Shani Orgad

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‘Have you seen Bloomberg?’:[1]
Satellite News Channels as Agents of the New Visibility

Shani Orgad

ABSTRACT

With the proliferation of transnational television flows viewers can see their own national affairs, which traditionally were predominantly covered by national news, portrayed by cross-border news channels. This article examines how satellite news, by covering national events and enhancing their global visibility, influence public debates within countries about national narratives. An analysis of the public debates in Spain and France about global channels’ coverage of the March 2004 terror bombings in Madrid and the October 2005 French riots, respectively, provides the basis for discussing the implications of the ‘new visibility’ (Thompson, 2005) of nations in today’s media age. The analysis demonstrates how global networks’ coverage of events in these countries generated estrangement: they de-familiarized and cast doubt on national narratives and common sensical discourses of us/them, thereby offering viewers an alternative distance from their national unit. This encourages a self-reflexive process of introspection and critical discussion, which may open up a possibility for a more inclusive national space and strengthen democratic cultures. At the same time it involves nations’ loss of control, triggers instabilities, and may contribute to citizens’ loss of trust in the news media – a dangerous scenario for democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Transnational media have become agents of what Thompson (2005) calls ‘the new visibility’: they produce and distribute accounts, images and symbolic content, relating to issues that viewers previously would have learnt about (or not) primarily, and sometimes exclusively, from their national media. Consequently, national broadcast media, which historically were the main

storytellers producing and distributing accounts and images, no longer exercise this singular symbolic power. Much attention in the literature focuses on how, in Moores' (1996: 2) words, satellite broadcasting services promise transport to new destinations; how, and with what consequences, transnational television channels expose viewers to news, music, and entertainment programs about geographically and/or culturally remote places. For example, scholars have studied the experience of immigrants watching programs from their home country via satellite dishes (e.g. Hargreaves and Mahdjoub, 1997; Aksoy and Robins, 2000; 2002; Karanfil, 2007). Others have examined the moral implications of transnational and global news channels' coverage of 'distant others' – people whose life circumstances and cultures are fundamentally different from those of the (predominantly Western) viewers (e.g. Chouliaraki, 2006; Moeller, 1998; Tester, 2001). Another key focus in the literature has been on how global news networks like CNN International, BBC World and Al Jazeera help audiences to understand world events and come to terms with the complexities of global politics (Chalaby, 2003: 468).

However, transnational television channels not only bring distant others to our screens, and help us understand the world; they also show us and tell us about *ourselves*. Transnational news channels also help viewers to come to terms with their *own* local national politics, and consequently, with their identities, as individuals, a community and a nation. Yet, there is little awareness that we are we are increasingly the objects of others' gaze, especially in today's global media environment, and 'that how we are seen and understood by those far removed from us also matters' (Silverstone, 2007: 172). How transnational news networks report on 'us', how we are seen and understood by far away others, and how this visibility influences ideas of who 'we' are and may want to be, as members of a particular national group, has been less well researched.

This paper tackles these questions by exploring the implications of global satellite news channels as 'agents of the new visibility', which produce and distribute accounts, images and symbolic content about specific countries. The focus is on how we become the objects of others' gaze and others'

storytelling, and the potential for global satellite news channels to produce and deliver stories and images that transform national imaginations in ways that are not possible by national media alone. This is examined in relation to the role played by satellite news in the coverage of the March 2004 terror bombings in Madrid and the October 2005 urban revolts in France (often referred to as the 'French riots').

Before presenting the case studies, to contextualize the discussion, some of the characteristics of transnational news channels and key transformations brought about by their proliferation are described. In analyzing the two cases the Madrid bombings are first discussed, providing a brief background to the events and their coverage in the media, followed by a discussion of the role played by satellite news channels, in particular, pan-European networks, such as BBC World and CNN International. The analysis demonstrates how global satellite flows provide material that national news media can draw on, and that the public relies on through satellite news channels. The second case, of the urban revolts in France, focuses on how the French media responded to international satellite news' coverage, and the broader debate that emerged in the French public sphere - as manifested in discussions in the press and the blogsphere – in response to the accounts and images provided through global satellite news. The remainder of the paper seeks to link the two cases to discuss the implications of the 'new visibility' of nations in today's media age, highlighting the role played by satellite news and some of the moral possibilities and challenges it presents.

TRANSNATIONAL NEWS CHANNELS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LANDSCAPE OF MEDIATED SYMBOLIC POWER

National broadcast media have always played a key role in the symbolic 'building of the nation', news being particularly central in this project (Billig, 1995; Scannel, 1996). Of course, national media (at least in liberal democracies) are far from a monolithic entity which operate in the same way and collude with its government's interests. Yet, as Scannell (1996: 145) observed, fundamentally, national broadcasters are underpinned by certain

care-structures: they make programs *for* their national audiences and what those audiences care about (or what broadcasters assume their audiences care about). The care-structures they operate by determine what they report, remark upon, attend to, observe, pick out, and foreground. They 'mark out the boundaries of our concerns' (Scannell, 1996: 144), that is, what matters and the extent to which it matters, to us, the nation.

The penetration of satellite flows and the opening up of the media landscape beyond the boundaries of national media, disrupt and transform what used to be the care-structures and symbolic power of national media. Global satellite channels, such as CNN International, BBC World, and Al Jazeera, address international and often multicultural audiences. They frequently strive for a global editorial viewpoint (Chalaby, 2005), which would be different, often radically so, from national perspectives. Furthermore, transnational news networks often enjoy spatial, institutional, regulatory, cultural, and thus emotional and moral distance from the countries and issues they cover, which enables them to produce images and narratives that would probably be difficult, if not impossible, for national media to broadcast. Transnational news networks also enjoy an immediacy in production and delivery of news, not always possible for national media for a variety of reasons, as will be demonstrated in the analysis of the Spanish and the French cases. Thus, transnational satellite news broadcasts are likely to attend to and foreground different phenomena. As CBS correspondent Susan Ormiston (News Xchange, 2005) admits, 'channels deal differently on their home turf, as opposed to other countries.' At the same time, the 24-hour flow of satellite news reports increasingly challenges national media to broadcast stories and images they might otherwise not have covered. In today's global media space multiple storytellers not only struggle for visibility and compete with each other over the production and distribution of stories and images, they also fundamentally affect each other, and influence each other's stories.

With the proliferation of cross-border satellite news channels, viewers no longer rely solely on their national broadcasters to be informed about national and world events. For example, in 2006-2007 BBC World, the commercially-funded

international English language news and information television channel has estimated audiences of 76 million viewers a week, up from 65 million in 2005/6 (BBC Press Office, May 2007). To be sure, penetration does not mean use: the increasing availability of channels such as BBC and CNN in households across the world does not mean that they are being watched regularly. For one, many people do not speak English - the language that these channels broadcast in. Yet, the accessibility and increasing presence of multiple news channels had made multi-channel homes important sites for comparison and reflection. What does Al-Jazeera say about this? Does CNN show some different images? Why wasn't that on our national news? And the technologies that allow viewers to record programs and watch them on-demand are enhancing the ability to compare multiple accounts. The Web, for instance, is bursting with examples of blogs and videos created by ordinary citizens relating to how issues are covered by different national and international media.[2] Furthermore, even if actual viewing of transnational channels is relatively low, they might have an indirect influence. As our analysis shows, transnational news provoked lively discussions and had important impact in Spain and France, primarily because the national media and politicians in these countries attended and responded to their coverage, and not necessarily because citizens themselves watched it in great numbers.

What are the implications of this opening up of the media symbolic space by cross-border news channels that produce and circulate narratives and images concerning individual countries? What happens when we become the object of others' storytelling? Before tackling these questions, it is necessary to address a central critique in the field of transnational media studies, most notably made by Aksoy and Robins (2002) and Chalaby (2005). These scholars argue that the national framework fails to deal adequately with the diversity and complexity of transnational television and therefore, that transnational broadcasting needs 'to be analysed outside the prison-house of the nation-state perspective' (Chalaby, 2005: 158).

The national framework should not necessarily be privileged over alternative frameworks. However, I would argue for its enduring relevance when thinking

and talking about the implications of transnational television. The study's data show that articulations of national identity, e.g. references to 'the Spanish people', 'the Spaniards', 'the French' and 'the nation,' were central in public debates in Spain and France about global news channels' coverage of events. Surely, these notions were not used in a singular way; at the heart of those debates is a struggle to define the 'Spanish people' or the 'French nation', what they are and will be, in the light of their experience (the terror attacks in Madrid, and the riots in France). But the majority of the contributions in the press and on blogs, assume the nation, however complex and unstable a concept, as the core reference against which they evaluate and comprehend transnational channels' news coverage.[3]

Thus, the interest here is in how transnational channels, such as CNN International and BBC World, inform, transform and disrupt notions of the nation. Fundamentally, this interest is not part of what Chalaby (2005) criticizes as a fascination with the transgressions of cross-border channels as a threat to national culture and identity. The focus is on how global news channels are understood and interpreted in national public debates, and the consequences that the visibility of the country on these channels has for the stories that the nation tells to itself, and the visions it pictures of itself.

THE ROLE OF TRANSNATIONAL SATELLITE NEWS CHANNELS IN THE COVERAGE OF THE MADRID BOMBINGS AND THE FRENCH REVOLTS

The role played by transnational satellite news in the coverage of the terror bombings in Madrid in March 2004 and the urban revolts in France in October 2005 was examined. Both events were widely reported by national and global media, and specifically, by the pan-European networks CNN International and BBC World, which were available in these countries at the time. The interest is not in conducting a consistent comparison between different channels' coverage, but to understand two specific aspects. First, how the way in which global news channels covered events in specific countries shaped and influenced the national media and their coverage. National media remain an important site for the formation of national identity, and thus we need to

understand how they respond to the accounts and images on satellite news by altering (or not) their coverage. Second, the study seeks to understand how the public relate to what they see or hear on cross-border news channels, as manifest in debates in the press and the blogsphere. These debates, primarily occurring within the national public sphere, provide a useful entry point into understanding how notions of national identity are articulated and shaped in response to, and in light of, accounts and images seen through satellite news. How does the public 'digest' the international visibility of its country and takes stock of its nation's story?

Methodology

The data on the public debates in Spain and France included articles from major newspapers and press agencies over the six-month period following the events in question.[4] The Lexis Nexis news database was used to search articles published in *El Mundo*, *El Pais*, *ABC*, *La Razon* discussing satellite news' coverage of the bombings, and articles in *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, *Les Echos*, *Agence France Presse* on satellite news' coverage of the riots. In the Spanish case the search terms used were 'Madrid' AND 'ataque' (attack) OR 'terrorismo' (terror) OR 'bombas' (bombing) OR 11-M (the acronym denoting 11 March 2004, the date of the attacks) AND 'televisión' (television) OR 'medios internacionales' (international media) OR 'medios extranjeros' / 'prensa extranjera' (foreign media / foreign press) OR 'televisión satelital' (satellite television). For the French search the terms that were used were 'émeutes' (riots) AND 'télévision' (television) OR 'médias etrangères' OR 'médias étrangers' OR 'presse etrangère' (foreign media in plural OR foreign media in singular OR foreign press) OR 'médias internationales' (international media) OR 'télévision satellite' (satellite television). French and Spanish blogs were also explored, using the .es and .fr Google Blog Search, with various combinations of the above search terms. In addition, transcripts of programs aired on CNN and BBC were searched for,[5] and English language literature on the media's role in the events was reviewed and used as secondary data.

Three caveats are necessary. First, while the paper focuses on the role of satellite news channels, a difficulty must be highlighted, at both empirical and theoretical level, of separating out satellite news from the broader landscape of international media. Public debates in Spain and France often referred to international media coverage without distinguishing between satellite channels news coverage, coverage in American and European newspapers and online publications. So, while the analysis highlights the role of cross-border news channels as agents of the 'new visibility', by no means is it argued that they are exclusive in performing this role.

Second, the study focuses on the press and the blogsphere as two key sites where national media and members of the public reflect on and discuss satellite news coverage of events in their countries. Of course, these sites represent only a 'slice' of the discussions that took place in the Spanish and French public spheres. Other sites where national narratives are shaped and transformed in response to satellite news accounts are beyond the scope of this paper, for example, the discussions that took place in the homes of citizens who watched these reports; the discussions among politicians and media professionals about the coverage of global networks on national issues. Furthermore, while the press was surveyed by systematic searches of the national newspapers databases (as described above), how to systematically survey discussions occurring on blogs (e.g. which blogs are leading blogs?) is a methodological challenge. In attempt to address (through surely not resolve) this problem, in addition to identifying blogs by using the Spanish and French Google Blog Search, any related blog that was mentioned in the national press was also searched, the assumption being that blogs which 'have made it' to be mentioned in the mainstream media, were focal sites in the national discussions that took place.

Third, the study mainly concerns pan-European transnational news channels such as CNN International, BBC World, Bloomberg, and Al Jazeera. This focus is dictated by the data: public debates in national newspapers and on blogs predominantly referred to these channels and commented on their

impact in the events. This is not to suggest that other types of transnational television channels, such as ethnic channels,[6] were not central or relevant.[7]

CASE 1: THE MADRID BOMBINGS

Background: the Madrid bombings and Spain's media

At 7:35 am on Thursday 11 March 2004, ten bombs exploded on four packed commuter trains in Madrid killing 192 people and injuring 1,430 (Olmeda, 2005). Immediately after the blasts, outgoing Prime Minister Aznar and other officials contacted the Spanish and international news media, stressing that the bombings were the responsibility of the Basque separatist movement ETA and dismissing speculation that Islamic extremists might be involved (Richburg, 17 March 2004).

Despite a number of characteristics pointing to ETA involvement (BBC News, 12 March 2004a), it was denied by callers to a Basque-language newspaper and television station. ETA typically takes responsibility for its attacks (Golden, 13 March 2004) and always issues a warning before an explosion; there were no warnings in relation to the Madrid bombings, which was atypical of the group (BBC News, 12 March 2004a). As early as 11:00 am on the same day, police discovered an abandoned van in a town that the trains had passed through, which contained detonators and a cassette taperecording of verses of the Koran in Arabic. However, this potential link to Islamic radicals did not become public until 8:30 pm when it was announced on national television (Richburg, 17 March 2004). That same evening, a London-based Arabic paper, *al-Quds*, announced it had received a letter from a group purporting to be linked to al-Qaeda, claiming responsibility for the attack, but the Spanish government continued to insist that ETA was behind the bombings (Norton-Taylor, 13 March 2004; Richburg, 17 March 2004).

The Madrid bombings happened three days before the then ruling party, the Partido Popular (PP), was defeated in a surprise victory by the main opposition party, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) at a general election with 'one of the largest electoral turnouts since 1977 (the year of the

first democratic elections after the demise of Franco's dictatorship)' (Moreno, 2005: 66). This high voter turnout, which included sectors of young voters and left-wing abstainers, can be partly seen as a protest against what was perceived as the manipulation of information by the Aznar government (Cohen, 2004; Moreno, 2005) and a vote against President Aznar's alliance with George W. Bush and Tony Blair on the war in Iraq (Moreno, 2005). In short time between the bombings and the polls, there were mass demonstrations across the country expressing dissatisfaction with the government and deep frustration at the failure of the main television stations to report on the government's manipulation of information (Laverty, 15 March 2004; Brayton, 25 April 2007).

It was largely against this backdrop of a highly controlled national media and the Spanish government's 'misinformation', that satellite news broadcasts, offered in Spain by the Digital Plus platform,[8] and other alternative media, proved an invaluable source of information.

Satellite news and the Madrid bombings

From the beginning, much of the broadcast media in Spain helped to bolster the thesis that ETA was behind the bombings. However, the Spanish opposition party and some national media outlets, including television channels of autonomous communities - Catalonia (*TV3*), Andalucia (*Canal Sur*) and the Basque Country (*ETB*) (Blakely, 2006), and particularly radio stations outside Madrid, soon after the attacks began offering a counterframe to the government's line. They gave wide coverage to condemnation of the attack by the leader of the banned Batasuna party alleged by the Aznar government to be ETA's political wing (Richburg, 17 March 2004).

In this rather unique situation of an impending general election, where events were unfolding quickly and a continuous flow of information was pivotal, the live, ongoing reporting of satellite news broadcasting played a central role in developing and legitimizing this counterframe. They had questioned ETA's being the sole or complicit perpetrator of the bombings, and raised the possibility of al-Qaeda's culpability. They were also outspoken in their

criticism of the Spanish government's pressure on them to report ETA's responsibility (Crawford, 2006).

By 1.00 pm on the day of the bombings CNN Chief International Correspondent Christiane Amanpour had suggested that parties other than ETA, and specifically al-Qaeda, might be involved (*CNN Live From…,* 11 March 2004). CNN en Español's[9] evening news program *Panorama Mundial* on 11 March 2004 discussed evidence of a potential link to Islamic radicals, raising doubts about ETA's even partial involvement. The day after the bombings, global news channels were generally opining that al-Qaeda rather than ETA was behind the attacks, suggesting that they were al-Qaeda's payback for Spain's support of the U.S. war in Iraq (e.g. Christiane Amanpour on *CNN Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees*, 12 March 2004; *CNN Wolf Blitzer Reports*, 12 March 2004; BBC News, 12 March 2004b[10]; *Panorama Mundial* on CNN en Español, 12 March 2004).

Some Spanish media outlets drew on satellite reports to develop and support a counter-narrative to the 'ETA authorship frame' (Olmeda, 2005). The daily newspaper, *El Mundo*, for example, in an editorial published on the day after the attacks drew on BBC coverage to raise the possibility of a 'joint-venture' between ETA and al-Qaeda (Olmeda, 2005: 25). Similarly, the daily newspaper *El Pais* which ran a special edition headlined 'ETA massacre in Madrid' in the hours after the blasts (Preston, 21 March 2004), by 13 March 2004 had shifted its focus, citing BBC presenter Andrew Neils, who confirmed in his program *The Daily Politics* (available in Spain via satellite) that sources in Downing Street had assured him in private that the British government believed that Al-Qaeda was responsible for the attacks (Oppenheimer, 13 March 2004). Thus, global satellite television channels played an important role by influencing the stories put out in the national media and providing them with material to legitimize the al-Qaeda thesis.

Furthermore, global news channels were instrumental in informing the Spanish public directly through their satellite services. Citizens' direct access to foreign news proved especially valuable in the context of the mistrust and

suspicion of national broadcasters, which were seen as government mouthpieces, supporting the manipulation of information. As one demonstrator put it, 'this is like it was under Franco, when we had to rely on international media and word of mouth to find out what was going on' (Sharrock, 2004: 14).

The international media were also the only ones to cover the illegal protests on the day before the general elections. In Spain 14 March was designated a 'Day of Reflection', when any political promotional activity was illegal; thus, the national media were prohibited from covering the protests (Crawford, 2006). The global news networks were not confined by the regulations of the 'Day of Reflection' nor were they being pressurized by the Spanish government; thus their role in broadcasting live and in depth reports from the demonstrations were key. They made visible what the national media (some of which were controlled by the state) could not, and might not want to show.

Interestingly, some national media unable to report directly on the demonstrations, were able to 'bypass' this restriction by reporting the satellite coverage of the demonstrations. For example, *El Mundo* described how the leading European networks and CNN were giving live coverage to the demonstrations by thousands of people in Genova, demanding 'Resignation!' and 'No playing with the dead' (Ramirez, 14 March 2004, my translation).

Olmeda (2005) describes how during the demonstrations several oppositional hub-organizations and websites called on the public to listen to the radio station Cadena Ser[11] and to watch CNN. Similarly, Laverty (15 March, 2004) recounts:

> Tens of thousands of mobiles were on the go flashing messages between friends. Have you seen Bloomberg? Check article in New York Times. Check out Radio Ser – 95% of police investigating Al Quaida and on it went all day contradicting the Government line till I received a message – "Meet outside PP party headquarters to demand the truth".....followed by a "cacerolada" (literally, protest by banging of pots and pans) at 10pm wherever you live……pass it on.

These accounts neatly capture how international media, satellite channels CNN and Bloomberg among them, became the sources that the Spanish public relied upon for information and which inspired them to take action (see also Crawford, 2006). While the Internet (e.g. Jarvis, 14 November 2005; Olmeda, 2005) and mobile phones (e.g. Laverty, 15 March 2004) are often described and celebrated as alternative media enabling citizens to access information that challenges mainstream media reports, the case of the Madrid bombings (and the French riots, discussed next), shows that satellite news has considerable potential to offer national viewers alternative stories to those being told by national media, especially when, for a variety of reasons, the latter may be unable to report crucial information directly.

CASE 2: THE URBAN REVOLTS IN FRANCE

Background: the French riots and France's media

The urban revolts erupted in October 2005 and were a vivid instance of France experiencing a 'new visibility'. On the night of 27 October youths in *Clichy-sous-Bois* began firing cars and stoning police, angered at the death of two teenagers of Maghrebi descent, who were electrocuted at a police sub-station in the suburb, and fuelled by the claims of Nicholas Sarkozy, the then Minister of the Interior. The riots escalated rapidly, curfews were in force in the suburbs of Paris and nearly 40 other French towns and cities. After 22 days of rioting, 9,000 vehicles destroyed, 2,921 people taken in for questioning and 126 gendarmes injured, the police announced a 'return to normal'. Curfews were finally lifted on 4 January 2006 (Duval-Smith, 5 February 2006).

The international media honed in on the riots and this occupation continued even when peace was restored. The blogsphere played an important role in discussing the revolts and their media coverage. The debate focused on the French model of integration and *les banlieues*[12] (impoverished suburbs) where the initial riots began. The projection of this 'local problem' - as described by the director general of France's leading commercial TV station, LCI, (News Xchange, 2005) – onto the international stage, via the 24-hour coverage on international news channels which had special correspondents reporting live from the *banlieues*, provoked much tension.

Satellite news and the French riots[13]

Perhaps the most heated controversy over the way in which global satellite networks covered the unrest concerned their use of rhetoric and images of burning cars. They showed images of burnt-out vehicles and used headlines such as CNN's 'Paris in flames', and Fox News headline banner 'Paris Burning'. Such approaches were seen as attempts to sensationalize events and exaggerate their scope and consequences. 'From Italy to South Africa, Poland to China, from CNN to Al Jazeera, the newspaper headlines and television commentaries set against a background of blazing cars are really hyping it up' wrote *Le Parisien* newspaper (Reuters, 9 November 2005). Jean-Claude Dassier, director general of LCI, described the international media's coverage of the unrest as 'excessive,' and fanning the violence (Cozens, 10 November 2005; News Xchange 2005), while French politician Alain Juppé, writing on his blog, accused the American press of 'unleashing itself against France' and 'taking revenge after Katrina and the ironic condescension demonstrated by us [the French] towards the American authorities' (Pégard, 16 November 2005, my translation).

As a response to what some French broadcasters and politicians saw as the foreign networks' sensationalism, the mainstream French media, e.g. France's leading commercial TV station LCI and the state-run channel France 3, on the whole scaled back their broadcasting of images of flaming vehicles. By

contrast, they saw their role as contributing to ‘maintaining law and order’ (News Xchange, 2005).

These responses show how the images and accounts broadcast on global satellite news influence the accounts that national channels produce. However, while in the case of the Madrid bombings national media gradually shifted their story to align with what the satellite news channels had maintained from the beginning, in the French case, the response of the national media was mainly defensive. LCI even admitted censoring its riot coverage in attempt, as its weekend editor, Laurent Drezner put it, to ‘inform without sensationalism’ (Ganley, 12 November 2005), and with the intention of providing counter-coverage to the international media.

At the same time, the discrepancies between international and French media coverage were provoking critical discussion in French public discourse. One commentator (Schneidermann, 2005) in the daily newspaper *Libération*, writing at the time in support of the French media’s avoidance of sensationalism, was extremely critical of their self-censorship of images of burnt-out vehicles. Bertrand Pecquerie (14 November 2005), a prominent French journalist and editor, and director of the *World Editors Forum*, in a posting on the Editors' Weblog criticized the ‘sanitized’ coverage of the riots by the French media as ‘unethical’:

> On [sic.] the short term, you can understand that shocking images can encourage rioters, but in the long term citizens need to trust their media: if not, the result will be that rumors will prevail on balanced coverage and truth. The worst scenario in democracy.

Lively debate revolved also around the way that global news networks compared the riots to events outside France. Explicit references were made to war, and military rhetoric was used to describe events. Although the two leading French networks, TF1 and France 2, adopted similar vocabulary, albeit that of civil war (Mattelart, 2006), the French media were fierce in their accusations that the international media, CNN and Fox News in particular, were using the war frame, and evocations of coverage of the Iraq war, to

dramatize and exaggerate events (e.g. Agence France Presse, 4 November 2005; Leser, 15 November 2005; *Le Figaro*, 7 November 2005).

Another analogy that evoked considerable discussion in the French public sphere was with the Palestinian Intifada. For example, on Al Jazeera, a spokesman from the Arab Committee for Human Rights, Hitham Manah, compared the riots to the first Palestinian Intifada: 'While young Palestinians used stones against Israeli tanks, Arab and Africans living in ghettoes are burning cars in wealthy neighborhoods to get the world's attention' (Ghazi, 9 November 2005). The term 'L'Euro-Intifada' was used by TV 5 (Dajani, 2005), a joint-venture among francophone public broadcasters from across Europe and Quebec (Chalaby, 2005: 164), and was later picked up by some French outlets (e.g. *Sud Ouest*, 8 November 2005).

The use of the Intifada analogy by international media incited a charged discussion in the French press about the French integration model and the strategies of dealing with violent urban conflicts. A commentary published in *Le Monde*, for example, with the headline 'The Palestinian Intifada as a model' (Diani, 9 November 2005, my translation) argued that the violent unrest of 'urban guerrillas' witnessed in the *banlieues* draws many lessons from the Palestinian Intifada, as well as the Iraq war, and an article in *Le Figaro* (Motta, 9 November 2005, my translation) entitled 'Mirail neighborhood is divided by the Intifada' presented a similar approach. At the same time, others were insisting on the need to distinguish between the causes, nature and consequences of the French revolts and the Palestinian Intifada. For example, the French ambassador to the US, Jean-David Levitte, replying to a *Washington Post* article that evoked the Intifada, stated that religion had nothing to do with the 'troubles' in the *banlieues* (Pégard, 16 November 2005). Youth from the *banlieues (*albeit presumably from a different political spectrum to Ambassador Levitte), also expressed their irritation at the analogy, and particularly Al-Jazeera's comparisons of the riots and the Intifada (Richebois, 24 November 2005).[14] Other sources compared the riots with Apartheid in South Africa (Nordbruch, 2005)[15] and the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina (e.g. Agence France Presse, 4 November 2004).

Whether commentators agreed on the appropriateness or rejected these comaprisons, the analogies invited them to articulate what they thought about the riots, and position them in relation to others' 'troubles'. The comparisons with the Iraq war, Hurricane Katrina, the Palestinian Intifada, and South African Apartheid, recontextualized the French riots in relation to other events rather than presenting them as particular; they not only rendered them visible to the rest of the world, but also conveyed the message – to the French and to the world - that this was not just a domestic French problem, but rather an issue with international salience and significance. This aspect is discussed more broadly later.

Satellite news coverage also played an important role in giving a stage to people from the *banlieues*, who historically have been excluded from the French national media (Bourdais, 2004). As Harding (2006) observes:

> Neither France Télévisions, the public broadcaster, nor TF1, the major private channel, gives a real sense of France's multiethnic composition. When you consider the figure of four million to five million people of "Muslim origin," add in sub-Saharan Africans (not all of them Muslim) and citizens of Asian extraction, then switch on your TV and surf the available dramas, soaps, news, or documentaries, you could be forgiven for thinking that France was lost in a timeless monoethnic fantasy based on the landscapes of the Barbizon School and the movies of Eric Rohmer.

The coverage of the revolts allowed the voices of the people from the banlieues, long suppressed by the French media,[16] to be heard - primarily on the Internet and global news channels such as CNN and BBC (see for example, BBC News, 30 October 2005; CNN Insight, 5 November 2005), and gradually, more and more also on French television. There is a 'satisfaction of a late but real recognition since the microphones began to be pointed … towards the youth of the cités to gather, analyze, dissect their frustrations and anger' wrote a commentator in *Les Echos* (Richebois, 24 November 2005, my translation). Accounts of French bloggers (e.g. *Blog TV*, 6 November 2005;

Un Blog de bretagne, 6 November 2005) writing during and after the riots corroborate this sense of pride in reclaiming a voice that had been confiscated and denied for years. They point to the potential role that satellite news played in legitimizing the people from the *banlieues* and highlighting that these minorities, who for years had been absent from French television screens, could not remain invisible.

NEW VISIBILITY, NEW DISTANCE AND NEW VISIONS OF OURSELVES – ESTRANGEMENT, BROUGHT TO YOU BY SATELLITE NEWS

The President of the Observatory for Public Debate in France (Muzet, 15 November 2005, my translation) notes how the riots were seen in France 'as if they happened in far away foreign countries, under whose gaze we [France] are placed from now on.' Similarly, de Beer (14 November 2005) observes: 'French citizens, used to CNN's emblematic war reporter Christiane Amanpour reporting from battlefields all over the world, have been shocked to see her standing in front of burned cars in the *banlieues'*.

One consequence of the new visibility that global media enable and propel - the foreign outsider telling our story, rather than just we ourselves – is that it generates *estrangement*. As Shklovsky (1991 [1929]) noted (originally in relation to art), the familiar often becomes habitual, seen and articulated in an automatic way. Thus, the commonplace tends to become invisible; familiarity breeds a particular form of blindness. National media, as the analysis of the Spanish and French cases has shown, contribute to this automatism of perception, not through conscious manipulation (although some would argue that this may have been true in the case of the Spanish media), but mainly because they are embedded within the environment on which they are reporting.[17]

National audiences, in turn, participate in the very same process of making things that happen in their country familiar, habitual, commonsensical and thus invisible. Erwan Lecouer, a French sociologist, describes how the French public 'have long become accustomed to sporadic outbreaks of vandalism

and violence in suburban housing projects across the country' (Bennhold, 30 March 2006).[18] Similarly, it was 'logical', as one commentator put it (AlterNet, 25 March 2004) for the Spaniards, after three decades of terrorist attacks staged by ETA, to assume that the group was responsible for the March 2004 bombings in Madrid.

Satellite transnational news channels (and global media more generally) have the capacity to make the familiar unfamiliar, 'to remove objects from the automatism of perception' – to borrow Shklovsky's (1991 [1929]) words: to de-familiarize and cast doubt on what national discourses often reinforce as common sense and taken for granted. The 'widespread French incomprehension and outrage at seeing the violence so widely covered in some countries' (Lecouer, in Bennhold, 30 March 2006) was due, at least partly, to the fact that this coverage challenged the common ways and explanatory frameworks within which people used to view violent outbreaks in the *banlieues* in national television coverage. By the same token, the international channels' coverage of the Madrid attacks (alongside that of other media such as local radio stations) forced Spanish viewers to see the familiar and commonsensical narrative – that it was ETA behind the attack – as unfamiliar and strange. The commonplace and taken for granted was made strange and alien.

The remainder of the article focuses on five strategies of estrangement (although clearly there are others), and the moral possibilities and challenges that the process of estrangement presents. However, the argument I make about the role played by international media in generating estrangement should be read with an important caveat in mind. Spain and France received considerable international coverage due to the conflicts they were experiencing. International media do not normally cover the everyday workings of small countries; even in cases of serious conflict, some countries remain what Koffi Anan called 'orphans'. Thus, while I argue that estrangement and the new visibility present significant moral possibilities and challenges for nations, it is important to bear in mind that these are not everyday processes. Rather, they tend to take place in out-of-the-ordinary

times. The very essence of estrangement is that it removes us from the ordinary; if it were to become routinized it would have lost its function.

Strategies of estrangement

One strategy is *recontextualization*[19] *and the use of analogies*. Analogies transfer the usual perception of an object – a bombing as yet another ETA terror attack, the outbreaks in the *banlieues* as yet another act of vandalism in suburban housing projects – into the sphere of new perception. The juxtaposition of two concepts perceived to be physically, socially, politically, culturally, normatively or morally remote from each other, creates surprise and distance, de-familiarizes the events, demanding reflection on the part of the viewer.

The global channels' comparison of the events to events outside Spain and France 'lodged' the local events in the regional and global scene. It demanded Spain and France – their governments, their media and their citizens, to consider themselves in relation to other countries and as part of the world. Of course, nations have always defined themselves in relation to other nations and cultures. But when others, rather than just we ourselves, tell our story, we are called upon, if not forced, to position this story in relation to theirs. And we are asked to assume some distance from the particularity of our 'local problem', to think whether and how it might be understood beyond the local or the national. Thus, in likening the events to something other than how they were commonly represented on the national media, the analogies used by the global media conveyed the message that this was not as Jean-Claude Dassier, Director of LCI insisted, 'just a local problem' (News Xchange, 2005), but rather, as Chris Cramer, president of CNN International networks described it, was 'pretty damn significant internationally' (News Xchange, 2005).

A second element which contributed to a considerable de-familiarization of the events in Spain and France was *the sheer volume of coverage produced* and disseminated on transnational channels. The significance of an issue, in terms of both its meaning and importance, is determined among other things by the

amount and scale of the visibility it receives. When an event that traditionally has received a certain degree of coverage at home, is suddenly exposed to a meaningfully wider visibility, and is delivered with the immediacy brought by the 24-hour rhythm of global networks, its 'normality' and taken-for-granted character are undermined.[20]

A third strategy of the global channels' coverage of the events in Spain and France which provoked distance and estrangement is *sensationalism*. The media, especially commercial media, are frequently criticized for sensationalizing, exaggerating and dramatizing events. These are often well-grounded criticisms emanating from a broader concern with the erosion of professional journalistic values. However, provocative as this may sound, I want to argue that sensationalism, when applied to 'us' – our country, our people, our nation, our community – can contribute to a process of productive estrangement and encourage reflection. Seeing 'our' story, with which we have become familiar, and treat as routine, normal, and perhaps boring or uninteresting (encompassed in the cynical question 'so what's new?'), presented as sensational, out of the ordinary, dramatic and spectacular, may make us rethink how we see it. True, it may reinforce entrenchment in *our* 'accurate' story, and alienation from and rejection of *their* sensational account. However, even if this is the immediate reaction, as demonstrated by the French media's reaction to what they considered as the global channels' sensationalism, in the longer term, however limited its impact, this new visibility of ourselves, may contribute to critical and self-reflexive engagement. The images of burning cars that the international media insisted on showing, however sensationalist, thrust the French model of integration and '*les banlieues'* onto the international scene, making it difficult for the French to sweep under the carpet this uncomfortable image of themselves.

Lastly, in both the Spanish and French cases, global channels' coverage created estrangement and evoked distance by *giving excluded social groups a stage to voice themselves*. They removed (at least to some extent) the taken-for-granted invisibility of the perspectives of Basque separatists in Spain and the youth from the *banlieues* (especially the Maghrebi community)

in France. By so doing, they endowed commonsensical (and therefore largely unquestioned) conceptions of 'us' and 'them' with 'strangeness,' and acted as a catalyst for reflection and rethinking, not only on the immediate issue (in the Spanish case the question of who was culpable for the attacks, and in the French case questions about the causes of the revolts and their solution), but also on the society and its relationship with these marginalized groups, the processes and mechanisms of this marginalization, and the urgent need to challenge them.

The consequences of estrangement: reflection, social change and fragility

The coverage provided by global satellite news channels, alongside other media and political players, prompted critical debate both among the French people, and between them and other nations, about their model of integration. This debate included reflection on alternative models in European countries, as well as the U.S., for coping with immigrants. An article published in *Les Echos* describes how the world's criticism of the French model of integration left 'a France that doubts herself' (Hubert-Rodier 2005, my translation). These processes of doubting, and acknowledgment of issues and voices that had been repressed for decades, among other things, gave a substantial push toward media diversity and representation of minorities in the French media (Malonga, cited in Harding 2006). At the height of the riots, President Chirac acknowledged that 'the [French] media must do more to reflect the reality of France today' (Harding, 2006). Less than a year after the riots, Edouard Pellet, adviser to the president for integration issues at France Télévisions, presented the public national broadcaster's plan for 'positive action for integration aimed at repairing inequalities and "dewhitening" the screens, structures and mentalities' (European Broadcasting Union, 8-9 June 2006).

In Spain, people had to go 'around the mainstream media' to access through their own channels, mobile phones and the Internet, information from foreign news broadcasts (Cohen, 2004; Laverty, 15 March 2004). The visibility facilitated by the global news channels contributed to the public's acknowledgment of the government's manipulation of information and to what

some analysts regard as a protest vote, which ousted the governing PP party. The Socialist Party's electoral victory led to some soul-searching among Spanish journalists (Purcell, 20 March 2006) and mass public outpouring of their misgivings (Dawn, 16 March 2004); they accused the state-run Television Espana (TVE), Telemadrid and the news agency EFE of manipulation, censorship and propaganda on behalf of the outgoing Aznar government (Sharrock 2004; Salvemos telemadrid Parlamento europeo, 2007). In the longer term, this has prompted an ongoing debate about freedom of speech and media accountability, and the launch of specific campaigns for and against the survival of public broadcast networks (e.g. the 'salvemos telemadrid Parlamento europeo' campaign).[21]

So, the visibility created by the satellite media can become a productive and transformative force, even a sort of an anti-denial movement helping the nation acknowledge hitherto unrecognized or avoided aspects of itself. At the same time, it inherently triggers tensions and instabilities; it undermines national narratives and frameworks that act as 'common sense' and provide ontological securities and sense of belonging. This sense of fragility is evident in a French expatriates' online forum (Comment les expatriés vivent les émeutes, 15 November 2005) which was established by LCI – the same television network that admitted to having censored images of burning vehicles. Postings to this forum reveal strong feelings of personal embarrassment and even humiliation among French expatriates, but also a collective sense of embarrassment and discomfort about being part of the French nation, being associated with the French government and the 'myth' of the French model of integration. There are also expressions of defensiveness, entrenchment in 'our' truth and 'our' moral superiority, denial, hostility and arrogance towards the international media and other countries (especially the U.S.), accompanied sometimes by nationalist sentiments and xenophobic discourses. Thus, while the visibility facilitated by cross-border media has contributed to a France that doubts itself, it has also contributed to a France that is ever more confident in itself, rejecting alternative images and accounts (and the doubts that they may create) brought by cross-border media.

Making the invisible visible for all to see on the world's 24-hour television screens can also amplify the instability of the very situation that is made visible, for example, the violence of the rioters in the *banlieues*. Some people, especially among the French media and politicians, argued that the presence of so many international correspondents in the *banlieues* encouraged the youth in these neighborhoods to supply foreign journalists with what they came to get: live images of burning cars and acts of violence. While it is difficult to discern whether the intense coverage of international networks of burning cars did indeed encourage young people to act more violently than they otherwise would have, the argument illustrates how the new visibility enabled by communication media might increase instability and amplify the volatility of the acts it exposes.

In Spain, perhaps the most explicit manifestation of fragility to which global news coverage contributed is the PP's defeat; however much Aznar's government sought to manage its visibility by controlling information on the attacks, they could not completely control it. Mediated visibility worked against them. The other party against which the mediated visibility worked was, of course, the Spanish media, especially the public broadcasters which were exposed over their involvement in the government's manipulation of information. The public was empowered by the visibility of information the government strove to keep hidden. That said, the mistrust that developed among the Spanish public towards their government and national broadcasters, clearly promotes high degrees of vulnerability and fragility in democracy. The comment of a demonstrator cited earlier, which compared the situation post '11-M' to Franco's regime, neatly illustrates how shaky and uncertain the situation felt like, for demonstrators and citizens alike.

CONCLUSION

'Television is the main mirror in the house' (Harding, 2006), said Edouard Pellet in an interview following the riots in France. Today, this mirror is ever more multi-faceted, offering viewers multiple kinds of reflections, through the multi-channel televisions in homes across Europe and the world. This paper

sought to enhance our understanding of what happens when the 'mirror in the house' offers multiple visions of ourselves, members of a national group. It forces nations – their media, politicians and citizens - to recognize that in the age of 24-hour international news and cross-border television channels, radio, the Internet and mobile phones, a national community's dirty linen is almost always washed in public, despite the reluctance for whatever reason of powerful players, national or international.

Seeing ourselves from a distance encourages us to realize that common sense conceptions of 'us' and 'them', or commonplace understandings of certain things as 'local problems' to which there are clear solutions, are not given and fixed, but rather are constructed, and therefore can be challenged and changed. It entails a real possibility for the creation of a more inclusive national space. At the same time, it threatens the nation's ability to manage a coherent visibility – the central role that national media with their care structures (Scannell, 1996) have played, in symbolically 'gluing' together national communities and providing them with a constant resource for community and a sense of belonging. In this new reality of the new visibility, nation states look for ways to regain this symbolic 'national glue', among other things, by finding ways to better manage their image on the international scene. France, for example, which was put under world scrutiny during the 2005 riots, has recently launched its own 24-hour global satellite news channel, France 24, in a bid to offer a different take on international news to that offered by CNN and the BBC (BBC News, 20 June 2007; Economist, 30 November, 2006), and to give France more weight in the 'battle of images and airwaves' – President Chirac's words in a speech made during the build-up to the Iraq war (Economist, 30 November, 2006).

Citizens too, have become more aware that the 'mirror in the house' offers more than a single, clear and unproblematic reflection. This awareness, commonly associated with the concept of media literacy, needs to be better understood, specifically in the context of the multiple news accounts that media consumers can access nowadays via satellite channels and other media. Such awareness of the constructed nature of news accounts and the competition

among them, and the broader recognition it invites, of the constructed character of frameworks that guide our social and moral lives, can contribute, as our analysis has shown, to a process of reflection and deliberation and thus a more democratic culture, both nationally and beyond national boundaries. But there is a fine line between such critical awareness and the negative consequences of estrangement: citizens' cynicism, loss of trust in the news media, alienation and loss of sense of belonging to a social community they feel they are part of and want to belong to – a dangerous scenario for democracy. It is the joint responsibility of the media – transnational, national, and local - governments and citizens, to struggle for the former and avoid the latter.

NOTES

[1] This is a quote from a text message exchanged among people in Spain during the days leading up to the general elections on 15 March 2004, following the bombings in Madrid on 11 March 2004 and the exposure of the PP government's manipulation of information (Laverty, 15 March 2004). It is discussed in the section on the Madrid bombings.

[2] E.g., a blog comparing the British and the Portuguese media coverage of the abduction of Madeleine McCann (*Gazeta Digital*, 31 August 2007); a blog discussing the coverage of the 2005 French riots by the French media in comparison to the US media (rec.org.mensa, 2005); a blog discussing international newspapers and television channels coverage of the 2004 Madrid bombings in comparison to a national media outlet (Caza de Brujas, 21 November 2004).

[3] Other discourses were present, for example, collective expressions of 'we, the Parisians' or references to 'the 'Madrileños', but these too were usually coupled with national frameworks.

[4] Given the huge coverage, the search was limited to six months. The blog search was not limited by a specific period and allowed some of the ongoing debate to be captured. This was helpful also because many blogs were established later than six months after the events.

[5] As Chalaby (2005: 486) observes, CNN and BBC networks' 'newsgathering facilities give them the ability to break international news and give real-time and round-the-clock coverage of international events.' Al Jazeera English was launched after the Madrid bombings and the French riots. It would be interesting to study its role in relation to what we identify here primarily regarding CNN International and BBC World.

[6] See Chalaby (2005) for a typology of cross-border television channels in Europe.

[7] For instance, a study of French viewers' reception of the satellite news channels' coverage of the events might have revealed the role played by channels not discussed here, such as Arabic news channels. Furthermore, such a study might have challenged the centrality of the national framework present in our data, as in, for example, Aksoy and Robins' (2000; 2002) study.

[8] Private television networks were first launched in Spain in 1990 with ANTENA 3. Cable and satellite TV markets have been growing steadily since, with a free-to-air digital terrestrial TV (DTT) service relaunched in late 2005 (BBC News, 17 May 2007). Public TV services are run by Radio Television Espanola (RTVE), funded by advertising and state subsidies (de Mateo, 2004: 229).

[9] *CNN en Español* caters mainly to audiences in Latin America, but segments of their programming are aired in Spain.

[10] Outputs from BBC News 24 UK are shown on BBC World

[11] *Cadena Ser* radio station is owned by the media group PRISA, which also owns *El Pais* newspaper (Olmeda, 2005: 22).

[12] For a discussion of the term *banlieues* and the history of these disadvantaged suburbs see Hargreaves and Mahdjoub (1997), Ossman and Terrio (2006) and Harding (2006).

[13] As of 2005, the satellite and cable industry in France has been dominated by only a few key players, and has not reached a huge number of households; 95% of the 25 million French households have TV set, but only 3.5 million households subscribe to cable television and 3.6 million to satellite (TAE, 2005: 649). That said, the satellite market has developed in France in recent years. The large availability of foreign media such as CNN has had a meaningful impact on French media and its sense of accountability (Bertrand, 2005: 7). Furthermore, immigrants, who often live in suburbs, can only access television channels from their own country through satellite (especially Eutelsat which provides many channels from Arabic speaking countries) (TAE, 2005: 706).

[14] See also Astier (22 November 2005) and interview with Riva Kastoryano, a professor at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris*, 'This is not a European Intifada' (Fontanella, 21 November 2005).

[15] Comparison to South Africa's Apartheid was made by a talk-show moderator on Al Jazeera, Faisal al-Qasem (Nordbruch, 2005).

[16] For a discussion of the exclusion of the people from the banlieues from the French media, see Bourdais, 2004.

[17] Research has shown how national journalists, especially at times of crisis such as war, when the nation is perceived to be under risk, often fail to maintain an appropriate distance from events and report them as members of the national community, taking for granted shared values (Schudson, 2002; Waisbord, 2002; Zandberg and Neiger, 2005).

[18] Bennholds' (30 March 2006) article focuses on media coverage of mass protests against labour law in 2006, but it offers useful insights in terms of the French surprise at the foreign media's interest in the 2005 riots.

[19] I draw on Fairclough's (1995) notion of recontexualization

[20] While we need empirical research to substantiate this claim (i.e. to compare amounts of coverage of the events on national vs. global television in Spain and France), the national media's reaction to the satellite channels' coverage (especially in France) as excessive and disproportionate is quite telling.

[21] 'Salvemos Telemadrid', a campaign launched in 2007 to exonerate Telemadrid amid accusations that it had manipulated information surrounding the 11 March Madrid attacks (see 'salvemos telemadrid

Parlamento europeo', 2007). The campaign is directed at the investigation held by the European Parliament (Brayton, 25 April 2007).

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