

When the Internet Fails to Connect: A Case Study on a Russian-American Non-Reflexive Discourse

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Abstract: This study investigates one such case study – the outburst of anti-Americanism among Russia Internet users during the Russia-Georgia military crisis of 2008. The paper analyzes the discussions of *Washington Post* articles at the *Washington Post* Internet forum and the *Foreign Media* Russian Internet site. The study shows that, despite numerous attempts by Russian users to deliver their messages to the American readers, their postings were ignored by the American users and global dialogue did not occur. It is this exclusion from the conversation, together with the denigration of Russia by writers in the United States that led to the intensification of anti-American sentiments among the Russians. The study makes clear that for the establishment of effective global public spheres access to new communication technologies and knowledge of English are inadequate, unless accompanied by the willingness to listen to others and a desire to understand them.

Keywords: global communication, public sphere, non-reflexive discourse, anti-Americanism, Russia-Georgia crisis, media framing

Communication research has paid significant attention to the possibility of the emergence of transnational public spheres through Internet communications. These spheres are spaces where global issues are discussed by multinational publics, and global public opinion, legitimate and efficient, is formed (Fraser 2007). Some scholars believe that, by creating a global communicative space where conflicting discourses are debated, the Internet facilitates if not ‘the development of unbounded citizenship’ (Cammaerts and Audenhove 2005, 183) then, at least, temporal transnational publics (Hermes 2006, 306). Lull, for example, claims that the Internet communication among people of different cultural backgrounds can lead to global ‘consciousness raising’ (2007, 162) and the increasing influence of transnational public opinions on international relations. It is also widely acknowledged that the Internet contributes to the emergence of a global civil society because it provides social movements with quick mega-mobilisation, effective coordination across borders, and high efficiency without

substantial financial investments (Scott and Street 2001). Besides, politically active people enjoy the Internet because of its ability to represent ‘voices that are distanced from political power’ and to create opportunities for critical evaluation of global events (Touri 2009, 55).

Ironically, the very attributes that make the Internet attractive for proponents of the global civil society also attract those who are usually framed as anti-democratic forces: terrorists, religious fanatics, aggressive nationalists, and so forth. In the same fashion as the Internet helps to mobilise social movements, it also acts as a resource and weapon for opposing parties in ethnic, religious, or other conflicts (Karatzogianni 2009). But if Karatzogiani (2009) believes that cyberconflicts reflect real-life contradictions, other thinkers allow that the Internet communication may cause new tensions by itself. According to Gardner, for example, being introduced through the Internet to radically different ideas, images, or views on selves, some publics might feel disillusionment, indignation and alienation (2009, 16). This can lead to retreat or lashing out – outcomes that hardly contribute to democratic communication, either deliberative, which is reflexive and reasoned (Habermas 1996), or agonistic, which leaves more room for emotions and conflict (Mauffe 1999). Political theorists call this lack of reciprocal communication ‘non-deliberative’, ‘closed’, or ‘unreflexive’ discourse (Dahlberg 2007, 139). Reasons for the occurrence of such closed non-deliberative discourses lies in different life experiences of communicators and other cultural biases, such as ‘specific norms or tone, grammar, or diction’ (Young 2000, 39).

Le (2006) has presented a case study that illustrates how transnational communication can lead to the increase of animosity among global publics. Exploring how *Le Monde* and the *New York Times* portray Russia and how Russian newspapers react to negative French and American opinions on Russia, the author observes: ‘The manner in which Putin is criticised in Western media reinforces fears for Russian national identity and encourages ‘anti-Western’ discourses that are then denounced by Western media’ (2006, 166). Le concludes that the media discourses of the West and Russia set up vicious circles that heighten tension and mistrust.

There is, in sum, a growing understanding that the effects of new communication technologies on relations among people and cultures are much more ambiguous than many optimists cared to imagine. Unequal access to Internet resources, disproportional presence of English-speaking westerners in virtual public domains (DiMaggio et. al. 2001) – these and other circumstances lead not to the establishment of a global deliberative space but to fragmentation into alienated ‘islands’ of political communication (Galston, 2003), which may further contribute to the spiraling of intolerance toward others.

Anti-Americanism as a Case of Non-Reflective Discourse

Lull claims that global anti-Americanism may serve as the best example of how globalised communication does not necessarily lead to greater tolerance and understanding (2007, 141). Other observers agree. Ceares, for example, claims that ‘Anti-Americanism has become the only ideology in the world that has a truly global reach’ (2004, 45). ‘In Europe, anti-Americanism seems to be one of the few public philosophies able to unite large sectors of the left, the right, and the Catholic Church’, maintains Fabbrini (2008, 2). ‘America has become a code word for all the various ills of the world’, echoes O’Connor (2006, 19). Joffe (2005)

argues that, in order to count as anti-Americanism, otherwise fair criticism must satisfy the following conditions: stereotyping (that is statements of the type: ‘this is what they are all like’); denigration (the ascription of moral or cultural inferiority to the target group); ascription of omnipotence (e.g., ‘they control the media, the economy, the world’); accusation of conspiracy (‘this is what they want to do to us – sully racial purity or destroy our traditional and better ways’); and obsession (the compulsive recurrence of ideas and images to the exclusion of others) (Joffe 2005).

If we apply Joffe’s criteria of anti-Americanism to Internet transnational public spheres, the following questions arise: How do the conditions of anti-Americanism described by Joffe (2005) appear in the course of transnational communication? What are the mechanisms of anti-Americanism formation if we admit that stereotyping, denigration, omnipotence, conspiracy and obsessions are not necessarily pre-existing and fixed conditions – in other words, if we examine the idea that global communication itself can cause rejection and further animosity? What factors can contribute to the spiraling of intolerance or retreat from communication? To examine these questions, this article investigates the case of the outburst of anti-Americanism in Russia during the Russia-Georgia crisis of 2008. The crisis broke out on 8 August 2008, after Georgia attacked South Ossetia, a self-proclaimed republic striving for independence (Nygren 2008). The same day, Russian troops were deployed first in South Ossetia, and then into undisputed territories of the Georgian state. On 13 August, Russia and Georgia agreed on a cease-fire. As Gorbachov (2008) claimed, a part of the responsibility for the crisis Russian people assigned to the USA. In September 2008, 65 percent of Russians reported their attitude to the USA as negative (Russian Public Opinion Research Center 2008).

Anti-Americanism in Russia

The roots of anti-Americanism in Russia can be traced back to the 1940s, when Stalin, realising that the USA had become the main competitor of the USSR, aimed Soviet propaganda to target ‘Uncle Sam’ (Shirayev and Zubok 2000, 11). However, because the relationships between the two countries were characterised not only by crises, but also by an anti-fascist alliance and détente, Soviet views on the USA were mixed. The ambivalence of roles ascribed to the USA – from the partner of the anti-Hitler coalition to the target in a potential nuclear war – was only exacerbated by the fact that Soviet propaganda, based on Lenin’s idea of the world proletarian revolution, had difficulties portraying working people of the USA as enemies (Shirayev and Zubok 2000, 14). As a result, the image of the USA in the eyes of the Soviet people became inconsistent, contradictory, and, ultimately, not so negative. This partly explains why in 1991-1993, the years following the collapse of the USSR, 70 percent of Russian people perceived the USA as very friendly (Connor 2004, 224). The situation looked radically different, however, only two decades afterwards.

Shirayev and Zubok (2000) explain why anti-Americanism grew in post-Soviet Russia. After the disintegration of the USSR, many Russian people dreamed of freedom, market abundance and new opportunities – everything that, in their view, the USA embodied. Admiration for the USA was so great that ‘any American professor of economics... could easily enter the most top-level offices in Russian officialdom’ (Shirayev and Zubok 2001, 37). Those

American pundits, possessing no understanding of the realities of post-Soviet Russia, only contributed to its economic collapse (Shirayev and Zubok 2001, 145). They were further disillusioned when the USA moved NATO to Russia's borders (Gorbachev 2008). Events in Kosovo, Serbia and Iraq just exacerbated Russia's disenchantment with the USA (Connor 2004).

However, as various polls show, Russians' attitudes towards the USA are not static and unchanging, but significantly influenced by immediate political events. In the aftermath of 9/11, for example, moved by the tragedy, more than one-third of Russians perceived the USA positively (Shirayev and Makhovskaya 2007). The image of the USA also improved after President Obama announced that his administration would reconsider the anti-missile system in Europe (Russian Public Opinion Research Center 2009). This mutability in the anti-American mood in Russia provides a good opportunity for a nuanced research on different factors that can lead to misunderstanding, retreat, or animosity in the course of communication between Russian and American counterparts.

Methodology

First, this study analysed the content of the *Washington Post* (*WP*) editorials and opinion pieces on the Russia-Georgia military conflict that, after being published in the newspaper, were posted for discussion at the *Foreign Media* (*FM*) Russian site (www.inosmi.ru) – an Internet forum that specialised in translation of media articles from all over the world and invited its users to discuss them (*FM* is an Internet project of *RiaNovosti*, a state-operated news agency; *WP* is a corporate newspaper owned by the *Washington Post Company*). Second, the study analysed the comments on the *WP* articles made by the Russian users of the *FM* forum. Third, in order to look at the differences in the reactions to the same articles between 'Russian' and 'American' readers, the article analyses the comments of American users of the *WP* forum, as well. Although the users of the *Foreign Media* and *Washington Post* may be people of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, in what follows the author will use terms 'Russians' (or 'Russian users') to denote Russian-speaking commentators of the *Foreign Media* site and 'Americans' (or 'American users') to denote English-speaking commentators of the *Washington Post* site.

The articles of the *WP* were chosen for this analysis because, as will be shown in *Anti-Americanism Meets Anti-Russianism* section of this paper, Russian users of *FM* tried to establish contacts with American readers of the *WP* by posting their comments at the *WP* site. These attempts are the prime focus of this research. All the comments posted on *FM* site were made in Russian; they were translated into English by the author of this article. All comments – both American and Russian – posted on *WP* site were made in English. The original spelling and punctuation of these postings were retained without changes, as they appeared originally.

Only those *WP* articles that were posted in *FM* during the conflict – from August 8 until August 13 – were included in the analysis. This narrow timeframe highlights the most immediate reactions of Russians to *WP* articles and allows for deep interpretive investigation which is the focus of this article. The research is based on the analysis of units, i.e. articles and comments. No sampling of articles or comments was employed as all of them were in-

cluded in the analysis. Since this research was conducted in spring 2010, the article investigates all comments on the articles that were posted both during the war and after it.

To analyse the content of articles and postings, I used qualitative framing analysis to identify media frames which are central organising ideas or story lines that provide meaning for events (Gamson and Modigliani 1987). This line of inquiry follows Entman's (2004) idea of cultural congruence, according to which a news frame is easily adopted by members of a society if it resonates with the wider culture of a given political environment. According to Entman, culturally congruent frames would cause similar responses by power elites and publics, reducing the chances for conflicts (Entman 2004). The more culturally ambiguous a frame is, the more resistance to it we might expect (Entman 2004). Touri (2009) claims Internet postings can challenge dominant frames by giving access to dissenting voices 'that diverge from culturally dissonant beliefs' (Touri 2009, 55). However, according to Entman (2004), these 'dissenting voices' can cause rejection.

Therefore, this analysis tries to identify whether the frames employed by the *WP* writers are congruent with views on the conflict of American and Russian readers and whether this incongruence – if identified – leads to conflicts or retreats.

The Four Frames of Presenting the Russia-Georgia Crisis

Eight editorials and opinion pieces of the *WP* related to the Russia-Georgia Crisis appeared at the *FM* site from 8 till 13 August 2008. American readers posted 2,105 comments on these articles at the *WP* site; Russian readers made 763 comments on the same *WP* stories at the *FM* site. Table 1 represents the distribution of comments on the articles across the *WP* and *FM* web sites.

Table 1. Distribution of Comments across *WP* and *FM* Sites

Title of Article	N of Comments at <i>WP</i>	N of Comments at <i>FM</i>
'Russia's Dare' (Washington Post 2008a)	75	65
'Black Sea Watershed' (Asmus and Holbrooke 2008)	143	123
'Putin Makes His Move' (Kagan 2008)	392	176
'Stopping Russia' (Washington Post 2008e)	266	154
'The Invasion Continues' (Washing- ton Post 2008f)	123	135
'Brutality to Make a Point' (Cohen 2008)	194	84
'Another Hard Landing for Russia?' (Rumer 2008)	103	18
'Russia's Strike Shows the Power of the Pipeline' (Pearlstein 2008)	46	8
TOTAL	1342	763

As the framing analysis of the articles and comments has revealed, there were four dominant frames or story lines employed by the authors of the articles and their commentators. One out of the four frames – 'Russia's Ambitions' – presented the Russia-Georgia crisis as Russia's attempt to restore its influence over the members of the former USSR. As Table 2 shows, 100 percent of the *WP* stories contain this view on events, while only 15.7 percent of Americans and 3.6 percent of Russians refer to it.

Another frame – 'USA Mistakes' – focused not on the conflict itself but on the critical assessment of the USA's reaction to it. The authors of such postings claim that the USA had no moral right to criticise Russian policy toward Georgia because it pursued similar policies toward Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Vietnam, and so forth. Another version of this frame states that the USA should not be involved in foreign conflicts, no matter whether for egoistic or altruistic reasons. As Table 2 shows, this frame is the most popular among American read-

ers of the *WP* (58.3% of their postings). Russians referred to it in 20.5 percent of their comments.

Table 2. Employment of Frames across Articles and Comments

#	Frames	<i>WP</i> Articles	Comments at <i>WP</i>	Comments at <i>FM</i>
1	'Russia's Ambitions'	100.0%	15.7%	3.6%
2	'USA Mistakes'	0.0%	58.3%	20.5%
3	'Media Bias'	0.0%	16.4%	21.7%
4	'Georgian Attack'	0.0%	9.6%	54.2%
	TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The third frame, that of 'Media Bias', was popular among both Americans (16.4% of their postings) and Russians (21.7%). Again, this story line focuses not on the conflict itself but on how the *WP* presents it. The commentators using this frame claim that the *WP* presented one-sided views on the events, which – supposedly - reflected the hawkish policies of the Bush Administration.

The most popular story line among Russians (54.2% of their postings) was the frame of 'Georgian Attack', which assigned responsibility for the conflict to Georgia and its president Saakashvili. The authors presenting this view claimed that Georgia attacked the sleeping Tskhinvali trying to gain control over Russia-leaning South Ossetia. As a result, thousands of peaceful citizens were killed, wounded, or left without a roof over their heads. According to this version of events, Russia defended Ossetians against Georgian genocide.

The Interaction of Frames in the Transnational Discourse

The first *WP* editorial on the crisis appeared in *FM* on 11 August 2008. Its title was 'Russia's Dare', and it accused Putin's regime of curbing freedom of speech in Russia, manipulating oil and gas supplies, imposing trade blockades, unleashing cyber-attacks and assassinating enemies abroad. According to the editorial, Russia had been perpetrating all these misdeeds in order 'to serve its imperial ambitions' (Editorial 2008a).

The article produced a stormy reaction at *FM*. Its users called the *WP* a 'Fuckington Post' (vedeney 2008), 'Fasciston propaganda leaflet' (amfetiron 2008) and 'Fascist Pravda' (Aijy 2008a). This indignation was caused by the fact that the *WP* editorial blamed Russia's aggressiveness, totally ignoring the Georgian attack on the sleeping Tskhinvali. As one of *FM* users put it, 'Damn, I could expect everything but this. They just followed Hebbels: vast masses would easier believe a big lie than a small one' (RaNd0m 2008). Other comments

were even harsher: ‘They would bleat about “mean” and “terrible” Russia, they would whimper and whine about it, but they would not utter a word about old people and children annihilated by Georgian chasteners. What a filthy nation of beasts!’ (PtaXXXa 2008). The majority of postings at *FM*, as Table 1 shows, shared this position. Even the authors of the posts who admitted that not everything in the article was untrue – ‘In principle, they are right about Vova [Putin]. The chap is censoring too much. No elections of regional heads, no free press. I am frightened to foresee where it might lead’ – agreed that the USA media misinformed their publics: ‘But on the other hand, in terms of the ability to distort truth, ‘VVP Corporation’ [VVP = Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin] is an infant compared to CNN and other ‘heralds of freedom’. They should rather shut up now’ (Black Star 2008).

At some point, the discussion of American duplicity was interrupted by the call for action: ‘The information war is being waged against Russia! Let’s defend our Motherland! Aim and fire at the enemies!’ (soldier 2008). In Russian, the last two phrases were well-recognised clichés from Russian history, specifically from the discourse about the Great Patriotic War against fascist Germany. At the point of the Russia-Georgia war, this anti-fascist slogan was triggered out of the collective memory to mobilise *FM* users against anti-Russia views presented in the foreign press. Some of them indeed went ‘fighting against enemies’ on the Internet forum of the *WP*. Here is one of their postings:

Dear friends! We are watching the Great Lie! The reality is that Saakashvili FIRST bombed Tskhinvali on the Day of the Olympic Games! Georgian soldiers SHOT Russian peacemaking troops, peaceful population FIRST and only AFTER this Russian troops came to prevent further destruction... (Aijy 2008c).

The aim of other similar postings from Russia at the *WP* site was the same – to inform Americans of what was perceived as misinformation and lies about the crisis. Here are some examples: ‘Such a terrible lie! At the night from Thursday to Friday Georgian troops began operation by shelling peacekeepers and sleeping city Tzkhinvali from Multiple Rocket Launcher System “Grad”’ (Russiancamel 2008); or ‘Hey, Robert17, have you heard about Grad missiles? An armored vehicle with several dozens of rockets... Georgians were firing these rockets all night against a town of 30000 residents’ (molokoplus 2008).

Postings by Russians on *washingtonpost.com* could be easily recognised by their nicknames that contained Russian words or names: ‘Rogozina’, ‘Luba’, ‘Molokoplus’, or ‘Russian flash-mob☺’. Some of them introduced themselves as Russians and apologised for their ‘bad English’ (luba 2008). Compared to their American counterparts, Russian postings were marked with a straightforward anti-Georgian tone and a highly emotional style. Many Americans also criticised the *WP*, but in a much more tempered manner. In most cases they concentrated not on the Georgian ‘genocide’, but on the USA’s lack of moral right to criticise Russia’s actions. Here are some examples: ‘W. has a myopia characteristic of a troglodyte if he really thinks he has the moral credibility to compel anyone to do anything after his glory-seeking Iraq adventure’ (doctort 2008); or ‘Did you think the world didn’t know that Saakashvili is the Bush administration’s lackey, or that we built a military base right on the Russian border?’ (auntmo9990 2008).

Although many Americans were critical of USA foreign policy and its media coverage, they did not share the perception of their Russian counterparts “ that it was Georgia that started the massacre. Rather, they tended to see Russian behavior as equivalent to USA behavior towards Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia, and other countries. They also avoided arguing with their Russian ‘guests’, who were noticeably frustrated about this disengagement. As one of *FM* users put it, ‘We could hardly expect anything else from the *Fasciston Pravda*. I’ve put my comment there but they are not rushing to respond. It seems they are not concerned with the deaths of peaceful victims... Scum’ (Aijy 2008b).

To some extent, this posting reflected the reality: Table 1 shows, the majority of the comments at the *WP* were concerned not with the victims of the crisis but with USA geopolitical or domestic interests. The following examples illustrate this observation: ‘Instead of wasting our military in countries that will never like us how about we help the ones that do like the USA’ (rverbist 2008); or ‘We should not get involved. It’s time our money is spent building up America, not going bankrupt on foreign aid for every little country that cries “more money, more money”’ (santafe2 2008).

However, despite the general lack of interest in the fate of the victims among the *WP* users, the content of the overwhelming majority of comments differed radically from that of the article itself. The distinctive characteristic of the editorial was its total support of USA foreign policy, whereas the majority of the commentators criticised it. It was this critique that at some point seemed to create a ground for a dialogue between the American and the Russian readers. It became evident from the following posting at *FM*: ‘95% of the comments at the Washington Post discussion site are of critical character. So, there are some Americans with brains. Why are they not admitted to power??’ (Aijy 2008b).

This potential was not realised, however. The unwillingness of the Americans to dispute with their transoceanic ‘guests’ led to the separation of their discourses. This happened during the discussion of the second article from the *WP* – ‘Black Sea Watershed’, which claimed that ‘Georgia was responding to repeated provocative attacks by South Ossetian separatists controlled and funded by Moscow’. ‘Whatever mistakes Tbilisi has made’, insisted the authors, ‘they cannot justify Russia’s actions’ (Asmus and Holbrooke 2008).

At that point, Russians abandoned massive sallies into the ‘enemy’s camp’ and concentrated on their internal conversations. Within the *FM* site, they could afford to argue with each other without a necessity of being polite. Here is an example of such a ‘dialogue’:

Unfortunately, as I see now, the Caucasian events provoke in you a hurrah-patriotism mood and desire to shoot. Do you really think it is wise? Saakashvili is a freak and psychopath, but Putin and Medvedev are not innocent peacekeepers saving Ossetians from Georgians either (rudi74 2008).

Oh, really? So who is saving Ossetians from Georgians? Holbrook, NATO, EU, UN?? If your brain got out of order, turn on at least your tailbone. Or several thousands of killed Ossetians mean nothing to you? (Vlad_I_Mir 2008)

Ok, your brain is perfect. Especially, when you are raving about Great Russia. Saakashvili is a marionette, it is clear. But it was Russian politics that provoked this loony to use force... (rudi74 2008)

Why Great Russia? Just Russia. There is such a country... Putin and Medvedev are not peacekeepers? Fine. But they are saving Russia (Vlad_I_Mir 2008).

The majority of postings, however, concentrated not on internal Russian disagreements but on the authors of the article itself. ‘Russophobes Asmus and Holbrook can lie as much as they want in the hebbelsian *Washington Post*, trying to justify Washington’s crimes. Americans may buy it, but not us. We, people of Russia, know for sure who is the real killer of 2000 Ossetians and 100 Russian soldiers’, claimed angrily one commentator (Nabludatell 2008). ‘I laughed reading it’, gloatingly confessed another one, ‘American strategists remind me now of two morons who shit their pants and ask perplexedly: How could it happen???’ (K155 2008). The third exclaimed with pathos: ‘Is this the same Holbrook who came to agreement with Karadzich and then scolded him? The hypocrisy of these people startles. But, sooner or later, they will appear before God. Hope the judgment will be fair’ (nboy 2008).

The topic of their country’s hypocrisy in foreign affairs was also popular among the American commentators. However, it was not as emotional and did not contain the same pathos, ominous condemnations and calls for God’s judgment. Americans preferred to construct their messages not in terms of good and evil (as did their Russian counterparts), but instead addressed the issue as a matter of geopolitics and a country’s right to intervene. ‘Right and wrong don't matter. Russia has as much right to intervene in Georgia as we did in Panama, Haiti etc.’, wrote one commentator (llaurence9 2008); another stated: ‘The USA bends over when faced with threat from the commie KGB Putin. The U.S. weakness before the Russians is on display to the world. This is a total humiliation for the Americans’ (Mickey2 2008). Although these comments represent different views on the conflict and its outcomes, they are quite similar in their main message: this war is not about good and evil, or villains and victims. This story is about hegemony, power and global respect for the strongest. Such a framework naturally entails the following outcome: it really does not matter who starts the war and how many innocent victims are killed. They are too small against the background of a big geopolitical struggle.

This idea provided the basis for another *WP* article, ‘Putin Makes His Move’ (Kagan 2008). Its main argument was as follows: ‘The details of who did what to precipitate Russia’s war against Georgia are not very important’ because ‘it is a war that Moscow has been attempting to provoke for some time’ (Kagan 2008). This claim caused an immediate reaction from the Russian-speaking camp. ‘The inability to be feel compassion is a diagnosis for all Anglo-Saxons’, stated one of the *FM* users, ‘We cannot change them. But, at least, we should be satisfied with one thing: gritting their teeth, they nevertheless acknowledge now that Russia has its own interests. And they will have to abide by them’ (Onz 2008).

Some American readers of the *WP* were also indignant at the author’s claim about the unimportance of the question ‘who started the war’. But, as some of the postings have shown, because of the unclear coverage of the conflict, Americans just could not decide who was its real victim:

Did Russia ‘provoke’ Georgia into driving across the border of South Ossetia on the night of August 7, 2008? Was Russia supporting a breakaway region of Georgia on the 8? It depends which side of the mirror you are looking through. Frankly, I felt really uncom-

fortable when President Bush called Russia's tactics brutal. No question, yet how would he define what's happened in Iraq so far? (Kellyyip1 2008).

Again and again, the critical comments on the articles by Americans referred back to the war in Iraq, the bombing of Serbia, American extensive support of Israel and other controversial issues of USA foreign policy, as if the commentators looked for a suitable frame for understanding the Caucasian conflict. Here are some examples: 'Putin does not like the EU and U.S. meddling in his backyard, much like President Monroe did not want strangers playing their fantasies in the Americas' (arami964 2008) or 'The stupidity and absurdity of the text will however be evident, when we change some names in it. How about Taiwan for South-Ossetia and China-Mainland for Georgia?' (xialing 2008).

Against the background of such abundant criticisms of USA foreign policy, which constituted the majority of the *WP* Internet postings, the newspaper's persistence in publishing only lop-sided anti-Russian commentaries was really striking. Not one of the subsequent commentaries related to the crisis published in the newspaper reflected the critical stance of its readers. The newspaper's next editorial, 'Stopping Russia' (Editorial 2008b) claimed that Russia just could not tolerate Georgia's independence); 'The Invasion Continues' (Editorial 2008c) called Russia 'a nation bent on conquest'; 'Brutality to Make a Point' (Cohen 2008) contended that 'Russian invasion of Georgia is a breath of dank air from the rancid past'; 'Another Hard Landing for Russia?' (Rumer 2008) maintained that Russia 'punished' the Georgians 'for their sins, the greatest of which is forgetting in whose back yard they live'; and 'Russia's Strike Shows the Power of the Pipeline' (Pearlstein 2008) alleged that 'Vladimir Putin thinks he has looked into the soul of the West and discovered that we need him more than he needs us. It's time to convince him otherwise'.

The reaction of Russian-speaking readers to these articles was predictable. 'They think not of the killed and the crippled but of their fat buns', reacted one of them to Pearlstein's deductions (Foxbet 2008). 'Normal, healthy delirium of a head stuffed with popcorn', replied his interlocutor (seamyr 2008). 'Vladimir Putin looked into the soul of the West and discovered there was nothing there but shit', sarcastically asserted another discussant (Vist 2008).

There is an interesting tendency in discussions of the *WP* articles on the *FM* site. The more the Washington newspaper talked about Russian aggressiveness, the less Russians wanted to discuss it. If in the beginning the Russians were eager to enlighten the Americans about disinformation spread by their media, later they lost interest in this venture, coming to the conclusion that it was in vain. People confessed, 'I read the first sentence and could not make it further' (Danion 2008). Rather, the Russian-speaking readers preferred discussing articles from European newspapers. Russians welcomed, for example, the attempts to understand their viewpoints by Almond in *The Guardian* (2008), who stated, 'Today in breakaway states such as South Ossetia or Abkhazia, Russian troops are popular... The Russians are seen as protectors against a repeat of ethnic cleansing by Georgians', or by Jenkins (2008), who maintained, in the same newspaper, that 'This week's operation in Georgia has displayed the failure of the west's policy of belligerence towards Vladimir Putin's Russia. The policy was meant to weaken Russia, and has strengthened it'. Such sympathies were obviously missing from *WP* editorials and opinions on the crisis. As Table 1 shows, their views on the

event were incommensurable with the attitudes of the vast majority of the users of the *FM* site.

Anti-Americanism Meets Anti-Russianism

As the preceding analysis has shown, the views on the crisis among the American writers and the American and the Russian readers did not coincide. While the *WP* writers framed the conflict stressing Russia's 'aggressiveness' and 'imperial ambitions', their American readers tended to focus on the duplicity of USA policies and the *WP* itself. The Russians welcomed the views of the American readers on the USA politics and media; however, their primary concern was Georgian 'nationalism' and 'politics of genocide' – a perspective that was popular among neither the American writers nor their American readers.

As my analysis has also shown, the irritation of the Russians and their offensive rhetoric toward the USA were caused by two major factors: 1) their inability to accept the way the *WP* framed the crisis; 2) their frustration about American readers who did not want to communicate with their counterparts from Russia - 'We could hardly expect anything else from the *Fasciston Pravda*. I've put my comment there but they are not rushing to respond. It seems they are not concerned with the deaths of peaceful victims... Scum' (*Aijy 2008a*). The first finding supports the idea of Entman (2004) that specific frames can cause rejection if they are incongruent with the political culture of the frames' consumers. Thus, for the Russians, who sincerely sympathised with the people of Tskhinvali, the statement of the *WP* that 'Putin cares no more about a few thousand South Ossetians than he does about Kosovo's Serbs' read like mockery, which caused the conviction that 'inability to be compassionate is a diagnosis for all Anglo-Saxons' (Foreign Media 2008c). Interestingly, *FM* users first distinguished between the authors of the articles and their critically minded American readers. Only after the Americans had refused to participate in reciprocal communication, did Russians equate them to the 'hebbelsian' USA establishment.

The Americans' avoidance of direct communication with the Russians became a demonstration of non-deliberative, closed, and non-reflexive discourse, which, according to Dahlberg, is typical of non-progressive counter-hegemonic groups such as Aryan Nations (2007, 138). The question arises, then, why well-educated, democratically minded, and critically thinking readers of the *WP* refused to communicate with their Russian interlocutors? One possible answer is that the Russians' dominant frame, which depicted Russia as a noble defender of Ossetians, was too incongruent with Americans' familiar image of Russia as a centuries-old aggressor or Americans' realistic conception of international relations, leaving no space for 'good versus evil' sentiments. According to Entman (2004), it is this incongruence of frames that may cause rejection. But if the Russians displayed their rejection by an aggressive rhetoric, the Americans – because of different cultural norms (of either American society in general or readers of the *WP* in particular) – demonstrated their disapproval by calmly ignoring the Russians.

Another possible way of looking at the problem follows Young's argument that 'culturally specific norms or tone, grammar, or diction' (2000, 39) can interfere with deliberative inter-cultural communication. As she puts it, the speech culture of white, middle-class people 'tends to be more controlled, without significant gesture and expression or emotion' (Young

2000, 39). Since the language of the Russians was much more emotional than that of their American counterparts, the majority of whom are white middle-class people, indeed (Washington Post Digital Ad Center 2010) this could also have contributed to miscommunication.

Whatever the reasons for the Americans' retreat were, it was this inability to establish a contact and dispute the *WP*'s dominant frame that led to an anti-USA outbursts in the *FM* public sphere. According to Joffe (2005), this can be clearly classified as an example of anti-Americanism. Stereotyping, denigrations and conspiracy constructions were abundant in the Russian discourse:

Stereotyping: 'What a filthy nation of beasts!' (PtaXXXa 2008) or 'Inability to be compassionate is a diagnosis for all Anglo-Saxons' (Onz 2008).

Denigration: 'There are some Americans with brains. Why they are not admitted to power??' (Aijy 2008b) or 'American strategists remind me now of two morons who shit their pants' (Aijy 2008b).

Conspiracy: 'The information war is being waged against Russia!' (soldier 2008) or 'Putin and Medvedev... are saving Russia' (Vlad_I_Mir 2008).

But, even while classifying Russians' emotional reactions to *WP* publications as 'anti-American', we should not forget exactly what caused them – a total disregard by the *WP* writers of victims among the Ossetians and the immediate classification of Russia's behavior as 'revanchist', 'nationalist', or 'imperial'. *WP*'s framing of the Russia-Georgia conflict can in itself be seen as an example of uncritical and inflexible prejudice. Indeed, if we substitute 'the USA' for 'Russia', Joffe's (2005) classification of anti-Americanism would suit perfectly to describe the extent to which the anti-Russia rhetoric filled the *WP* pages:

Omnipotence: 'Many had theorised that a nation willing, in the service of imperial ambition, to manipulate oil and gas supplies, impose trade blockades, unleash cyber-attacks, and sponsor or at least tolerate assassinations of enemies abroad might not hesitate to wield outright military force' (Editorial 2008a).

Conspiracy: 'If Saakashvili had not fallen into Putin's trap this time, something else would have eventually sparked the conflict' (Kagan 2008).

Stereotyping: 'Russia, as my grandmother could have told George W. Bush, always fights dirty' (Cohen 2008).

Denigration: 'Putin... likes the West. But he ought to be reminded that the West no longer likes him' (Cohen 2008).

If we apply Joffe's description of anti-Americanism to the USA discourse about Russia, we will see that there is little difference in prejudices. What really differs is the style and the use of linguistic means: whereas the Russians do not restrict themselves in employing flamingly harsh language, their American counterparts (both writers and readers) appear polite, restrained, and rationally deliberating. However, the substance of what is written by the established USA contributors and the anonymous Russian Internet users is very similar: the Russians allow themselves to stereotype, denigrate, and vilify Americans no less than the Americans stereotype, denigrate, and vilify Russians.

The observations made in this study support the statements of previous researchers that anti-Americanism in Russia often emerges as a reaction to outside stimuli. Unlike previous studies, however, this analysis focused not on how public opinion can fluctuate in accordance with different international events, but on how USA media discourse on Russia can influence Russians' way of talking about the USA. This research gives evidence that anti-USA sentiments may intensify among Russians when USA commentators stereotype and denigrate Russia, or when they discuss Russia's concerns without taking into consideration what Russian people think of them.

Although shedding some light on why non-reflexive communication in global public spheres might occur, this study has its limitations. First, there is no evidence of whether the contents of the comments analysed here were censored by moderators. Second, it is not clear to what extent possible demographic differences between the American and the Russian users of different Internet sites (educational, class and occupational background) can contribute to different modes of linguistic expressions and thus to the misunderstanding themselves. Further research is therefore required to broaden our understanding of why non-reflexive or closed discourse can occur among global publics who have a potential to communicate reflexively.

Conclusion

Traditional media in the global environment of intensified information flows can also cause the spiral of animosity among alienated publics (Le 2006). However, it is difficult to follow exactly how negative public opinions are formed, what factors contribute to their formation, and to what extent media products by themselves can lead to aggressive alienation. Internet discussions, on the other hand, make the shaping of public claims visible. By providing virtual spaces where otherwise diffused or unspoken reactions of media users can be concentrated, the Internet facilitates exchange of arguments and viewpoints. Under specific circumstances (such as wars, terrorist attacks, or other conflicts), this concentration of public opinion can lead to quick shaping of anti-other discourses. The ease with which anonymous strangers post their remarks at Internet forums – often without censorial or self-censorial restrictions – can not only intensify already existing hostilities and prejudices, but even create new ones (Gardner 2009).

The intensification of global communication flows therefore does not necessarily lead to the formation of democratic public spheres, characterised by inclusive discussions and respectful attention to the arguments of others (as many theorists have envisioned). As my analysis of online discussions demonstrated, although the Russians' comments were technically included in the discourse, de facto they were disregarded by the Americans, who simply left them without answers. The Russian-American encounter on the *WP* forum did not become a dialogue. For the Russian commentators, it triggered a long-simmering anti-American animosity. The majority of American commentators, on the other hand, did not express negative attitudes towards the Russians, despite the prejudices displayed by the *WP* authors. While the Russian commentators wrote with pathos and passion, their American counterparts remained calm and almost indifferent. It is, however, unclear whether their attitude would have remained neutral had they visited the *FM* site and read the blatantly offensive Russian postings

about the USA and Americans there. Ironically, the Russians' knowledge of English and their access to American media seems to have served as an additional factor in fueling anti-American emotions. On the contrary, the Americans' lack of familiarity with the content of Russian offensive postings on *FM* discouraged the spiralling of anti-Russian sentiments.

To sum up, this article contributes to the arguments of those scholars who think that new technologies by themselves cannot lead to any progress in international relations and understanding among different cultures. By making the world closer, they may exacerbate the existing contradictions or even create new ones. What is more, my discussion demonstrates that neither access to new communication technologies nor the knowledge of English – the dominant language of the Internet – lead automatically to the inclusion of cultural outsiders into Internet discourses and the formation of global public spheres. For the effective inclusion of others into global discourses and the establishment of an open global discursive universe, other factors are required, such as a willingness to listen to the arguments of others and the desire to understand them.

Although this study is narrowly focused and interpretive, the questions raised here are of global scale. The ability to hear others – from different countries, linguistic cultures and political views – is tremendously important for achieving international peace and solving common human problems: poverty, illnesses, terrorism, and so forth. If we still believe in our ability to respond to these challenges, we need to learn how to overcome prejudices and treat each other with respect. One step to this is to stop studying anti-Americanism as only a denigration of the USA by other parties. Rather, it should be investigated as a complex multi-sided phenomenon of global miscommunication, where mutual stereotyping and denigration of various parties take place.

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