

## Of Special Interest

The Centre for Internet & Society in collaboration with HIVOS and Rising Voices are organising the third and final International workshop titled **'From Face to Interface'**.

The regional focus of the workshop is on Latin America and The Caribbean and it will be held in Chile from the 8th to the 10th of February 2011

More about the workshop here:

<http://bit.ly/eCu2it>



*A note from our Research Director,*

## Nishant Shah



When the Digital Natives with a Cause? team first asked me to contribute to this first of the DN newsletters, they wanted me to write a poem. However, in all my good faith, I know it, that I am not a poet, and how difficult it is to write a poem without actually inflicting pain on the people who have to read it, and so I resisted from penning verse, for the better, or for the worse.

Instead, I decided to welcome you all to this newsletter with a poem that somebody else wrote, for somebody else. It is called "Waka Waka Bang Splat" (No, it does not feature Shakira!) and is a poem that is not in a human readable language. It is not intended for humans to intuitively read it. It does not have recognisable meanings and does not hold profound truths in its structure. All it is, is a series of sounds, created out of punctuation marks, to remind us that the world we live in, is not only about us. Especially for Digital (alter)natives, we talk, as much to machines (with whom we develop intimate relationships) as we do to/people (who are generally more difficult to trust).

If a Digital Native love technologies, think of them as extensions of their selves, and invest in their relationships (with human or non-human actors) through digital technologies, it is a pity that Hallmark never made an 'I love you cellphone' or the 'Best Laptop in the World' cards. However, this New Year's Eve, when the ball drops and you get together with people you love (and hopefully, who love you back), go ahead, and read out this poem, written especially for your gadgets. (I have included the Human Readable version to let you know how to read it. The original poem does not have the words; just the symbols):

```
< > ! * ' ' #
Waka waka bang splat tick tick hash,

^ " ` $ $ -
Caret quote back-tick dollar dollar dash,

! * = @ $ _ _
Bang splat equal at dollar under-score,

% * < > ~ # 4
Percent splat waka waka tilde number four,

& [ ] . . /
Ampersand bracket bracket dot dot slash,

| { , , SYSTEM HALTED
Vertical-bar curly-bracket comma comma CRASH.
```

Fred Bremmer and Steve Kroese

With these words of non-wisdom, I wish you all, a very happy 2011 from the entire Digital Natives with a Cause? team, now scattered across 4 continents (Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America) and growing.

Warmly,

Nishant Shah, Director – Research, Centre for Internet and Society

# Babel Fish Deconstructs Mipmip: A Nonsense Verse in Prose



Mipmip contains the universe. Mipmip could even be made up of one tiny atom. But is synecdoche a horror we want to escape? Babel Fish gives us juxtaposition

- Nilofar Ansher

This is a story of the frogs growing up in the fictitious world of author Terry Pratchett's book, *Wings*. Growing up hunting insects among the petals of the epiphytic bromeliad, laying eggs in the central pool of the petals, and growing up into tadpoles. "Eventually they die and sink down and join the compost at the base of the leaves, which, in fact, helps nourish the plant. And this has been the way things are for as far as the frogs can remember. And even if they remember anything more than that, it does not really count because the frog cannot say more than --mipmip.--"

"One such frog, in its quest for beetles, goes very close to the edge of the petals and then he stops and stares. Far away in the distance, it sees another flower, wedged in a fork in the trees. Another flower. Another universe. Another frog staring at it from the edge of the petals. --mipmip.-- says one of the frogs to the others and because that is about the only word that frogs have ever mastered in their lives, they are content. You cannot write epics with --mipmip.--, but if you both know what it stands for, it can contain the extraordinary power of containing the entire universe..."

I imagine a meeting between the tiny, training wheel-limbed frog from Terry Pratchett's *Wings* and the cyber-aquatic creature Babel Fish, who can only translate what is fed into it, but has nary a thought. What a contrasting world both of them come from. When so few words would do, no, just one in fact – "Mipmip", Babel Fish teases the frog to widen its vocab and go crazy with blah blahs. Blah blah, it says to the frog, is the new Mipmip.

Funny, how some of the most profound stuff written about synecdoche gets centred on an amphibian creature, and the most useful and clever device (supposedly) invented, the multilingual instalator (instant translator, anyone), actually sought inspiration from an aquatic being born in the imagined world of Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

And come to think of it, science fiction has ever come to our rescue. Most of us who call ourselves digital natives, do seem like fish and frogs who took to the cyber-waters instinctively. Quite a Simile. With the frog's discovery of a new universe and Babel's ability to articulate that sense of discovery, we are all boldly heading

where no fish or frog ever tread before – our explorations never cease after all, says T.S. Elliot.

Then, there's also the question of self-referentials and contexts. Did the frog made sense of the universe by just looking at it, or did it have to articulate that gaze by mipmiping? Where does awareness begin and appropriation end in the frog's world? And what of Babel; did meaning making happen at the time of appropriating the brain waves or during assimilation and output, when the product is ready to be labelled and identified as such.

Look, the frog has now discovered the other frog on other dewy flower, chasing beetles of its own. The sense of discovery is alien to it and the gasp it coughs also comes out as Mipmip. Babel fish tries to articulate the sense of wonder-surprise-fear-delight-anxiety-rush-excitement-hesitation that green legs undergoes. But a simple Mipmip suffices. It seems befitting.

And that's when I wonder: the frogs never suffer from overpowering déjà vous. Paucity in words means their experiences are articulated differently within. Tighter. Crammed with all the feelings that six little letters can manage. The multiversed cyberverses allows for reinventions and originality is stretched and reused infinitely. Avatars are not free from the cycles of Karma, but they are free from the burdens of tradition. While Babel Fish does thrive on the spermian possibilities of infinite codes, the quatrain lettered equation of p'i'm'p would do.



But wait, how do you define this universe? Did it come out of a tadpolean egg and crack up into several thousand frogs, all of them screaming Mipmip Mipmip Mipmip. Or is the cyber-verse really a Babel-inspired translation – a universe translated – from a language that already existed in some other Verse? The first sound came from us. And the cyberverses is a reflection of its mirrored reflection. And what an irony, we now wait for the original to catch up with its copy so that all rules are evened out.





By **Frank Odongkara**

## *The tweeting white- bearded man*

Some dreams are for the sane  
 My dreams are for the insane  
 Especially the one about the tweeting man  
 I got a gift that I wouldn't keep  
 Beautiful and antique but modern in build  
 Colorful and shiny as the deep sea  
 And yet I needed my glasses to see  
 My eyes have never had fault  
 See, my dreams are not for the sane  
 Especially the one about the tweeting white  
 bearded man  
 I sent a thousand gifts to my friends  
 It cost me bandwidth, not cents  
 In reply I received their smiles  
 In form of smileys  
 I never received so many gifts before  
 And never had to touch non of my gifts  
 before  
 I do not know some of the people I sent  
 gifts  
 What a world! God should desire to live  
 here  
 See, my dreams are not for the sane  
 Especially the one about the tweeting white  
 bearded Santa  
 I had cleared all doubts of his existence  
 Till I got mail from Mark Zuckerberg's  
 company  
 Santa had for me a package to accept or  
 reject  
 And now I willow in shame  
 For having doubted my childhood friend  
 All these years he looked for my socks  
 Lo! Now I have a Santa hat for this  
 Christmas,  
 But I shall never wear it.  
 In Mark's storeroom forever it shall last  
 I told you, my dreams are not for the sane

# A Mobile Network's Christmas Present

By **Khanyile Joseph**

A few weeks before Christmas, I knew that it was going to be different. I felt that in my blood. Even though overzealous children had started blowing firecrackers imported from China through South Africa, I knew there will be some missing details, some missing stroke to this year's Christmas picture here in Bulawayo.

However, an interesting conversation I eavesdropped in an Emergency Taxi (ET) on my way to work three days before Christmas provided me with the missing stroke.

A young teenage girl was telling her mother of developments among their relatives in South Africa.

"So when is Samson and all others coming for Xmas?" the mother had asked.

"Samson is not coming," the girl said in a quiet voice and seemed reluctant to continue. "Jabu and Siphos are still trying to apply for permits. Jabu didn't have a longer birth certificate to apply for a passport and only got into the list now that the South African government said those without any form of documents can be compiled into a list. Siphos is still waiting for his permit."

"But what about Samson? Why is he not coming?" the mother asked.

"He is in jail."

"In jail? In South Africa?"

"Yes," the girl looked sad. "He has been in jail for years now. Armed robbery."

The mother was quiet. The teenage girl was quiet too.

I was also quiet and thinking of what the girl had just said as if I was a legitimate participant of their conversation.

I was not concerned about Samson who is in prison. There are so many Zimbabweans who are guests in South African government's correctional colleges. I was thinking of the two brothers who were trying to get four-year study, work and living visas.

In what the girl had said, there lay my answer on why our brothers and sisters are not coming for Christmas this year, and complete the picture of the festive season in our part of the country.

There are thousands of young people who work in South Africa from Matabeleland and every year, they come back home to celebrate Christmas and the coming of the New Year.

This year they did not come and I had wondered why; then the girl gave me the answer: They were trying to regularise their stay in South Africa.

The fact that they were still in the process of getting permits to stay in South Africa for four

years meant that they could not come home and enjoy a normal Christmas celebration.

At the beginning of September, South African authorities announced that the country would begin deporting Zimbabweans on the last day of December 2010 and warned that all undocumented Zimbabweans that they have until that date to sort out their paperwork.

On 20 September 2010, South Africa started issuing 4-years free permits to Zimbabweans as a way of regularising their stay in the country and only holders of a valid Zimbabwean passport are eligible for the permit.

A moratorium on Zimbabwean deportations was announced in May last year, at the same time that the South African government announced it intended giving Zimbabweans a special dispensation permit, that would assist Zimbabweans in regularising their stay in South Africa.

However the mother had not been easily sold to the girl's stories like I had been. Maybe it is because the girl's world and mine were almost similar.

"How come you know all this? Are you not making up stories? When did they last call? People in SA rarely call these days," she said.

"I am always in touch with Siphos on facebook. It is cheaper that way," she said. "Facebook is something on the internet. I have internet on my cellular phone and we always talk."

Her mother was still puzzled. The ubiquity of technology and how it has shrunk the world at affordable rates such that I am in touch with friends and family in South Africa, the UK and the USA; as if they were in the next suburb here in Bulawayo.

Sometimes, I hardly know what is happening to my sister in a suburb across town, yet up to date with a cousin's progress at varsity and her love relationships in the USA. So, I just took for granted what the girl had said but never thought that to the mother it will sound like a folktale – some yarn that depends on the suspension of disbelief on the part of the listener.

The country's largest mobile network provider, Econet Wireless, introduced its 3G internet service at the beginning of September 2010 and, mostly teenagers have flocked for connection.

When I disembarked from the ET and walked past Meikles Department stores and saw a Father Christmas figure inside the shop, I knew that the Econet service had come on time as it connected thousands of people in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe with thousands of the brothers and sisters in economic exile and trapped by the necessity to regularise their stay across Limpopo.

# Word Around Town

**Albert** shares the importance of transparency in his timely post on the ongoing Wikileaks Saga here <http://bit.ly/f356fs>

**Simeon** touches upon the topic of Slacktivism here <http://bit.ly/hdxCLK> with Nilofar's joining in the discussion.

The Gender and Inequality discussion carries forth on Facebook and **Paidomoyo** leaves us looking forward to more on that with him in the New Year.

**James** emphasizes the need to promote a reading culture beyond classrooms. Think along his lines here <http://bit.ly/eu5hTQ>

## Behind the Stories: Digital Natives with a Cause(?) and TCW

I'm Cole, a Filipino working as a Travel Writer in Vientiane, Laos and I have a blog.

The recently-concluded Digital Natives with A Cause(?) Thinkathon in the Hague, Netherlands held last Dec 6-9 has been an amazing experience for someone like me who blogs as a hobby. It was amazing in a sense that 1) I got to meet and converse with people and personalities around the world who are really and I meant really intelligent with an understanding of everything digital and research-oriented so deep, I freaked out; 2) I was able to meet my Team Taipei (Talking Back Workshop held last Aug 16-18) friends; and 3) I got to see snow, at least remnants of it. Also,



the travels to other towns of the country made a very good material for my blog's first anniversary.

But you ask, how did I get involved with the project? How random can a travel blogger be part of a project studying the interests of Digital Natives in social change? What does being a Digital Native mean to me? It's also a question

from all my friends who are gawking at my status whenever I post that I'm going somewhere because of, or relating to, the Project Digital Natives. I guess it's time to bring my open book up a notch, I'll walk you through it.

<http://colewalks.com/2010/12/24/behind-the-stories-digital-natives-with-a-cause-and-tcw/>

## An interview with a six year old Digital Native



**M**y name is Henna, I am 6 years old and I go to Frank Anthony's Public school in Bangalore. I like to play Iwin games on the computer. I like the cooking games most and also with bright colours. I also have Nintendo game and there are sooooo many new games! I used to have a Nokia phone but since I lost it my mother wont give me a new one. She gives me coins to call from local phone booths now. Since some dirty pictures came on the internet, my mother doesnt let me use the Internet when

I'm alone. That's ok, I have a Nintendo and my downloaded games. No no I dont wish I was four years old again or even five. Yes those days my mama used to let me play soooo many games on the computer, but now every Sunday mama takes me for book reading with other kids which is fun too! Oh, my phone? It's ok, even my other school friends dont carry theirs to school so I dont miss it. Haha! This is the first time I've had an interview and over the phone but that's not enough to make me want one. Happy new Year to you too!

# LOL

## The Past and Present of Social Networking Mapped

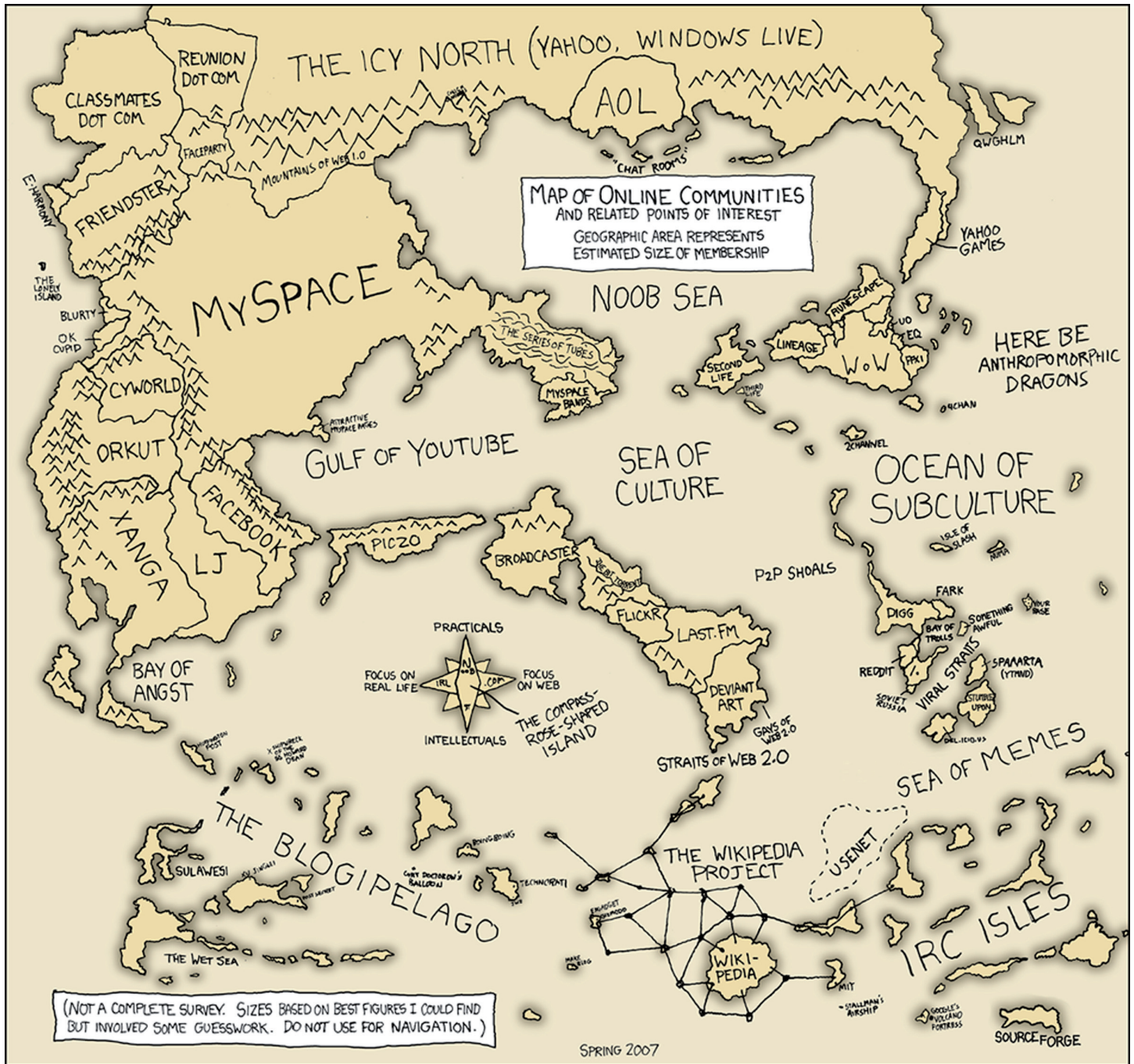


Figure 1: The past

