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Introduction to the section:

Livingstone and the legacy of Empire in the journalistic imagination

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Despite empty revisionist attempts to justify the British Empire, there is absolutely nothing to celebrate about colonial rule in Africa – or for that matter in any other part of the world. We can recognise Empire as a historical reality and even highlight some of its achievements but no political institution, no train track, no court of law, no road or school can make up for the pilfering that took place at the time and that still continues in many forms.

Nevertheless, efforts to redeem Empire's reputation are alive and kicking. Back in 2005, for example, the then British Chancellor of the Exchequer and later Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, in a laconic attempt to appear less Scottish and more British in order to increase his appeal as a future Prime Minister said that 'the days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over' (Brendon 2007), while asserting that missionaries had gone 'to Africa because of their sense of duty' (BBC 2005). Brown, whose father was a Church minister, was referring, of course, to his Scottish co-national David Livingstone to defend the Empire's legacy as one of 'enduring British values of liberty and tolerance'.

His defence of Empire was by any standards clumsy and ill-informed. Indeed, one might expect that type of rhetoric from the Tories, the party of Empire, but not from a Scottish-born, Labour leader who should have known better than to repeat this type of populist nonsense in the face of his own party's historical views on colonialism. One would also expect that someone as widely read as Brown would have realised before giving his speech the disturbing paradox between proclaiming values of liberty and tolerance and the most enduring legacies of the British Empire; those of capitalism, slavery and racism.

However, the most shocking aspect was not Brown's words, but the silence from those present at the time. Few journalists in the event challenged him in his historical assertions nor questioned his call 'to celebrate the Empire' (Brogan 2005). Even within the Labour Party there were few who challenged Brown's words at the time, despite many of them having a long stance against colonial rule and its bastard son 'apartheid'.

True, it was New Labour under Tony Blair who invoked Livingstone to insult Africa by calling it 'a scare in the face of humanity' (McGrea 2002) while selling weapons to mercenaries on that continent and staging military interventions in places such as Sierra Leona. But still, for Gordon Brown to embrace the idea that Empire had a positive impact on Africa was perhaps a step too far.

If truth be told, Empire was a disaster for those under colonial rule. For Africans themselves, the British Empire was a Holocaust followed by a Genocide. It represented the destruction of entire societies followed by perpetual oppression and exploitation. Moreover, after the end of slavery the Empire inserted Africa as a colonial market into the capitalist system that still reproduces relations of dependency and exploitation in the name of modernity and civilisation. This insertion of Africa in the world markets consolidated in the 19th and 20th centuries the structures of wealth distribution and inequalities that still today define the relationships between Africa and the West.

Such a horrible historical construct deserves no celebration, still less the rhetoric of acolytes that enables it to reproduce itself as aligning with modern ideas of progress in the media and the public imagination. The recounting of history, as clichéd as it may sound, is an accordion which contracts and expands; playing conveniently to the tune of those in power. It is easy now for the West to blame all Africa's problems on corruption and point their fingers at the 'tribal' nature of its politics. In so doing, it is able to dismiss historical continuums and ignore direct links between the historical accumulation of wealth in Europe and the United States and poverty and exclusion in Africa.

Indeed, too often those playing history as a justificatory instrument forget that many of the contemporary issues in Africa are directly linked to the colonial legacy and the structures that were left in place by the European Empires. From the most recent Arab spring and their preceding authoritarian regimes to the now not-so-recent problems such as land reform and its consequences in Zimbabwe, the conflict in the Congo and the environmental degradation in Nigeria.

These same voices which now try to revive the legitimacy of colonial rule also tend to deliberately ignore the reality that the British Empire was made possible not only through the use of military force but also by those widely spread narratives that kidnapped and raped the popular imagination of the public in Europe; a discursive travesty that presented the British Empire as an emerging adventure of discovery and a quest for progress, modernity and civilisation.

So the obvious question is why then dedicate a section of this journal to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of the British Explorer David Livingstone? The answer is because Livingstone still represents for many in the West the 'acceptable' face of Empire and colonial rule. Therefore, far from representing a celebratory tone, this section attempts to examine critically his legacy in the context of both media systems and Western representations of Africa. In so doing, it offers a critical assessment of the legacy of British colonial rule on that continent.

For some, Livingstone's role in representing Africans to the British Empire offers many parallels with the role of the 16th-century Spanish Dominican friar, Bartolomé de Las Casas, in America. That is a narrative of benign colonisation which saw natives as human but nevertheless justified domination. This comparison is often appropriated by some to offer a humanitarian face to Empire with redeeming features of civilisation through salvation. But those who expound this narrative, forget that de Las Casas advocated the use of African slaves instead of Natives in the West-Indian colonies and that neither he nor Livingstone ever questioned the right of fellow human beings to colonise others or ever challenged the claim to superior civilisation made by their own empires in their times.

In fact, the seemingly morally acceptable face of their respective crusades when combined with their claims to humanitarianism, if anything, gave impetus and strength to their own Empires by creating historical narratives of redemption and benign intervention. Because of this, both de las Casas and Livingstone, became in life and after death very effective - although perhaps unwitting - propagandists for the causes of Empire and colonisation. Their writings have been appropriated today to salvage from the wreckage of history one of the most despicable concepts, that of Empire.

To be sure, at the centre of the prevalent view of Africa we encounter a journalistic narrative that keeps repeating old discourses in terms of 'Civility and Barbarity' (Fitzgerald 2010). It is a discursive exercise that can be traced back to the formation of European modern empires and that attempts to present a positive spin on Imperial rule, while presenting colonial masters as servants of the greater public good.

Even in the most positive reports on Africa, we find a patronisingly subtle tone that tends to remind us constantly that this is a hopeless region that needs salvation and that can only achieve 'success' –in itself a loaded term - if it manages to reproduce Western institutions and values. Sometimes the media in the West echoes these ideas openly, as when the BBC comments on how "tribalism stunts African democracy" (Juma 2012); sometimes they do so in a more subtle manner, as when news stories from

the New York Times blames most problems of African countries on corruption and lack of Western-style institutions (Nossiter 2013).

These pre-conceptualisations of Africa as a reality in the minds of many journalists can be traced back to the discourses articulated during the Victorian times. They nevertheless continue to be recycled in modern times precisely because the legacy of explorers such as Livingstone has been used and appropriated in ways that somehow create moral spaces of justification for Empire and colonisation. Empire was generally bad, goes the more progressive of these arguments, but left some important positive legacies in the colonies. However, the implication of the argument is dangerously clear, that there was nothing before colonisation and everything afterwards. This is a notion that serves many colonial masters extremely well in the present, acting as a rationale underpinning the contemporary claims made, for example, by the state of Israel that there was a general lack of civilisation, progress and modernity in what used to be Palestine before 1948 (Pappe 2007).

In the face of this simplistic but very dangerous argument, it is important to remember the words of Frantz Fanon when he wrote:

> *Perhaps we haven't sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today (1961).*

The special section was born from a one-day international symposium on the bi-centenary of David Livingstone under the title of 'Representations and Social Change in Africa' in May 2013. It was organised by the Centre for the Study of Journalism and History at the University of Sheffield. The idea was to offer a space to reflect on the post-colonial baggage that journalism in the West still carries in its narratives and discourses when reporting and representing Africa.

What we found is that the baggage – we have refused to use the term heritage here - is still deeply influential not only in terms of media representations but also in relation to the structures of media ownership itself. We also came to appreciate how these historical legacies have profoundly shaped not only the way Western eyes see Africa but also how Africans see themselves even when living as diasporas abroad.

Olatunji Ogunyemi addresses the topic of diaspora in his contribution on ethnocentric news values in diasporic media in the UK. Looking at the *Nigerian Watch* newspaper, Ogunyemi highlights the powerful counter-narratives provided by African diasporic media, but does so with a wary eye towards the way such media can adopt a narrow focus. Acknowledging the marginalisation of mainstream media towards Africa and diaspora, Ogunyemi notes the way diasporic media can apply ethnocentric news values to marginalise mainstream sources and readerships. Such a reliance on ethnocentric news values by both diaspora and mainstream media risk hardening, rather than bridging, divisions along racial and ethnic boundaries.

Patrick Malaolu looks at the other side of this in UK news coverage of Nigeria, as he addresses the way mainstream news uses sources in their coverage of Nigeria. What Malaolu finds is a heavy reliance on expert opinion and traditional sources to tell a narrow, uncritical, story of Africa. He finds the use of sources in the coverage of Nigeria perpetuates a simple story of Africa around a narrow set of themes. This source selection shapes the way news tells the story of Africa through residual elements of its colonial legacy, but Malaolu argues such a narrow perspective can be redressed through a critical account of sources so a fuller story of Africa can be told.

The third contribution comes from Tokunbo Ojo, who looks at how Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper cover Africa. Ojo provides a case study of the coverage out of Canada's only dedicated

foreign bureau in Africa. Ojo too finds a narrow scope of representations of Africa, and a focus on controversy, politics and conflict. While the trend of decreasing foreign coverage is well known, Ojo's contribution highlights the way the loss of foreign bureaus constrains the information international audiences have access to. Like the other articles in this section, this study identifies how the legacy of western interventions in Africa, including exploration, colonisation and commercialization continue to inform the narrow frames through which Western audiences are told the story of Africa.

We also decided to include an interview with the British novelist and biographer Tim Jeal whose books on the Victorian African explorers have become best sellers and consequently very influential in popularising ideas about the Victorian explorers in the public imagination. Jeal has produced, with little doubt, one of the most important and effectives attempts to rehabilitate Livingstone and his legacy in the eyes of the general public. For the enterprise of interviewing such a powerful voice, we asked for the assistance of Fionnghuala Sweeney from Newcastle University, whose own scholarly work about the historical legacy of the transatlantic slavery in literature and the public imagination has proven key in understanding the links between the former and the current media representations of Africa.

With regard to our own contribution, as guest editors for this section, we want to think that we have used the anniversary of Livingstone's birth as a convenient excuse to re-visit the legacy of the discourses associated with exploration and colonialism as a driving force of the underlying ideas and narratives of modern journalism. We would like to thank Professor Herman Wasserman at Rhodes University, editor of *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, for giving us the opportunity to bringing this project to fruition. We also want to thank the Interdisciplinary Centre of the Social Sciences (ICOSS) of the University of Sheffield in the UK which funded the symposium from which this project emerged.

We hope that this section becomes another contribution to the task of demystifying once and for all the revisionist attempts to justify colonial rule both in the popular mind and in the journalistic imagination. We are conscious, however, that it might be a task as perennial as the enduring consequences of Empire.

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