

Exploring perspectives on the 2009 London G20 meeting: how far is the crisis ideologically global for the middle groups in society and what are the implications for global development?

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## 1. Introduction

This paper starts from the ontological stance that while there is the appearance of a global economic crisis . especially as viewed from the international financial centres . there may be significant variations in perceptions of the situation at national levels by people who may be characterised as middle class in those national societies. For our purposes metaphorically, the ideological global system may usefully be envisioned as an African savannah eco-system with a variety of species (including predators) sharing an environment rather than a single organism. Our middle groups are the zebras in this eco-system with complex societal characteristics, family structures (including generational hierarchies), and experience predators as a constant threat but only an occasional experience.

Our second proposition is that this variation can be found in mass media newspapers produced at national level. While these texts are produced by and for those nationals most closely internationally connected, that is people most likely to show global cosmopolitan tendencies, we claim that the messages reflect local economic immediate realities and longer duration, local cultural orientations. Development studies research has responded to post-development concerns with the experiences and life worlds of indigenous peoples, metaphorically residing in the oxbow lakes created by the global river system - oxbow lakes that may appear autonomous but whose existence can only be understood with reference to the dynamics of the mainstream. We argue that this respect for cultural variations, can be extended to more nuanced variations that can be found in the main channels of the river, that is among groups of people whose lives appear more enmeshed in a global economy and culture. These variations can be seen as being induced by unevenness in the river bed, long duration cultural effects, and contact with the river banks, that is positionality in the current international economy.

To develop our propositions, we explore responses to G20 claims to speak for the whole species in national texts produced and consumed by those who would probably see themselves as being in the mainstream of their national societies. These mainstream people in their production and consumption patterns will have particular group experiences of the immediate effects of current economic perturbations. They may also reflect beyond these group particularities and perceive specific national economic experiences. These group and national interests are reflected, albeit imperfectly, in commercial national newspapers. To commercially survive, these newspapers must use a language that is accessible and attractive to a substantial group of readers. Using the national language generally increases accessibility and not only builds on a national culture but also contributes to that culture. We suggest national languages are also key factors in conserving longer duration cultural identities and using widely recognised aphorisms and metaphors in the national language increases attractiveness.

We test our propositions by deconstructing leading national language newspaper accounts of the outcomes of the G20 meeting in London in April 2009. The societies covered are Canada, Ethiopia, Mexico, Pakistan, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The results of the descriptions of contents and deconstruction of the texts will partially answer the question is there an international mainstream consensus among people in the middle groups of society in envisioning current experiences of a global crisis and a consequent agreement on broad global pro-developmental responses?

## **2. Development studies and a 'middle class':**

Development studies has understandably been seen as concerned primarily with poverty alleviation, and hence the lives of the poorest groups in society. Description of poverty, poverty analyses and alleviation, and empowering the more vulnerable and oppressed is the prime focus of the discourse on development. While not challenging this primary concern, this paper argues that there are moments when temporarily shifting focus onto broadly defined middle groups in society can be appropriate.

Starting on a simplistic note, on 12 February 2009, the Economist magazine reported that more than half of the world population belongs to a middle class in the article 'The new middle classes in emerging markets: Burgeoning bourgeoisie<sup>1</sup> with an emphasis on the spending power of this group. In this article, using an income definition of \$10 to 100 a day depending on national per capita income, an Indian economist, Surjit Bhala is cited as claiming the middle class share of the whole world's population rose from one-third to over half (57%) between 1990 and 2006. He argues that this is the third middle-class surge since 1800. The first occurred in the 19th century with the creation of the first mass middle class in western Europe (see chart 1). The second, mainly in Western countries, occurred during the baby boom (1950-1980). The current, third one is happening almost entirely in emerging

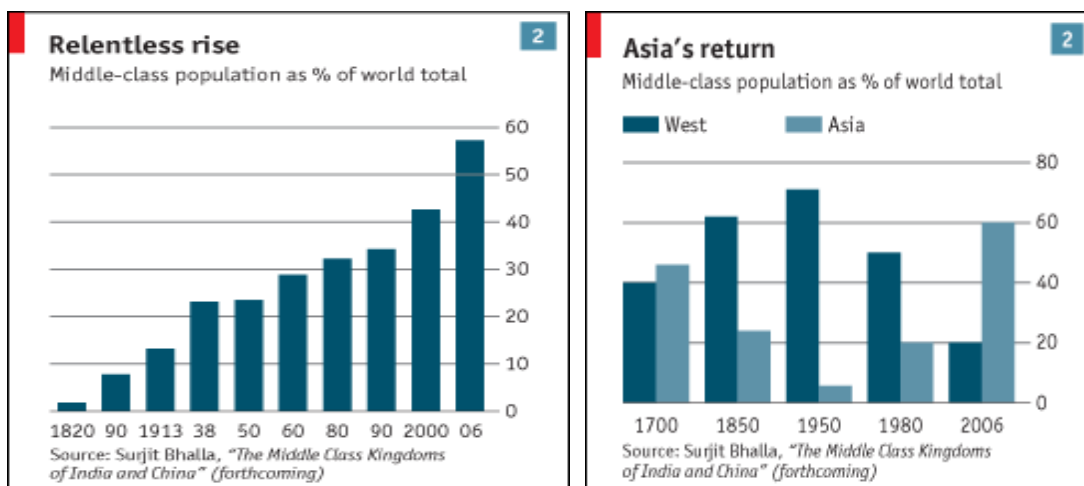
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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.economist.com/specialreports/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=13063298](http://www.economist.com/specialreports/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13063298)

countries. According to Mr Bhalla's calculations, the number of middle-class people in Asia has overtaken the number in the West for the first time since 1700.

But our argument, though it benefits from such an economic, demographic assertion, is more subtle. We argue that such middle groups are a major driving force of social consciousness in societies today. They are the primary beneficiaries of movements towards electoral political systems and provide the key staff for the State in all its functions. They also grapple with the challenges of life lived on the frontier between public sector and private sector provision of many key services including health, education, housing, transport, water, personal security, and environmental services. Their choices for or against the public sector are crucial to whether social policy is more universal or residual. In this spirit in the Netherlands, Oxfam Novib has sought to strengthen the middle of society, under the banner of strengthening civil society, to improve checks and balances against violence and corruption, and play a developmental advocacy role.

Chart 1: The rise of the middle class



For our purpose, we use middle groups as an empiricist, non-closed, normatively self-understood category, people appearing in national public spaces with confidence, and certainly without shame. They are sufficiently literate to read higher quality national newspapers, have some disposable income for mass communication durables though not necessarily connected to the internet at home. Economically, they constitute the core demand in markets for transnational and national private sector enterprises. Their collective decisions to increase or reduce consumption are highly influential on the dynamics of global capitalism.

Culturally, these middle groups are a key channel/barrier in the transmission of external values into more local cultural systems. They can be seen as the Trojan horse for the penetration of USAisation, or, Chinese frontline warriors defending a mountain pass through which barbarian McDonalds and Coca-Cola have to

advance<sup>2</sup>. We will not explicitly reflect on the complex, often polemical, debates on cultural globalisation and the virtues/vices of cosmopolitanism which understandably has focused on groups with claims to have developed local cultures with limited influence by external forces. Instead, we will draw on our data to contribute some empirical evidence on the liminal nature of middle groupings in the cultural transmission process (in the spirit of Hannerz, 2000).

Politically, the middle groups probably vote in most elections, but possibly as a civic duty and without great enthusiasm, and would not see themselves as part of the national elite or personally powerful. They attempt to protect themselves from the vagaries of State actions through family and wider civil society networks, but the political system may lose both stability and legitimacy if they do not participate in elections. Their political influence is as much through contempt and desertion as through claim and participation. As perhaps can be seen in the UK and other countries European election turnouts. More actively, in the Netherlands, from the turn of the millennium, a wave of questioning of pillarisation (a Dutch phenomenon ironically arising originally as conflict reducing, indirect representation of potentially antagonistic religious groupings) has produced a strong right wing vote among parts of the middle groups, who feel unrepresented/deceived in the national parliament debates.

We find Nikolai Tilkidjiev<sup>3</sup> following description provocatively useful, though we suggest the sense of a polemic reflects a self-perception of middle class personhood, much more positive than the more nuanced perception we are offering:<sup>4</sup>

*“The **middle class** is, essentially, a macro-social group embracing individuals, or rather categories of individuals, marked by a unique general attitude towards life. Those are people who owe everything to their own efforts, resources, qualification, education, etc. Self-made as they are, middle-class people are furthermore self-employed and relatively free and autonomous in their work. Their knowledge and qualification, property and managerial skills are intentionally acquired and so is their social status. Hence the specific medial stratification status of the group, in terms of the existent social, economic, political, cultural, etc. inequalities. Indeed, it is status hierarchy - in terms of occupation, education, income, property and social prestige - that reveals the unique medial position of the middle class people. And the status of the middle class within that hierarchy is clearly a unique one – in-between the “upper-class” elite and the “lower-class” workers, in-between the upper*

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<sup>2</sup> The pan-African version of Big Brother is currently being widely advertised – it is also interesting that many societies are generating their own ‘soaps’ for television and possibly becoming less dependent on US located products in this genre.

<sup>3</sup> Tilkidjiev, N. 2005. “The Middle Class: The New Convergence Paradigm”. In: *Sociologie Romaneasca*. Vol. III, Nr.3, pp. 210-231, online materials [http://www.omda.bg/institut/NIKI/middle\\_class.htm](http://www.omda.bg/institut/NIKI/middle_class.htm) accessed on May 2, 2009

*crust and the wage earners, in-between the envy of the world and the pitied ones”.*

We argue that this form of self-confident, self-perception finds representation in the newspapers read by many in this middlegrouping, confirming its central position in the national identity. We are aware that in many societies there is a gendered element in the editing and purchasing of such newspapers, but we suggest that the eventual total readership is likely to be more gender balanced. We are also aware that newspapers are being widely displaced by the electronic media as a source of information. But given the widespread cross-cutting between the print and electronic media, the messages oriented towards the middle groups in society are likely to be similar in content in both forms of the media.

None of the countries discussed in this paper have extensive, official censorship of newspapers. In several, the attitudes of government to the mass media verge on the hostile, but it is a sign of the rise of the middle groups that increasingly outright censorship is politically impossible. Helped by the technical inability to censor the electronic media. The commercial pressure on newspapers to attract advertising is intense, but we see this as making newspaper editors more conscious of their need to reflect, rather than attempt to dictate, the views of substantial numbers of middle group people. And certainly not offend them. If the test of subservience to commercial advertising is an inability to criticise capitalism, then we will be presenting significant evidence on a lack of subservience in the newspapers we will analyse below.

Therefore our argument here is that a sub-set of private sector newspapers aimed at middle group people, and using their mother tongue languages, has to represent their range of views if they are to survive commercially. This representation is not perfect and has to be read cautiously as an interactive relationship between deeply held beliefs, opportunistic reactions to events, and economic interests of advertisers (though predominantly local rather than trans-national capital).

### **3. The context of the G20 meeting in London in May 2009 (WCC<sup>5</sup>)**

This paper starts from the ontological stance that while there is the appearance of a global economic crisis today. especially as viewed from the international financial centres. there may be significant variations in perceptions of the nature of changes being experienced at national levels. Therefore the calling of a global conference of heads of state and heads of multilateral organisations in London in May 2009 (see Annex A), may have had very different meanings in different countries. But we start with a focus on where there was considerable consensus. the nature of the event itself.

In terms of bipolar disorder, the tone of articles in the Canadian National Post varied as can be observed in the titles of the articles, *“A Major Step Forward”* and *“Another Year, Another Unnecessary Summit”*. However, the perception of the G20 seemed

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<sup>5</sup> Western Christian Calendar – we think it is worth pointing out the cultural specificities in the ways in which the human species measures time today!

mostly negative with references to the G20 meeting as %the younger, chubbier cousins of the equally pointless G7 and G8 summits.+

In more straightforward, though rather detached vein, *The Ethiopian Amharic Reporter* magazine, on its foreign news section, begins with the G20 meeting with an introduction to the group about its composition and the purpose of the meeting. It states the purpose of the meeting as a way of reaching to possible solution to the current international financial crisis. It also mentions about the dominance of Barack Obama and Gordon Brown in the media coverage.

Then it explains the background of G20:

- That it has been more than 10 years since established/formed
- Has the objective of advising on international financial system, and to bring up international economic development

It also explains how it functions, when it was established, which countries the conference was held so far until this year\$ London\$ turn. This downbeat approach arguably reflects the lack of relevance of the G20 middle groups not only in Ethiopia, but more widely in sub-Saharan Africa.

*The Ethiopian Amharic Reporter* reports quiet concerns of countries such Brazil, India and China, about the US dollar status as international reserve currency, and a need to create one independent of the dollar. Such worries are related to a belief that the bankruptcy of American\$ banks resulted in the crisis. A need to avoid Obama\$ plan and follow a better alternative for the common\$ is embedded in the opposition of China to America\$ effort to impose its economic policies on other countries

Looking across all the newspapers read for this article<sup>6</sup>, a general view can be extracted that the sense of deterioration in the global economy had strengthened, and there were was great uncertainty coming into the meeting. There was a widespread perception that this was a moment of breakthrough for Brazil, India and China, notably China. Their strategic concerns with the US dollar being the international reserve currency would need to be discussed, and there is the need to create another reserve currency which is independent of dollar. Therefore any plan from Obama was suspect, despite his charisma. As a side issue were more tactical technical issues of banking reform and fiscal policy dividing USA and UK from France and Germany.

#### **4. Performativity at the meeting**

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<sup>6</sup> The newspapers were purposefully selected reflecting the language capabilities of the co-authors and their knowledge of the newspaper readership in countries they know well (the newspapers are listed in Annex B). All the newspapers were published on 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> April after the G20 Communique had been released to the press. Transliteration into English where required was done by the co-authors and each co-author accepts responsibility for that element of the paper. The remainder of the paper is the responsibility of all the co-authors.

The official picture of all the major participants appears frequently (albeit with the Canadian Prime Minister inserted for the version he missed for a comfort break, a telling reminder that the image is a group of human beings, not superheroes or gods). The focus on people not message is indicated in a Mexican newspaper, when the English words "stability | growth | jobs" on the banner in the background were not translated in the text. Jointly with the title "The London Summit 2009" the whole image may appear to a Mexican reader as a distant event (El Universal).

The homogeneous dark suits and tie homogeneity of the dress, is only broken by two men wearing turbans and two women. This can be contrasted with many other multi-lateral meetings (ASEAN, the Commonwealth) where national dress is worn for the official photographs. In western cultural terms, the dress was appropriate for a funeral . an ominous analogy. But perhaps it was intended to suggest deep seriousness and a cosmopolitan consciousness, but on whose cultural terms?

In a UK newspaper, The Times, the banner headline "The London United" . an irreverent analogy with sport - shows the Italian Prime Minister, US President and the Russian President (the first and third probably not highly valued for their leadership credentials by the British readership) in smiling "Year of 2009 College Reunion" thumbs up mode (a gesture considered rude in Bangladesh and in many Moslem countries...) while the caption writer omits any mention of the Saudi, Chinese and British leaders in the photograph. It also cannot resist claiming that the French Prime Minister, Nicholas Sarkozy in his former life helping the rich to hide their cash in Swiss tax havens, Sarkozy having threatened to walk out of the summit if it did not put morality back into capitalism.

Some UK papers featured the UK Prime Minister striding onto the G20 stage in front of the flags of the G20 countries. But did no one think that having twenty national flags prominent in the image was a telling, if unintended, paradoxical image for a meeting that was supposed to be a unified meeting in the global interest?

The meal which the world leaders of the G20 received, receives attention in the UK and Dutch press. Possibly the world's famous tv-cook Jamie Oliver oversaw the menu: Shetland-salmon, lamb from Wales, with a sausage of British herbs and British vegetables and Bakewell-pie as desert. Arguably a demonstration that the UK has retained an element of local cultural identity in the kitchen, if rather insensitive to the variety of food preferences represented at the table . presumably many leaders had their own chefs back at their embassies? In similar ironic vein, a Dutch newspaper, Trouw, discusses the G20 in the series of meetings of flying world leaders in the same week: "The world order is born in a cloud of CO2" In another insight, throwing doubt on the seriousness of the event moving closer to concerns with celebrity, two pages of the UK Times are devoted to the body language between the G20 leaders.

## 5. Perceptions of the outputs and outcomes of the G20 meeting

The G20 meeting gave an opportunity to reflect on the context of the meeting and the state of the global order. Closely related to these reflections are the perceptions of the outcomes of the G20 meeting.

Although Barack Obama<sup>7</sup> is highlighted (true in almost all the newspapers we selected), by no means does the President of the USA dominate the Mexican coverage. Indeed, the participation of Felipe Calderon is emphasised by an official picture with his closest team. The US President's picture and words, regarding the agreed measures without precedent are paired with others of Nicolas Sarkozy and Gordon Brown, whose interventions as the host leader, are the most extracted along the note. Separately, at the bottom of the page, a smiling picture of Luiz Inacio Lula and Hu Jintao appear to represent the emerging countries, which another note asserts, are the most benefited (El Universal). The UK Independent had President Obama dominating the front page and the overall line was that he had brokered an agreement.

A Dutch newspaper is arguably the most optimistic about the outcomes of the G20 meeting claiming that wisdom was displayed. This positive note continues with relief that the leaders of the twenty most important economies in the world avoided a dispute over the question who has to do what to get the economy out of the mud (an understandable Dutch metaphor). They disagreed, but kept themselves in London to the task for which the G20 was established; a global steer and coordination of the economy and trade. The previous American president could not speak of this without making faces. The new president, Obama, showed in London that the Americans have an eye for global cooperation.

In the same Dutch newspaper, it is claimed that, before the summit, all the participants agreed that global problems need global solutions. This fits well with a Dutch style of decision-making known as the pillars in which pre-meeting consensus is highly valued. The newspaper claims that for years, the IMF has warned against dangerous imbalances such as a USA building up its debts and the big trade surpluses of countries such as China. The G20 summit has proven that such imbalances can only be redressed by a share of power. While Europe is hardly in the position to provide extra stimuli. The biggest gain is that the G20 has demonstrated itself as a platform of negotiations. The previous summit in October, was above all characterized by the complete absence of the world's biggest economy, the USA. At that occasion, in Washington, President George Bush did the worst he could do: talking for nine minutes without saying anything. (Trouw)

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<sup>7</sup> In almost all the coverage, the personhood and positionhood of Barack Obama and President of the United States are intertwined, though the emphasis on the person is striking. The change in US President seems to be perceived as much more than a change in policy. The emphasis on charisma is a subject to which we shall return in the Conclusion. In the body of the text, we have used personhood or positionhood titles as they were used in the newspapers – very, very frequently the personhood title.

The Dutch De Telegraaf, in its financial katern, makes mention of the many plusses of the G20 agreement. The big minus is the fact that the assistance to banks which want to get rid of poisonous loans still has to start. As a result the G20 brings no solutions for the short-term. Banks will not open their records of bad loans which contributes to an unnecessary sickening/doorzielen of the crisis. At present banks have written away 1000 billion (miljard) USD of bad loans, for which they managed to attract 900 billion USD of new capital. It is estimated that capital is to be attracted for another 1000 billion USD. The fact that the IMF capital has increased by 500 billion USD to 750 billion USD will make it possible that countries that otherwise will get into problems of balance of payments/betalings in countries such as Mexico and a number of East European countries can be assisted. Although the emissions only have paper value (SDRs, I think, note MB) still make them a good option. Altogether the G20 has managed to free an amount of 1100 billion (miljard) USD to give impetus the world economy.

In the UK Times, the front page emphasis is on "NATO divided over troops for Afghanistan"....not the G20, suggesting there are non-economic issues that are being ignored . especially relevant to the UK whose troops are heavily engaged in fighting in Afghanistan. But the editorial Leader nominates the dysfunctional financial system as the principal structural weakness, and homes in on conflicts of interest within the credit ratings agencies as the proximate trigger of the credit crunch.

In the Mexican newspaper, there is the claim that that the world leaders have recognized that regulation faults were the fundamental causes of the current turbulence and were confident that the measures adopted face the problem and avoid the repetition of a crisis such as the current one. *El Universal* gave a high coverage to the G-20 Summit, with the main headline dedicated to it, as well as two and a quarter more pages of its *Finance* section. In the front page, it recovers the optimistic claim that the world is united around the crisis and a historic bailout has been launched. (*El Universal*) This allusion to the world may be contextualized by two facts. First, the inclusion of emergent countries which are given two separate notes, from a Latin American perspective, explaining that the meeting brings together most important economies (*El Universal*). Overall the perception is of a Latin America enhanced in the G-20. While nervous about the perception that Brazil is the regional leader, Lula's statement is reported when he thanks God that the IMF will not condition the credits to countries that need money as it did some years before. (*El Universal*)

Alongside Lula's opinions, words of analysts of Northern organizations are quoted to argue a potential gain of poor countries, throughout the IMF capital. The sufficiency of the amounts involved and the limited participation of Brazil, Russia, India and China and 'overrepresentation' of Europe present a rather soft skepticism. (*El Universal*) The summary of the Summit's guidelines and references to expected disagreements between countries round up the note, emphasizing the positive evolution of four country's stock markets, including Mexico's. (*El Universal*)

But the coverage of *El Universal* is mainly focused on the financial and regulation issues of the Summit. Behind its positive tone and its claims to the unity of the agreements, it exudes an opposition of interests between two blocks of countries, developed and developing, reflecting local concerns on an aggressive economic environment. It edits positively the role of the Mexican government role in this regard. The points of attention and highlights are appealing to government and elite interests, its intended audience. Mexico is ambiguously referred to, as a winner and as disadvantaged country, at the same time (*El Universal*). But, in terms of scale, a sense of proportion is given by comparing the Mexican GDP (1.2 billion dollars) with the reserves of China (1.6 billion dollars).

On the UK domestic front, the UK Guardian opines of the UK Prime Minister, "In the long term, Brown's view of the world looks distinctly Panglossian. Nothing in [yesterday's summit] suggested that the fundamental problem - imbalances in the global economy - is being tackled". And in the US, faith in Treasury Secretary Geithner's toxic assets disposal plan is reportedly 'paper thin'. And 'paper assets' is precisely what worries Peruvian economist De Soto who has speculated that balance sheets have yet to reveal all of their toxic horror stories.

## **6. Perceptions of winners and losers**

In terms of the biggest winner, the UK Guardian concludes that the lack of progress on the 'long-term project to reform capitalism' is 'startling'. Though more self-interestedly the Guardian noted the G20 also signally failed to address the vast global tax avoidance industry (a specific concern of a recent expensive investigative campaign by the newspaper).

A Dutch newspaper points out China and other Asian countries feature high on the US priority list: the economic crisis makes the US in need of Chinese funds to pay of its debts. In return Beijing demands more say in international financial institutions and will most likely get this. It is too early to state that the G7 has become overshadowed by the G20. The G20 not only has significance when it comes to the economic architecture, but when it comes to questions of peace and security the club is without significance. The summit has brought into existence a larger group and this means a step into a multipolar world. A world in which not one or just a handful of big powers set the agenda. (*Trouw*). Obama leads and Europe welcomes his élan, but is not always in favor of his ideas (the Dutch newspapers are interesting in their perception of Europe as an entity with a single interest).

The UK Times asks with the BRIC at the top table - Brazil, Russia, India and China - is a new world order emerging? "It remains to be seen whether conditions attached to IMF assistance will be acceptable to the governments of Eastern Europe ... or whether China... will agree to help European countries on easier terms than those offered to Asian, African and Latin American countries in the past". The sale of \$6bn of gold by the IMF is cold comfort to HIPC and LDCs proper.

While the UK Guardian concludes it was a good summit for China, which gained greater clout in the IMF and the World Bank, and exemptions for its two SARs (Special Administrative Regions) - Hong Kong and Macau - as a quid pro quo for injecting \$40bn into the IMF, and... for the suppression of any 'green language' in the final communiqué. China's status as a fully-fledged superpower finally matured in London. But has it cost the earth? George Monbiot, an influential green radical commentator, writes caustically that "no expense is spared in saving the banks, and every expense is spared in saving the biosphere".

An Ethiopian newspaper does see an improvement in the widening of the agenda at the London G20 meeting such as: taking coordinated macro-economic decisions, solutions which bring development and job creation, improving financial sectors of international financial institutions like IMF, reformation of the World Bank, and the like. These items were raised in the last year's G20 meeting but they were not able to find any solution and have been transferred to this year's meeting.

There is a conclusion that if the countries who were struggling individually because of the crisis cannot come up with a common stand (about the financial crisis) all together, there could never be a way to find solution to the international financial crisis. The Ethiopian view can be interpreted that the present situation is not a qualitatively new crisis for the Ethiopian middle groups, but a quantitative turn of their long duration, collective thumbscrew<sup>8</sup>.

The UK Independent concentrates on the symbolic shifts of power that the G20 symbolised between countries, notably the rise of China and India - no other country from the south receives mention. Overall the readers of the Independent who identified with the coverage would recognise that not much of real significance had happened in terms of global economic issues and they would need to be wary about their family finances in the coming year.

In the Canadian newspaper, Barack Obama's invocation of history is reported suggesting that the G20 meeting was unprecedented. The article calls Obama's allusion to history as ironic because the G20 was a convocation of people who apparently had little or no knowledge of, or interest in, history. The article continues on to say that the G20's Action Plan is blind to past failures.

Although the perceptions of the G20 were mostly negative, Canada and Prime Minister Stephen Harper's stance during the G20 were shown in a very positive light. Titles such as "Don't worry, be Harper" and "A position of Strength" exemplify this. The Prime Minister was lauded as reasonable and predictions about Canada's economy were optimistic. One article claimed that "Canada will emerge from recession ahead of the pack and in relatively good financial shape."

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<sup>8</sup> A instrument of torture used in the UK to extract confessions for those accused of disobeying sovereign authority.

Prime Minister Harper was shown as sensible and rational. An article claimed that Mr. Harper didn't get carried away, noting that there is no instant turnaround. This same article continued on to say that the Prime Minister must have been on the receiving end of envious glances from his counterparts at the G20 - - so much so, they even noticed when he was missing from their end-of-summit photo op. A sense of surprise humour is conveyed through this statement as normally, Canadian leaders are regarded as little more than a hole in the air.

## 7. Interests and altruism

Crucial to our exploration is the mix of interests expressed in the newspaper texts and whether we can find the vapour trails of particles of altruism from the collision in London. In most newspapers, the opportunity to reflect on the interaction of interest and altruism, and hence developmental implications of the G20 meeting, was missed. This is partially an accurate reflection of the limitations of the G20 outcome, and its lack of vision beyond national interests except in terms of defending global continuing liberalisation of all economic transactions. That is apart from some regulation of the most socially irresponsible of financial transactions and, of course, opportunity may also reflect the implicit acceptance of the readership that unenlightened self-interest may be trumping enlightened self-interest let alone altruism in the current economic weather.

Also the G20 meeting was extraordinarily vague on how much the proposals would cost middle groups, though such a concern may be read into Franco-German scepticism about further fiscal stimulus. In this context, the UK Times thunders (a nickname in its more radical past was 'The Thunderer') "The politicians who brandished their trillion-dollar deal [yesterday] are too complacent about... ordinary people... [who] wonder whether there could come a time when the environmental costs of growth outweigh the social and economic benefits. This is a question that politicians can't even afford to acknowledge...". The ordinary people are presumably the middle group people who read The Times?

The UK Independent reports (in distributionally neutral terms) that the UK PM was claimed to have said the free-market consensus was over and "From today we will together manage the process of globalisation". But generally the agreements are described in the newspaper with little enthusiasm and no confidence that these agreements offer any real prospect of a clear direction to global change.

In the Mexican press, Bernardo Kliksberg, advisor to the UNDP, is quoted stating the result that the most weak should be protected. His picture is given a caption entitled 'environment' with a brief reference to the very tough social challenge that Mexico has before the crisis. Secondary headings allude, above, to the duty that IMF resources shall serve the poor countries, and below, to the characterization of the economic as a humanitarian crisis. (El Universal). The concept of the most weak

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<sup>9</sup> Presumably we now have 'weather' varying chaotically, rather than 'climate'?

appears to be eliding into 'poor countries' though the term 'humanitarian' does suggest a concern, at least in terms of absolute poverty.

But this moment of concern for 'poor countries' is overshadowed by the specific concerns of the Mexican financial system. The heading 'speculators have had notable losses' leads to a statement by the President: 'we are armored' (an understandable analogy for a national middle grouping feeling metaphorically and perhaps physically besieged by civil violence). There is a reference to the credit line approved by the IMF, transmitting a sense of risk, against which the Mexican government appears to have succeeded. An unusually long quotation, explains that the range of variation of the Mexican peso has been within the average of other countries, attempting to calm fears on the economic security of the country. The Ministry of the Treasury is also quoted on the demonstrated solidity of the Mexican debt and monetary indicators, backed by the central bank's reserves. (El Universal)

The UK Daily Telegraph in a complex national altruist mode suggests "This grand plan will not shorten our dole queue". Most of its readership will not be claiming unemployment benefit, though the view of a lack of impact on UK unemployment is also expressed by the UK Guardian from a very different part of the political spectrum. Beyond national interest, the Daily Telegraph is complacent in seeing the G20 as being positive from the rich economies' standpoint ". a genuine moment of unity across the rich world about the direction **they** mean to take in the future." (our emphasis). But national chauvinism returns in discussing the IMF's increased role. The sale of gold by the IMF for 'concessional' finance for the poorest countries... has sparked a fall in the spot price of gold. Worse still, Brown's 'new consensus' [heavy irony] means another period of humiliation... "The deteriorating political shape of the world ... [following] the [dismantlement] of the British Empire... the 'new consensus' handing more power to the EU and allowing American and Chinese influence to completely dominate...".

The UK Guardian newspaper reports IMF funding is to be distributed to 'frontline' 'emerging market' eastern European countries and 'vulnerable' Far East economies. The poorest economies 'proper' are to be fed crumbs from the sales of IMF gold reserves. The non-invited developing countries named in G20 documents are only those who have not [yet] signed up to the new dispensations on tax havens. The rest are anonymous faces pressed against the glass of the conference venue . though given the security at the G20, they would have problems getting to the windows in the first place.

Issues of global development, including poverty alleviation and environmental conservation, reached the newspapers unevenly through reports of the public demonstrations in London. But these reports rarely involved any detailed information on the issues driving the demonstrations . the concern was much more with middle group concerns with threats to public order. Some reports did also refer to the extraordinary security surrounding the location of the G20 meeting, suggesting that

the leaders were afraid of the people. But overall, the demonstrations received only factual reporting. UK reporting was understandably most detailed, given the location in London. The UK Guardian described the objectives of the demonstration in the following rather UK nationalist terms:

*'The protestors have held responsible the Banks' administration and governors for the loss of jobs by 2 million people and the decline of the economy. Among the protests were "job security, self sustainability and poverty alleviation". They don't feel that the G20 meeting would bring any solution to those who lost what they had, who lost their hope and don't know what to do and where to go to; that is, victims of the financial crisis in general.'*

The UK Daily Telegraph observed "Man dies after being caught among the mob". The term mob has a motives on the paper's readership probably stuck

## **8. Deconstructing the underlying message and meaning of the G20 meeting**

There are varying positions on the place of cartoons as acceptable entry points for debunking<sup>10</sup> the pronouncements of those who claim to know and thereby close debate. Cartoons can bring out deep emotions, as shown by the impact of anti-Islam cartoons published in Denmark. In the UK, cartoons have a long history of criticising the UK establishment (as well as expressing national chauvinism). In an appropriate cultural context, cartoons can be seen as deconstructing the pomp and circumstance surrounding the powerful.

A telling cartoon in the UK Guardian shows Prime Minister Gordon Brown trailing disconsolately off the world stage in the wake of G20 leaders, looking pensively over his shoulder at a banner which proclaims "Mission Accomplished" . reflecting the moment of hubris for President Bush after the invasion of Iraq.

But a focus on cartoons is inappropriate for an article aiming at a wide ranging, cross-cultural understanding. So our main focus is on metaphors and analogies as they appear in the written texts of the newspapers. We will not formally deconstruct the various terms used, though we will reflect on their hue and tone in the Conclusion.

Was the G20 a summit- a mountain climbed by skilled, determined mountaineers? In the UK Daily Telegraph, a sense of irony is conveyed on the front page by placing quotation marks around the word historic attributed to the US President, appropriate to a sceptical readership tired of UK politicians' exaggerated claims, such as twelve years of claims to have ended economic boom and bust and the invasion of Iraq was an act of liberation. In a similar spirit, the statement World leaders agree to throw funds suggests an action that lacks real judgement.

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<sup>10</sup> A term possibly derived from the UK's maritime history when sailors slept in beds called 'bunks' – to be debunked would then have the connotation of being woken up!

The UK Guardian metaphors the G20 output in gloomy terms "Crackdown is cost of solving crisis". "price to be paid".. "punishment"... "harsh restraints... regulatory backlash." In similar vein, the UK Daily Telegraph quotes the opposition to the G20 conclusions in dramatic and gloomy terms, like ~~warn~~, choking, shackles, shock. The CBI, the Institute of Directors, the Association of British Insurers... "warn [G20] leaders on [tighter] regulation". "... hasty and ill-thought-out regulation which would risk choking off recovery... if the fine words of today become the shackles of the future". And without the barest scintilla of irony"... the financial markets are now in such a state of shock that they are regulating themselves...".

The Pakistani Daily Express compares the world economy, especially the worst performing economies, with a ~~falling wall~~. Such a falling wall potentially offer a frightening image to a population surrounded by problems for whom the walls of their house may be seen as a last defence. For the Mexican *El Universal*, the preferred image is that of ~~turbulence~~ reflecting an unpredictable outcomes of crises for this economy, and a generalized state of confusion, which, somewhat paradoxically, is accompanied by confident statements about ~~measures~~ adopted face the problem and avoid the repetition of the current crisis.

The Ethiopian Amharic Reporter magazine characterizes the topics of the London summit as ~~burning issues~~ and although it approves of the efforts to come up to an agreed solution during the six month preparation of the meeting, an observation on ~~different directions~~ suggests caution on potential divisions in the G20 and the potential for the fire to re-ignite and become a ~~wild fire~~.

Two Mexican papers select metaphors to discuss regulation issues. While *El Universal* names the countries included in the OECD's list of weak regulation environments as ~~fiscal paradises~~ *Reforma* refers to them as ~~tax heavens~~. The use of the term *paradise* may have some ambiguity suggesting a state of greed, which could correspond to countries in a state of perfect pleasure seen as benefiting from avoiding proper regulation. The French word *paradis* is also used in the phrase *fiscaux paradis*. In contrast, *Reforma* uses the word *heaven*. Its immediate mention of the two Latin American countries included in warnings of future sanctions, suggests an ironical concern for these countries, in a country very conscious of death.

While quoting Gordon Brown on the ~~emergence~~ of ~~a~~ new international order, *Reforma* also makes an analogy to the institutions of the Catholic Church for electing its maximum leader: ~~the~~ leaders of the most powerful economies of the planet and the main emergent nations *conjured*, in this way, the fears that differences between the United States with France and Germany (  $\delta$  ) would wreck the *conclave* on how to face the worst crisis since the Great Depression. Here, in the context of the secrecy and selectivity connotation of the ~~conclave~~ the journal alludes to some magic or supernatural forces involved. The reference invites to think ironically of the

novelty or actual change of the international order, if leaders are thought as performing illusions and tricks.

As might be expected, the Pakistani press is also very conscious of religion, though without the irony of the Mexican (and French?) newspapers. While criticizing the lack of attention to poverty alleviation, the Pakistani *Daily Express* claims that since G20 countries are followers of Christianity, if not moved by the worst situation created by poverty and unemployment, should at least listen to their Pope the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, who . claims the journal has emphasized the need that industrial states join hands for eradicating poverty from the world. This position is reinforced in its editorial.

In more poetic mode, the Pakistani *Daily Express* resorts to the interdependences of the type found in ecosystems to describe capitalism. It explicitly compares the hegemonic system with a tree, on which branches the flowers of increasing wealth bloom but which roots are grounded in the exploitation of weak and backward countries. The hostility of the Pakistan press to (and contempt for) the global order is not only expressed explicitly, it is also represented by silence in much of the Urdu language press.

In similar negative vein, the most poignant and metaphor-rich article in the Canadian National Post was entitled Tribal Leaders blind to history. It describes the G20 as a meeting of tribal elders around a campfire. The metaphor continues throughout the article and sarcastically compares the economic crisis to a hostile tribe appearing on the horizon. Furthermore, the author draws a comparison between solutions in the communiqué and, what can be considered, tribal or traditional forms of healing such as the application of leeches, doing a rain dance and praying to the Gods.

## 9. Conclusion

## 5. ENVISIONING THE STATE OF THINGS

Many apparently merging meanings adopt opposing directions, once their embedded descriptions of the current state of the world economy and the potential outcomes of the summit are considered. Images of imminent chaos coexist with images of an unchanged order. Most of them present unenthusiastic, often ambiguous similes, but all seem to reflect interests of local echoes and reverberating meanings.

Dynamics: order/chaos/positive and negative feedbacks

Religion: greed/paradise and haven/fate

Medical: injection/recovery

Natural: capitalism as an eco-system

Military: war for/against ?

Legal: regulation/law

Our second proposition is that this variation can be found in mass media texts produced at national level. While these texts are produced by and for those nationals who are most closely internationally connected, that is people most likely to show global/cosmopolitan tendencies, we claim that the messages they circulate reflect local economic immediate realities and longer duration, local/cultural orientations. We argue that this respect for cultural variations, can be extended to more nuanced variations that can be found in the main channel. These variations can be seen as being induced by unevenness in the river bed, long duration cultural effects, and the river banks, positionality in the current international economy.

A letter to the editor to Trouw wonders that the artificial bringing down of the interest rate is seen as a recipe. According to him, only one thing counts for an entrepreneur if he has made an investment: an expectation of profit. Interest rates play an inferior/onder-geschikte role. Moreover, a low interest rate is not conducive for the consumption, as many savers want to spend the interest with the Dutch pension funds are partially the result of interest rates that on purpose are kept low.

The silences: ecology, gender, governance including violence and corruption, human rights

## 5. ENVISIONING THE STATE OF THINGS

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5. Reading between the lines . liminalities and aporia

Optimists and pessimists . evolution/ entropy/ transition/transformation/repetition

The silences: ecology, gender, governance including violence and corruption, human rights

5. ENVISIONING THE STATE OF THINGS (Beatriz to coordinate)

Dynamics: order/chaos/positive and negative feedbacks

Religion: greed/paradise and haven/fate

Medical: injection/recovery

Natural: capitalism as an eco-system

Military: war for/against ?

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3. PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATE OF THE WORLD

Space and time/history

Lines of difference . terms used

Shared global interest/national interest/class interest/altruism

Inequalities/poverty/deserving and undeserving groups of people

Reading between the lines . liminalities and aporia

4. PERCEPTIONS OF THE OUTCOMES (Ellen to coordinate)

Effective/ineffective in terms of likely outcomes

Optimists and pessimists . evolution/ entropy/ transition/transformation/repetition

Inequalities/poverty/deserving and undeserving groups of people

Annex A: Leaders attending the G20 meeting in London

Annex B: List of newspapers consulted

Source: The Economist February 12, 2009