

Abstract

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The Globalization of the Pavement.

The seeds of this work sprang from the events surrounding a series of explosions at an ammunition depot in a suburb of Tanzania's commercial capital Dar es Salaam in February 2011. The mainstream media were slow to react to these explosions that left 20 dead and there was little coverage inside or outside Tanzania. In contrast social media (blogs, text messages, Facebook, yahoo chat) were quickly alive with eye-witness accounts, news and rumour.

We were intrigued by this lively use of social media in Tanzania and within the diasporic communities – two of the authors have close friends/family in Tanzania, some of them living close by Gongo la Mboto the site of the explosions. The way social media was being used suggested the progression of an oral media tradition that has long existed in Tanzania. The notion of user-driven content circulation, as in traditional *pavement radio*, where rumour from the street quickly modifies official government information, or fills the void left by lack of information, points towards an extension of older traditions into new social media practices.

The media practice emerging around the Gongo la Mboto explosions led us to consider how these '*pavements*' of rumour and 'rave' - the lively, conflictual and critical commenting streams, with their repetition and additions – contrast with the '*spaceship*' news production of international broadcasters such as the BBC World Service, where one of the authors worked as a radio producer. Far removed from its audience in Africa the BBC World Service is committed to using social media as a way to enhance audience participation but the unruly nature of the globalized pavement can be problematic for an organization so ingrained with traditional news values.

A critical view might be that the usefulness of social media as a tool for social change is severely restricted because it is only already advantaged groups that have access to these resources and that until social media use spreads to a broader public we should be careful not to overstate its impact. Using the Gongo la Mboto explosions as a case study we will explore an emerging media practice that despite the digital divide indicates strategies for coping with those in power, engaging with and constructing *rumour*, *public memory*, and *civic spaces* - a 'coming together' in the style of an oral exchange, but mediated through text and images that ebb and flow as digital raves/waves.

Key words (other than title key words): media, orality, sociality, news, speed, identity, civics, spaceship

The abstract and article are based on a work in progress, first presented on the ComDev programme's weblog <http://wpmu.mah.se/comdev> and during Spring 2011. Part of the work is also being developed into a forthcoming research project.

Presenter biographies: Ylva completed her PhD in Media and Communication in 2010 with a dissertation on Tanzania, youth and media practices (University of Uppsala). Anders has a PhD in Cultural Studies (Nottingham Trent University) on youth and conflict coping in alternative educational spaces in Israel-Palestine. Hugo has a BA in Media Studies (University of East London) and has worked for many years as a radio producer and journalist at BBC's World Service. They all work on the Communication for Development MA at Malmö University.