the present that either say that, because race ought to be nothing, it is immediately of no consequence, and the American-centric discourse which states that it is not nothing but everything. As well as negotiating the logic of race talk, these vibrant counter-cultures also refuse the modern, occidental separation of ethics and politics from culture and aesthetics. They help specify the altogether different worlds of blackness to which these motley crews are committed to in the twenty-first century; black vernacular expressions which seek out new freedoms in areas of social life that are not respectful to the tempo of contemporary lawful commerce.

## Chapter 5

### Global Processes and the Question of Palestine: Freedom and the Public Sphere in the Occupied Palestinian Territories



Image: Untitled (Ramallah, 2008)

The public sphere is the site where struggles are decided by other means than war.  
– Alexander Kluge (1972)

Here we shall stay / Singing our songs / Taking to the angry streets / Filling prisons with  
dignity / In Lydda, in Ramlah, in the Galilee / We shall remain / Guarding in the shade of  
the fig and the olive / Fermenting rebellion in our children / As is yeast in the dough  
– Tawfiq Zayyad – *We Shall Remain* (1965)

We want the skyline of the West Bank to be dominated by apartment towers, not missiles.  
We want the roads of the West Bank to flow with commerce, not terrorists.  
– Benjamin Netanyahu speech at the White House (1 September 2010)

I want to tell you something about the word resistance. When an army invades you resist the army. When consumption invades you resist consumption. Ramallah is not resisting consumption.

- young Palestinian living in Al-Amari Refugee Camp (Ramallah, July 2008)

Those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are far from alone in this world.<sup>1</sup> Despite the continued repression, dispossession and fragmentation of life in the Occupied Territories, Palestinians have not disappeared. They continue to reinvent their pasts, articulate their present and image their futures. However, they are also not immune to the processes of contemporary globalisation that have come to define our age. This chapter aims to re-situate Palestine in current discussions of the global networks of contemporary capital and cultural flows. It intends to make a critical contribution to a cultural sociology of globalisation, and in doing so allow for new modes of thinking through some of the regimes and networks of the occupation today.

The first part of the chapter lays out the new historical situation since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. In the years leading up to the second Intifada, the Palestinian Authority, through its complicitous relationship with successive Israeli governments and its harsh dealing with political opponents, severely weakened Palestinian civil society. What was assumed to be the state building processes of the Oslo period spurred professionalised NGOs funded by Western governments and foundations and corporate sponsored institutions rather than popular organisations (Hanafi and Tabar 2005). The second half of the chapter analyses the impact of these trends on the social life of Palestinians. It focuses on “quick impact” international donor projects that are attempting to revive economic and social life in strategically chosen areas across the West Bank and the particular impact this is having on Palestinian youth culture. It hopes to question the extent to which such a public sphere is able to manipulate and shape young people’s opinions and behaviours.

The consequences of the spatial regime being consolidated in the occupied West Bank today, a result of the Israeli policy variously characterised as Bantustanisation, cantonisation, enclavisation and ghettoisation, have been discussed at length in recent years (Weizman 2007; Gordon 2008; Ophir, Givoni and Hanafi 2009; Zureik, Lyon and Abu-Laban, eds. 2010). A tremendous outpouring of documentation and reporting, analysis, opinion, and activism has been devoted to this issue; monitoring by international,

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<sup>1</sup> The Occupied Palestinian Territories comprise the West Bank – including East Jerusalem – and the Gaza Strip. These areas were occupied by Israel from Jordan and Egypt after the Six-Day War of 1967.

Palestinian, and Israeli agencies and organisations has shown the policy of fragmentation's devastating impact on the economy, social networks and the provision of basic services such as healthcare and education.<sup>2</sup> However, one of the less-analysed aspects of the emerging spatial regime is its effect on urban life as it is lived and experienced by Palestinians on a daily basis. Among the consequences of the consolidation of this regime have been the contraction of Palestinians' social worlds and the emergence of new forms of localism. Perhaps the most curious and paradoxical of these is the cosmopolitan-metropolitan localism of Ramallah.<sup>3</sup>

When considering Palestinian experiences, one is struck by the continuous repression, dispossession and denial of Palestinian reality, but equally by the changing forms and processes of self-determination. By reflecting on the dominant themes around which Palestinians understand and articulate their present, past and future through everyday lived experience, the over-arching concern of this chapter is the consideration of what comprises the Palestinian cultural universe amid historical and political instability. The difficult questions that this chapter hopes to pose stem from both the dissatisfaction with much of the literature produced on Palestinian youth culture and my experiences conducting fieldwork in the West Bank over a three-month period in the summer of 2008.<sup>4</sup> During this time the disparity between the representation of the Occupied Territories in this literature and the complex, contradictory – and at times surreal – reality of life under occupation became increasingly difficult to resolve. The aim of this chapter, however, is not to achieve some neat resolution of this dissonance. If anything, it is intent on asking familiar questions to which clear answers cannot be given, and thereby make complex again an area of study that for some time now has been devoid of the ambiguities and contradictions of human existence.

### **Ethnographic Sketches: A Public Sphere in the World of the Colony?**

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Human Rights Watch (Israel and the Occupied Territories) – [www.hrw.org/middle-eastn-africa/israel-and-occupied-territories/](http://www.hrw.org/middle-eastn-africa/israel-and-occupied-territories/), Palestinian Centre for Human Rights – [www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/](http://www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/), The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group – [www.phrmg.org/](http://www.phrmg.org/), or B'Tselem – [www.btselem.org/](http://www.btselem.org/)

<sup>3</sup> Decolonising Architecture, an international art and architecture collective based in the Palestinian town of Beit Sahour, is one of the few groups trying to engage critically with this complex spatial regime. Its interdisciplinary practice proposes the subversion, reuse, profanation and recycling of the existing infrastructure of the colonial occupation. For more, see [www.decolonizing.ps/site/](http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/) In terms of literature on how this production of space is connecting with and complementing the changing mechanisms and tools of Israeli control, see Abourahme (2009) 'The bantustan sublime - reframing the colonial in Ramallah', *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 13, 4: 499-509.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *Journal of Palestine Studies* (University of California Press) or *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* (BRILL).

Just as Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993) attempted to confront the qualitative transformation of capitalist social relationships from the standpoint of the changes in everyday experience in society, this chapter intends to extend their approach to the conflicted constitution of contemporary public spheres to the world of the neo-colony. For Negt and Kluge, the central category is the public sphere, which organises human experience, mediating between the changing forms of capitalist production on the one hand, and the cultural organisation of human experience on the other. Differentiating between the bourgeois public sphere, increasingly part of the capitalist production process, and the concept of a proletarian public sphere, Negt and Kluge argue that the latter could potentially oppose the organised interests of the bourgeois public sphere through its organisation of human needs.<sup>5</sup>

Three months worth of fieldwork in the West Bank is thus used to build a clearer and more up-to-date genealogy of the occupation's architecture; an architecture that has undergone a number of significant changes in recent years. I rely on a number of mixed methods, including interviews with government officials and funders, cultural organisers, commercial sector employees, youth surveys, programme evaluations and participant observation at trainings, exhibitions, screenings and concerts. It also draws from the social movement, popular education, and community media literatures. However, it is equally influenced by the time spent with young people outside the formal networks built through structured ethnographic work. This came to dominate the ethnographic work because it provided a space for honest investigation into the complex cultural field in Palestine, and in particular the complex and at time seemingly contradictory choices young Palestinians are making in their lives today. Although much of the ethnographic work focuses on young men, it makes a conscious effort to escape one of the central limitation of contemporary sociological work – the researching of youth and the particular preoccupation with the “spectacular behaviour” of predominately young men.

It is important to note that the logic of the occupation and the restrictions and limitations it imposes constantly shaped and re-shaped the nature of the fieldwork and therefore the issues raised in this chapter. Everything from the amount of time I could spend in the West Bank and where I could travel, to more intimate issues of how to take notes or conduct interviews, was mediated through Israel's securitocracy. I learnt over time

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<sup>5</sup> What is of particular relevance here is the authors' insistence that it is politically and theoretically necessary to weave together the fragmented history of resistance to capital into a larger whole or a counter-public sphere.

that by conducting fieldwork in a situation of war and under the conditions of military and civilian occupation, not only does it become necessary to blur disciplinary boundaries, but also crucial to re-evaluate the relationship between theoretical, empirical and ethnographic work. For attempts to present some version of reality does not come after practice, and neither does it precede it. They are undoubtedly intertwined. Just as Pierre Bourdieu's enduring concern for epistemic reflexivity during his fieldwork in war-torn Algeria, sociological fieldwork in Palestine forces one to reflect on everything, to monitor everything, in especially all that is taken for granted in the ordinary relation between the observer and the informant, the interviewer and the interviewee. More than ever, the very meaning of the observation and interview comes into question for the interviewees themselves (Bourdieu 2004).

The decisions I made, from the moment I arrived at Ben Gurion International Airport to my departure via the Allenby/King Hussein Bridge, were always mediated by what was possible under the immediate conditions. Nothing could ever really be planned. I remember arriving in Tel Aviv and being pulled out of the queue at arrivals and asked to wait in a room. As the hours past, the room began to fill with people – mostly Palestinians and young international activists – all waiting to enter Israel. After a number of interviews with security officials I was ushered into the office of a senior officer.

“Is this your uncle?”

He said as he turned his computer screen in my direction. The screen showed a photo and personal details of one of my uncles living in the West Bank.

“Are you intending on visiting him?”

I had told the other officers that this was my first time back since childhood and that I was intending to spend the summer holiday with family in East Jerusalem.

“You're not going to the West Bank? It's not a good idea you know.”

I told him that I was hoping to spend a month or so in Israel.

“You're not intending to apply for citizenship? Reclaim any land?”



After reassuring him that I was content as a British citizen and had every intention of returning, he said that he would need to take some final details before granting me entry. This information included my email addresses and passwords, mobile phone number and pin to access voicemails, and finally, my Facebook page and password.

I therefore learnt from very early on that I would have to negotiate a very fine line if I was going to manage to get away with any sort of research in the Occupied Territories. Not only do these experiences highlight the high-tech fantasy of Israeli surveillance and the state's desire to deploy advanced technological systems that dream of minimising human friction, but they also show the quintessential Palestinian experience. Most Palestinian's daily life is being structured around the experiences at airports, borders and checkpoints; in short at any of the high-tech barriers where modern identities are checked and verified. It was through these early experiences at the airport, border crossings and various checkpoints that I began to take stock of the changing nature of Palestinian nationalism. It became clear to me that these new technological regimes were having a particular impact on the socio-political imaginations of those living within the Occupied Territories. The fractious nationalism that had come to dominate Palestinian identity, particularly since the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, was slowly being eroded and replaced by a different form of identification and classification; a sort of virtual nationalism for which there was little precedent.

"I.D. Passport. Open your bag please", she said. After rummaging through my belongings the young soldier pulled out two notebooks and a digital recorder. "What are these?" I had been in the West Bank for almost a month by this point and was finally getting used to my new surroundings. I was staying with relatives in Ramallah and traveling to various cities and villages in the West Bank whenever I could hitch a ride with friends. I had just spent a week in Jenin Refugee Camp and taken part in a number of drama workshops with children at The Freedom Theatre.<sup>6</sup> After attempting to reason with the officer and her superior, I was told in no uncertain terms that the notebooks and recorder would be confiscated; a month's worth of fieldwork, interviews and personal thoughts gone. I also could not be naïve to whose hands this information was now in. I began to worry about the names, contact details and things people had said. I learnt very

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<sup>6</sup> Using the arts as a model for social change, The Freedom Theatre is the only professional venue for theatre and the arts in the north of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. They aim to empower and give voice to the children of Jenin Refugee Camp through a programme of workshops and activities in theatre, supporting arts and multimedia – ranging in their emphasis from the largely therapeutic and healing, to the presentation of high-quality artistic productions.

quickly the value – and danger – of information under such conditions. From that point on notebooks would be hidden in my left shoe and my recorder in my right sock, while names and mobile numbers written down using alphanumeric system that I devised for myself. As Bourdieu noted in the context of a different war of national liberation, such conditions

Exert a permanent practical reflexivity which is indispensable, in conditions of extreme urgency and risk, to interpret and assess the situation instantaneously and to mobilise, more or less consciously, the knowledge and know-how acquired in one's earliest social experience. (Bourdieu 2004, p. 420)

Nothing is ever self-evident and everything is constantly called into question when conducting fieldwork under such conditions.

The idea of intervention, not only as a way of acquiring knowledge, but also as a political act becomes necessary when working – or simply being – in the Occupied Territories. Intervention no longer follows, as Annemarie Mol notes:

A gaze that tries to see objects, but instead follows objects while they are being enacted in practice. So, the emphasis shifts. Instead of the observer's eyes, the practitioner's hands become the focus point of theorising. (Mol 2003, p. 152)

This chapter hopes to contribute to this tradition where knowledge is no longer treated primarily as referential, as a set of statements about reality, but as a practice that interferes with other practices.<sup>7</sup> It is at the cost of a veritable epistemological conversion that lived experience can enter into empirical analysis. The writing up of this ethnographic work itself involves the process of listening for stories. It necessitates connecting the intimate experience of social life with public issues.<sup>8</sup> Some of the small stories, autobiographical or other, attempt to relate experiences and troubles to a larger, worldlier scale (Back 2009). The tensions of conducting fieldwork in Palestine reminds one that the nation-state can no

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<sup>7</sup> This is very much inspired by the work of Alain Touraine and his method of “sociological intervention”. First proposed in his book *The Voice and the Eye* (1981), sociological intervention is described by Touraine “as an intensive and in-depth process during which sociologists lead the actors from a struggle they must carry on themselves to an analysis of their own action. This process involves a series of stages that constitute the history of the research”. The intervention is thus a self-analysis that requires the active participation of social actors engaged in a collective struggle. It does not focus just on the analysis of a political discourse, but is equally concerned with the struggle represented by the action that has brought it about.

<sup>8</sup> The ethnographic sketches in this chapter are influenced by Smadar Lavaie's *The Poetics of Military Occupation* (1990). Through her ethnographic work whilst living with the Mzeina Bedouins of the South Sinai Desert, Lavaie reveals how ordinary people utilise ritualistic storytelling and literary allegory to help deal with and ultimately resist foreign occupation through everyday practices. It is Lavaie's keen eye for the paradoxes and ambiguities in everyday life under such conditions that is of particular interest.

longer remain the prime container of sociological analysis and challenges one to construct a genuinely global sociological imagination.

### **Palestine in a Globalised and Segregated World: From the Oslo Accords to the “War on Terror”**

In terms of the Middle East, the United States has maintained a dominant role in the region since the late 1960s. More recently, and still very much in collusion with American regional hegemony, the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have taken on the role as a key source for flows of surplus capital and globalised culture in the region. Significantly, the GCC plays a key role as the central U.S. military outpost in the region with the Centcom headquarters – the unified command centre for operations in 27 countries – moving to Qatar in 2003. Moreover, Jordan and Egypt have also developed into regional security and economic hubs in a post-Cold War regional landscape that has only further accelerated under the “war on terror”. There is a tendency, however, to leave Palestine out of such discussions of American influence and neo-liberal development across the Middle East.

It is important to stress here the legacy of the Oslo Accords, not only its fracturing of Palestinian national unity and its creation of a completely subservient Palestinian Authority, but also the physical truncation and re-imagination of the Palestinian population and their land. The severing of Gaza from the West Bank, as well as the general separation and isolation of population centres all stem from the 1990s. Cities and urban spaces have been integrated as truncated patchworks of territories and industrial zones in the continuously evolving map of the Occupied Territories.<sup>9</sup> However, this should be understood as an intended legacy of the Oslo period. Edward Said’s writings on Oslo have always stressed that the process was nothing more than a modified Allon Plan that aimed to keep the territories in a state of permanent dependency (2000). Not only was this fully compatible with the imperatives of global capitalism, but the matrix of control and compliant cartography also helped institutionalise a carceral archipelago, an ersatz

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<sup>9</sup> In 2010, Peace Now launched an iPhone application, Facts on the Ground, which uses Google’s satellite images of the West Bank and a myriad of data to give a live picture of the continuously evolving picture of Israel’s settlement expansion.

Palestine controlled by Eretz Israel. The Oslo process, therefore, effectively transformed the Palestinian people into inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The distinction being that people have national rights of sovereignty over their land, independence and freedom, while inhabitants constitute a group of people with interests not exceeding garbage collection and earning a daily living.



Image: Palestinian Sovereignty in a Carceral Archipelago<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Taken from The Atlas of *Le Monde Diplomatique* (2009).

It is important to remember that such attempts at re-shaping Palestinian nationhood are always being contested and evolving. The various claims being made by both local and international actors are in constant flux – sometimes clashing and resisting, and at other times coalescing around each other. Exploring the much-neglected role of the spatio-temporal orders in the Occupied Territories is central to understanding the socio-political changes that are now occurring. For the displacement of geographical knowledge always takes place through diplomatic and political practice, and wars and interstate relations. As Thongchai Winichakul (1994) shows, national identity always evolves alongside its geographic identity. By tracing the Siamese geo-body through to the formation of the modern nation-state of Thailand, Winichakul's work allows for a critical interrogation into the relationships – the transformations, shifts or confrontations – between outernational forces, state institutions, social practices and local communities.<sup>12</sup>

A nation's territory is never simply characterised by a piece of the earth's surface. Territoriality, as Winichakul rightly points out, is the attempt by an individual or group to affect or control people and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area. It is a complex strategy and the device through which people construct and maintain spatial organisations. Above all, as the basic geographic expression of influence and power, territoriality is always socially constructed (Winichakul 1994, p. 16). Therefore, by focusing on the contrasting geographical discourses held by both the Siamese and British and French colonialists in 19th Century Asia, his work not only helps dispel the idea that the Siamese were simply victims or innocent bystanders, but also highlights how locals were at times able to manipulate the ideas and innovations of the colonial powers to form an independent nation. In the case of Palestine, however, a similar reading becomes further complicated by looking at Winichakul's mapped world in an age of global mass communication. Many of the technological appendages of contemporary globalisation are being successfully manipulated, but a number of processes are also being distorted in order to further entrench the architecture of the occupation.

Moreover, Eyal Weizman's concept of a "politics of verticality" allows for an increasingly virtual and three-dimensional orchestration of territorial configurations to

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<sup>12</sup> The geographical boundaries of a territory – its geo-body – are defined by the operations of the technology of territoriality which created nationhood spatially, and emphasises the displacement of social knowledge which has in effect produced social institutions and practices that created nationhood. For Winichakul, the geo-body of a nation is "a man-made territorial definition which creates effects – by classifying, communicating, and enforcement – on people, things, and relationships".

maintain and deepen Israel's geopolitical advantage. The notion of "verticalised sovereignty" allows for a new understanding of the post-Oslo landscape in which "a panoptic system of three-dimensional control makes an entire environment of the Occupied Territories the embodiment of the architecture of colonialism" (Weizman 2002). This is particularly pertinent to the new and intricate frontiers that are now being re-invented, just as the temporary borders drawn up in the Oslo Interim Accord before. The PA is given control over sections of these isolated territorial islands, with Israel retaining control over the airspace above and the subterrain below. Ron Pundak, the architect of the Oslo Accords, described solutions for portioning the West Bank with a three-dimensional matrix of roads and tunnels as the only practical way to divide an undividable territory. While Gilead Sher, Israeli chief negotiator at Camp David, explained it as a way of enlarging the "cake" before portioning it. This framework allows for new and seemingly temporary facts on the ground that permit this presence to continue and entrench itself further.

In the context of what Stephen Graham calls the constructed urbicide in the Occupied Territories, it has become fashionable to apply ideas such as Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception" and "bare life", as well as Achille Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics", to the present situation in Palestine (Mbembe 2003; Agamben 2005; Graham 2010).<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt that there is a besieging cartography in place that is forcibly attempting to de-develop Palestinian urban society, but it is becoming increasingly important to see this strategy of deliberate urban destruction as closely integrated with more recent Israeli, Palestinian and international efforts to reconstruct place and space in the Occupied Territories. Agamben's interpretation of Carl Schmitt's work is crucial to understanding how states of exception, which include life in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion, are central to the core concept of sovereignty. Understanding the ability of the power of law to actively separate citizens – as political beings – from bodies of bare life is crucial to deconstructing the logic of the occupation, but it is also becoming

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<sup>13</sup> Most recently, the Palestinian sociologist Sari Hanafi has written about the "spacio-cidal" – as opposed to genocidal – practices of the Israeli military. For Hanafi, spacio-cide is more holistic than urbicide in that it denies and ignores the demographic development of the Palestinian community and systematically denies space for demographic expansion. For more, see, Hanafi (2009) 'Spacio-cide: colonial politics, invisibility and rezoning in Palestinian territory' *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 2, 1: 106-121. Also see, Ophir, Hanafi and Givoni (2009) *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*. Massachusetts: MIT Press. This collection of essays attempts to uncover the structural logic that maintains and reproduces the Israeli occupation. By situating the occupation within international forms of discriminatory rule, it provides a new set of categories to help understand the contemporary dimensions of the occupation regime.

increasingly important to distinguish the various forms of subjectivities being constructed by the occupation today.

The concept of “bare life” and Mbembe’s “necropolitics” – a politics in which sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die – are relevant, but their sometimes lazy application in the case of Palestine fails to differentiate “bare life” from other equally oppressive, but at the same time empowering forms of subjectivity that late modern colonial occupation produces. For Frantz Fanon, colonial occupation entails first and foremost a division of space into compartments, “the town belonging to the colonised people is a place of ill fame [...] the native town is a hungry town, a crouching village, a town on its knees” (Fanon 2001, p. 30). However, the colonised in Palestine cannot be simply relegated into a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood. There needs to be room for an analysis of the emerging (class) formations within Palestinian society that are intrinsically linked to Palestinian citizenship, freedom of movement and the idea of Palestinian sovereignty. The addition of a lane at checkpoints for those with VIP status – predominately politicians and businessmen – highlights this emerging distinction in Palestinian experience and quotidian life. Late modern colonial domination is a concatenation of multiple powers – disciplinary, biopolitical and necropolitical.

It is important to add that this critique of the emerging social-spatial order is not intended as some form of romantic ruralisation of developed areas. It is, however, intended to map the emerging paradigm of security, control and citizenship that is developing in the coexisting archipelagos and enclaves in the Occupied Territories. It also hopes to place this development within the larger trend in offshore residential islands in Dubai, gated communities in the United States, transit centres in Europe and green zones in Baghdad. Central to this question of sovereignty is that of movement and access. Therefore, in contrast to the infringements on the movements of Palestinians both within, in-between and beyond the Occupied Territories, American and Jordanian military instructors, thousands of rifles from Egypt – with the approval of the Israeli cabinet – and consumer goods from across the globe travel and move freely across the West Bank. The processes of connectivity and fragmentation evolve interdependently. These flows work through and alongside the networks of borders and walls, thus allowing for frameworks of freedom in some places and frameworks of control in others. These varying forms of quasi-sovereignty highlight how in this emerging geopolitical order there are different ideas for



different areas. The logic of the occupation in Gaza – that of suspension – is linked, but drastically different to the technologies of control in the West Bank.



Image: Walls and Towers (Ramallah, 2008)<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Abraj Investment and Development is a newly established Palestinian real estate company. Established in 2008, it aims to provide “high class residential and commercial buildings and villas based on international standards including high quality and technology requirements in such buildings so that it allows our

## Neoliberal Development, Cultural Diplomacy and the Logic of Securitocracy

### *Foreign Governments and International NGOs*

The West Bank is now facing a different endgame. Numerous processes – from the unceasing settlement expansion and continued construction of the wall in the West Bank to the continued isolation and carceralisation of Gaza – have gathered pace since the Oslo Accords and growing list of aborted negotiations since. This has coincided with a new strategy put forward by the Middle East Quartet and backed by a number of governmental and non-governmental organisations.<sup>15</sup> Their stated aim is to revive the economic and social life in strategically chosen areas – those targeted thus far include Jenin and Nablus in the north, Ramallah in the heart of the West Bank, and Bethlehem in the south. The Quartet speaks openly about the need to fit such projects into a broader regional logic, as well as the geopolitical concerns in the “war on terror”. The goal, if these projects prove a success, is for a broader plan that aims to neutralise spaces and populations through economic and social development. They will be initiated by international governmental and non-governmental actors, and implemented by local governmental and corporate and consumer industries. Such processes are therefore attempting to reshape and remap the central question of Palestinian nationhood and sovereignty in the West Bank.

Since 9/11, the Middle East Quartet has taken over much of the logistics for international economic and social programmes in the Occupied Territories. Interviewing one of Tony Blair’s advisors in the West Bank brought to the fore how the context of the “war on terror” has added another dimension to these processes. When we met, in what has come to be known as the NGO enclave in Ramallah, she was keen to stress how the new model for its various projects in the West Bank is based on the experiences of Coalition forces in Afghanistan. Tony Blair and his envoy envisage a scenario in which areas, cities and districts can be strategically neutralised by linking economic development and social vitality with Israeli security concerns. Their “area based” programmes is to be part of a new regional approach of securing governments and then developing them to make them function effectively. However, acknowledging the unpopularity and skepticism of past

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customers to feel the luxury in their life and business”. For more on their latest projects, see [www.abraj.ps/Home.aspx](http://www.abraj.ps/Home.aspx)

<sup>15</sup> For more on the Office of the Quartet Representative Tony Blair, see [www.tonyblairoffice.org/quartet/](http://www.tonyblairoffice.org/quartet/)

security approaches, Ms. Klob was convinced that the “carrot of social infrastructure and extracurricular – quick impact – projects would prove a success”.<sup>16</sup>



Image: USAID Development Project (Jericho, 2008)

Ms. Klob raised another linked change in international policy regarding the Palestinian territories. Speaking to her about the particular role of social and cultural projects under the broader framework of regional security, she stressed the need to change the attitudes of the next generation by focusing on the realities on the ground. The Quartet, she said, felt that the numerous cultural institutions, such as the Goethe Institut and Amideast, are proving ineffective in engaging the target audience of young Palestinians on terms that would genuinely change their outlook on the West.<sup>17</sup> Both the United States and the Middle East

<sup>16</sup> Author's interview, Henriette Kolb, Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and special advisor for Quartet Representative Tony Blair in Jerusalem, Ramallah, 12 August 2008. Henriette Klob is now the CEO of the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, which provides integrated business development support for women entrepreneurs in developing and transition countries. For more, see [www.cherieblairfoundation.org](http://www.cherieblairfoundation.org)

<sup>17</sup> The Goethe Institut promotes the study of German language abroad and foster international cultural cooperation. They aim to convey a comprehensive picture of Germany by providing information on the cultural, social and political life. For more, see [www.goethe.de/ins/ps/ram/deindex.htm](http://www.goethe.de/ins/ps/ram/deindex.htm) Amideast is an

Quartet are now planning for a regional approach, particularly involving the Gulf States, which could prove more effective in getting young people to participate in the changes that are taking place around them. It is interesting that she became increasingly uncomfortable when I tried to push her further on what these changes in youth perception should entail. She was unclear, or at least uncomfortable, on pinning down what exactly would be seen as a success when it came to these changes in attitudes.

They have, therefore, decided that delegating diplomatic programmes – an area traditionally seen as the work of governments – to non-governmental and private sector organisations would prove to be a more effective strategy. The Quartet have announced a \$200 million initiative with the Ministry of Education and a number of private sector corporations aimed at revamping the education sector and improving extra curricular opportunities – concert halls, sports grounds, parks and museums.<sup>18</sup> Such projects have proven attractive to foreign capital as it expands the opportunities for international and local commercial sectors to expand and capture new audiences. This can be seen most clearly in the Quartet's plan to reinvigorate their I.T. project at the beginning of 2010. This will include Palestinian private sector businesses, the telecommunications sector and a number of U.S. companies – most notably Microsoft.<sup>19</sup> The overall belief is that by creating a framework through which governments can act as a filter, the private sector can help achieve the highest level of impact on the ground.

### *Private Sector*

The Palestinian Reform and Development Plan, sponsored by the World Bank and DFID, is crucial to understanding both the post-Oslo political direction and neo-liberal vision for the region today. The PA's private sector driven economic strategy to attract FDI and reduce public spending intends to formalise a truncated network of Palestinian enclaves and industrial zones. It is not only dependent on the occupation, but also creates the conditions for cheap Palestinian labour to be exploited by regional industries. Not only is it important to stress the culpability of Palestinian political and economic elites in the operation and maintenance of these structures, but also to see it as part of a larger regional and international framework that intends to reinvent the Orient by normalising relations

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American non-profit organisation engaged in international education, training and development activities in the Middle East and North Africa. For more, see [www.amideast.org/](http://www.amideast.org/)

<sup>18</sup> For more, see [www.quartetrep.org/quartet/](http://www.quartetrep.org/quartet/)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

and integrating Israel into the region. This new neo-liberal zone envisioned by the United States rests upon Israeli capital flows in the West and Gulf capital flows in the East. As the work of Adam Hanieh stresses, the construction of dependent islands of territories across the West Bank and Gaza becomes a prerequisite for such a strategy (2009, 2010).

This reformulation allows for a critical re-reading of the financial support for the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan that emerged out of the donor conference held in Paris in 2007 pledging \$7.7 billion to support the Abbas and Fayyad government. One of the interesting developments to come out of the initiative is the plan for industrial zones and parks that were endorsed by the United States, the E.U. and Israel.<sup>20</sup> Not only are these zones part of the attempts to restructure the Palestinian economy, but they are also intended to facilitate Israeli, Palestinian and regional capital to cooperate within these spaces and take advantage of the low relative wage costs. The general movement in and out of these areas will be controlled by Israeli police and Palestinian security forces. The underlying logic, therefore, is not simply the exploitation of cheap labour, but also the normalisation, legitimisation and further extension of the existing structures of the occupation. Moreover, a number of projects considered at the Palestine Investment Conference in Bethlehem in 2009 bring to attention how the military and civilian occupation is increasingly being integrated into the development model for the Occupied Territories and the quotidian life of most Palestinians. For example, the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity and agro-industrial zone in the Jordan valley not only aims to allow for further penetration of Israeli and regional capital, but also significantly rearticulate the question of Palestinian statehood. Palestinian sovereignty thus becomes predicated not only on Israeli security concerns, but also increasingly subservient to international capital flows.

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<sup>20</sup> Industrial zones and parks have begun to be built in Jenin, Nablus and Tarquimiya.



Image: The “Beautification” of a City (Ramallah, 2008)

Musri’s Palestinian Development and Investment Company (PADICO) represents about 35 percent of the Palestinian economy, with the stated primary goal of developing the infrastructure of Palestine.<sup>21</sup> The increasing synergy between these political and socio-economic forces, initiated during the Oslo period, came to a head at the end of 2007 when the business elite and professional class led by Musri launched a new political movement – Muntada Forum – with the intention of converting it into a political party in the near future. This process coincided with calls by Egypt, Jordan, the Europeans and the United States for Munib Masri to become Prime Minister of a unity government. Aside from the reconfiguration of the political elite, the burgeoning business comprador class is equally important in understanding this emerging landscape. The figure of Munib Musri brings to

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<sup>21</sup> Since its inception in 1993, PADICO’s mission has been to develop and strengthen the Palestinian economy through investing in vital economic sectors. This mission was initiated by several Palestinian and Arab investors who believed that the Palestinian market was a unique business opportunity and offered substantial financial returns. The number of PADICO’s investors has gradually increased over the years – from 710 shareholders in 1998 to over 12,000 shareholders in 2008. Its stated mission is, “to play a central and leading role in building and developing the Palestinian economy – a young, promising, and challenging economy, to attract potential investors (local, regional and international) and encourage partnerships”. For more, see [www.padico.com/](http://www.padico.com/)

attention not only Frantz Fanon's warnings of the pitfalls of national consciousness, but also the contemporary nexus of the occupation.<sup>22</sup>

I remember walking in one of the wealthy residential areas near the city centre in Ramallah and noticing one of the numerous construction sites. Opposite the new Movenpick hotel that was nearing completion was a row of new housing developments.<sup>23</sup> This was not a particularly unusual site, but what caught my eye was the fleet of Caterpillar bulldozers. I watched on, hypnotised by its movements, as one dug into the ground, only to be finally distracted by a Palestinian flag flapping violently in the breeze. The flag was attached to the bulldozer. This came as a surprise since the majority of the Israeli military's deliberate destruction of Palestinian homes since 1967 have been carried out by bulldozers supplied to the Israeli military by the Caterpillar Corporation in the United States.<sup>24</sup> What, therefore, interested me was how a Caterpillar bulldozer that the Israeli military use to destroy Palestinian homes can successfully morph into a bulldozer leased to international and Palestinian businesses for the construction of new homes, hotels and shopping malls in the West Bank. This image not only raised fundamental questions about the relationship between colonialism, nationalism and international capital, but also changed how I looked at the numerous developmental projects taking place across the West Bank. For in the context of the occupation, the logic between construction and destruction became increasingly blurred and complex.

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<sup>22</sup> As Fanon notes in 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' in his *The Wretched of the Earth*, "history teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism. For a very long time the native devotes his energies to ending certain definite abuses: forced labour, corporal punishment, inequality of salaries, limitation of political rights, etc. This fight for democracy against the oppression of mankind will slowly leave the confusion of neo-liberal universalism to emerge, sometimes laboriously, as a claim to nationhood. It so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps".

<sup>23</sup> See [www.moevenpick-hotels.com/en/pub/service/about\\_us/development\\_strategy/future\\_projects/openings\\_2010/ramallah.cfm](http://www.moevenpick-hotels.com/en/pub/service/about_us/development_strategy/future_projects/openings_2010/ramallah.cfm)

<sup>24</sup> For more, see War on Want's 'Caterpillar – Alternative Company Report' March 2005.



Image: (De)constructing a City (Ramallah, 2008)

The growth of the private sector in the Occupied Territories can be seen in the increasing synergy between cultural institutions – historically central to Palestinian public life – and both international and local commercial enterprises. This trend is also marked by the particular shift to a younger demographic target audience.<sup>25</sup> The free and independent *Filistin Ashabab* [The Youth’s Palestine] magazine, whose mission statement stresses the need to engage Palestinian youth with issues that affect them most, plays it very safe in terms of content, and is littered with advertisements – a disproportionate portion dedicated to the newly established Wataniya Palestine Telecom Company.<sup>26</sup> Speaking to Sani Meo, the General Manager of Jeel – the publishing company of *Filistin Ashabab* – he felt that

<sup>25</sup> An example of this is the Young Entrepreneurs of Palestine (YEP). YEP is a new organisation based in Ramallah with the aim of promoting entrepreneurship and engaging Palestinian people (especially young and women) in economically productive activities. YEP sees itself as, “giving a new value to the notion of entrepreneurship and helping to build a solid foundation of human security (social, economic as well as national)”. YEP’s vision is to become a leading service organisation bringing the younger generation of entrepreneurs to play a significant role in shaping up the future of Palestine. The purpose of this initiative is to establish a forum for young pioneers to be involved in business life and the decision-making. For more, see [www.yep.ps/](http://www.yep.ps/)

<sup>26</sup> The latest issue can be found online [www.filistinashabab.com/](http://www.filistinashabab.com/) In 2007, *Filistin Ashabab* and Wataniya Mobile held their inaugural awards ceremony in Ramallah to recognise the winners of its monthly literary and art competition.



the magazine's success "proved that the commercial world could be a friend to the culture scene – a new generation of Palestinian artists did not in the past have such a medium to express themselves".<sup>27</sup>

There is a growing awareness within policy circles that public diplomacy constitutes more than exchange students and a few diplomats who can speak Arabic and struggle on satellite television in the region to explain American foreign policy. It is within this context that Tony Blair's decision as the Quartet Representative to support the project for a second Palestinian mobile company should be understood.<sup>28</sup> Speaking on the deal, which was finally announced at the Palestine Investment Conference in Bethlehem in May 2008, Blair stated that, "the launch will also provide a welcome boost to the Palestinian Authority and the Government's work to attract Arab and international investment to the Palestinian Territory".<sup>29</sup> Stuck at the checkpoint on the outskirts of Jenin, I could make out the sounds of engines revving as they prepared to take part in the 2008 Wataniya Mobile Car Racing Championship. A number of attempts to rationalise with the soldiers finally led to an outburst on my behalf, and I was barred from entering the city that afternoon. On my way back to Ramallah, a friend in Nablus called me asking where I was. He told me that over 8,000 spectators lined Al Mountazah Street to support their local favourites. The race was followed by an awards ceremony at the Nablus Municipality Cultural Centre that was attended by Dr. Jamal Al Mohaisen, the Governor of Nablus, Dr. Hafez Shaheen, the Deputy Mayor, Mr. Allan Richardson, the CEO of Wataniya Mobile and Mr. Khalid Qadura, the head of the Palestinian Motor Sports Association. Mr. Allan Richardson also addressed the crowd saying:

We are proud to be able to support this race, which was the first event of its kind in the city, and we are delighted to see so many drivers from all over the West Bank participating. Wataniya Mobile is committed to supporting the cultural life of Palestine and we will continue to do so.<sup>30</sup>

In 2009, Technology Entertainment and Design (TED), the powerful American non-profit organisation, set up TEDxRamallah.<sup>31</sup> By focusing on technology and culture,

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<sup>27</sup> Author's interview, Sani Melo, Jeel General Manager, Ramallah, 3 September 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Blair helped broker the agreement, which was agreed between the government of Israel and the Quartet in May 2008, and further specified in a bilateral agreement between the PA and Israel in July 2008.

<sup>29</sup> See [www.tonyblairoffice.org/quartet/news-entry/tony-blair-welcomes-wataniya-mobile-phone-launch-as-largest-foreign-investm/](http://www.tonyblairoffice.org/quartet/news-entry/tony-blair-welcomes-wataniya-mobile-phone-launch-as-largest-foreign-investm/)

<sup>30</sup> Recounted to me by a Palestinian friend who attended the event.

<sup>31</sup> Technology Entertainment and Design (TED) addresses an increasingly wide range of topics within the research and practice of science and culture. At its conferences, speakers are given a maximum of 18 minutes

and through its network of global conferences and annual prizes, TED aims “to leverage the powers of ideas to change the world”.<sup>32</sup> By bringing the mass media, entertainment industries and market forces together, it believes it can amplify the power of ideas to change people’s attitudes and lives. TEDxRamallah, which took place in April 2011, brought together over 20 speakers and performers from a number of different disciplines.<sup>33</sup> Despite it taking place in an occupied and segregated city, the numerous events aimed to educate and motivate through inspiring stories, spread them virally to a globally connected audience, and thus contribute to the positive perception of Palestine. However, a closer look at the organisation’s networks, sponsors and curatorial choices sheds a different light on TED’s supposedly non-partisan work. Rather than a global community or clearinghouse that offers free knowledge and inspiration from local and international thinkers, TEDxRamallah serves to both broaden international corporate networks in the region and intensify the “hallucination of normalcy” in the West Bank.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, unlike other non-profit organisations, such as Davos and the Clinton Global Initiative, TED attempts to harness the power of both social networking and the infotainment telesector to help establish a new generation of technoliterate and globally connected entrepreneurs and cultural workers.

Despite such attempts by international donors and local NGOs to formalise and regiment culture, the reality is not so simple. As soon as you step outside of the Cultural Palaces, international cultural centres and cafes in the wealthy suburbs of Al-Maysoon, one notices that the relationship between such projects and Palestinian youth is somewhat messier. It was only my second day there and I decided to take a walk in the centre of Ramallah with an old friend. It was a Sunday night and the Manara [Lion Square] was buzzing. I had taken an old phone with me and failed to realise that the Bluetooth was

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to present their ideas in the most innovative and engaging ways they can. From 2005 to 2009, three \$100,000 TED Prizes were awarded annually to help its winners realise a chosen project aimed at changing the world. In 2010, it changed its selection process, and a single winner was chosen. Past presenters have included Bill Clinton, Malcolm Gladwell, Al Gore, Bill Gates and Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin.

<sup>32</sup> The talks and conferences have been offered for free viewing online, under a Creative Commons license, through TED. As of July 2010, over 700 talks have been made available free online. By January 2009, they had been viewed 50 million times. In July 2010, the viewing figures stood at more than 290 million, reflecting a still growing global audience.

<sup>33</sup> Invited speakers included Fadi Ghandour, founder of Ruwwad for Development, a private sector-led initiative engaging youth to empower disadvantaged communities, Gisel Kordestani, the Director of New Business Development at Google for Latin America and the Asia-Pacific region and Mohammad Khatib, a former web developer intern at Google who went on to co-found Bazinga! a startup catalyst and tech hub in Ramallah. Live performers included the HBO Def Jam poet Mark Gonzales and DAM, the Palestinian hip-hop group.

<sup>34</sup> Leading sponsors range from AOL, AT&T, BlackBerry and Microsoft to The Coca-Cola Company, Levi’s and Gucci.

activated. After a while it began vibrating. I failed to realise at first since no one had my number, but then it began vibrating incessantly. I took it out, and without looking rejected a couple of the invitations. However, I grew more frustrated as the beeps and vibrations continued. I noticed my friend smiling and she told me to open the next one. Without fail, my phone started vibrating. Opening the incoming messages, my inbox read “sex.avi”. The next one “iloveu.mpeg”.<sup>35</sup> “What does it say?” She asked, unable to hold back her knowing grin. Confused and not knowing what to say I turned away and noticed two teenage girls – one of whom was wearing a hijab – looking at me and laughing. “Get used it to Omar. You’re in Ramallah now.”<sup>36</sup>

When I went home that night and read the messages and watched over the videos I thought about how mobile phones have been hailed as important new democratic technologies for those across the Global South (Rheingold 2002; Rafael 2003). They are among the crop of new media – most prominent among them satellite television and the Internet – upon which many media scholars, diplomats, CEOs and others have thrust their hopes for a more democratic future in Palestine and the Arab world more generally. New technologies have often caught up in the popular fantasies of and mobilisations for democratization (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002;). It was something that would constantly return to me as I spent more time with young people there.

Despite the increase in violence, political instability, and economic poverty since 1994, telecommunications has become the only area of growth in the Palestinian Territories (Tawil-Souri 2011).<sup>37</sup> A virtual economy seemed like a plausible solution to a population increasingly fragmented by Israeli policies and with little opportunity for employment. However, the Oslo Agreements opened the floodgates to foreign investors and aid projects which followed the blueprint of mainstream development initiatives in the developing world: promises of modernisation, democratisation, strengthening civil society,

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<sup>35</sup> When I later opened them, the files contained short hardcore pornographic clips that had clearly been downloaded from the Internet.

<sup>36</sup> What made this encounter particularly interesting was that it took place somewhere in between a mediated online world where identities can be withheld or altered and the world of tactile human interaction. The girls were comfortable and confident enough to make it clear that it was them who sent the messages, but there was equally an implicit understanding that I would neither approach them nor respond to their message.

<sup>37</sup> For more on the Palestinian economy since the Oslo Accords and the particular processes of de-development, see the work of Sara Roy, in particular *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development*. Institute of Palestine Studies, Berkeley: University of California Press.

integrating into the global economy, and sustaining peace.<sup>38</sup> The idea of “peace funding” in Palestine resulted in the marginalisation of local institutions and grassroots organisations because of the shift to aid projects that bolstered Western and American corporate, strategic, and ideological presence in the territories (Tawil-Souri 2007).

Arguably, the last decade and a half has brought with it exponential growth in media and cultural production in the Occupied Territories. Such growth may be attributed to these new technologies and the age of globalisation in which both outsiders have more access to Palestinian products, and Palestinians, no matter the difficulties of being encased in Bantustans and refugee camps, have more access to the outside world and to each other, at least in mediated forms. However, Internet development projects usually have a narrow focus, positing to be about improving prospects for wider access to information and communication networks on the assumption that this is enough to enable political and economic progress. As such, invoking the information society as an icon of modernisation and a mark of Western industrial development becomes a new form of colonisation, reinforcing a world of contact and influence between radically asymmetrical economies (Goggin and McLelland 2008).<sup>39</sup> While the Internet may link users globally and enable information to flow across borders, location still matters in shaping both the creation of the infrastructure needed and online activities. It is, therefore, equally important to recognise, particularly in the context of Palestine, how offline activities determine the development and expansion of the Internet.

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<sup>38</sup> The amount of international aid to the Palestinian Territories increased from \$130 million in 1994 after the signing of the Oslo Accords to \$800 million in 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Helga Tawil-Souri argues that internet development in the Palestinian context, with similarities reverberating globally, is nothing short of the Americanisation of Palestinian society.



Image: “When there is civilisation ... Your mobile is on us.” (Ramallah, 2008)<sup>40</sup>

### *Cultural Institutions*

<sup>40</sup> Palestinian Telecommunications Group (Paltel) was founded in 2005, and includes the subsidiaries Landline Paltel, which came into service in 1994, mobile network communications Jawwal in 1999 and Internet services Hadara in 1997. Paltel makes up 29 percent of the Palestinian Authority’s gross national product and accounts for 50 percent of the worth of the Palestinian Securities Exchange.

“What’s up my nigga!” I recognised the voice. It had been over four years since I had last seen Sameh “Saz” Zakout. He had been part of DAM, the first Palestinian hip-hop group. They had begun to achieve an international following, mostly on European and North American university campuses, and received a record deal with a French label that specialised in world music. However, Sameh left DAM a few years later to pursue a solo career. He managed to get EU funding for a small recording studio and had just set up his own record label. Sameh, like a number of young Palestinian rappers, felt inspired by Jay-Z’s business approach of setting up one’s own record label and business rather than trying to get signed to a major. However, Sameh was also dedicating his time to another venture – *Project Hip-Hop Palestine*. This started out as a small project created by a few well-intentioned NGO workers that ended up as a touring hip-hop workshop funded by the Danish government and supported by the artistic NGO Sabreen.<sup>41</sup> With help from local, Danish and other European-Palestinian rappers, a five-week summer training programme was set up across the West Bank. The programme consisted of break-dancing, spoken word, rap and beatboxing workshops, with the most talented kids being chosen for more intensive workshops in Ramallah before a final showcase at the Cultural Palace.

Said Murad, the general manager and artistic director of Sabreen was keen on stressing to me the qualities of writing lyrics and rapping as a means of self-expression for young Palestinians. However, what was most interesting was the role given to European-Palestinian rappers who ran the various workshops. I was able to sit in on most of the sessions and noticed that they were extremely ambivalent to the context and contradictory circumstances under which the whole project was funded, set up and run.<sup>42</sup> The most revealing part was how they chose to run the workshops. They began each session with a bastardised version of hip-hop’s history. It was sold as very much an African American cultural form with little to no understanding of its transnational routes. All the artists they played in terms of styles were American, and they pushed the two dominant political trends in American hip-hop today – the hyper-militarised pseudo-revolutionary music of Immortal Technique and Dead Prez or the branded consumer-friendly revolution of Def Poetry Jam and Talib Kweli.

Most of the young kids were frustrated with how they were perceived by other Palestinians:

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<sup>41</sup> For more, see [www.sabreen.org/](http://www.sabreen.org/)

<sup>42</sup> The five-week programme took place over July and August 2008 across a number of Palestinian towns including Nablus, Jenin, Bethlehem and Ramallah.

People don't understand what rap is, they think it's some negative Western influence, like we're forgetting our culture, but we are mixing Palestinian tradition and patriotism with rap. It's our way of reaching youth inside and outside of Palestine.

Many of the young kids chosen for the workshops evoked the spirit of hip-hop reminiscent of stories from hip-hop's birth in the South Bronx.

There's only really a few good DJs in our city [Jenin], with their one equipment. They charge between 200 and 500 dollars per show. We can't afford that [...] Since we don't have the equipment, and the recording studio is too expensive, we try to cut albums in the most simple way, using a laptop mixer programme and recording in our homes.

Ahmed was probably the most talented of all the MCs. He loved West Coast rap and modeled himself on his favourite rapper Snoop Dog. He, like many of the kids in the workshops, kept up with the latest releases on YouTube. However, Ahmed was not interested in the latest trends and was obsessed with the Snoop of the early '90s. It was his flow in particular that attracted him. He recently jheri-curled his hair, started wearing the blue bandana, a t-shirt which read "hip-hop is not dead it lives in Palestine" and a large handala pendent.<sup>43</sup> What was most refreshing about Ahmed was that although most of the other rappers saw hip-hop as a vehicle for political protestations, he was equally interested in the aesthetics, forms and spirit of the art form. He was the only one in the group to push the workshop leaders about breathing patterns, flows, word play and other aesthetics aside from the main American forms.

Speaking to the kids chosen to perform on the final night at a concert at the Cultural Palace in Ramallah, I was reminded of one music commentator's take on the current state of hip-hop culture and the subsequent uproar and consternation it caused within music circles. For Sasha Frere-Jones, rap had largely become a meaningless term. Not unlike the cry of mid-seventies reggae artists like Culture and Bob Marley, unvarnished reporting delivered with a panache that balanced the pain was rap's first achievement for Frere-Jones. However, somewhere along the way, "the struggle to escape

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<sup>43</sup> The handala is the most famous of Palestinian political cartoonist Naji al-Ali's characters. The artist explained that the ten-year old represented his age when forced to leave Palestine and would not grow up until he could return to his homeland; his turned back and clasped hands symbolised the character's rejection of 'outside solutions'. The handala became the signature of Naji al-Ali's cartoons and remains an iconic symbol of Palestinian identity and defiance.

became a love of accumulation, and underdogs ended up sounding as smug as the authorities they once battled” (The New Yorker 2009).



Image: From Star Academy to Palestine (Ramallah, 2008)<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Star Academy Arab World is a pan-Arab televised talent show. The show began airing on the Lebanese television channel LBC in 2003. As the LBC station also provides satellite connections to the majority of Arab countries, it became one of the most popular shows in the Arab-speaking world. Karl Wolf is a



*Project Hip-Hop Palestine* is one a number of local cultural projects with Western government and international donor funding that aims to engage young Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The main cultural institutes in the West Bank that aim to attract young Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank are the Goethe Institut and Franco-German Cultural Centre, which both advance information on culture, language and life in Germany and France.<sup>45</sup> They offer language classes, contribute to all the major festivals and sponsor numerous concerts, exhibitions, film screenings, and dance and theatre performances. The Goethe Institut has also launched an Institute of Modern Media, which has co-produced a new television soap opera *Matabb* (Speed Bump) with the European Union that aired for the first time during Ramadan 2008.<sup>46</sup> This state of the art institute in the heart of Ramallah is sponsored by Deutsche Welle – Germany’s leading international television and radio channel who are also in control of the centre’s multimedia programming.<sup>47</sup> From speaking to a number of producers who run the two centres, it became clear that the cultural agenda of these kind of institutions in the Palestinian Territories are on the whole fairly vague and at time somewhat contradictory. Although, one producer at the Goethe Instiut put it to me that, “we intended to show them [young Palestinians] modern life and culture in Europe and abroad”; Palestinians are on the whole using the institute’s facilities and language classes as a way of finding work in the increasingly lucrative NGO and donor sector in Ramallah.<sup>48</sup>

### **Ramallah: The Liberal Metropolitan City of the Future<sup>49</sup>**

Ramallah has come to represent this fantasy world. Ramallah today, especially as the Israeli regime of control intensifies, is viewed increasingly as an oasis of normalcy and

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Lebanese-born Canadian singer. As well as being one of the mentors for contestants on Star Academy, he was at the opening act for the launch of MTV Arabia with Ludacris and Akon.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on the Franco-German Cultural Centre, see [www.ccf-goethe-ramallah.org/](http://www.ccf-goethe-ramallah.org/)

<sup>46</sup> For more on Matabb, see [www.goethe.de/ins/ps/ram/prj/mat/en3642478.htm](http://www.goethe.de/ins/ps/ram/prj/mat/en3642478.htm)

<sup>47</sup> It is co-sponsored by ARTE – European Culture Channel.

<sup>48</sup> Author’s interview, Goethe Institut, Ramallah, 25 August 2008.

<sup>49</sup> In *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*, Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk address the phantasmagoric but equally real places being constructed as alternative utopias in a capitalist era unfettered by state regulations. These neoliberal zones – in cities, deserts and in the middle of the sea – are worlds where consumer capitalism and inequality surpass our worst nightmares. The most dramatic development schemes – private archipelagos in Dubai, gated communities in Hong Kong and the Mall of America in Minnesota – may be free of the chaotic diversity of city life, but they also constitute a spatial regime that ultimately serves the interests of an increasingly international bourgeois class at the expense of the Global South. This chapter, therefore, attempts to situate Ramallah, as a neo-colonial enclave, into this “dreamworld of neoliberalism”.

decadence in a desolate landscape of shattered urban spaces and violated rural expanses. Although the political and socio-economic structures of most Palestinian towns are still dominated by strong family ties, Ramallah is different. For a number of political, economic and geographical reasons, Ramallah has become the seat of the Palestinian Authority, the safe-haven for international news agencies, multinational NGOs and transnational activists, as well as hub for private sector investment – in essence a de-facto capital-in-waiting. The question of production of space inside Ramallah thus holds important significance to how the occupation is unfolding in the West Bank today. For many who reside, work, play and generally attempt to reproduce their daily life in the city, Ramallah represents a place of increasing potentiality, a space of relative freedom.



Image: Nike Town (Ramallah, 2008)<sup>50</sup>

It is within this context that Ramallah is beginning to be referred to as the “Palestinian Green Zone” (Massad 2006). An enclave which, in addition to the intelligence staff of Israel and certain Arab regimes, shelters those Palestinians who are protected by

<sup>50</sup> The distributing rights over Nike in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are owned by a Jordanian Palestinian businessman.

the legacy of the Oslo process – whether the Oslo bureaucracy, its technicians and hired intellectuals, or the business and middle classes recently habituated to this name brand consumerism that only a Green Zone can offer. It is important to stress here that this opulent life that is now available to some contrasts sharply with the life of the majority of Palestinians. The preservation of Ramallah and increasingly other such enclaves in parts of Nablus, Jericho and Bethlehem is therefore paramount to the Palestinian Authority who fear any reform that would strip the elite of the benefits of corruption, occupation and the dolce vita that Fateh rule has ensured for them.

However, despite the new opportunities that have been opened up to some in the West Bank, it is also creating a new (class) divide between those who have been able to acquire the skills to be accepted and those denied access to this seemingly cosmopolitan public sphere. I remember getting lost one afternoon in Al-Amari refugee camp in the heart of Ramallah. I noticed a group of young kids who thought I was a tourist or NGO worker and were making jokes about me in Arabic. After a brief conversation, I asked them the way out of the camp. One of the boys pointed and said, “you want to go to Ramallah? Ramallah’s that way.” Although there were no physical boundaries between the camp and the city, there was still a clear divide. The more I spoke with people in the camp, the more the divisions became evident.



Image: The Palestinian Green Zone (Ramallah, 2008)

During the summer holiday most of the boys from the camp make some extra money by forming groups and offering their services to the upscale hotels who are overloaded with wedding bookings during the summer months. It is not only a popular time for wealthy Palestinians to organise their weddings, but also a time when many diasporic Palestinians, particularly from the United States, tend to spend their holidays in the West Bank. There are usually three weddings a week and the boys are entrusted with cleaning the pool and terrace, washing all the plates and cutlery, and setting up and serving dinner on the night. I would join them at the end of most evenings, when guests had moved to the bar where a celebrity singer was entertaining them. The boys would either be behind the bar or clearing up for the hotel's breakfast the following morning. It was on these nights, as young diasporic Palestinians mingled with the local elite, that it became clear how the diplomatic efforts and cultural programmes of the larger institutions are not aimed at engaging the majority of the young population. Despite their technical literacy and access to most digital technological forms, there was a certain invisibility that this could not overcome. If anything, they were creating further fragmentation within Palestinian society and helping consolidate a new class of Palestinians that would further entrench the

status quo. However, despite this, Ramallah is in many ways no different from the rest of the West Bank. It is still a city under occupation, continuously being undermined by continued settlement expansion, military incursions and checkpoints. Although Ramallah has replicated many features of modern cosmopolitan city centres, it is important to remember that Jerusalem, which used to be just a twelve-minute drive along the hilltop road, is now inaccessible to most Ramallawis.<sup>51</sup> These are the contradictions that have become symptomatic of quotidian life in the West Bank.

### **(Re)producing the Orient: Continuity and Newness in the Occupation's Architecture**

All the transformative projects for Palestine – from Zionism to the project for a new Middle East – have rationalised the denial of the present reality in Palestine with some argument about a higher interest, cause, or mission.<sup>52</sup> Zionism essentially saw Palestine as the European imperialists did, as an empty territory paradoxically filled with ignoble and at times dispensable natives (Said 2003). However, conditions have changed from a time when Zionism was the sole method for transforming “a degraded and unworthy East” into a copy of the “noble, enlightened West” (Massad 2006). The forces behind these trends stem not only from the United States and the European Union, but also the Gulf – a region that is playing an increasingly influential role attempts to reshape the modern Middle East. However, the grotesque reproductions of the West taking place in parts of the occupied West Bank today cannot be simply reduced to the impact of foreign interventions.

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<sup>51</sup> Popular term for a person from Ramallah.

<sup>52</sup> In June 2006, as Israel besieged Lebanon, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke of the realignment of the Middle East. In her press conference before travelling to the region, she stated that, “what we’re seeing here, in a sense, is the growing – the ‘birth pangs’ – of a ‘New Middle East’ and whatever we do we have to be certain that we’re pushing forward to the New Middle East [and] not going back to the old one”. Press Conference, U.S. State Department, Washington, D.C., July 21 2006.



Image: Haifa Airport in 1934 and a Magnum Ice Cream Advertisement (Ramallah, 2008)<sup>53</sup>

Palestinian artist Wafa Hourani's mixed media piece *Qalandia 2067* was much lauded when it was exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery in London.<sup>54</sup> Dating his piece 2067 – one hundred years after the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War – Hourani constructed five scale models that were intended to envisage the future of a refugee camp where time seems to have repressed rather than evolved. Basing each segment on an actual site – airport, border crossing and three settlements – the buildings are rendered as war-ravaged and crumbling. The wall is dressed with mirrors, while a menacing airstrip with fighter jets and commercial symbols of hyper-consumption represents the Israeli side. However, despite the aesthetic qualities of Hourani's work, the piece grossly misrepresents the future of the occupation in the West Bank. The inability to imagine the increasingly segmented temporality and selective modernity in the Occupied Territories leads to a misreading of the development of both urban consumer spaces and refugee camps – spaces which lack

<sup>53</sup> Magnum is one of a number of consumer products on the Boycott, Divest and Sanctions Campaign list. For more, see [www.bdsmovement.net/](http://www.bdsmovement.net/)

<sup>54</sup> Combining photography and sculpture Hourani's *Future Cities* projects deal with the social, political, and economic realities of Palestinian life to develop grim and apocalyptic predictions for the residents of the West Bank. Exhibited as part of 'Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East', Saatchi Gallery, London, 30 January – 9 May 2009.

basic services and infrastructure, but are equally equipped with Wi-Fi and broadband services. Moreover, in relation to the wall and Qalandia checkpoint, these developments will lead to a very different endgame. These central features of the occupation will turn inwards and re-function as the gates to Ramallah, thus serving to segregate those Palestinians living outside from those benefiting from the neo-liberal development that set these hubs and future gated communities apart from the rest of the Occupied Territories.<sup>55</sup> Such a process reshapes the lingering imperial topography, which creates hierarchies between those whose lives are cherished and state(less) deaths.

At the end of 2008, the Ramallah Municipality launched its three-year development plan as part of its centennial celebrations. Through its “modern vision”, the \$180 million dollar project aims at a “comprehensive renovation, rehabilitation, beautification and refurbishment of Ramallah”.<sup>56</sup> This form of gentrification will include media centres, a national expo centre, new neighbourhoods and a pedestrianised zone of cafés and restaurants. However, what is interesting with the project in Ramallah is the particular creation of a regime of consumption that is central to the logic of the occupation today. This is a regime that functions both regionally and globally, and is aimed at creating new social subjectivities and realities in the West Bank. The radicality of this situation positions this project in a much wider process of fragmentation and bantustanisation through which the development of neo-liberal enclaves cannot be separated from the colonial regime.

Israeli military strategy since the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000 is in fact part of a long-term strategy of spatial demolition and strangulation. Far from being a recent phenomenon, the enclavisation of space has been implemented as an instrument of spatial expansion and control since 1967 in the Occupied West Bank, but is rooted in a long-standing policy of territorial expropriation – to dismember the space of the remaining Palestinian population. In a similar vein, Leila Farsakh has noted that the Israeli permit system, the territorial fragmentation of the occupied Palestinian territory under the Oslo accords, and the expansion of settlements have all contributed to the creation of disconnected Palestinian population re-serves that have the characteristics of Bantustans rather than of cantons. The political consequences of this regime are not difficult to

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<sup>55</sup> There have been suggestions in the Israeli press that Qalandia checkpoint will be privatised in the near future. For more on the privatisation of security apparatuses in the West Bank see Mansbach, ‘From Checkpoints to ‘Terminals’ in the Occupied Territories: The Dangers of ‘Normalisation’’, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the APSA, Boston, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> For more on the Ramallah Municipality’s development plan, see [www.ramallah.ps/pics/Ramallah-english-book.pdf](http://www.ramallah.ps/pics/Ramallah-english-book.pdf) For a virtual video presentation of the planned projects, see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhnZ5p2LsbA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhnZ5p2LsbA)

predict. Enclaving can be characterised as a means not only of cutting off spatial interflow and heightening control, but also of sundering enclaved space from other spatial areas, thus confining and drastically weakening the population economically, politically and socially; in effect neutralising its challenge as a potential opponent (Farsakh 2005).

In June 2008, e-Points, the largest consumer reward programme in the Middle East, launched its services in the West Bank as part of its regional expansion plan. Jamil Daher, the regional manager, expects e-Points Palestine to create a solid clientele base – dining, fashion and services – of 30,000 cardholders by the end of 2009. He also believes that because of the close proximity to Jordan, e-Points realises the added benefit it can give its cardholders for utilising the services across borders, thus increasing the benefit to the participating merchants.<sup>57</sup> Taking advantage of the territorial fragmentation that underlines the occupation, e-Points is one of a number of new consumer technologies that are becoming increasingly central to the entrenchment of the occupation in the West Bank. All these technologies are underpinned by the logic of governmentality that seeks to transform populations into free, enterprising and autonomous individual, with the dream that eventually only limited direct governance by the (colonial) state will be necessary (Rose 1999, 2008).

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<sup>57</sup> Author's interview with Jamil Daher, e-Points Regional Manager, Ramallah, 23 July 2008.





Image: e-Points (Ramallah, 2008)

Raja Shehadeh laments:

When I look back now at those years in the eighties when I could walk without constraint, I feel gratified to have used that freedom and taken all those walks and got to know the hills. (Shehadeh 2007)

Shehadeh's words could be read as somewhat of a romanticised retelling of the "natural" history of Palestine and its landscape; a time when roads still respected the contours of the hills. However, despite its shortcomings, it was only after my own walks in Palestinian cities that I came to understand what Shehadeh meant by the walks he would never again be able to take. It was only through my own walks in the cities and their outskirts – as well as those that were abruptly cut off by either Israeli soldiers or Palestinian police officers – that I understood how the intimate relationship between the land and the people was being transformed and another map being drawn.

First came the billboards in English:

Never Ending Summer. Jericho Resort. The most beautiful site in Palestine. 58 Hotel Rooms. Swimming Pools. Restaurants. Free Wireless Internet Access Available. Do You Live an InterContinental Life? InterContinental Jericho.

Followed by Arabic:

PALSAFE Integrated Security Solutions. Investment is Viable. 10 years of Coca-Cola Palestinian Production. PALTEL ... super savings! 33% discount on all Israeli mobile destinations. Setting You Free. Roam with Jawwal ... Stay Connected. Taybeh. Drink Palestinian. Taste the Revolution. Drink for Freedom.

Then European Union and government funded initiatives:

European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. Palestinian folktales and book festival. Keep cultural heritage alive. Classics of European cinema in translation. Musical exchanges build bridges among young people.

By having to respond to the rhythm of the streets and learning to listen to images that contain voices that are present yet inaudible, the accepted image of the Occupied Territory as simply a space of suffering and de-development becomes more complicated. It brings to light the taxonomy of a natural history deformed into a social anthropology whose real purpose is social control. Walking in Palestinian city centres has come to be seen as a redundant – almost alien – activity for most Palestinians. For Shehadeh, roads, once built, would become a cruel reality more difficult to change than walls and settlements.

As well as the expulsion and fragmentation of life that has become central to the Palestinian experience, Palestinians in the West Bank, particularly the young, are now experiencing the modern phenomenon of alienation. It is a process in which the ability to feel at home in these neo-liberal enclaves not only represents a form of complicity with the status-quo, but also a seemingly contradictory sense of nationalism. This has created a scenario, particularly in the urban enclaves of the West Bank, in which those who have dedicated the most to ridding the Occupied Territories of colonial domination are the very same people who have been most alienated and want to leave. This reversal of the feeling of (national) belonging is a result of these new relationships between territory, state and populations that is taking place in the West Bank. The Israelis may not have made the

desert bloom, but Palestinian comprador classes are beginning to make their slice bloom with concrete and neon lights.



Image: Movenpick Hotel (Ramallah, 2008)<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For more on Movenpick Hotel Ramallah, see [www.moevenpick-hotels.com/en/pub/your\\_hotels/worldmap/ramallah/overview.cfm](http://www.moevenpick-hotels.com/en/pub/your_hotels/worldmap/ramallah/overview.cfm)

“Why be so worried about the settlements?” Asked Selma. “We too will expand. Investments will pour in and we will create a new reality. You just wait.” I thought about the time I spent with my family during my first few weeks in Ramallah. They knew this was my first time back to Palestine since my childhood and were keen to demonstrate the fortitude of the people in the West Bank who were able to make a good life for themselves even under the toughest of conditions. In the words of one uncle who picked me up at Qalandia checkpoint on my first day:

Look at the malls and the glass buildings. This is how we piss off Israel and America. This is how we show them that we exist and are here to stay. All this under occupation. Imagine what we can do if we were free?

Although I found this reactionary and counterproductive, people from all backgrounds conveyed similar sentiments. For one could not help but notice how the resulting invisibility of the Palestinian people from Israel’s everyday colonial practices rendered possible the systematic deterritorialisation of the Palestinians. To counter this, Palestinians have focused particularly on construction, which has come to be considered by some as the most effective means of non-violent resistance.

### **Pushing The “Like” Button**

Although resistive forms have gone through fundamental changes over the past six decades, the cornerstone ideological justification, political strategy and everyday experience at the heart of the Palestinian struggle seem as resilient as ever. Palestinians continue to respond to the shifting political landscape they find themselves facing. They are now faced with changing experiences of space and de-territorialisation. In response, they are discerning new forms of expression and opposition. Such self-signification is manifested through older forms of communication – poetry, theatre and political cartoons – and civil disobedience, but also through new forms, such as hip-hop, videogames, mobile phones and the Internet. It may be de-centred, transitory, oppositional, unstable and discordant, but as Palestinians continue to face political impossibilities, they cannot be considered as not producing a culture of their own.

The various kinds of participatory media projects that have become increasingly popular across the West Bank are commonly seen as useful in amplifying the voices of young people and combating mainstream media stereotypes in which Palestinian,

particularly Palestinian youth, are portrayed as either helpless victims or perpetrators of violence.<sup>59</sup> It is also suggested that these media projects allow young people to participate and engage in their communities in new ways, providing space for regional and international dialogue.<sup>60</sup> Youth media is thus deemed to challenge young people to express their ideas and experiences in unique ways, while activists feel that their representations can enhance dialogue and initiate action on different issues. However, at the same time, there seems to be a lack of critical engagement with these kinds of digital technologies and the types of interaction they are creating amongst Palestinian youth.

When I was thinking about youth empowerment and civic engagement at the community level, I remembered the kids I had met in Al-Amari refugee camp. I was talking to them about the expansion of cultural projects by international NGOs in the area and asking them how they felt this was impacting them. They told me that apart from the United Nations service and projects in the camp, they were largely ignored by those NGOs, who they said were more interested in attracting more socially mobile Palestinians. They began telling me about the increasing social divides this was causing within Palestinian society, and then one of the boys said he wanted to tell me about a campaign they were hoping to set up. Their plan was to boycott Café de la Paix – the most expensive café in Ramallah. Alongside Stones – a hip nightspot – Café de la Paix represented the growth of a significant new class of young socially mobile Palestinians who were seen as benefiting from the increasing international capital that was flooding into the West Bank. However, the main reason they had singled out Café de la Paix was because most of its more expensive produce was brought in especially from Israel. Although they did not go so far as to say these Palestinians were complicit in the occupation, they were clearly angry and frustrated at the vast wealth and seeming corruption that was pervading this new class.

What was just as interesting was the way they had chosen to go about the campaign. They asked me what I thought would be the most effective ways of garnering support, but first I wanted to hear their ideas. They told me they were planning on setting up a Facebook group, an online petition to get people's attention and possibly shooting a short film to put up online if they managed to borrow one of the cameras in the camp. Although I was aware of my role in this situation, I still wanted to go beyond simply

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<sup>59</sup> Such projects include photography workshops – Picture Balata in Balata Refugee Camp in Nablus, film, video and digital storytelling workshops – Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy project across the West Bank. Although the focus here is on the West Bank, participatory media projects can also be found in Gaza, Israel and Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon.

<sup>60</sup> See Special Issue of *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* (2009).

observing and decided to help them develop other possible strategies. I asked them what they thought about more direct participatory methods, but they were quick to dismiss their effectiveness. Not only would the Palestinian Authority crack down on any mass mobilisation, particularly kids from the refugee camp, but it would also be unlikely to attract young people out onto the streets. I then suggested less overtly confrontational methods such as a bake sale outside the café, but they were adamant that they would have more freedom with an online campaign and that it would be the most effective way to get people's attention.

Undoubtedly a new spatial poetics of the Palestinian people's longstanding struggle can be found through these forms of participatory media. Such mediated expressions reveal new forms of Palestinian self-signification and demonstrate continued resilience and vitality as expressed in everyday life. However, it is important to acknowledge that participatory media are not removed from the power dynamics inherent in traditional modes of representation. Therefore, one of the tensions that lies at the heart of this chapter is the extent to which Palestinians can combat their loss of real physical space by resorting to new media and technologies as the way of negotiating a sense of orientation in the world, and for constructing both personal and collective identities.



Image: Discarded Mobile Top-Up Cards (Ramallah, 2008)

### **Villas in the Middle of the Jungle: Towards a Critical Sociology of Freedom**

One of the aims of this chapter is to problematise the seductive and seemingly unimpeachable value of freedom. The distinction being made here is one between freedom as an ideal, as articulated in struggles of resistance against power, and freedom as a mode of organisation and regulation (Rose 1999).<sup>61</sup> For Israel and the international community, the unfree subjects of Palestine cannot merely be freed; they have to be made free through spaces of well-regulated liberty. In terms of Palestine and the Global South, the choice for those in the periphery has become one between a dynamic renegotiation of dependency or further marginalisation from the world economy. The Internet and new communications technologies are usually privileged in accounts of these global trends, but the Internet is also a leading edge in the transnationalisation of economic activity, with cyberspace being colonised by the logic of the market system, and comprising the central production and control apparatus of an increasingly supranational consumer market system (Schiller 2000).

Under contemporary consumer capitalism, cultural campaigns increasingly attempt to combine various public and private interests in order to individualise and personalise their message and products for consumers. The growth of apparatuses in our time corresponds to the equally extreme proliferation in the processes of subjectification. For Agamben, every apparatus implies a process of subjectification, without which it cannot function as an apparatus of governance, but is rather reduced to a mere exercise of violence. For in a disciplinary society, apparatuses aim to create docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their freedom as subjects in the very process of their desubjectification (Agamben 2009). There is a need here to differentiate between the actions or engagements that the system of products effects within the consumer grid and the various kinds of room to maneuver left for consumers by the situations in which they exercise their “cart” (de Certeau 2002). However, the idea of consumer capitalism under occupation complicates the idea of a certain play in that order; a space for maneuvers of unequal forces and for utopian points of reference, or what de Certeau calls the “opacity of

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<sup>61</sup> For Nikolas Rose, the achievement of liberalism as an art of government was to begin to govern through making people free. The problem of freedom here is that it comes to be understood in terms of the capacity of an autonomous individual to establish an identity through the practices of freedom as consumption and pedagogies of lifestyle.

a ‘popular’ culture”. What is intended here, therefore, is to allow for alternatives to either simply destroying such apparatuses, or, as some naively suggest, using them in the “correct” way.



Image: “All the prices rise! With us, they always come down.” (Jawaal Telecommunications) (Ramallah, 2008)

Freedom, both as an ideology and a technique of government, should in fact be understood within these mutations and transformations of technologies of power. For freedom, particularly as one of the conditions of development of modern capitalist forms of economic organisation, is a correlative of the development and deployment of apparatuses of security. As the work of Foucault and subsequently Nikolas Rose suggests, an apparatus of security cannot operate well except on condition that it is given freedom – the process of circulation of both people and things.<sup>62</sup> In the context of a post-9/11 landscape of securitocracy, this highlights the evolving relationship between security, territory and population that is taking place. It is only when these are brought together

<sup>62</sup> For Foucault, the concept of governmentality is different from “reigning” or “ruling”, and not the same as “laying down the law”. His 1978 lectures at the Collège de France reveal how the development of the town and city through the C17th and C18th became resituated in a space of circulation – spatial, juridical, administrative and economic – as well as the eventual opening up and penetration of such spaces.



under such conditions that it becomes clear how the post-Oslo project in Palestine fits into the imaginary “new Middle East” that Condoleezza Rice spoke of.

The new social and spatial order that emerged after the collapse of the Oslo peace process has manifested in a kind of “normality” – a fantasy of a possible co-existence between the occupation and certain freedoms. It is as if the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state – in effect indefinitely postponed – would be achieved through pure illusion; like in a magic trick where obfuscating the process maintains the power of the trick. The aim is to show that there is no thought out process and that the whole trick is a simply nothing more than a hoax. A powerful representation of this fantasy, and future fallacy, can be seen in *The Time That Remains*, Elia Suleiman’s concluding film in his trilogy about the Israeli state and the Palestinian people. Following the story of his family in Nazareth from the 1948 Nakba to the present, the film ends by playing on the contradictions of the current status quo in the West Bank. Using deadpan comedy and sardonic wit, Suleiman dissects the ambivalence that this new social and spatial order is helping produce. In one particular scene a man leaves his house and is about to get in his car as his mobile starts to ring. As he answers, a tank pulls up beside him and points its barrel in his direction. He continues his conversation without even acknowledging the tank’s ominous presence as its barrel absurdly follows him as he paces up and down the pavement. While in another scene, shot in the Stones nightclub the boys from Al-Amari were talking about, an Israeli military night patrol pulls up outside the club. It is after curfew, but the young Palestinians continue dancing into the night completely unaware to the shouting soldiers outside. The soldiers continue warning them on a loudspeaker and tell them to go home, but they carry on dancing and ignoring their warnings. As the music blares and drowns out the military sirens, the soldiers themselves slowly become hypnotised by the techno beats and begin swaying to the rhythm. What is important in Suleiman’s work is that the line between resistance, ambivalence and cooption is continuously blurred.



Image: Advertisement for Taybeh Beer (Ramallah, 2008)<sup>63</sup>

A collective of both Palestinian and international artists, musicians and writers are trying to capture and critically engage with the effects of these new types of spatial and

<sup>63</sup> Taybeh Brewery is a Palestinian brewery founded in 1994. It is situated in the West Bank village of Taybeh. The company was co-founded by Nadim and David Khoury soon after the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993.

social ordering that have emerged since the collapse of the Oslo peace process. Ramallah Syndrome is a “kind of hallucination of normality, the fantasy of a co-existence of occupation and freedom”.<sup>64</sup> It is as if the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state will be achieved through pure illusion. These artists are grappling with the absurdities of normalcy under occupation, escapism as defiance, consumption as agency, as well as the potential for new forms of resistance to emerge out of these very contradictions. Their sounds, moving images and photographs are, in effect, creating a possibility for us to think of Palestine in radically different terms. They imagine Palestine as having the function of both a place to be returned to and as a novel as yet unimagined future; perhaps even a historical disaster transformed into a hopes for a different future.

The work in this chapter stresses that it is no longer adequate to theorise occupied or war-torn cities as simply locally bounded sites cut off from the rest of the world. Our unruly world is not fixed by a conventional Cartesian grid. We, therefore, need other ways of mapping our turbulent times. Decentring nation-states, none more so than the case of Israel/Palestine, allows for critical work to situate such spaces within the growth of transnational governance, as well contextualise the increasingly transnational flows between cities and metropolitan centres. For national borders – real and imagined – have ceased to be continuous lines on the earth’s surface and have become non-related sets of lines and points situated within countries. In the case of Israel/Palestine, this makes it possible to see the occupation as functioning on a number of seemingly contradictory levels – as an historic spatial arrangement of Apartheid, but also as a highly modern, fluid and instantaneous policing of space.

Placing the Occupied Territories into a different cartographic imaginary highlights the new claims that are being made on them from international business classes and tourists to continental migrants, cross-border traders and refugees. This centres on the processes of deregulation, privatisation and securitisation taking place. This can be seen in the landscape, the various forms of privatised and semi-privatised architecture – offices, conference facilities, hotels, restaurants and shopping centres – that is changing the social

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<sup>64</sup> Ramallah Syndrome Sound-System collects materials as its initial starting point and then it is reworked for the sound installation presented at Palestine c/o Venice. The performance, while a result of this process, is not intended as a replication but rather a re-examination of the material, picking up threads from the original piece in a dynamic exploration and experimentation of found footage, archive sample, audio-video location recordings, and heavy electronic music. This material is critically re-interpreted and imbued with new meaning through juxtaposition and multiple audio-video layering, allowing a narrative to emerge and for the audience to experience another level of the project. By mashing-up and reconstructing what seem like disparate bits of film and audio emerges the possibility of critically and playfully illuminating the ruptured commonalities and connections between people and places in Palestine.

life and aspirations of a new generation. At the other extreme, increasing numbers of refugees are reactivating the boundaries of political exclusion in new ways. This new political geography does not resemble any of the two traditional visions – two national states or one bi-national or secular polity. In terms of the occupation, two realities come together to form a cognitive dissonance. On the one hand the Israeli state is attempting to get rid of Palestinians, on the other the state institutes an impressive infrastructure of control and containment. This has significant implications for how the Palestinians choose to resist. As Helga Tawil-Souri (2011) argues, “Israel is a good example of a case where citizenship does not necessarily serve as an inclusionary mechanism and where citizenship is actually incapable of seriously combating the structures of social inequality”.<sup>65</sup> This all begs the question whether a return to the strategies of the first Intifada is now more relevant than ever. A return to a time when many Palestinians elected to suspend everyday life as a political strategy of reasserting collective power and reminding everyone that these were and continue to not be normal times.

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<sup>65</sup> Helga Tawil-Souri notes in ‘Orange, Green and Blue: Colour-Coded Paperwork for Palestinian Population Control’ how as much as ID cards have been necessary for the Israeli state to control and survey Palestinian populations, they have also, since the Oslo Agreements, been necessary for Palestinian Authority bureaucracy.

## Conclusion

### Public Culture in Times of War



Image: Discarded (Ramallah, 2008)<sup>1</sup>

Life is more important than art, that's why art is so important.  
– James Baldwin (1961)

An officer of the Nazi occupation forces visited the painter [Picasso] in his studio and, pointing to Guernica, asked: “Did you do that?” Picasso reputedly answered, “No, you did.”  
– Theodor Adorno (1962)

**Man** ‘And for a long time we thought this was the perfect way to live. A civilisation without a fist. But now we realise ... it is not perfect.’ How do you mean? ‘We have been attacked by another race from another planet. They attack us with things that go boom!’ Bombs? ‘In our language we have no word for such things. We have never had need for them. We call them Things That Go Boom. My only child was one of the first to be killed by one of the Things That Go Boom. It happened in your

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<sup>1</sup> A tape of Sabah – a popular and prolific Lebanese singer and actress from the 1950s.

equivalent of the school playground. The day it happened my cry of grief was so powerful it created a black hole in the universe – You see it? There. Next to our galaxy.’ I see it, yes. ‘It’s sucking everything into it, as you can see. Very soon our own galaxy will disappear into this endless dark. Like a unicorn hurling itself into a black whirlpool.’

– Philip Ridley – *Tender Napalm* (2011)

In April 2010, the State Department sent the rap collective Chen Lo and the Liberation Family to perform in Damascus. Following their performance, CBS News interviewed U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about the role of hip hop culture in recent American diplomatic efforts. “Hip hop is America”, she said, noting that rap and other musical forms could help rebuild the country’s image abroad. “You know it may be a little bit hopeful, because I can’t point to a change in Syrian policy because Chen Lo and the Liberation Family showed up. But I think we have to use every tool at our disposal”, she went on to say.<sup>2</sup> As the conflict in Syria becomes increasingly militarised and the Assad regime brutally cracks down on all forms of dissent such examples of cultural diplomacy may seem increasingly insignificant. However, given the purported role of social media and youth culture in the Arab revolts, such diplomatic efforts will continue to serve as a bridge to the democratic youth movements. It is too early to say whether or not the revolts will usher in a new era of relations between the United States and the Arab world. The opinion that the Libya intervention would presage a realignment of American power in the region away from oppressor to the oppressed is proving increasingly naïve. If this proves to be correct, and American foreign policy in the Middle East remains unchanged, then perceptions will undoubtedly remain poor, and no amount of live hip hop acts, social media interaction or technological development will change that.

In retrospect, this thesis has come to serve as a preface to the “Arab Spring”. The long-term implications of the uprisings on American influence in the region are still unclear. However, what is evident is that American diplomatic efforts have learnt from earlier failures. Previously formalised processes are slowly becoming relics of previous policies as more time and money is being spent on developing these new techniques and technologies. The State Department has understood that Arab audiences are not passive consumers and simple objects of American desire. With youth as the new target demographic, the battlefield has shifted and is still very much unsettled. It is important to

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<sup>2</sup> For more see, Aidi (2011) ‘The Grand (Hip-Hop) Chessboard: Race, Rap and Raison d’Etat’ *Middle East Report*, 260.

stress, however, that the success of these new initiatives is based on a number of false assumptions. Firstly, they wrongly assume that there is a strong correlation between the consumption and use of such technologies and social medias and the incorporation of secular and neo-liberal values. Secondly, advocates of such policies see popular culture in a purely functional sense, in which the enjoyment of hip hop culture, for example, will help nurture moderate, modern and pro-American citizens out of unruly populations. Whether or not the drastic changes in American statecraft that Jared Cohen and others have initiated at the State Department have the desired effect, the more fluid and ambivalent exporters of America's culture industries will undoubtedly have more of an impact than previous imperial projects.

### **Violence, Destruction and Hope**

By investigating how American power is attempting to adapt to a changing global landscape, the intention has been to question stubbornly held assumptions about the workings of contemporary power and cultural dissemination in an increasingly networked world. Much has been made of the apparent newness of our current global condition, but dominant narratives have continued to lag behind the changes that are taking place within structures of global power. The analysis in each chapter positions national, transnational and subnational identities as complexly intertwined. By transcending the logic of the nation-state and critiquing the historic invisibility of certain processes under contemporary globalisation, it strives to offer a critical contribution to the cultural sociology of globalisation. Therefore, what one should now be asking is to what extent our present-day postcolonial world constitutes a rupture with the past, looking at how and where it is being rearticulated or challenged, as well as the extent to which it has been left unchanged.

It is clearly no longer solely about directly managing territories and populations, but also about creating the very world one inhabits. This has created difficult questions about modern statecraft and its relationship to sovereignty and contemporary geopolitics. Continued disciplinary entrenchment has unfortunately hindered interrogations into the increasingly outernational ambition of American influence and the non-linear flow of ideas, bodies and cultures that break up absolutist continuities and certainties. These interventions, therefore, hope to add weight to a literature that intervenes in a number of discourses of current scholarship, and move them well beyond the nationalist presuppositions that have explicitly and implicitly defined their previous practice.

Firstly, the aim has been to denaturalise American power as a category and insist that it is a complex construct that must be accounted for, rather than presumed as the foundation of any analysis. This is increasingly important at a time when American indispensability is increasingly being questioned and the United States' role as an imperial power teeters on an uncertain edge. The various distinctions between hard, soft and smart power have not only proven inadequate in better understanding how power functions in the global arena, but they have also served to occlude the violence that has helped maintain certain dominant structures and institutions in place. The intention, therefore, has been to show how a number of public personalities, social movements and trends outside of the formal institutions of political power came to affect the socio-political struggles during the Cold War and have gone on to shape the international post-Cold War landscape. Like the Cold War, the "age of terror" is being fought primarily through an information war. However, the propaganda industries in the United States now run the gamut from the technologies and business models of mass media that have influenced global culture, to the professional practitioners of mass influence in marketing and advertising. Whereas propaganda, and message management more generally, may have come of age in the twentieth century, its refinement and efforts to use information to maintain and build social cohesion and control defines the twenty-first century. Therefore, understanding the evolution of American global power needs to account for the evolving relationships between military, diplomatic and culture industries in a post-9/11 world.

The second task has been to produce a study of American cultural diplomacy in the Middle East from the Cold War through to the "war on terror" that highlights the continued hold of racial and civilisationist discourses on policy makers, military strategists and the popular imaginary. This critical reading of American public diplomacy focuses on the historical relationship between American commerce, popular culture and finance in selling America abroad. The contemporary genealogy of American cultural diplomacy offered here stresses the importance of continued critical engagement with questions of colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism so as to better understand and critique the growth of modern securitocracy. It is within this context that the question of Palestine is reintroduced and reframed within the globalised networks of contemporary capital and cultural flows. By remapping the central issue of Palestinian sovereignty, the aim has been to address the numerous changes taking place in the occupation's architecture, but also to offer new modes of thinking about the place of archipelagos of exception within the logic of contemporary globalisation.



The animating assumption throughout has been that culture is important, and thus to show how culture has mattered to specific groups of people at particular moments in time. Popular culture, however, is still very much deemed to be epiphenomenal to questions of international politics and power. There is a need to render the popular internal to the political, and not simply a manifestation external to it. To highlight the centrality of culture is not to suggest that cultural products stand in for other realities; quite the opposite, it is to say that in many instances today, culture has become a matter of life or death. Thus, if culture is central to our political and social world, it is not only because culture is part of history, but also because the field of culture is history in the making. Despite the critical take on the role of rap music in the globalisation of the themes of American social doxa, the particular weight given to the formation of the black Atlantic is intended to offer a way out of seeing culture as a way of explaining away certain micro and macro situations. Its stubborn resistance to both the structure of the nation-state and the constraints of ethnic and national particularity is held up as an example to help imagine transgressive future trajectories under the persistent hold of civilisationist discourses. The hope, therefore, is that the transnational character of black culture can aid the opening up of radical spaces for a fluid interplay of postcolonial and ultimately postnational life.

Finally, the ability of digital technology today to uncouple cultures both temporally and spatially, and then transmit them almost instantaneously across the globe, is proving to be a double-edged sword. The task, therefore, has been to question the celebratory tone around the role of technology in bringing about a more borderless world. The novel role that digital technoculture is beginning to play in the new Pentagon and State Department sponsored info-war highlights the dangerous trends that are taking hold within our public spheres. For American cultural diplomacy, the winning of hearts and minds is now deeply intertwined with the phenomenon that has become characterised as the age of digital freedom. Most importantly, this has led to a radical shift from traditional state-centric diplomacy to other channels and forms of communication. Digital technology is thus being developed and employed by government, military and commercial bodies in order to manipulate the ways in which we receive and exchange information. This technoculture involves the wholesale integration of struggles over information, technology, communication and culture into the conflict itself. The intention has been to stress the urgent need for a serious reappraisal of the nature of this info-war and the various ventures that are attempting to blur the line between public and private realms, as well as the distinctions between citizen, civilian and soldier.

The false binary set up between techno-pragmatists and digital evangelists has proven particularly unhelpful in understanding how the political economy of information is being reshaped for a digital age. This not only holds important implications for issues of diplomacy, sovereignty and international relations, but also for ideas of solidarity and internationalism in an era of the declining nation-state. If the dominant false thinking around technology and human connectivity is to be disrupted, it important to both historicise such trends and weave together the fragmented history of resistance into a larger counter-public sphere. The underlying thread through these chapters, therefore, has been to further complicate our understanding of communicability and human interaction in an increasingly connected yet fractured and uneven world.

### **Fast-forward or Eject? To Live With Sound or Die With Noise**

In his essay “Living with Music”, Ralph Ellison recounts his desire and dedication to try and reach the heights of technical mastery that would have allowed him to, “eloquently express idea-emotions through music” (1995 p. 193). Overhearing one observer say, “let that boy blow. He’s got to talk baby talk on that thing before he can preach on it”, Ellison grew to appreciate the technique and discipline required to express an affirmative way of life through a particular musical tradition. For Ellison, who was to later put down his trumpet in order to pursue his writing, the daily living with music gave one an orientation in time, and a unique significance to, “all those indefinable aspects of experience which nevertheless help to make us what we are” (1995 p. 198). Unlike the technoaesthetics that dominate digital culture, he conceived of a more intimate source of noise, one that got beneath the skin and worked into the very structure of one’s consciousness.

In the essay, Ellison invites the reader into the simultaneously private and public space of his “booby-trapped” ground-floor apartment, complete with audio equipment, wires, discs and tapes, as well as the “surrounding chaos of noise”.<sup>3</sup> In his hunger and thirst for quiet, he chose to escape into a new electronic world – a place between the hi-fi record and the ear – in order to enjoy recorded music as it was intended to be heard. However, as he was soon to discover, this simple end eventually led to his loss of humility. Instead of soothing, and with these new marvels of science now at his control, a war of decibels was declared. The playing of electronically reproduced music thus became a fundamentally

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<sup>3</sup> This particular chaos consisted of a small restaurant with a jukebox the size of the Roxy to the right. To the left was a night-employed swing enthusiast, and across from the apartment a small backyard full of singing and preaching drunks.

ethical dilemma for Ellison. No longer restricted to the demands of pleasure, music could now be turned into a weapon to be aimed at our fellow man – in Ellison’s case it could turn the singer up above him into a shrivelled plant that had taken too much sunlight (1995 p. 198).

In his insightful essay on Charlie Parker, Ralph Ellison (1995) speaks of both Parker’s attempts to reject the traditional entertainer’s role, as well as his revolutionary creation of a new aesthetic through the artful juxtaposition of earlier styles. While our dominant technoculture leaves us with a fundamental dilemma – whether or not we can rewind and eject, or, if we have gone too far – the solution may in fact reside in fast-forwarding this particular cultural form. Technological progress has been sold so hard that the losses involved have been effectively masked. Thus, the study of the nature of the losses created by progress is not intended as a regressive exercise, but rather as part of an ethical quest to create the conditions for a different kind of progress.

The fundamental difference with contemporary culture industries seems to be the basis of its triumph thus far. Adorno and Horkheimer noted that the success of the culture industry at the time was that consumers felt compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them. However, the power of contemporary culture industries and their relationships with consumer-citizens today is somewhat different. Benjamin’s work reminds us that during long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence. Therefore, the social transformations expressed by these changes in perception could also open paths out of the cynical processes we currently see at work. If there is a clear ideology at play in today’s shift in American cultural diplomacy, it functions exactly at this intersection of mass communication and the increased incommunicability of shared experience that this form of diplomacy is attempting to exploit. It is this very space that is now celebrated by many as increasingly democratic. Cultural consumers are told that they have never been more independent of the stranglehold of industries, and for the first time they are free to make their own choices. However, what is insidiously left out of this picture is the intentional destruction of vital sources of our shared experience.

Reflecting on the purported violence of his paintings, Francis Bacon said:

When talking about the violence of paint, it's nothing to do with the violence of war. It's to do with an attempt to remake the violence of reality [...] We nearly always live through screens – a screened existence. And I sometimes think, when people say my work looks

violent, that I have been able to clear away one or two of the veils or screens. (Bacon 1987)

At a time when existence seems evermore screened and distanced, art, in its essential violence, may help tear away such barriers. Despite the hyperrelational sociality of our digital age, the central problem still rests on what is seen and not seen. We continue to think that we see what happens “there” and thus make pronouncements about “them”. However, visual culture may unwrap us and help create a mutually communicable language of shared experience. Walter Benjamin, after all, is a critic who lodged extraordinary hope and wrote with exceptional intensity about the potential radicalism and subversive power of a visual culture shaped by “mechanical reproduction”. However, that provides all the more reason to find it telling that when Benjamin worries about aestheticisation, he turns, for redress, to the word. In his essay “The Author as Producer” (1934), Benjamin remarked:

What we require of the photographer is the ability to give his picture a caption that wrenches it from modish commerce and gives it a revolutionary use value. But we will make this demand most emphatically when we – the writers – take up photography. (Benjamin 2009)

Ironically, at a time where communication is perceived as both borderless and instantaneous, there is an increasing counter-trend of the incommunicability of shared experience. Our technology uniform, as well as technical progress more specifically, has created forms of life – and of power – that appear to reconcile the forces opposing the system and defeat or refute all protest in the name of the historical prospects of freedom from toil and domination (Marcuse 1979). The insidious nature of these new user-generated technologies is that they do not fundamentally alienate humankind. Our relationships, whether willed or not, are of subordination, not of alienation, and aim at integrating man into its circuit. However, this paradox is not irreversible. We already see how populations living under difficult circumstances are attempting to subvert the status quo through technology. Whether it is a DJ about to cut up a classic record with a live audience, an artist posting an audio-visual mash-up on YouTube, Gazans using Google Earth to circumvent the Israeli embargo, or Afghans using mobile phones to dispel coalition propaganda, technology is also undoubtedly being used in creative and powerful ways.

During the Israeli invasions in Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2008, there was an increasing trend amongst both Hezbollah and Hamas militants of either handing in or switching off their mobile phones before leaving their homes (The Scotsman 2009). This alternative strategy of deciding to disconnect from the virtual world, which is fundamentally a matter of life and death in many of these cases, could possibly serve as an example for quotidian life as well. Not only does it show us that our contemporary struggles for freedom do not necessitate such technological appendages, but more importantly it also opens up the imaginative possibility of a way out of the destruction caused by today's technoculture that resides outside these very spheres. Rather than solutions to the questions of how to not lose according to the rules as they are now, it attempts to create conditions to change the rules of the game itself. The hegemony of electronic communication and social networking, with its overactivated sociality, has come to replace the social itself. As Jean Baudrillard argues, "communication, by banalising the interface, plunges the social into an undifferentiated state"; a state in which the new digital relationships formed between consumer-interlocutors replaces tactile and emotionally exploratory relationships of the past (1993, p. 13).<sup>4</sup>

However, what is at the heart of both diplomatic and military efforts is not just an attempt to undermine these strategies used by militants and civilians alike, but also the desire to destroy any genuine attempts at convivial culture. This is why I chose to end with a question and true story from a soldier during World War II. "What if they gave a war and nobody came?" Grossman recounts a story that brings to light the potential for convivial culture even under the most unlikely of situations. On more traditional battlefields there was a constant danger that, in periods of extended close combat, the soldiers would get to know one another as individuals and subsequently may refuse to kill one another. The experience of a Henry Metelmann, a German soldier, on the Russian front during World War II brings this out poignantly. Metelmann recounts when two Russians came out of their foxhole during a lull in fighting:

[And] I walked over towards them [...] they introduced themselves ... [and] offered me a cigarette and, as a non-smoker, I thought if they offer me a cigarette I'll smoke it. But it was horrible stuff. I coughed and later on my mates said 'you made a horrible impression, standing there with those two Russians and coughing your head off.' [...] I talked to them and said it was all right to

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<sup>4</sup> In his essay 'Xerox and Infinity', Baudrillard sarcastically asks why we bother speaking to each other, when it is so simple to communicate instead. The essay brings to attention how the interactivity of human kind is being replaced by the interactivity of screens.

come closer to the foxhole, because there were three dead Russian soldiers lying there, and I, to my shame, had killed them. They wanted to get the [dog tags] off them, and the paybooks [...] I kind of helped them and we were all bending down and we found some photos in one of the paybooks and they showed them to me [...] We shook hands again, and one patted on my back and they walked away.’ Metelmann was called away, but when he returned to the battlefield he found that the Germans had overrun the Russian position. Although some of his friends were killed in the firefight, he found himself to be more concerned with ‘those two Russians’. ‘‘Oh they got killed,’ they said [...] My feelings were very sad. I had met them on a very human basis, on a comradely basis. They called me comrade and at that moment, strange as it may seem, I was more sad that they had to die in this mad confrontation than my own mates and I still think sadly about it. (Grossman 1995, p. 159)

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