

# Digital Infrastructures and Communities in Resistance

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- Colonial substrate of internet infrastructures (the telegraph story)
- Techno-modernity and fixing digital divide (the Facebook story)
- Decolonizing internet infrastructures

Postcolonial Digital Humanities as a local, decentered, and anti-colonial mode of thinking





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How did this train get here?

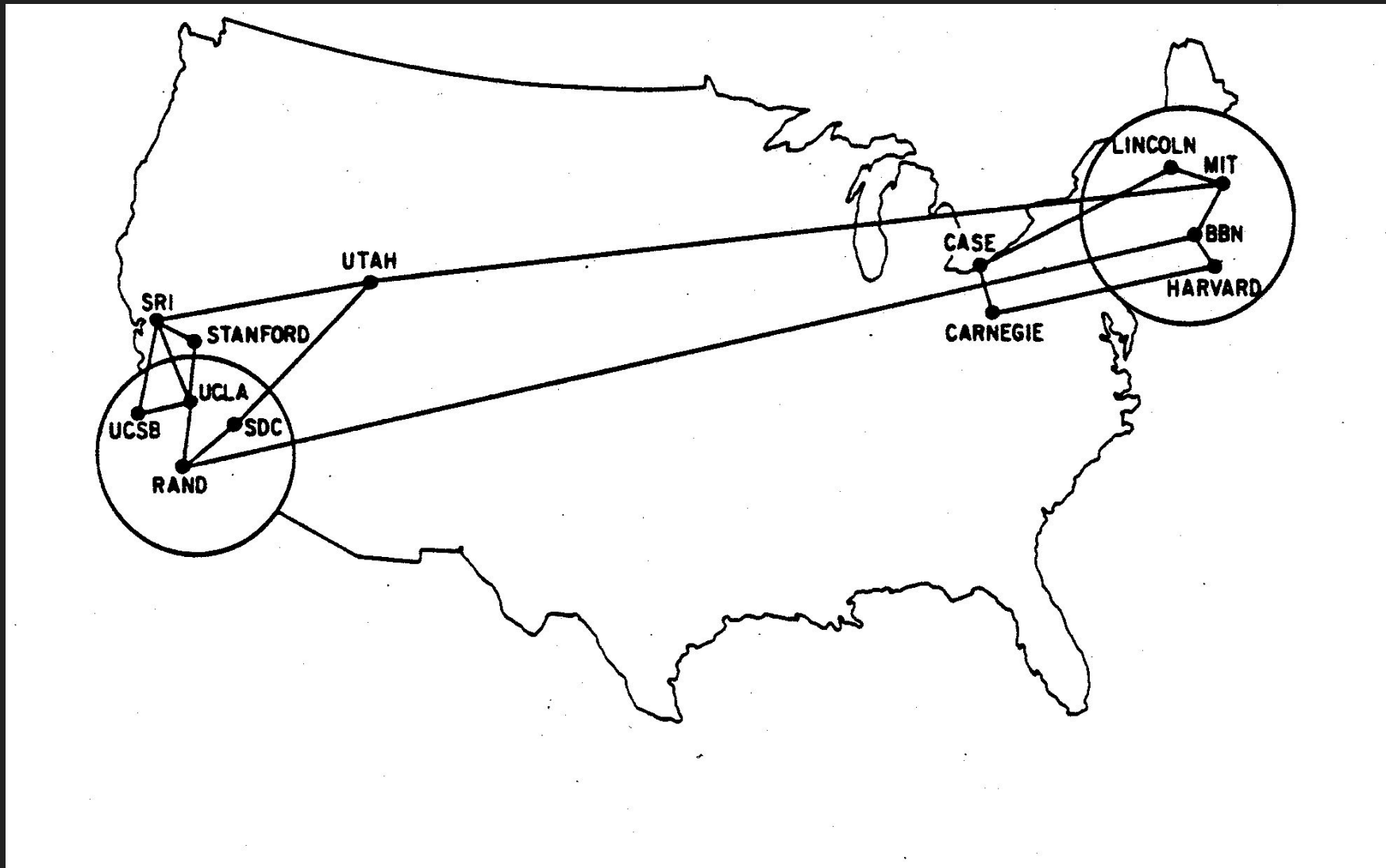




# 1. The colonial substrate of Internet infrastructures

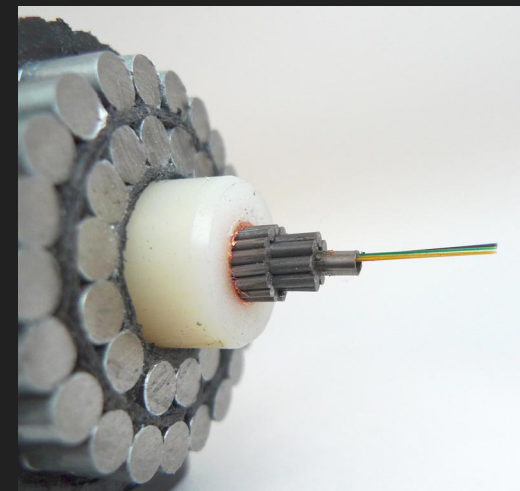
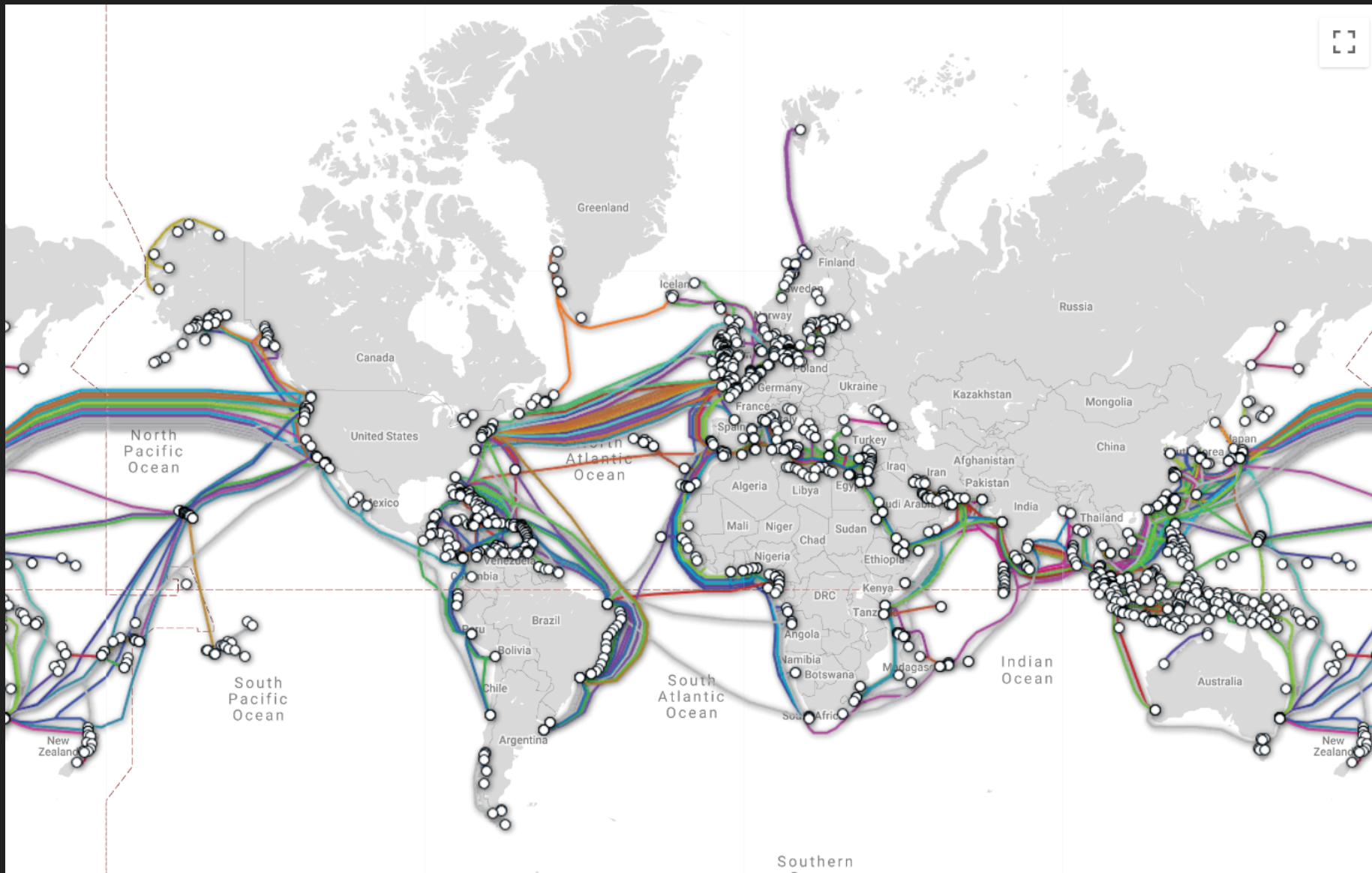
Ties between colonial communication networks, neocolonial politics, and digital technologies

What are the sedimented histories of the Internet infrastructures we rely upon?



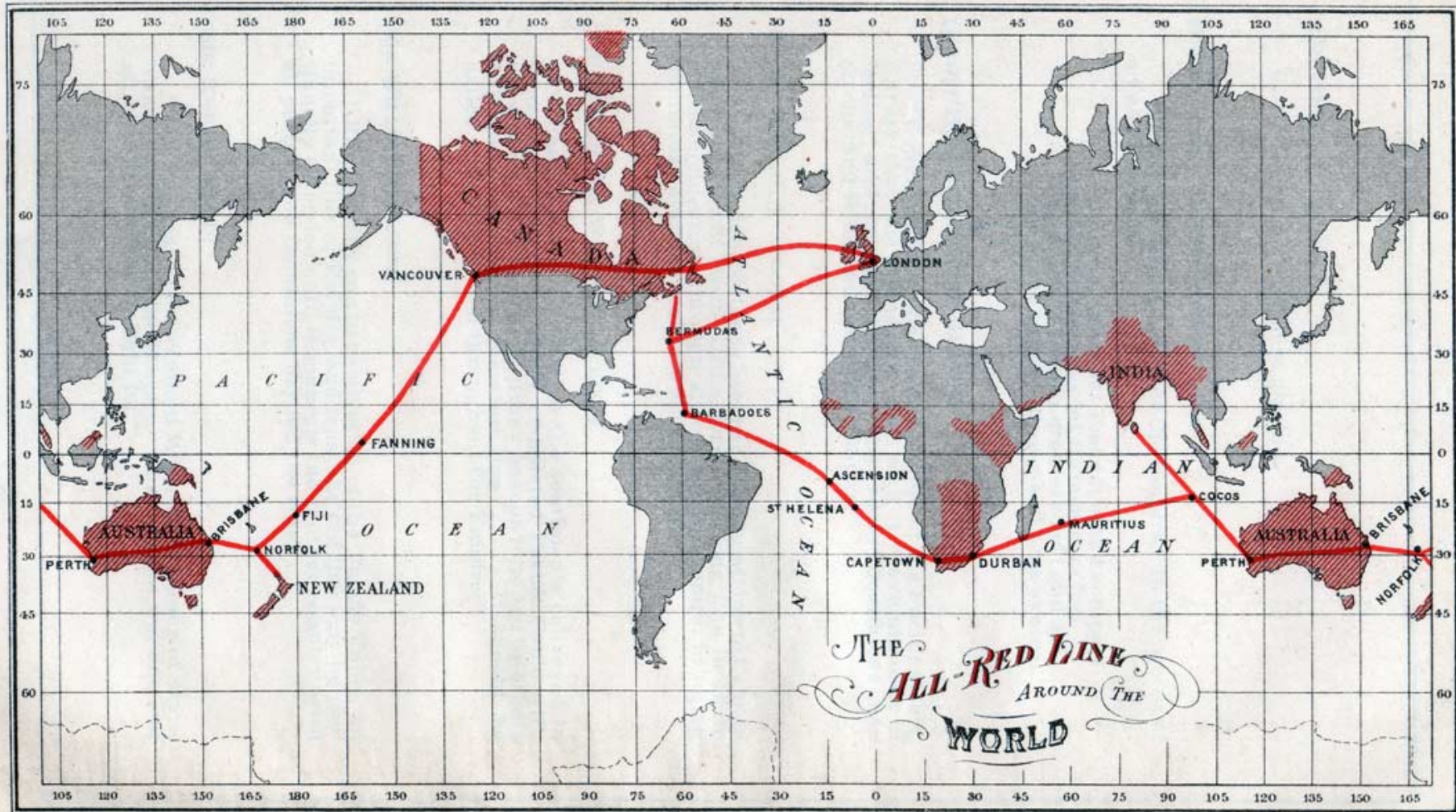
Map of ARPANET (1971)





The undersea fiber optic cable network (2017)

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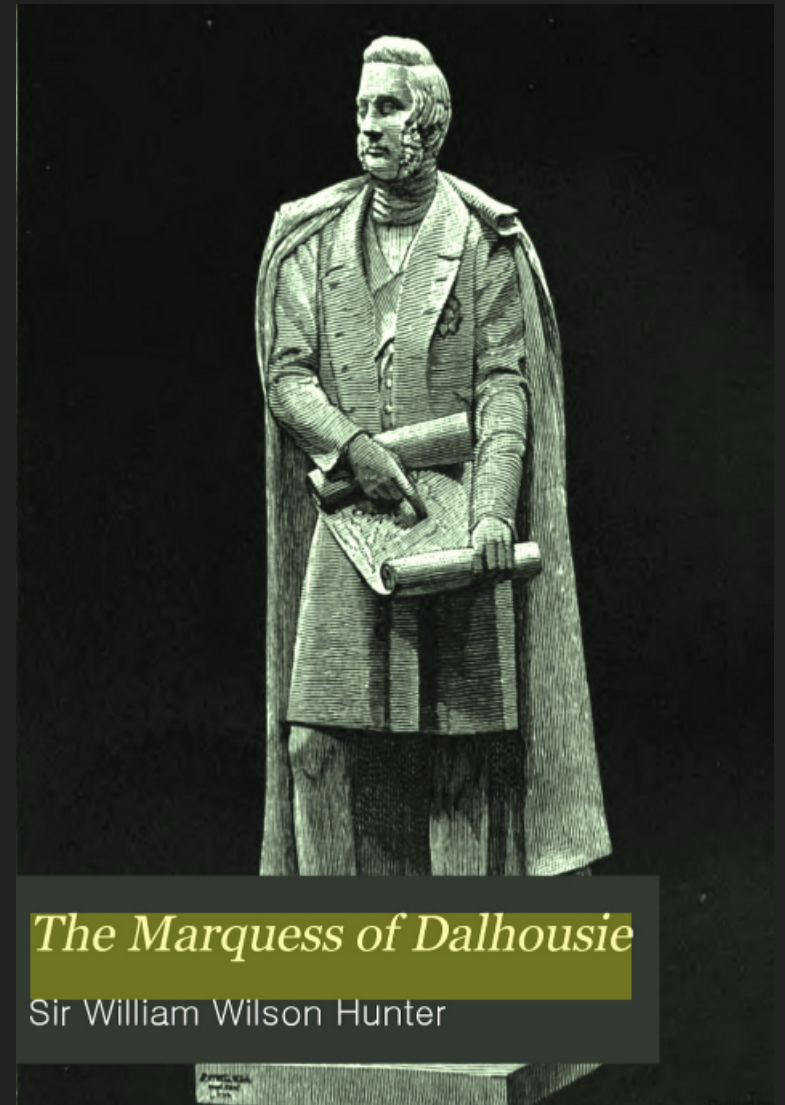
The All Red Line (1902)





The “railway and the telegraph were worth thousands of men to us in the Mutiny of 1857 and it is by the railway and the telegraph that India is now strategically held”

Sir William Wilson Hunter (1894)





# The colonial substrate of Internet infrastructures

The telegraph was a technology of control, centered ambitions of colonial empires

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The fiber optic internet infrastructure was built atop this older network

## ○ Precarity of this inherited colonial topography

### 2008 submarine cable disruption

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **2008 submarine cable disruptions** were three separate incidents of major damage to submarine optical communication cables around the world. The first incident caused damage involving up to five high-speed Internet submarine communications cables in the Mediterranean Sea and Middle East from 23 January to 4 February 2008, causing internet disruptions and slowdowns for users in the Middle East and India.<sup>[1]</sup> The incident called into doubt the safety of the undersea



1. 23 Jan - FALCON cable near Bandar Abbas, Iran
2. 30 Jan - SEA-ME-WE-4 near Alexandria
3. 30 Jan - FLAG cable near Alexandria
4. 1 Feb - FALCON cable between Muscat and Dubai, UAE
5. 3 Feb - DOHA-HALOUL between Qatar and UAE
6. 4 Feb - SEA-ME-WE-4 near Penang, Malaysia



### The Jakarta Post

TODAY'S PAPER

## Internet capacity down to 10%

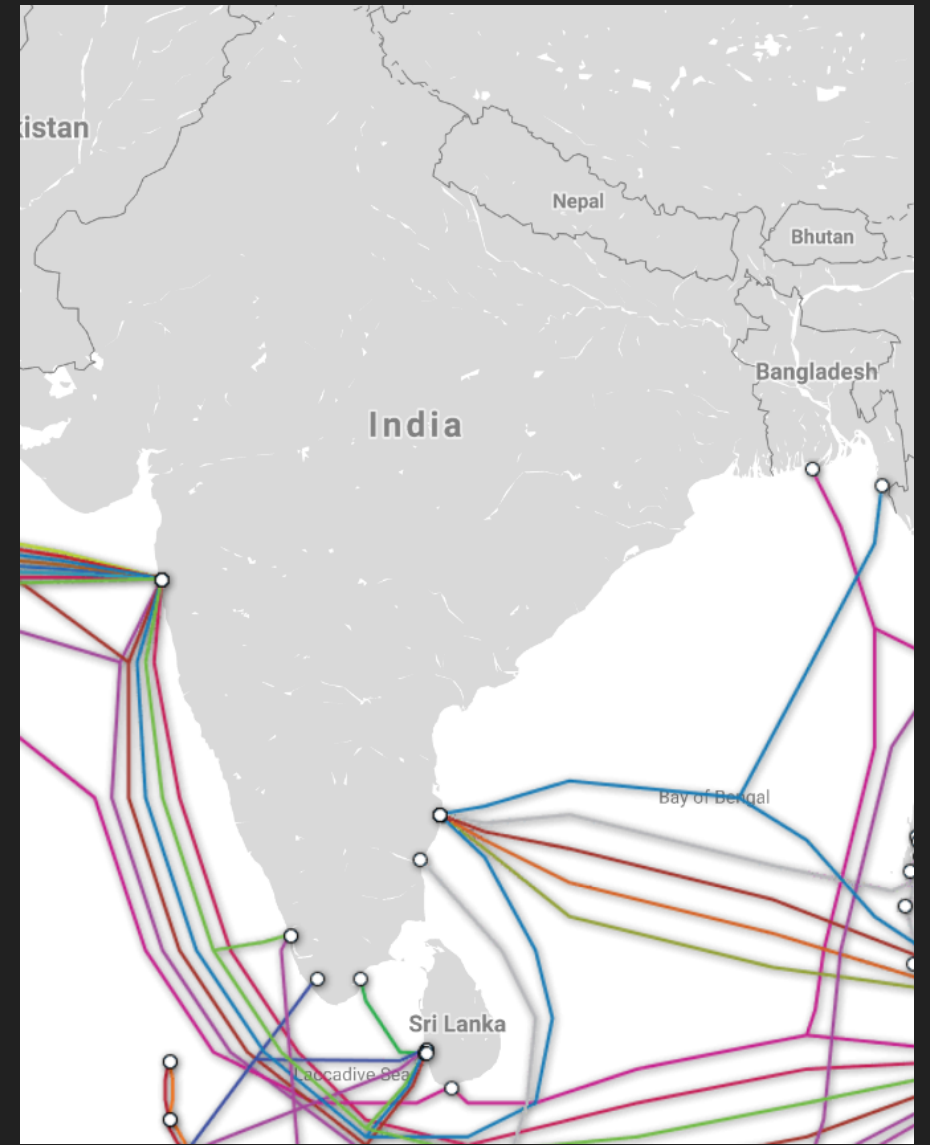
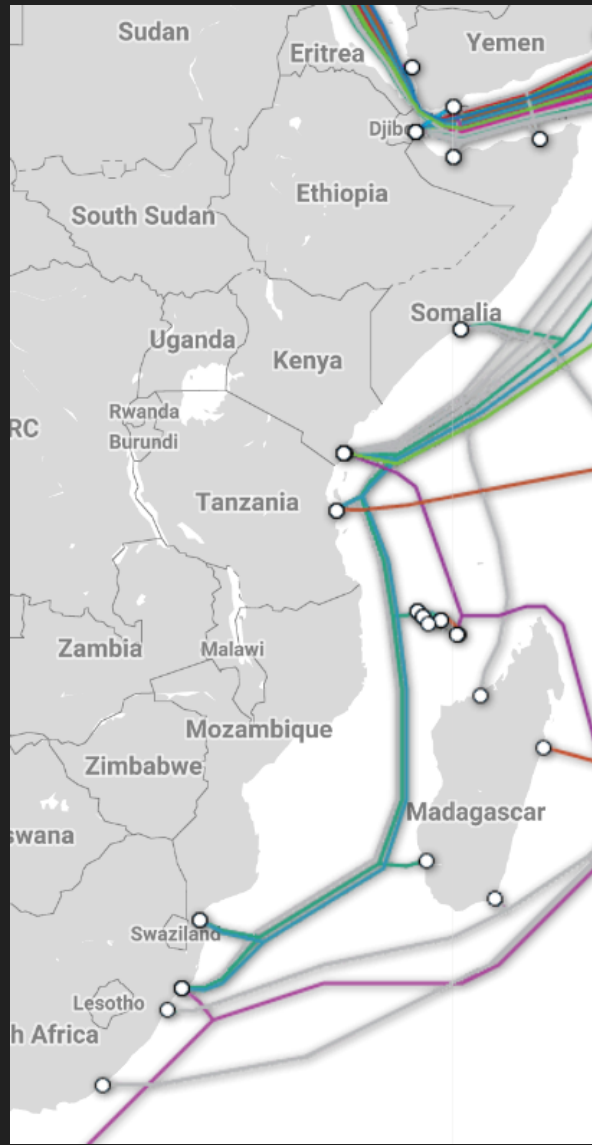
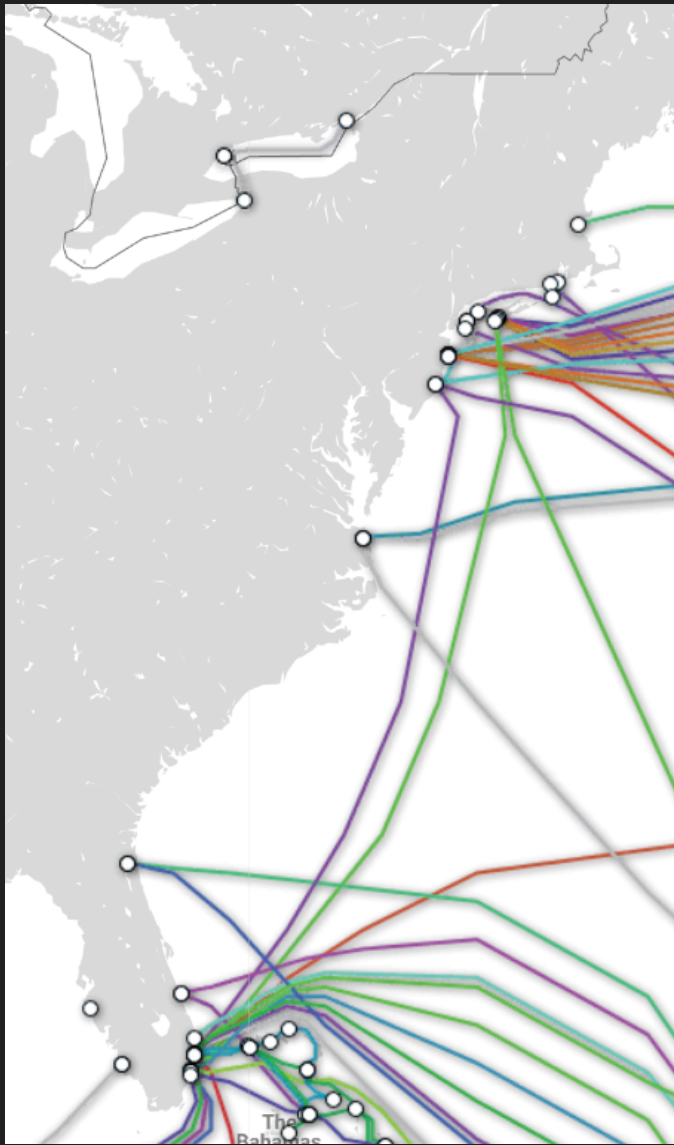
The Jakarta Post

Jakarta | Sat, March 1 2008 | 03:26 am



PREMIUM

The internet traffic capacity of PT Telekomunikasi Indonesia (Telkom) was down to 10 percent on Friday as undersea fiber optic connections to Singapore, which connect the country to the rest of the world, failed to function. Despite being the main provider for internet traffic connection, however, Telkom said its fiber optic failure did not completely cut



Cables and cable landing stations

@shree\_thorat



# The colonial substrate of Internet infrastructures

The material infrastructure of the Internet is global AND bound to territorial and state politics

## 2. Techno-modernity and fixing the digital divide

Initiatives to redress the global digital divide remain invested in colonial ideologies about progress and modernity





internet.org by facebook

MENU

## Free Basics by Facebook

Free Basics by Facebook provides people with access to useful services on their mobile phones in markets where internet access may be less affordable. The websites are available for free without data charges, and include content on things like news, employment, health, education and local information. By introducing people to the benefits of the internet through these websites,



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\*T&C Apply

## Riza



Riza used Free Basics to write her computer science thesis.

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## India and Technological Abjection

Advertisement in The Times of India,  
December 2015

- “connected”
- “opportunities online”
- “better future”
- “digital equality”
- “move India forward”



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Pipe dreams

## Tech giants are building their own undersea fibre-optic networks

*Google, Facebook and Microsoft want more control over the internet's basic infrastructure*



The Global South is not a lab

# Techno-modernity and fixing the digital divide

Narratives about development, progress, and modernization are tied to the civilizing mission

- 
- 
- 

And cannot be the basis of infrastructural projects in the Global South



# 3. Decolonizing Internet Infrastructures

## Subversions

- The Indian Independence Struggle

## Rejections

- Facebook's Free Basics

## Transformations

- TATA Communications
- SEACOM Line



**SEACOM**

