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'Mapping' the 'Other' in Television News on International Affairs: BBC's 'Pre-Accession' Coverage of EU Membership Candidate Croatia

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Summary

This is an enquiry into the ways in which the alleged 'reality-transmitting' television genre, namely the news, 'maps' 'other' cultures when the need to affirm a sense of belonging to a fragile supranational identity is provoked by a newcomers' knock on the door.** As the Croatian application for EU membership awaited the current members' decision on the possible start of the membership negotiations, BBC television coverage brought to light the pertaining questions of the EU's cultural boundaries, consequently (re)activating the classical East-West divide. In grasping the contours of such 'mappings', this study performs a close reading of selected television news stories on Croatia as cultural narratives, and deconstructs them in the light of the Balkanist discursive tradition. The analysis suggests that despite of (or, for the benefit of) the proclaimed credibility of the genre, the international news subject remains reduced to its particular Balkanist 'otherness', preserved in a self-sustaining visual 'spectacle-ness' of an EU candidate.

Key words: international news coverage, Croatia, Balkanism, EU accession, news-mapping

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*For sensation-gatherers or experience-collectors that we are...
difference comes at a premium.*

Zygmunt Bauman (1997: 55)

Vigorously striving to deliver the diversity of reality to demanding audiences, international television news insists on making the 'distant' and the 'unknown' *available* for target spectators' sensations. Professional standards and institutional setting notwithstanding, it is not potential humanist challenge or comprehension of differences that is fostered, but primarily credibility in what the news understands when it looks at the world through its own lens. In this perspective, international news tells us little about *inter-national* relations, and much about cultural 'self'-'other' exchange in encountering and 'mapping' the 'other' on the grounds of available understandings shared with imagined audiences.

Contending that the 'other' encountered in the news is "who he is only on those screens and speakers", Silverstone recognises "media's work as boundary work", within which "judgements of inclusion and exclusion" are made (Silverstone, 2007: 3, 54). This is rendered both at the macro level, in the form of community, national and transnational broadcasting, and at the micro level, in particular narratives (*ibid.*: 19).¹ This study focuses on the micro level, where media texts persist in "the endless, endless, endless, playing with difference and sameness", subliming in that way "their primary cultural role" (*ibid.*). Momentarily coexisting in "the generalised now of the news report", where "presence is far from complete", yet remains inviting, "strangers are met with face to face" (Johansen, 1997: 170). If 'others' appear on the television screen, coming from outside one's dominant "cognitive, moral or aesthetic map", they are designated as strangers, causing immense unrest "by their sheer presence" (Bauman, 1997: 46). This study's attempt to deconstruct the meta-physical qualities of the 'screening' of the 'other' in television news, must, in turn, keep in mind that "the screen is not only the medium through which images are projected for us, but also the screen onto we project our fears, fantasies and desires concerning the Others against whom our identities are defined and constructed" (Morley and Robins, 1995: 134).²

This study analyses two BBC television news reports surrounding the start of the Croatian³ membership negotiations with the European Union (hereafter EU) in

¹ Compare with Morley and Robins (1995: 1, 4-5, 84) and Morley (2000: 209, 261).

² For further consideration, see Conclusion. See also Stevenson (1999) and Chouliaraki (2006).

³ Out of four present membership candidates (cf. europa.eu, 2007b), only Turkey and Croatia started the talks, after concurrent diplomatic activities, whereby the countries' respective evaluations took place in a single register.

late 2005.⁴ I will attempt to dismantle the audio-visual strategies of representation by which Croatia was 'mapped', as its future belonging to the EU was negotiated and its perceived level of present compliance was displayed. Britain is selected as one of the EU's 'old' members (cf. Inthorn, 2006: 76), which, albeit from an "isolationist or national perspective" with "low attention" to the EU political agenda, holds the "central" position amongst EU states as "the most frequently referenced EU member" (Kevin, 2003: 173, 108-109, 117). In this process television is the EU citizens' "preferred method" for understanding the EU issues and imagining supranational belonging (*ibid.*: 31, 119).

It is nothing new to say that Croatia⁵ is Europe's 'other'.⁶ Cultural criticism has been analysing representations of 'otherness' for decades (Todorova, 1997: 7) in the light of the classical "Eurocentric" discourses (Thrift, 1997: 164), most notably in Said's (2003) study on "Orientalism", followed by Todorova's "Balkanism" (1997). Although, as Pieterse and Parekh (1995: 3-4, 12-13) observe, "stereotypical images of 'non-Western' cultures" continue to resort in the Western visual cultures as a lasting legacy of the past dominations, the West-Rest divide (cf. Pieterse, 1994: 130) has not as yet been examined in television news in the particular way this study attempts.

I propose to link the Balkanist (married as it is in its discursive rationale with the Saidian Orientalist) representational traditions with the textual dynamics of the sampled news stories by making use of Todorova's findings as paramount intellectual resources in theorising particular cases. Thus the focus is on textual embodiments of "generalised images and stereotypes ... that transcend structures of ownership or patterns of work relations [in news production]" (Schudson, 2005: 187). Accordingly, this news coverage analysis meets the need for investigating "by what representational strategies is the viewer being invited to 'fill in the gaps', ... [and]

⁴ The stories were produced and broadcast by the 6:00pm, 10:00pm and the News on BBC World in late 2005 and early 2006. The BBC World channel, available to the national audience on digital television, was included, as the BBC archives did not identify a sufficient number of stories about the Croatian accession broadcast on terrestrial channels. To be included in the analysis, the stories had to consist of, or at least substantively include, the reporter's encounter with the 'other' on the terrains of the two countries respectively. The News archives were researched by the keywords "EU", "Croatia", "accession", "negotiation". The BBC was chosen as the European flag-bearer of public service broadcasting (Wallis and Barran, 1990: 44), the fundamental obligation of which is to provide "universal distribution of its services", whereby the news programmes bring issues into the public "common domain" (Scannell, 1989: 138-140).

⁵ Amongst many available maps of the Balkans, I follow Todorova's classification (1997: 25-31) that encompasses "Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians and most of former Yugoslavs", without Slovenia and with Croatia, since some of its then territories were under Ottomans.

⁶ See Georgiev and Tzenkov, 1994; Hammond, 2006; Neumann and Welsh, 1997.

make the *appropriate, rational* inferences” (Allan, 2004: 97, original emphasis). Assuming that it is particularly the storytelling nature of news that allows it to reproduce broader cultural assumptions on the representational level of sheer fact-reporting, I apply the narrative analysis method in reading news texts. Such an unconventional approach is confined to exploring: a) what kind of sub-textual ‘othering’ is in force; b) by which communicational tools; and c) to what extent the ‘common’ Balkanist (Todorova, 1997) assumptions are reproduced.

The very nature of ‘event’ reported in the chosen case corresponds with Ellis’s (2002: 76) witty recognition that the television news performs a particular social function, an anxious handling of that which is thought to be forthcoming after, and in relation to, the ‘now’. Thereby, the ‘factual’ present of news becomes “a precarious moment ... [wherein] everything ... is mortgaged ... to an unknown future” (*ibid.*). At the (alleged) expense of the “uncertainties of the future” (*ibid.*), in our case, two distinct cultures are ‘mapped’ by means of centuries-old ‘mapping’ traditions. Consequently, the power-relations inherent to them are reproduced, whilst, still well within the standards of television’s audio-visual “structuring effects” (Heath and Skirrow, 1977: 13), the identities of those being ‘mapped’ are abruptly negotiated.

The EU and the Cultural Economy of ‘Accession’

A complex unrest has been contextualising discussions about what kind of unity the EU imagines, and in what ways it demarcates its borders over a single geographical entity – the *continent* of Europe – claiming its name, and infusing it with a culture of divisions. When the European Union, as it is known presently, saw the need to respond to Soviet security ‘threat’ after World War II (Wallace, 2001: 1-2), “the idea of the East/West divide [became] ... a motor for integration” that would “preserve European ‘values’” (Hammond, 2006: 13). On the turn of the 1990s the ‘iron curtain’ separating the two domains collapsed, and the EU stretched towards the Black Sea to incorporate a total of twenty-seven members. Contractual relations between them bounded what was formerly divided, on the basis of shared values (democratic system, market economy, and administrative accession ability (cf. europa.eu, 2007c)). Nonetheless, the idea of ‘common European identity’ remained both a necessity and a repeatedly discovered problem.

Take the enlargement that took place with the historical entry of Central and Eastern European countries in 2004. Raik’s analysis of political discourses surrounding the process demonstrated that the EU political elites transfixed it with a set of seemingly ‘positive’ notions such as the “inevitability” of enlargement, and the demand of “speed” and “efficiency” in negotiations (2004: 574). In practice, the ‘negotiations’ were reduced to mere “transmission of present [Western]

rules”⁷, whereby the more similar the two sides’ documents became, the more they were seen by the EU as “speaking the same language” (*ibid.*: 574-582). What Raik (2004) did not (intend to) do is what I would tentatively suggest here, and that is to link the anxious ‘integration’ of the ex-communist newcomers to the underlying European insecurity about its identity. Although it is ardently desired, the EU identity “remains a vulnerable and anxious phenomenon”, and is rarely given final determination (Morley and Robins, 1995: 3, 23, 58).⁸ Consequently, it is “fated to anxiety”, which pushes the EU to preserve its longed for unity “against the [imagined] forces of disintegration”, by the practices of “enclosure and fortification”, against those “who appear to be non-European” (*ibid.*: 3, 21, 23).⁹ In such a context, the EU-accession discourses foster a particular power ration, articulated on the ground of mass media communications as “a politico-cultural condition in which some countries’ Europeaneity is a given, while others have to work for it” (Hammond, 2006: 8).

The accession talks with Croatia began on 3 October 2005, after the start had been postponed, seven months before – for the first time in the EU’s history – due to Croatia’s unsatisfactory cooperation with the Hague International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Literature locates Croatia amongst Central and East European countries (Wallace, 2001), eight of which entered the EU in the 2004 wave. Despite the EU’s then initiative to include Croatia, the war with Serbs and Bosnians in the early 1990s was seen to “[had broken] the ethnic, democratic and economic principles at the heart of the EU’s enlargement policy” (*ibid.*: 14-15), and Croatia remained outside the EU. The start of formal negotiations with Croatia in October 2005 was coupled with Turkey’s bid to enter the EU, and it is important to understand Croatia’s progression towards EU membership in that particular context. It would not be overstated to say that Turkey is a country with both one of the longest running formal relations with, and the most unforeseeable future in the EU. After the formal application for membership in 1959, Turkey was offered ‘associative’ status (europa.eu, 2007a). It was then charged for an unsatisfactory economic performance and human rights record, whilst a subsidiary silent evaluation saw Turkey as “alien in language and culture”, an assessment that was quickly “couched in terms of [its Euro-Asiatic] geography” (Wallace, 2001: 2).¹⁰ Accession talks began after exhaustive ‘backstage’ diplomatic discussions that referenced (and, in the case of Austria, conditioned) the possible acceptance of Croatia’s candidature.

⁷ Compare with Hammond, 2006: 13-14.

⁸ See also Kevin, 2003: 1.

⁹ The argument is developed by Neumann and Welsh (1997: 314-316).

¹⁰ Inthorn’s (2006: 84-85) content analysis of German and British press shows that Turkey continues to appear as “a country where cultural difference matters more” than for others.

As member states discussed the two pretenders to their club in September and October 2005, the mediated public expectation of newcomers anticipated that the EU borders were to be stretched and its territory 're-mapped'. At that point, the sense of EU identity (however provisionally it may be imagined in the singular¹¹) was confronted with identities waiting outside the unity's extant borders. Operating fundamentally with "cultural codes" that stem from "cultural assumptions" about 'reality' (Glasgow University Media Group, 1995: 49), the news discourse transcended the uncertain political process of 'accession' to the familiar cultural domain of 'othering' that took place at sub-textual levels of audio-visual representation. If we are to understand the nature of such 'mapping' operations (before turning with more detail to the foundations of the news genre that made this process possible), more attention must be given to the vector that fundamentally "impinges" (Winn, 2001: 28) on EU identity: its culture of borders.

An elemental force of "maintenance" seems to be driving any group's self-sustainability (Bauman, 1992: 678), and that is keeping guard over the borders, as they are "deemed crucial to [a group's] orderly and/or meaningful life" (Bauman, 1997: 46). Thereby those outside the dominant rules of group membership are found belonging to a different "level of reality" where the perceived 'other' is "not really human at all" (Johansen, 1997: 183). Since 'West' is essentially an arbitrary allocation, being *given* to an entity of location (cf. Morley, 2007: 177)¹² according to some specific cultural parameters, Europe's imagination of its borders, as a part of "the great landmass of Eurasia" (Pieterse, 1994: 131), could be found residing the "gradation of 'Orients'", whereby "all ethnic groups define the 'other' as 'East' of them" (Bakić-Hayden, 1995: 918-919). Accordingly, the Balkans are Western and Central Europe's East, whereas Turkey is Balkan's East, Asia is Turkey's East, and so on (*ibid.*).¹³ Nowadays European 'belonging' is confined to formal citizenship in EU Member States (Kevin, 2003: 25). In other words, "European citizenship" is equalled with a "citizenship of borders" (Balibar, 2004: 6).¹⁴ This brings us back to Europe's present quest for the 'other' that would take the place of the communist 'other' that vanished when the Cold War faded. The news screening of the intense awaiting for the European Council's decision on whether to start the negotiations with Turkey and Croatia, sheds light on the sophisticated cultural refurbishment of new/old fronts of Europe's margins, and its 'others': the Orient and the Balkans.

¹¹ See Pieterse, 1994: 141-146.

¹² Compare with Balibar's discussion (2004: 4).

¹³ For particular examples, see Razsa and Lindstrom (2004), and Patterson (2003).

¹⁴ See also Cole, 1998: 139.

Orientalist and Balkanist 'Othering'

Rich theoretical heritage in scrutinising Western representations of “the distant in faraway societies and the marginal in nearby ones” (Todorova, 1997: 10),¹⁵ necessarily directs us to Said’s key work in deconstructing the “system of knowledge about the Orient” (2003: 2-3, 6, 9-28).¹⁶ Following the Foucauldian tradition of analysing power through discourse and Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, Said was able to conceptualise the ‘Orient’, as well as the ‘Occident’ as “man-made” parts of *imaginative geography* composed and made “real and present” by a “tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary” (*ibid.*: 3-7, 23-25, 71, 73). Since it grows out of domination, wherein power is fed by and dependant on information, the Orientalist knowledge, according to Said’s classical premise, “creates the Orient” and keeps it “fixed in time and space” (*ibid.*: 36, 40, 94, 108, 208).¹⁷ Increasingly overlooked by many Said’s critics is his equally strong assertion that Orientalist ‘othering’ works in a “median category”, between full knowledge and complete novelty, in seeing “new things ... as versions of a previously known thing” (*ibid.*: 58). This instance grasps the logic of Orientalist representations, that is, of my main focus, to which I now must turn with more detail.

Amongst the lasting imprints that transfuse Europe’s modernist apprehensions of its “Near East” is the fundamental relationship between the European ‘West’ and the ‘Orient’ as “one between a strong and a weak partner”, wherein “it is Europe that articulates ... represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous [Oriental] space beyond familiar boundaries” (*ibid.*: 57, 58). Even more recently, as this study aims to illustrate, despite the intensified proliferation of channels and the segmentation of markets, electronic media have managed to further “the nineteenth-century ... demonology of the ‘mysterious Orient’” that can be reduced, arguably, to “five attributes of Orientalist representation” amounting to the Orientalist “discursive consistency”, as ones that:

- (a) bear [the Orientalist’s] distinctive imprint,
- (b) illustrate his conception of what the Orient can or ought to be,
- (c) consciously contest someone else’s view of the Orient,

¹⁵ For a broader insight, see Pieterse and Parekh, 1995: 1-19.

¹⁶ The supplied overview focuses on *representational* qualities of Orientalist texts, and by no means exhausts the otherwise much greater breadth of Said’s intellectual enquiry. Contemporary critique of Said’s study has been perhaps as large as its success (cf. Sardar, 1999: 70-74). Although “Orientalism” has been charged for “surreptitious anti-Westernism ... [and] a manifestly idealist approach” (Todorova, 1997: 8), this study foregrounds its indisputable humanist advocacy of “intellectual responsibility towards other cultures” (Turner, 2004: 176), which secures the momentousness of Said’s work in studies of similar concerns.

¹⁷ Compare with Harbsmeier’s (1984: 72-76) and Porter’s (1983: 179-180) discussions.

- (d) provide Orientalist discourse with what, at that moment, it seems most in need of, and
- (e) respond to certain cultural, professional, national, political, and economic requirements of the epoch.
(*ibid.*: 26, 72, 274).

It is on the basis of a “seemingly identical, but actually only similar phenomenon” to that of Orientalism that Todorova (1997: 11-12) developed the “foremost” (Patterson: 2003: 111) critical exploration of the ‘Western’ discourse on Europe’s south-eastern peninsula, physically indivisible from the European continent, yet discursively maintained as its cultural “other within” (*ibid.*: 12, 188). “Balkanism”, in Todorova’s words, sublimes “a spectre” of the Balkans that has been “haunting Western culture” on the grounds of its disturbing indeterminacy “between barbarity and civilisation” (*ibid.*: 3, 130).¹⁸ More concretely, Balkanist discourse resembles the Orientalist imagining of Europe’s East as a socially “backward”, “irrational” and “immobile” place, “against which the positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ and the ‘West’ has been constructed” (*ibid.*: 11, 130, 188). All these instances service an awareness of representational consistencies, to which this study is committed.

For the purpose of informing the analysis, the following key features of the ‘Western’ “frozen image[s]” of the Balkans in the travel-writing and academic accounts (*ibid.*: 7, 19) are singled out:

- (a) whereas the West and the Orient are “incompatible, ... completed anti-worlds”, the Balkans’, because of their rich inner diversity, hold a “transitional status”, as “the central characteristic” (*ibid.*: 17-19);
- (b) in contrast to the “exotic and imaginary” Orient, the Balkans appear in an “unimaginative concreteness ... [of] a straightforward attitude, usually negative, but rarely nuanced” (*ibid.*: 14);
- (c) after the Balkan wars and the outbreak of World War I, “violence” became one of the key elements, supported by ideas of “cruelty”, lawlessness and “unpredictability”, for which “the most frustrating characteristic” in the eyes of the Western visitors – the “ethnic complexity” – was deemed responsible (*ibid.*: 118-119, 122, 128);
- (d) additionally, following Hammond (2006), “the Balkans [are recognised] as a frontier zone that required policing from without”;¹⁹ such “dependency”

¹⁸ See also Hammond (2006: 8-13) and Finney (2003).

¹⁹ This is strikingly similar to the ways in which the EU political elites assigned the membership candidates “the position[s] of ‘pupil[s]’ of the EU”, asserting that only full membership would turn them into “equal partner[s]” (Raik, 2004: 582-583).

was helped by the “western interference” in local tensions during the last two centuries (2006: 9-17).

It is precisely the way in which “a geographical appellation [is] transformed into one of the most powerful pejorative designations” (Todorova, 1997: 7), that underlines imaginative geography as the basis of this study’s applied link between Said’s and Todorova’s distinct accounts. This demands taking a *cultural perspective* on news, whereby “the privileged” status of the news in reporting on ‘reality’ makes “the seductive powers of its narratives particularly significant” (Bird and Dardenne, 1988: 82).

News Culture-Mapping

Television news, as one of the key sources not only of facts that the citizens need in order to participate in society (Fiske, 1987: 281), but also of “social and political knowledge and beliefs about the world” (van Dijk, 1991: 110), successfully induces belief in its content (Schudson, 1995: 16) by “claim[ing] objectivity” (Fiske, 1987: 281). However, it is a well-researched claim that “the news is not a neutral product”, but rather a “manifestation of the collective cultural codes”, stemming from “assumptions” about reality (Glasgow University Media Group, 1995: 41, 49, 52), which is why the slippery slope of ‘news objectivity’ and ‘bias’ must be vacated at the outset if the cultural determination of news texts is to be grasped. Thus, the news is rather seen as a “cultural artefact” (*ibid.*: 1) partaking in the “mediated public space ... of appearance ... [that] both reflects and constitutes the world” (Silverstone, 2007: 31, 81). With these ‘informational’ and ‘cultural’ qualities of news texts in mind, the news is best understood as a ‘mapping’ tool, which “organises, selects and renders coherent the innumerable sense impressions we might experience on the ground” (Hartley, 1982: 15). In this way, news as a ‘map’ of the world is an “abstraction from reality” that proposes differentiations of the land that are inaccessible outside the ‘map’ (*ibid.*).²⁰

Since one of the key “sense-making mechanisms” in ‘news-mapping’ is not literal, but metaphorical language (Fiske, 1987: 291), it is no surprise that contemporary ‘guides for producers and reporters’ instruct the reporters to “Write For the Ear, Shoot For the Eye, Aim For the Heart” (Tompkins, 2002). In order to accomplish that, “reporters should be looking for the more imaginative pictures which will *add something extra* to otherwise standard subjects” (Yorke, 2000: 141, my emphasis). This leads us to what Heath and Skirrow (1977: 57) foreground as “the fact of television itself ... [that comes] before the production of a particular ideological position” (Heath and Skirrow, 1977: 57). Rendered by the medium-specific politics of

²⁰ See Hall *et al.*, 1978: ch. 3 on ‘news-mapping’.

expression, a news programme operates as an “institution of the image”,²¹ wherein a “succession of images” is to “fill in [the voice-over, and] make a passage”, not to provide an “analysis of reality” (*ibid.*: 27-28, 34). Thus, what underlies the sense of “realism” which the news manifestly advocates (Fiske, 1987: 291),²² is a perennial desire to “hold” the viewer (Heath and Skirrow, 1977: 19). This theoretical critique gives our study an important impetus for grasping the ways in which sub-textual news ‘othering’ works hand in hand with creative textual production known in film (such as sequencing, montage, planes, sound mixing, etc.). That is, the focus is on “a characteristic of news so basic as to be sometimes invisible” (Tuchman, 1991: 81): once the ‘facts’ are gathered in a news report, a “news story springs anew” (Bird and Dardenne, 1988: 67), articulated by means of a *particular form of narrative*. However, this is complicated by a pertaining ambiguity with which the idea of news-narratives has been transfixed,²³ which demands some basic clarifications.

Whilst a considerable body of news research assumes that “textual devices that control the sense of news are embedded in a narrative form” (Fiske, 1987: 293), Lewis’s (1994: 30) research demonstrated that news texts disrupt the key ‘narrative’ instrument “that tempts those ... who keep on watching”. Namely, “the hermeneutic code”, consisting of enigma, its temporary absence and resolution (Lewis, 1991: 126)²⁴ is conversed: the news tells the resolution of a story first, or “the punchline before the joke” (*ibid.*: 131).²⁵ Conversely, Fiske accentuates the “increasingly uncertain relationship” between the praxis of television fiction in implying a sense of “realisticness” and the way television news “works through stories” when reporting on reality (1987: 293-294).²⁶ This is particularly the case with the way interviewees appear in the news stories: seemingly they support the news’ “realisticness”, but, in turn, they uphold the narrative “by the placing of the interview in the overall context of the story” (Hartley, 1982: 109-110). Notwithstanding the viability of

²¹ See also Morley and Brunson, 1999: 62-82.

²² Compare with Jensen, 1986: 58.

²³ Contrast the straightforward claims by Bell (1991: 147): “Journalists don’t write articles, they write stories”, and Watson: “News is *not* a story ... it is for real” (2003: 167, original emphasis). Yet both theorists refer to news reports as “narratives”. Neither of the claims is completely serviceable, because the former oversimplifies a journalist’s work and the latter is based on the self-evident distinction between information and fiction. It is a broader notion of narrative, which signposts the storytelling dynamic in reporting facts that this study proposes.

²⁴ Lewis draws on Barthes (1974).

²⁵ The stories I analyse appeared as *subsidiary* items giving critical *background* (cf. Bell, 1991: 170) to the preceding ‘hard news’. This contradicts Lewis’s over-generalised argument that a news story crops up “out of the blue, not as a moment in a particular history” (1991: 132). See chapter VI.

²⁶ Compare with Hall (1984) and McQuail (2000: 337).

Lewis's (1991: 131) research, this study is inclined towards the latter set of arguments, which recognise that:

there are systematic differences between the inverted-pyramid structure of print news and the "thematic" structure of television news, ... [in which] journalists work with the traditions of storytelling [and] picture making ... [inherited] from their expressive cultures (Schudson, 2003: 186).

In other words, between the requirements of 'objectivity' and the urge of 'creativity', journalists "do some chronicling, some story-telling, and a lot that is something of both" (Bird and Dardenne, 1988: 78). This is where news theory meets narratology, the recent development of which identifies narratives in "whatever you say or think about a certain time or place ... including the world and the self" (Herman and Vervaeck, 2005: 1).²⁷ With these notions in mind, I propose 'reading' television news stories as *cultural representations, stricto sensu*, as texts drawing on and reinforcing particular cultures,²⁸ for which an approach that treats the news reports as stories and utilises narrative methodology that focuses more on "interpretation" than on "measurement", would be more useful (Hesmondhalgh, 2006: 120).

Analysis

By focusing not on the 'factuality' of news inasmuch as on its representations, I pursue, following Said, "not ... [an] analysis of what lies hidden in the Orientalist text, but analysis rather of ... its exteriority to what it describes", because "it is not [raw] 'truth' [that is circulated] but representations" (2003: 20-21). In the case of television news, "it is only in the detailed consideration of particular instances that the effective reality of television production can be grasped" (Heath and Skirrow, 1977: 9). This will be guided by Gillespie's account on narrative analysis, tailored for mass media texts, which understands a 'narrative' as a text that "imposes a certain order [of events] and creates a pattern of meaning" (2006: 83). To achieve that,

²⁷ See also Schudson, 1995: 65.

²⁸ A number of studies recognise that international news predominantly represents the foreign 'others' "homogeneously", i.e. unified by a certain cultural feature (Stevenson, 2004: 235), which is also, in another way, found to be determining the news flow. Galtung and Ruge found "cultural proximity" between the news broadcaster and the reported event to be influencing the entrance of a news item in the programme (Galtung and Ruge, 1965: 66-68; compare with Hannerz, 2004; Larson, 1984; Karim, 1999; Sreberny and Paterson, 2004). 'Cultural proximity' in the news textual practice reflects what "journalists are sent off with" overseas, that is, the "well-stocked kit bags, not just with a few clean shirts or blouses, but of attitudes and recognisable perspectives as well", in order to "make sense in terms editors believe [the audience] ... will understand" (Harriman, 1987: 192). Contrast this with Said's (2003: 52) note that any Orientalist's travel baggage to the Orient included "unshakable abstract maxims about the 'civilisation' he had studied".

narrative analysis observes both the respective vantage points of a storyteller and of a receiver, not losing sight of the fact that “what is omitted [in a story] is as important as what is selected” (*ibid.*: 82). Gillespie’s narrative analysis works from the standpoints of “narrative structure”, “process of narration” and “social representation” (*ibid.*: 80-81, 101-102). For the purpose of the news analysis, the following components are appropriated:

- making causal inferences
- noting duration and frequency of events
- filling in the gaps of narrative time
- assessing the spatial frame of reference
- considering how space and elements of style express human relationships (from Gillespie, 2006: 96; 102).

The analysis understands the ideological reproduction in the news-narratives through the tradition of ‘news-discourse’ analysis, which alleges that news texts operate with many “missing links”, which the reader is expected to ‘fill’ with shared social knowledge (van Dijk, 1991: 112).²⁹ The next step is to acknowledge that the television news articulates the “dominant definitions of situation”, which “are also ‘negotiated’ and challenged by other speakers who may attempt to redefine the terms of debate” (1981: 388). Thus I will attempt to trace not whether “social cognitions” are “monitored by the same ideology” (van Dijk, 1991: 118), but *by which audio-visual strategies of representation ‘dominant’ assumptions are reproduced.*

This approach goes in line with Hall’s argument that the mediated social knowledge is a point where “power intersects with the discourse”, and attempts to invest it with a “preferred reading” in order to “hegemonise the audience reading” (1994: 262-263). However, knowing that “there is no one fixed meaning” in the “infinite semiosis of language” (*ibid.*: 263-264), my ‘readings’ do not aim to forecast and may not correspond with how particular audiences might read the same texts. This deliberate limitation rests on my further assumption that “textual analysis may be able to identify a text’s popular potential, but it can only speculate about if or how this potential will be actualised” (Fiske, 1989: 189). My aim is to suggest the ‘preferred readings’ of the texts as “something which is grounded in the operations of language”, “however tentative” it may be (Hall, 1994: 266-267). In the final instance, what is aimed at here is “not a final theoretical model” but ‘theorised’ research (*ibid.*: 269).

²⁹ For further elaboration, see Van Dijk, 1988: 18-30.

“Croatia Awaiting”³⁰

It is in the state of indeterminacy defined by the “awaiting” of the EU’s decision about the country’s future that Croatia is introduced to the viewers. The air of uncertainty came because Croatia “was seen to be sheltering an indicted war criminal, general Ante Gotovina”. The position the whole country is assigned at the outset is that of a criminal dossier.

The opening sequence puts before the viewers a group of politicians posing around a desk for the flashing cameras.



Fig. 1: Meeting I

Following the reporter’s narration, one can locate Croatia’s political leaders sat opposite the Chief Prosecutor of The Hague War Crimes Tribunal. The meeting in Zagreb, “described in advance as a watershed for Croatia”, came before the Prosecutor was to give her final evaluation to the EU leaders, who would then decide on whether or not to open accession talks with the country. The Prosecutor came to re-assess Croatia’s cooperation with the Tribunal in capturing “Hague’s most wanted Croat”, General Gotovina, after the Tribunal “effectively blocked Croatia’s application to the EU” earlier that year, because “Zagreb” did not find its General. A sense of the country’s immobility and inferiority before its individual evaluator comes to mind here, as Croatian politicians are referred to as a group against the ‘Western’ individual, who is to meet the country’s alleged need of “policing from without” (Hammond, 2006: 12).

³⁰ Fish, Jim, A Report. In *BBC News*. TV, BBC World Service, 2005, Sep 30.



Fig. 2: Meeting II



Fig. 3: Meeting III

The viewers are now taken to Dalmatia, the southern Croatian coast, where, according to the reporter, the General originates from. The piece of information is ‘covered’ by a shot of a yacht moving slowly through a quiet bay and a swimmer enjoying the sea, all seducing the viewer with natural beauties.



Fig. 4: Seaside

A glimpse at the Adriatic that evokes tourist brochures portrays the area not solely as a place of genuine intact nature, but a sense of similitude to the ‘West’ is implied as well. I would tentatively recognise it as ‘Balkanist travel exoticism’ that enforces appeal by screening indigenous purity, invested, at the same time, with emblems of ‘Western’ appropriation. In those parts, the reporter continues, the General “is considered a hero”, whilst posters and billboards in local streets are shown portraying the General as “*heroj*”.



Fig. 5: Billboard

Despite the “indictment” accusing the General for “killings and expulsions of Serbs from Croatia”, four years long attempts to capture him “have come to nothing”. The screen is then glued to the document of indictment, for the attentive viewer to scan the information, giving stamina to the “usually negative” “straightforwardness” of representing the Balkanist countries in the ‘Western’ representation (Todorova, 1997: 14).

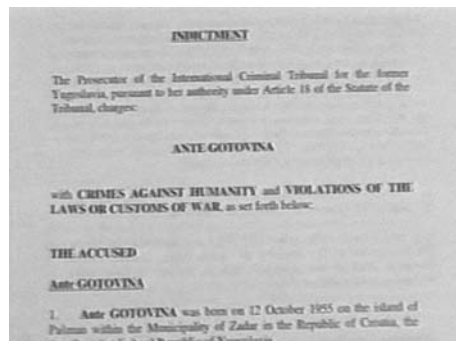


Fig. 6: Indictment

The accusations refer to the events surrounding the end of, as the journalist calls it, the “Balkan war”. According to Todorova, the use of ‘the Balkans’ to signpost the war in ex-Yugoslavia in the early 1990s services a deliberate invocation of “indiscriminate generalisations about the [whole] region”, implying that the Balkans’ inhabitants enter the late 20th century practicing cruelty as if “unmarked by any [historical] change” (*ibid.*: 136-137).

The court in The Hague had been suspecting, the journalist continues, that the General was protected in Croatia by a “network of supporters”. The information is covered by a sequence of men in military uniforms chatting, firstly in public, under the bright sky, then in a dark closed space, where they seem to be arranging something secretly.



Fig. 7: General

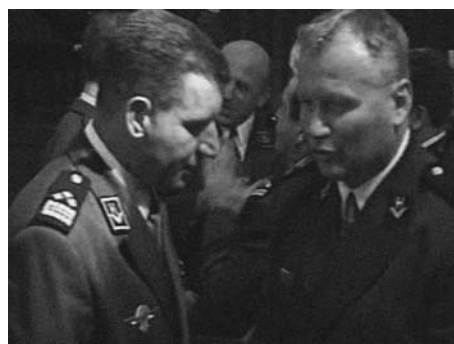


Fig. 8: General with others

Such an image discretely reproduces what Todorova classified as “social arrangements” in the Yugoslav part of the Balkans (*ibid.*: 137). Such relations reside in “extended families, clans, tribes”, a configuration that outlived the 17th-century “feuds over pastureland and routes” (*ibid.*). Nowadays it breeds supposed “Balkan violence”, which is special for being “archaic” and “more violent [than Western]” (*ibid.*). Here the cultural economy of ‘Balkanist’ signifying works as an ultimate ‘othering’ tool, proving its all-time availability in the ‘Western’ discourses, for use in times when, as in the intense pre-accession process, the extant EU borders need to be affirmed. Quite incidentally, yet indisputably powerfully, the story evolving around the General’s escape also reinforces the classical “distinctly male appeal” of the Balkans, rooted in “the appeal of medieval knighthood, of arms and plots” (*ibid.*: 14).

The story turns back to the Prosecutor giving a statement before an army of journalists. In a twenty-five second ‘sound clip’, filled with intermediary silence, all we hear is the lady refusing to say *anything* about her latest assessment, explaining repeatedly that the special European taskforce will be the first to know her final verdict over “Croatia”.



Fig. 9: Prosecutor

In a spectacle of anxious expectation over what the Prosecutor would say, she demands: “Don’t ask me nothing, because I will tell you nothing”. What *is* ‘told’ is the single evaluator’s power over the whole country that throughout the report ultimately remains silent. Such inference is supported by the close attention given to any word the Prosecutor would utter. Even if all she says is that she “will say nothing”.

Another Balkanist continuity is evoked as the story goes on to negotiate Croatian identity between its Balkan origin and contested ‘European-ness’. On a sunny day, an entrance to a building is shown as overlooked by two flags, the Croatian and the EU’s, implying that the place is moving “between stages of growth” (*ibid.*: 16).



Fig. 10: Flag



Fig. 11: City

As the sequence develops into a visual depiction of what looks like a metropolitan area, the reporter speculates about what would happen (not to Croatia, but to the EU) should the EU decide to postpone the membership negotiations again.

“Europe’s plan to open talks with Turkey could be torpedoed by Austria, which believes that Zagreb should have priority over Ankara”, alleges the journalist, delineating the ‘liminality’ of Croatian identity between the Balkans and the West. Turkey is assigned a place in the group of EU candidates, but is ranked lower than Croatia, which appears to be preferred, due to a single ‘Western’ siding.

The country introduced as ‘criminal’ now looks increasingly ‘disciplined’, with an ordered public movement on lively streets, in the last frame even giving away a trace of sexual appeal of an indiscrete and uninterrupted camera gaze at the girl walking towards it.



Fig. 12: City II

If “the Balkans ... have always evoked an image of a bridge or a crossroads” (*ibid.*: 15), the report could be seen as a micro-journey from the obscure war in the present-perfect to the bright sunny modern European-near future, all referenced from without, but taking place within.

“Croatia’s Choice”³¹

“Now, how far should the European Union expand?”, asks the presenter at the beginning of his introduction, adding that the Union already has twenty-five members. With a gesticulation that allows him to hit the paper he holds when highlighting that “many say that’s big enough!”, the presenter introduces Croatia as one of the countries “waiting in the wings”, with many citizens still living “with the legacy of the civil war”. In order to provide us with an answer to the question “is the country ready to join?”, the European editor “travelled there” and delivered a “special report” on “Croatia’s choice”. The narration sets the hermeneutic code with the uncertainty about the country’s future and instantly gives the enigma a preferred direction

³¹ Mardell, Mark, A Report. In *BBC 6 O’Clock News*, TV, BBC 1, 2006, Jan 27.

of resolution, as the issue of the “big enough” EU is readily linked to “Croatia’s”, not anyone else’s “choice”.

The opening gallery of shots confronts the viewer with ruins. The voice-over alleges: “this is still a land recovering from war”, stretching the spatial reference to the whole imagined territory.



Fig. 13: Ruins I



Fig. 14: Ruins II

The visual depiction indicating isolation in time insists on stretching the temporal reference of destruction as well, to a general – ‘forever’. According to the voice-over, “the capture of the man accused for burning these Serb villages and murdering their inhabitants” is a precondition for Croatia to start EU-membership talks. At that point of the story, the temporal reference splits onto two overlapping levels: the visual information keeps representing an *enduring* destruction, as there is still no movement, no signs of ‘contemporaneity’ implied in the shots, whilst the audio introduces reference to the *near past*. The temporal inference of the visual level then nears the one on the audio level, as in the next shot we see two cars driving by a



Fig. 15: Building

building clearly under reconstruction. A big poster of a military person is exhibited too. It is, the reporter explains, General Gotovina, who “for many” in Croatia “is a hero, not a war criminal”.

In the following sequence, many more Generals’ portraits are hanging on the wall of the “veteran’s club thick with tobacco smoke”. The video, on the other hand, accentuates signs such as the sticker “Thank God I’m Croatian” and a badge of a cross, suggesting a single religion, Christianity, in the core of what the veterans were fighting for. What is evoked is the classic consistency of a tension between the “irreconcilable camps” of Christianity and the Ottoman legacy of Islam, against which Christianity was building a principal boundary in the Balkans (Todorova, 1997: 20, 64, 188).



Fig. 16: Sign

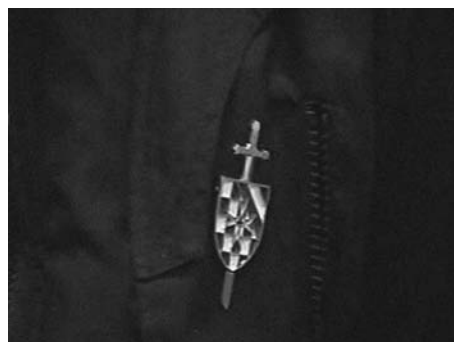


Fig. 17: Badge

The men sit and look around as if stuck in a frozen moment in history (cf. *ibid.*: 136-137). On the resigned, rusty faces, under dark interior shades, the war is officially finished, but the future is rejected before it even knocked on the door. The Balkan men remain traditionally “uncivilised” and “dishevelled” (*ibid.*: 14).



Fig. 18: Veterans



Fig. 19: Veterans II

With the introductory shots of the ruins of the villages of Croatia's 'other', the Serbs, Croatian nationalism is paired with aggression, a conflation known as "virulent Balkan nationalism" of an unprecedented intensity, "intrinsically alien to Western civic and supposedly civilised nationalism" (*ibid.*: 183, 132). In the latest sequence the warriors' dignity and pride are added, on the grounds of a veteran's statement that their military operations were defensive, and that the EU's pressure makes them feel that they should "sell their souls". Representing his compatriots' view, but, in turn, presenting the presenter's problem of "Croatia's choice", the veteran concludes: "if someone don't want us – I think – it's better be out".

Remnants of Croatia's near and burdensome past take another distinct form in the following sequence, in which an elderly woman shows the reporter into her home – a garage.



Fig. 20: Coming In

The woman retells us her story in the voice-over, of how she, being an ethnic Serb, has been living there since the war destroyed her home, and herself "inside". While the journalist lists that the woman has no running water, no toilet, and no



Fig. 21: Water



Fig. 22: Through the Net

lighting, the camera scans the place inside and outside, detailing the lady's sad face, the tiny room, a kettle for warming water, and a net on the back window, through which a sorrowful dark counter-light movement of the lady is discerned.

The story-telling evolves with the journalist speaking 'over' the person who we see speaking as well. We do not hear her directly, but only in the journalist's translation. Whilst the woman has not been heard completing a single sentence, the voice-over fires a set of her fragmented thoughts, ending with: "she tells me". Clearly she is not speaking for herself, but what is more striking in this relationship between the 'reporter-translator-representer-expert' and his interviewee is the light-hearted appropriation of the Other's attempted self-exposition. By means of montage and language the statement is assimilated into a single representational texture, the journalist's story.

Although clearly victimised by the war, the woman appears primarily as someone who praises the country's entry in the EU. As a consequence of the EU's demands, the woman is getting a proper apartment, an instance which the journalist concludes by re-telling what seem to be the woman's words: "Europe will help this country come to its senses". Because the sound-bite is embedded in a coherent text about 'general truths' on Croatian EU-accession, its content gains significance of a more general scope. Associating the conditions of EU-membership with the question of the lady's proper home in Croatia, the voice-over indirectly affirms the classic assumption that "European civilisation was held responsible for ... [each] improvement in Balkan civilisation" (*ibid.*: 133). A subsequent reference to a weak and backward entity (Croatia) before a strong and ordered system (EU) follows from this quite easily.

The journalist adds a possible explanation of the need for an outside power to put things in order, again, in the woman's retold words: "there is too much hatred". With an interchange of bright and dark shades throughout the video, this narrative instance evokes the Balkanist stereotype of the national sentiment being structured only around "love or hate; there was no medium" (*ibid.*: 120). The black-and-white perspective is finalised when linked to the patriotism that dominates the sequence from the veteran's club. The love for their country is juxtaposed to hatred witnessed by Croatia's 'other' – the Serbian woman, whereby the love-hate dichotomy is effectively reproduced.

A long zoom from an upper floor of a modern glass-and-steel building introduces to us a businessman of a multinational company in "the Balkans". He talks in fluent English, with a 'foreign' accent, and, as the journalist explains, "advises the government here" about the economic aspects of EU-accession.



Fig. 23: Building



Fig. 24: Businessman

The interviewee informs us of strong Euro-scepticism in his country that will induce “a kind of national sentiment, a kind of closing the borders”, which leads him to conclude that EU-accession will be “overly negative for the economic and social perspective of Croatia”. Nationalism here implies “closure”, whilst the overall “negativity” of Croatian EU-accession in the story readily closes much more: it closes the country securely from the Western viewer, until the story ends there where it all began – in the Balkans.



Fig. 25: Stand-up

The journalist takes over to give the final note, saying that, “just ten years ago this country, the whole region, was in war”, and that the ongoing changes are driven by the will to enter the EU. “But if that prize is snatched away it could sap the whole will to change”, closes the journalist, reducing heterogeneous social dynamics of a whole country to the idea of ‘proper’ behaviour that should be awarded by an allowance of entering the EU. What in fact seems to be ‘snatched away’ from the viewers is, in the end, the title “Croatia’s choice”, leaving it unclear *whose* choice the story about the EU-membership criteria negotiates: Croatia’s, EU’s, or its representers’.

Conclusion

The 'Western' 'mappings' of its respective 'others' read in the analysed stories share some general characteristics that will be considered in the concluding remarks. The analysed reports axiomatically depicted their subjects as cases of cultural alterity, and articulated them by drawing on the traditional Balkanist assumptions. Todorova's (1997) study was indispensably helpful for understanding such practices.

The screened encounters took the form of oppositions, a practice which news theory is already familiar with (cf. Hartley, 1982: 116). The ones standing out were West-East, modernity-tradition, inside-outside the 'Western' unity, and family-individualism. Thereof the 'other' was not only 'other', but was an appearance-measure of the extent to which the 'other' was different from the subject that reports and the subject that is being reported for. Such a tendency carefully kept the contextual issues (of EU-accession) under-analysed. It follows that displaying 'otherness' did not invite an engagement with difference, but was limited to the 'spectacle-ness' of an audiovisual exhibit. The encounter with 'alterity' did not aim at comprehending 'alternativity', but remained at a level of 'appropriation' in order to make a 'display'. The operation was double-edged, and I will discuss it having in mind Morley and Robins's (1995: 134) theoretical contention, referred to in the beginning of the article, about the double entendre of the screen.

Ambiguity transfused the screen saying 'Croatia's choice' next to the presenter asking worriedly "how far should the European Union expand" (see fig. 26). One wonders whose 'choice' was in question. Let us briefly revisit the relation displayed before us: the locals' statements, uttered in local languages, were in the stories re-told by the journalists, who spoke 'over' them and embedded them in narratives to support the presenter's introduction, unknown to the interviewees. The viewers were thus left with nothing but a 'choice' and a 'worry', not of the 'indigenous', but of the presenter and journalist, in a word, the 're-presenters'.

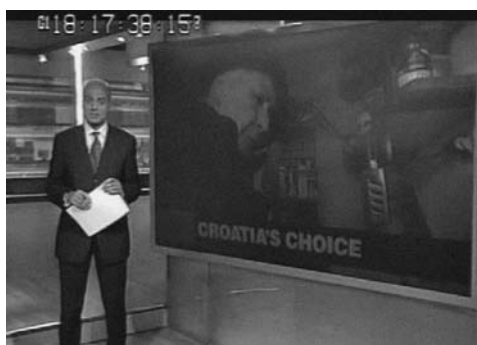


Fig. 26: Presenter

The 'others' were heard fully only when they were seen speaking in the presenter's language. This was beyond mere language-wise collaboration with the Western onlookers, since the English-speaking locals were also placed in the narratives not only as speaking *to* the Western audiences, but also *for*, or even, *with* them. Thus, by allegedly screening the 'choice' and the 'worry' of their group's 'others', the 're-presenters' screened the anxiety of their own group, caused by the increasing proximity of those 'others'. Should one recall the postulate on which the news genre legitimates itself in society, that of communicating 'reality', the discussed instance explains *whose* reality the news represents. The aim is to draw attention to the fine sub-textual workings, which tacitly stretch far beyond debates about journalistic 'bias', and handle a field of their own: the field of 'mapping' the 'other', allocating the 'other' its place, and reducing its complexities to the fears and desires of the 'self'.

In particular, the EU-accession process was implied throughout the analysed news coverage as both inevitable for Croatia's prosperity and problem-causing for the 'Western' evaluators, which brought the opposing forces of 'accession' and 'othering' to a schizophrenic relation of mutual support. Between these forces, the overriding impression was that of a *transitional* stage in attaining 'European-ness' which the country appeared in. This was supported by the choice of shots for covering voice-overs and sound-bites, whereby the 'other' was subtly being connected to and disconnected from the 'West' at will. This depended exclusively on the 'West's' need to understand its 'others' and to affirm its difference from them. To take one example, the ruins in Croatia portrayed its 'barbarity', whilst the shots of urban areas supported the idea of Austria's pro-Croatian sympathies.

The analysis ascertained that the 'news-mapping' collaborated abundantly with the techniques of news production, but it also recognised that the nature of the ways news-narration allows for cultural 'othering' in the international news is an under-researched field. At another level, further enquiry should also assess how the pre-accession process manages the signifier 'European-ness' to foster a preferred performance of a candidate.

No tenable answer has yet been provided on how to move beyond the perspectives taken in the texts analysed. Said demonstrated that "the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism", as the term necessarily falls back on the same logic of self-driving "seductive degradation of knowledge" (2003: 328). Alternative paths to understanding 'news-othering' demand a different set of thoughts. In her psychoanalytically informed account, Kristeva suggests that the "foreigner" *could* be released from the semantic cargo imputed in naming one 'foreign', by the way of recognising the 'foreigner' as "the hidden face of our [own] identity ... [which] means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself" (1991: 1, 13). The intention

behind using Kristeva's rhetoric here is not a surface-scratching moralisation, but an emphasis on the necessity for daily contestation of the *status quo* that the media purport. Thus, if it is possible to break down, in Bauman's (1997: 57) words, "the mini-Berlin Walls erected daily", the mediated encounters do hold a potential for "the chance of human togetherness" (*ibid.*). For it to be realised, the screened 'display' as a 'dis-position' of the 'other', should be reconfigured into an 'inter-play' of making a 'com-position', not in play 'with' differences, but 'of' differences, that is, in a mutual 'side-by-side-ness'. In practice, this would entail making evident and estranging the position of one's 'self' (that is, the vantage point taken). I will briefly explain with the following example.

The second story on Croatia started as "a look at Croatia", in which the journalist marched into a foreign terrain with an attitude of an expert, without making it clear from the outset that what he is presenting is the institutional *EU's* list of problems. By adopting a specific framework to support his own credibility, the journalist delivered 'EU's look at Croatia' as 'all there is'³² in Croatia, which is similar to Lévi-Strauss' (1973: 17) strong objection to the classic travel-writers related to "[having] a desire to impress ... so dominant as to make it impossible for the reader to assess the values of the evidence put before him". Should the reporters remark the environment they report on strictly as 'what seems to *us*', where *us* is the individual reporter, the news organisation, the nation, or Western Europe, the viewers would be endowed with an invaluable opportunity to encounter the *nature of a textual representation* in front of them – *before encountering the 'other' represented therein*. Only then could texts which deliver ready-made differences in forms of 'accommodate-able' 'others' stand a chance – within the constraints of meaning-giving viewing activities – of being dismantled and reworked.

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³² Contrast this instance with Pratt, 1992: 217.

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