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Historically a strong strand of critical research in the broader field of communication and media studies has focused on the market-driven media space dominated by a handful of large media corporations (Jenkins, 2016:33–40). Critique against the market-oriented practice of concentration of ownership intensified with globalisation circled around the tendency of multinational media to focus on large populations and media products that ‘travel well’ to maximise global distribution opportunities. Focusing on profit and audiences poses a threat to the diversity of voices (and cultures, opinions, identity options, and so forth) being represented in the media. The advent of the internet and audience-focused media genres (such as the reality genre) was first celebrated as the panacea to the lack of diverse views presented by oligopolistic media as a partial democratisation of the media (Andrejevic, 2015; Couldry, 2015). This optimism waned over time – until the introduction of online social media platforms. New audience-generated platforms promised ordinary people the opportunity to be producers of mass-mediated communication (Andrejevic, 2004:24–47; Andrejevic, n.d.), as well as opportunities to facilitate mass self-communication (Castells in Van Dijk, 2012:182), and for self-(re)presentation (Thumim, 2012), and for self-identity expressions (Burger, 2015:264–286). Hence a growing body of scholarly work is intrigued by reasons why and ways in which ‘audiences’ – that is ordinary people or media consumers – take ownership of the opportunities afforded to them to participate in producing mass-mediated communication (Couldry, 2015; Jenkins, 2015).

In fact, the immense volume of ordinary people mesmerised by the promise of the digital revolution to afford them mass message producer status is associated with a broader trend of ordinary people not only participating in communicating publicly about themselves, but generally speaking participating ‘in something’ (Jenkins, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013). Such mass public participation is in line with democracy in the horizontal society. In a horizontal society, ordinary people are brought to the foreground, instead of only experts, nobility, the clergy, the wealthy, politicians, celebrities or intellectuals (Friedman, 1999:vii–viii). In contrast to a vertical society, the current time is marked by a more horizontal society where ordinary people have more say and subsequently accommodate negotiations and flexibility, and facilitate an agency-driven society to a greater extent than a hierarchical society (Friedman, 1999:vii–viii). In other words, in this way a person’s agency, the will and ability to take charge, is supported by enabling social circumstances and

that, in turn, impacts on self-identity (Hall, 2004:1). A horizontal society thus provides freedoms and choices without the restrictions of the past (Friedman, 1999:240). The horizontal society thus paved the way for the current situation valuing the views of ordinary people, or at least where ordinary people are given opportunities to voice their views – opportunities that are enabled with audience-based reality media genres and the internet. Within the media sphere such popular participation has been met critically suggesting that the media institution as the fourth estate in support of democracy is challenged by spectacular, popular, personal, emotional, trivial, and downright un-intellectual mass-mediated messages (Kellner, 2004). The counter-argument is that some opinions might be heard and the realities and texture of the lives of ‘unimportant’ people, ordinary people, are at least heard by the popular and spectacular orientation of privately owned profit-oriented media (Kellner, 2004).

However, the trend of ordinary people participating in different ways and more extensively than in earlier times is not restricted to communication and media studies, but spans a wide range of fields such as genome research, architecture and town planning, politics, development, and the arts. This increased social awareness and social impetus to participate publicly, has been labelled as a *participatory turn* that marks almost all aspects of contemporary social life (Andrejevic, 2015; Burger, 2015:264–286; Couldry, 2015; Jenkins, 2015;). Examples of the popular turn include the many social drives that seek a change in regime and ordinary people taking time to record such actions and post them online, thereby becoming citizen journalists. In fact, journalists are increasingly reporting their own subject positions instead of being objective. Other examples include the many opportunities for small local filmmakers to create, sell and distribute their films through film festivals and through the internet, as well as the reality radio genre, most often talk radio, that invite listeners to share their life stories and become producers of mass-mediated messages. This prosumer notion is extended to the reality television genre in talk shows, game shows, competitions, and so forth. However, of the most pronounced examples of the popular turn is found on the internet that offers a myriad of different platforms where consumers are granted the opportunity to express their views by commenting on online material or by creating their own messages, especially through social media.

In grappling with reasons why ordinary people seem to participate more in mass communication than in earlier times, Appadurai (1996:1–4) points to the cultural aspect of globalisation. He argues that the feeling of ‘being in motion’ paired with the many mediated opportunities available ushered in an era of ordinary people publicly participating in creating mass-mediated messages. He argues that ‘life as we know it’ had changed forever: in globalised settings the stability and security of modern life and its established social institutions made way for instability, uncertainty, constant change, and thus being in flux. Indeed, cultural globalisation has the consequence that group and individual identity seem to be in flux and is constantly shaped and re-shaped in the wake of exposure to dissimilarity as people are exposed to stories from around the world, to different ways of living, and to different identity performances. This fluidity brings anxiety for some, whilst others respond to it creatively and engage in authentic ways by experimenting with different and new subject positions. Furthermore, in regions with great differences, especially in conditions of unequal power relationships, this process of working with identity is all the more pronounced (Gaonkar, 2001:2–23). Against this background, Appadurai (1996:1–4, 7–11; 2013:61–64) suggests that the globalisation-media-internet pairing brings the possibility of *the work of the*

*imagination* – that is, to draw on how *difference* is imagined (what it would be like to have been born into a different gender, race, space, class, language group or culture) to work on self-identity. As the media, the internet and the physical mobility of people bring images of ‘other worlds’, the possibility of embracing and experimenting with new identities has thus been opened up. Appadurai argues further that instead of nurturing an oppositional identity resisting globalisation by defending and protecting the status quo, the possibility of embracing and experimenting with new identities are now possibilities. The tension between the established, ‘other’, and creating new identity options give further impetus to public identity work. Aside from this global-local nexus that poses interesting and productive spaces for identity performances often particular to location or mindset, many efforts of resisting hegemonic power relations are evident. In fact, many such social movements are anchored in identity expressions. It seems that many people who publicly participate in identity formation processes do so whilst at the same time participating in something else, such as resisting hegemonic power relations. Identity thus seems to be the locus of action (Castells, 2001:62-63; also see Bordenave, 2006: 421 and Huesca, 2006:750).

Indeed, the present seems to be an *identity paradigm* as many people are publicly displaying, performing and engaging with their individual and group identities (see for instance Tufte, 2013:32, and further Barker, 2012:176–179; Bordenave, 2006:421; Castells, 2001:62–63). It seems that the confrontation with or the stories of other worlds and ways of living, bring opportunities to creatively engage with identity. In many cases such identity work manifest *publicly*, especially in the wake of the proliferation of digital and audience-based mediated opportunities for revealing or displaying or engaging with some version of the self (Appadurai, 1996:1–4, 7–11; 2013:61–64). It is thus argued that although internet and reality genre represent a partial democratisation of the media, it also paves the way for performing identities in public, for *public identity work*, that seems, in many cases, to be affirmative, therapeutic, or validatory. This trend of the public participating ‘in something’ is evident in civic life where ‘serious’ matters are discussed, but also where seemingly trivial material is shared with those who care to listen – if a ‘listener’ is assumed. However, it seems that in many cases, public identity work undergirds such actions.

### ***Performing local identities***

The global-local nexus and the historic locale of South Africa provide much opportunity for public mediated identity engagements. This edition of *Communicare* both theorises such identity efforts and analyses cases of local identity performances – most often enquiring into the power relations of such communicative actions.

In their article, Lauren Dyll and Keyan Tomaselli examine local identity performances through the lens of the power relationship between the researcher and the researched. As part of the larger longstanding *Researching Indigeneity Project*, this article presents a critical meta-examination of this relationship during an archaeological rock engraving research project. In this project the orthodox interviewee/informant/participant role assumed by the Bushmen has deliberately been changed to that of co-generators of knowledge (in fact some Bushmen were co-authors of research publications). Furthermore, the Bushman co-generators of knowledge established the parameters of the research interaction. Using critical indigenous research methodology to afford the Bushmen study participants a different power dynamic than that offered by orthodox

objectivist research methodologies, this article suggests that the Bushmen facilitated not only new ways of understanding rock engravings, but also facilitated agentic identity performances, emphasising the importance of a critical analysis of research methodologies.

In theorising identity performance opportunities during developmental and social change projects, Hannelie Otto and Lynnette Fourie explore the notion of participation as communicative action by drawing on the Habermasian notion of overt dialogical communicative action and the Freirean dialogical praxis. Otto and Fourie negotiate a myriad of dissimilar epistemologies, methodologies, imagined goals and praxes, suggesting that the Freirean context-specific and action-based approach and the Habermasian overt communication action are useful approaches in defining participation in development and social change projects, as these approaches may facilitate identity performances of beneficiaries of development and social change projects.

In contrast to simply assuming the selfie as narcissist self-identity affirmation, Amanda du Preez theorises two forms of online selfies. She investigates the selfie as digital double by drawing on McLuhan's two-pronged typology of human exchange with technology. She uses McLuhan's first category, technology, as extending the self through an alter ego, to theorise the selfie as the 'double by duplication' or as a replica, stand-in, or a cloned self. This form of selfie is self-affirmative and promises to preserve the person's selfie duplicate even after death, since the selfie is an amplified self or online persona that extends the presence of the self as an alter ego. McLuhan's second category of overwhelming technology having a numbing (or self-amputative) effect, forms the basis of Du Preez's second category of the selfie, the selfie as 'double by division'. Here the selfie is seen as a 'split shadow' (or a division,) amputated from the self that forms a 'shadow-like debris' that follows the online self whenever data is shared.

Through a filmic analysis of local Afrikaans feature films (*Pretville*, *Platteland* and *Treurgrond*) starring Steve Hofmeyr, Chris Broodryk explores representations of local Afrikaner identity performances in post-apartheid South Africa. He argues that these films represent a singular narrative of Afrikaner exceptionalism with claims of victimhood often tied to the character portrayed by Hofmeyr. The article concludes that the singular identity representation of Afrikaner conservatism in these films is problematic since it not only undermines multiculturalism, but contributes to the current already complex ideological context.

Further investigating filmic representations, but this time how audiences engage with filmic representations, Michele Tager and Lauren Nell examine romantic identifications with characters. They investigate ways in which a group of Johannesburg women, between the ages of 18 and 45, makes sense of the romance between Edward and Bella in the international feature film *Twilight*. It was found that the participants chose to downplay Edward's obsessive affection for Bella despite the country's exceptional high rate of violence against women. Instead, the participants tend to single out and identify with the romantic love theme in the film, as these seem to be congruous with their own chosen romantic imaginations and identifications.

In their article, Sandra Pitcher, Tammy Frankland and Nicola Jones chart Nelson Mandela's publicly mediated identity, despite his objections (in his autobiography *Conversations with myself*) to a 'false image' of him as a 'saint' or 'semi-god', to how his symbolic power is elevated to a

'Messiah-figure' in the media. They base their arguments on a comparison of 2010 and 2013 representations of Mandela in the *Independent Online* to indicate that as his immortality became evident during time of illness, his 'Madiba Magic' mediated identity was carefully constructed to elevate him from illness to mythical revolutionary.

Priscilla Boshoff investigates a case of not having an official identity and the subsequent partial identity recognition by the media. Many South African residents have been awaiting identity documents for undue long periods of time (often years), affording them no official identity. By drawing on Agamben's notion of bare life and the camp, and Lacan's conception of symbolic order, she argues that citizens without official identity documents have been reduced to bare life as the National Department of Home Affairs seems to have forgotten about their existence. However, the *Daily Sun* column, 'Horror Affairs', captures many of their life stories and in this way offers them some recognition of their existence and identity dilemma. Boshoff argues that despite their unfortunate official situation, the newspaper's acknowledgement of their existence affords them the 'gift' of some form of identity performance – a performance that they are entitled to, but is withheld by the official system.

Pontsho Pilane and Mehita Iqani investigate the relationship between the media, gender and race in South Africa. They analysed a sample of almost 3000 images of women in *Glamour* magazine published during a single year, in terms of the quantity of black female representations and also in terms of notions of beauty. Although 65% of *Glamour's* readership comprises black women, only 30% of the images were of black women and when represented, the hairstyles and body type were aligned with the aesthetic of 'white beauty'. It is theorised that the inherent suggested emulation is not in line with post-apartheid South African ideals, since black women are only represented as valuable if they aspire to and comply with white ideals. This analysis speaks to the role of the mass media to facilitate discussion about diversity and to provide opportunities for new identity representations.

A theme cutting across the articles in this themed issue of *Communicare* is that, despite the power of the 'big player' (notably the media, the developmental benefactor, a government department, or a research institution) the ordinary person (or the consumer, audience, or the researched) seems to make use of the many mediated opportunities available to perform some agency in negotiating their individual and group identities. Collectively these articles offer a range of views on how identities are displayed, resisted, shaped, imagined and performed in this specific locale against the background of complex power relations.

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