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Daniele Conversi^a

^a University of the Basque Country/Ikerbasque Foundation

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Irresponsible Radicalisation: Diasporas, Globalisation and Long-Distance Nationalism in the Digital Age

Daniele Conversi

The growing scholarship on ethnic diasporas has prompted various off-shoots. Two significant directions are the relationship of diasporas with globalisation and their role in the expansion and radicalisation of ethnic conflict. The corporate enthusiasm of the 1990s for globalisation has been followed by sombre reflections on its destructive impact upon a vast array of areas, including inter-ethnic relations worldwide. This article explores one crucial aspect of this wave of disruption—the rapid expansion of radical forms of long-distance nationalism, often leading to a stress on maximalist goals and an abdication of responsibility. It conceptually distinguishes between stateless diasporas and diasporas that conceive themselves as tied to, and represented by, an existing ‘nation-state’. Examples include ethnic lobbies from the former Yugoslavia, greater Han xenophobia among overseas Chinese, and Hindutva technocratic chauvinism among Hindu-Americans. Finally, the article identifies the onset of ‘online mobbing’ or ‘cyber bullying’ as a new and ominous trend in Internet radicalism.

Keywords: Diaspora; Globalisation; Long-Distance Nationalism; Internet; Radicalisation; Cyber Bullying

The Internet Revolution

The Internet revolution has brought about new levels of global interconnectedness, often resulting in the rise of a new global consciousness. *Avaaz.org* has become the largest web movement in history, reaching almost 5 million active participants throughout the world by June 2010, and up to 15 million by March 2012, with 78,818,264 actions taken since January 2007.¹ Its powerful appeal speaks with one

Daniele Conversi is Research Professor at the University of the Basque Country/Ikerbasque Foundation. Correspondence to: Prof. D. Conversi, Dept of Contemporary History, University of the Basque Country, Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, 48949 Leioa, Spain. E-mail: dconversi@telefonica.net.

voice for many people; it is the active avatar of what armchair theorists can conceive as a cosmopolitan democracy.²

However, the Internet also provides opportunities for those who do not share these values and who try to impose incompatible ones based on exclusion, denial and, sometimes, sheer hatred. These latter values often prosper among expatriate *déraciné* communities and uprooted diaspora groups.

Two main instances are analysed here: non-state and state-related nationalist diasporas, or 'stateless' and 'state-linked' diasporas (Sheffer 2003).³ This article agrees that such a distinction is crucial in the comparative study of ethnic diasporas, as it runs parallel to the crucial distinction between stateless nations and nation-states, with their contrasting forms of nationalism. *Non-state nationalist diasporas* involve political actors who aspire to achieve international recognition (in the form of political autonomy/independence or reunification with an existing state) for their stateless nations, for example Tamil Eelam, Chechnya or Kashmir. *State-related nationalist diasporas* include activists who identify with a specific state already recognised by the international community (and usually a member of the United Nations), but who may also want to expand its frontiers and clamp down on minorities—for example the Hindutva project of a greater India stretching from Burma to Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka to China, while encouraging pogroms against non-Hindus; or Chinese ultranationalists aspiring to invade Taiwan while condoning repression of the Uyghurs, Tibetans and other minorities. There are cases which span this dichotomy, like the Arab diasporas described in this issue, and which may not identify with a particular state while not necessarily perceiving themselves as part of a 'stateless nation' (Rinnawi 2012), but the opposition remains useful and valid.

Just as globalisation erodes and destroys older and traditional boundaries, new boundaries are created almost instantly in response (Conversi 1999). In other words, both globalisation and nationalism foster processes of boundary building and shifting, while mutually reinforcing each other. However, there is a crucial difference between allegedly 'defensive' nationalism and globalisation's totalising reach. Although nationalism's rationale may appear to work in defence of those very boundaries threatened by globalisation, its official discourse does not usually contain any coherent critique of the phenomenon. In fact, nationalism may prosper on the wings of the major dislocations and disruptions brought about by globalisation.

Nationalism is therefore simultaneously a process of boundary maintenance and boundary creation (Conversi 1995). However, although nationalist rhetoric is often based on a defensive re-assertion of pre-existing boundaries, its claims cannot be taken at face value. Nationalism is the 'modern Janus' looking simultaneously at the past and at the future (Nairn 1977, 1997). For some disenchanted scholars, nationalism is intrinsically deceptive or fraudulent, or based on an invented past (Hobsbawm 1983).

How does diasporic nationalism insert itself into this boundary-building logic? On the one hand, nationalism within the diasporas is largely conceptualised as a defensive project: its rational claim is that cross-boundary support for ethno-national mobilisation is needed in order to maintain ethnic boundaries perceived to be under

constant threat. On the other hand, long-distance processes tend to involve political actors who are acting from a safe distance and who, therefore, do not put their safety at risk, while being eager to promote risky strategies in their homeland. In short, expatriates tend often to be more radical than 'natives' when they engage in 'homeland politics' (Connor 1986; Kaiser 2004). In some specific instances of radicalisation, I postulate that a 'rule of the online mob' emerges in unregulated discussions: typically, the most aggressive and intolerant members of the 'virtual community' tend to bully more liberal and tolerant participants by accusing them of complacency, cowardice and even treason.⁴

Digital Revolutions and Digital Nationalism

Email communication was tentatively launched in the late 1980s⁵ and, by the early 1990s, had already spread beyond academia, beginning to re-arrange the initial combination of factors leading to the expansion of earlier forms of diasporic nationalism. At a series of lectures at Cornell University in 1994–95, Benedict Anderson recognised this trend at a very early stage by defining it as 'email nationalism'. In those years, the advent of powerful web browsers like Mosaic in 1993 and Netscape Navigator in 1994 had enabled access to increasingly vast databases. Search engines, from WebCrawler and Lycos in 1994 to Google, launched in 1997, greatly amplified the possibility of information retrieval and long-distance communication amongst individuals and organised groups.

While the Internet has remained an open space for expanding global communication, not all new technologies have offered the same possibilities and some are definitely less universalistic: the formidable expansion of mobile phones has reinforced family ties and parental control by increasing communal contacts and decreasing the sheer number of new, longer and more sustained face-to-face encounters. In several ways, they became a contributing factor to ethnic closure and the rise of self-segregated communities.

But soon new personal digital devices of broadband telephony, like *Skype* (released in 2003), allowed relatively unfettered person-to-person communication, free of charge and supervision. These two-way communication systems became well suited to respond to the need for personal contacts of a more restrained and circumscribed nature, and are thus not ideal tools for social networking on a massive scale. However, the use of highly encrypted *voice over IP* (VoIP) software allowed more fluid international communication with greater protection for privacy.

On the other hand, personal digital assistants (PDA) and palmtop computers have allowed long-distance organisational tasks to be carried out in real time in the pursuit of international networking. Since 1996, some mobile phones have begun to incorporate PDA functionality, with the global spread of smart- and feature phones. Apple iPhones also have multiple uses, some of which can facilitate in-group communication. Portable media players (e.g. iPod, launched in 2001) have expanded the capacity for carrying around various types of information, as well as music. Most

importantly, ‘instant messaging’ and online chats seem to reconstitute elements of direct one-on-one interaction within a virtual space, although several missing clues in such contexts may occasionally contribute to the distortion of the content and meaning of conversational interaction.

Finally, social networking has enabled individuals to create *ad hoc* micro- and even macro-communities, which can either transcend or reinforce ethnic boundaries. With 500 million users at the time of writing, Facebook has become the leading tool with which to reinforce diasporic as well as local networks. According to its founder, ‘When Facebook first launches in a country, nearly all the friend connections are with foreign Facebook users. We know that a country has tipped when local-to-local connections outnumber local to foreign’ (Sweney 2010). However, a major problem with most social networking and micro-blogging services remains privacy and security, as sensitive personal information can be accessed by an unpredictable number of Internet users. This problem makes them an undesirable channel for many radical groups, although the signs of diaspora nationalism are visible throughout these sites. The most significant development amongst users of social networking is the reinforcement of overseas family and friends’ ties reconnecting fresh diasporas to their homelands.⁶

All these forms of networking between individuals with broadly shared ethno-political goals have led to the emergence of *virtual ethnic communities*. These can be defined as social networks constituted by groups and individuals interacting through the World Wide Web and other media on the basis of putative common descent. This view is a multi-dimensional expansion of Anderson’s famous notion of modern nations as ‘imagined communities’. While the latter relied on the development of literacy-based markets (first among the elites) and the diffusion of novels and other forms of literature through print capitalism (Anderson 1983), the new virtual communities are shaped by the spreading fruition of increasingly interconnected communication tools through the digital space.

Anderson’s Theory of Communication

Anderson developed both the earlier notion of *e-mail nationalism* and that of *long-distance nationalism* (1992)—subsequently expanded by Eriksen (2007) into that of *Internet nationalism*. Before the advent of the Internet the notion of ‘*vicarious nationalism*’ had been used to cover the activities of politicised diasporas independently from new technologies (Smith 1986: 151–2). The Internet permits a situation of radical unaccountability in which, according to Anderson (1994: 327):

[t]he participant rarely pays taxes in the country in which he does his politics; he is not answerable to its judicial system; he probably does not cast even an absentee ballot in its elections because he is a citizen in a different place; he need not fear prison, torture or death, nor need his immediate family. But, well and safely positioned in the First World, he can send money and guns, circulate propaganda, and build intercontinental computer information circuits, all of which can have incalculable consequences in the zones of their ultimate destinations.

Theoretically, a study of digital diasporas and 'virtual' nationalism should draw at least some of its inspiration from Anderson's (1983) earlier work. One reason is that technology was central to his explanation of the birth of nationalism due to various factors, most importantly the development of 'print capitalism'. This technological innovation, allied with the expanding 'business' of printing presses, brought about a revolution in communications, with news and images circulating faster than ever before, while informing new perceptions of space and community. This change of perception occurred, as in the case of the French revolution, even in the absence of mass literacy, that is, through public readings and mass mobilisation.

Moreover, Anderson spoke of a decline in religious authority as part of a long-term trend: 'For all the grandeur and power of the great religiously imagined communities, their *unselfconscious coherence* waned steadily after the late Middle Ages' (1983: 16, italics in the original)—so that 'The eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought' (1983: 11). One can ask whether a new decline of both scientifically and spiritually sanctioned 'authority' may occur with the expansion of Internet-related modes of communication. In the case of religious faith, the 'vertical' relationships between the faithful and his/her spiritual guide(s), which often depend on indirect face-to-face interaction, are easily bypassed by the 'horizontal', non-contiguous relationships typical of long-distance communication (Fukamizu 2007). Yet, the same thing can be said about most systems of thought, including science and morality. The denial of scientific evidence through corporate lies, political spinning, the deformation of truth and conspiracy theories can notoriously thrive online.

On the one hand, some data indicate that the spiritual leaders of most major religions have fully accepted the challenge posed by the Internet, with Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Shinto, Taoism, Chinese traditions, animism, Japan's New Religions and branches of Buddhism offering online access to courses, counselling, discussions, rituals and Holy Texts (Ess *et al.* 2007; Kluver and Cheong 2007). On the other hand, more unmediated forms of 'horizontal' communication between the faithful spontaneously and inevitably coalesce around religious sites and can easily challenge 'direct' forms of traditional authority. Thus the passage to the new, physically, if not mentally, de-territorialised virtual communities of the diasporas entails as-yet-unexplored dimensions of shifting spirituality and religious hierarchy.

In antiquity, power was established simultaneously through personal liaisons and extra-territorial institutions such as the Church. With modernity, political power becomes concentrated and exercised within a strictly bounded space. Because the state aims to exercise power over every single citizen in its entire territory, ethno-national boundaries have acquired a newly fixed essence.

The spread of the *printing press* prepared the way for the advent of modern nationalism through the creation of 'empty homogeneous time'. The key role of the press was associated with the spread of literacy, which in turn received the greatest support with the advent of the modern state and its sustained effort of mass public

instruction (Gellner 2006). The state's monopoly was enormously reinforced by the advent of one-way non-literacy-related mass media, namely radio and TV, although one could still think in terms of '(tele)visual literacy'. Their supposedly boundless character could still be kept in check through the combined alliance of language (mutual unintelligibility) and power (state regulation and control of the media). But the popular spread of *two-way* communication tools, from the telephone and the fax to email and other IT technology, made censorship increasingly difficult to implement.

The trend is to both atomise and globalise society: we are now more alone and more interconnected with solitary others. Thus, in the vast, depressing spaces of provincial America, the 'technical-professional migrants' of the Hindu diaspora craved for a meaning, authenticity and community. But they found themselves ensnared and locked in their 'isolated, chiefly Euro-American, suburbs' while resenting the consequences of ever-deepening 'Americanisation' (Mathew and Prashad (2000: 521). Many thus became attracted to diaspora nationalism and, in the process, discovered a new spirit of intolerance. 'As a resource against their isolation, many migrants turn to the Internet from which they download packaged information on South Asia. This is one of the avenues used by the Hindu Right to disseminate its ideology' (2000: 521). The relationship between virtual interconnect-edness and really-existing loneliness through self-introspective politics will be explored with some detail in the section on the 'Yankee Hindutva' phenomenon (see Bhatt and Mukta 2000).

Anderson's intuition about a new era of long-distance nationalism has since formed the conceptual core of specific case studies, like those dedicated to the Serbian diaspora (Pryke 2003), Haitian migrants into the United States (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001), Tamil Tigers support groups (Fuglerud 1999), East Timorese refugees (Wise 2004, 2006), or Tibetan expatriates (Misra 2003), while informing more case studies like those on the Basque diaspora (Molina Aparicio and Oiarzabal 2009: 710) or Croatian exiles (Djuric 2003). The concept of 'long-distance nationalism' has also been applied to post-conflict reconciliation efforts among Burundian exiles, whose websites are shaping virtual communities, providing avenues for the expression of otherwise unspeakable events (Turner 2008).

However, this approach needs to be supplemented by some theoretical considerations about the diasporas' patterns of assimilation, isolation and loss of culture in the host country.

Loss of Culture and Ethnic Assertion Amongst Diasporas

Most diasporic groups face tremendous challenges not simply to integrate, but also to gain access to the culture of their host societies. Do they usually adopt strategies of recognition, while struggling for the promotion of a more articulate and vibrant multicultural environment? Are they trying to take advantage of the benefits offered by the host society without losing their cultural 'identity'? The answer is, of course,

variable but, in the case of radicalised diasporas, is largely conditional on both international conflict and inter-generational cultural transmission.

My approach conceptually distinguishes between *culture* and *ethnicity*, two terms which are often unreflexively amalgamated among scholars of both multiculturalism and nationalism studies (Conversi 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Fenton 2010: 19–22). There are several cases in which persisting ethnic identities, rather than vanishing cultural differences, are heightened in response to pervasive similarities. Groups may seek de-differentiation precisely because difference is putative or non-existent, so that it is possible to conceive an anthropology of ‘difference’ as ‘denied resemblance’ (Harrison 2002). Sigmund Freud’s famous notion of the ‘narcissism of small differences’ describes at the individual-relational level a similar concern about jealously preserving one’s sense of separateness in the absence of externally meaningful distinctive traits (Freud 1989).⁷

The broader interpretive apparatus informing this article is that the eclipse of a shared culture within the diasporas is part of a long-lasting process of assimilation into the host society, which often results in a compensatory stress on more enduring ties of ethnicity and common descent. Eventually, ethnicity devoid of immediate cultural content provides an ideal breeding ground for radicalism. More specifically, culture can be ‘replaced’ by violence when cultural continuity is no longer carried forward from one generation to another, so that violent means are used to reinforce otherwise porous boundaries. Political entrepreneurs who act in the name of ethnic values envision ‘their’ communities as coherent, distinctive and internally homogeneous. They do so in the face of cultural assimilation and similarity across ethnic boundaries, often stressing homogeneity of ‘will’ in the lack of a shared culture. In other words, it is possible to find a correlation between de-differentiation, or lack of visible cultural variation, and ethno-political violence (Conversi 1994).

Globalisation, Culture and the Internet: When Ethnic Network Building Replaces Cultural Transmission

After the 1990s’ corporate enthusiasm for globalisation, a more reflective mood followed at the dawn of the millennium. The critics of globalisation addressed several of its detrimental outcomes (see Barber 1996). This article addresses the relationship between globalisation and nationalism within ethnic diasporas. By the mid-2000s, most authors fully recognised that ethnic conflict had spread and, in the end, neo-liberal globalisation had made the world highly unstable (Chua 2003; Conversi 2009c; Kaldor 2004), perhaps, in a way, recalling how liberal imperialism had affected pre-1914 European politics.

The relationship between diasporas, ethnicity and globalisation has been the subject of various studies (Laguerre 2006; Sheffer 2003: 154–60). By focusing on the role of diasporas, Chua (2003) has provided one of the first systematic insights into the relationship between globalisation and violent ethnic conflict.

Mega-corporations have their own ideology (Bowman 1996) which claims that globalisation produces encounter, *métissage* and fusion while ‘respecting’ local differences. For instance, the term ‘glocalisation’ is aptly deployed to conceal the conflictive character of globalisation, while assuming that it is compatible with local cultures. Yet, globalisation entails various processes of cultural destruction and homogenisation, most often in the form of mass consumerism and Americanisation (Conversi 2010). With limited means, pressures towards global uniformity have been ‘resisted’ both in principle and in practice. Thus, the reactivation of ethnic ‘identities’ can be partly interpreted as a conscious or unconscious reaction to broader homogenising trends. In the process, ethnic boundaries have been, and are being, incessantly accentuated by the forces of globalisation.

Of course, no ‘virtual’ community can ever replace the density and effectiveness of daily face-to-face interaction (but see Wittchen *et al.* 2007). In order to reactivate a local culture, a complex process of cultural entrepreneurship, education and media expansion is required. It may therefore be easier for dispersed diasporas to build militant virtual communities by emphasising conflict, incompatibility and even violence, while it is much harder to transform these virtual networks into locally rooted programmes of cultural regeneration and economic revival. In other words, the Internet can indirectly contribute to the loss of cultural diversity. Culture is made by a series of inter-generationally transmitted skills, norms, customs and abilities, requiring frequent personal interactions of a quality and density that the technological revolution is unable to sustain. Thus, computer-mediated communication can hardly encourage the kind of human face-to-face encounters which are necessary to feed the cultural life of non-virtual (really existing) communities. Indeed, the growing reliance on computers is a known hindrance to the maintenance of face-to-face inter-personal relationships.⁸ As we shall see in more detail in the Hindu-American case, online relationships tend to prosper in cases of physical isolation characterised by perceptions of anomie, alienation and the loss of meaningful, personal, in-the-flesh relationships. Traditional encounters and communication networks have been overwhelmed by new possibilities of virtual interaction. But the boundaries between, and within, newly constituted virtual communities are in a process of continuous redefinition and strengthening.

Diaspora, Lobbies and Empire

Some countries lend themselves to be more receptive to diaspora politics than others. Throughout modern history, neighbouring states ruled by specific ethnic elites have allowed ‘kin-related’ diaspora residents to play an active role in international politics. Moreover, imperial capitals like London and Paris have acted as magnets for highly educated refugees who used their new safe havens as the basis for initiating diasporic networks dedicated to their country’s liberation. Historically, European nationalism prospered among diaspora figures based in strategic Western capitals, including ‘founding father’ figures like Mazzini, Garibaldi, Kossuth and Herzen. Occasionally

nationalists transcended into more cosmopolitan vocations as a way to legitimate their particularistic projects: not content with setting up a Young Italy, Giuseppe Mazzini decided to create a Young Europe in Geneva in 1833 as a multi-diasporas network, including Young Ireland and Young Switzerland. Mazzini's broadening of geopolitical horizons was inspired by encounters with other diasporic figures who shared a similar ideology and predicament (Bayly and Biagini 2008).

In the contemporary world, the role of diasporas has occasionally been institutionalised. The USA stands out as a maximalist example, given the power accorded to lobby groups in Washington DC (Ambrosio 2002). The gap between relatively powerful and powerless ethnic diasporas can be as huge as the gap spanning the major mega-corporations and the destitute poor. The well-known political influence of the Jewish lobby (Sheffer 2003) is matched by the weakness of groups representing the interests of other diasporas, like the Arab (Marrar 2009) and the Puerto Rican diasporas (Torres and Velázquez 1998). Thus, pro-Zionist groups play a disproportionate role in relation to their numerical significance (Terry 2005), while their power has been tactically increased by establishing powerful alliances with the neo-conservative Christian right (Friedman 2005). But the focus on ethnicity as a geopolitical resource involves other groups.

There is an extensive international relations literature on the role of diasporas as active actors in the shaping of US foreign policy (Ambrosio 2002; Shain 2007; Shain and Aryasinha 2006). Within business studies and related disciplines, there is also a separate literature on the powerful role of lobbies in the USA, particularly those associated with the corporate and multinational industry—and how this represents a grave threat to democracy (Butts 2003; Luger 2000). Ethnic lobbies are thus players in a complex multi-level game.

Some ethnic and foreign-policy networks have been influential only in specific moments. For instance, the *Serbian Unity Congress* (SUC) was able to influence, even determine, US foreign policy choices in the earlier stages of the wars of Yugoslav dissolution (Blitz 1996; Hockenos 2003). Moreover, the mobilisation of the Serbian diaspora abroad was a crucial factor in promoting Serbian nationalism at home, pushing Belgrade's elites further down the path of extreme nationalism leading to ethnic cleansing (Bock-Luna 2007). After a period of vacuum and indecision (Letica 1996), its place was seized by the Croatian lobby (Djuric 2003), at a time when the Internet was fast becoming adopted as a more effective means of disseminating the atrocities perpetuated against Croatian civilians (Bock-Luna 2007: 19). As usual with highly mobilised diasporas, Croatian ultranationalists relied on radicalised networks in Europe and America to tighten their grip on power (Hockenos 2003: 101). Franjo Tudjman's election campaign was largely financed by *émigrés* sometimes guided more by 'hatred for the Serbs' than by love for their country (Gallagher 2003: 50–3). On the other hand, Slobodan Milosevic's allies in the West took advantage of pre-existing diplomatic channels at a time of mass mobilisations with the participation of 'much of the Serbian diaspora' (Ramet 2005: 95). Increasingly, Serbian Internet sites became receptacles for anti-Croat and anti-Muslim hate speech, presenting conspiratorial

images of Croats as being collectively intent on dispensing with all Serbs (Bock-Luna 2007: 156).⁹ Moreover, older generations of diasporic Serbs could ignore the reality of Milosevic's repression because they had landed in the 1940s already as ultranationalist WW2 refugees, 'including quislings and fascists' (Ramet 2002: 356). After NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999, Albanian *émigrés* gained a new prominence. A flow of cash and weapons between the USA and the Greater Albanian ultra-nationalist guerrillas in Macedonia was uncovered in March 2001 (Hedges 2001). Public opinion in the Balkans then became convinced that the US was behind home-grown terrorism. Although the Albanian diaspora is dispersed across Turkey, Greece, Italy, Austria, Germany, France, the UK and Canada, it is the numerically smaller community in the USA that has apparently been able to exert the most influence.¹⁰

The balance of fortunes amongst ethnic diasporas can shift considerably. Thus, the influence of the diasporas amongst Kosovars (Hockenos 2003), Irish (Boyle 2001), Kurds (Wahlbeck 1999), Chechens (Hughes 2007), Ibos/Igbos (Onwubu 1975), Armenians (Aghanian 2007), Crimean Tatars (Williams 2001), Amboneses/Moluccans (van Amersfoort 2003) and others has waxed and waned across time. Although ethnic diasporas often spawn peaceful and pacifist organisations, such as those among Tibetan (Bernstorff and von Welck 2003) and Ogoni (Osha 2007) refugees, the most radical elements tend often to be 'de-traditionalised', culturally disconnected from the homeland and assimilated into the host country's culture. This triadic relationship between 'de-traditionalisation', radicalisation and forms of online activism can be discerned in the two important diasporic examples given below.

Is the Chinese Exception Exceptional?

The mushrooming of militant diaspora networks runs counter to erstwhile clichéd assumptions that globalisation heralds a new era of 'universal' and cosmopolitan values. In the same year as Srebrenica (July 1995) and one year after the Rwandan genocide (April–July 1994), a neo-liberal pundit wrote: 'If there were another event like Tiananmen Square, foreign capital would leave China, new foreign companies would not enter, and those already present would slow down or stop their provision of needed skills and technology' (Ohmae 1995: 72). On the other hand, we hear that diasporas are 'incapable of giving a territorial dimension to their national *imaginaire*. Sikh, Tamil, Haitian, Armenian and other immigrants have been forming true post-national organisations' (Appadurai 1996: 165, cited by Dieckhoff and Jaffrelot 2005: 257).

Optimist statements like the above have been refuted by the expansion of radical diasporas and, in the case of China, by the reach of government repression in the rural areas, increasing the widespread use of death sentences for petty crime, and the creation of slave labour reservoirs. Rather than withdrawing, Western companies bowed to Beijing government pressure in exchange for expanding facilities. Compliance with government directives has affected digital giants like Google, Google China (founded 2005), Microsoft and Yahoo!.¹¹ With their great shares of the market and hence control over unparalleled amounts of personal users' data, they

have been at the centre of various scandals and investigations (Amnesty International 2006). According to well-known Wikileaks documents, a secret war was carried out against Google by China's ruling Politburo. Overtaking Google, the largely government-filtered *Baidu* has become the most popular search engine in China—interestingly founded in 2000 by members of the Chinese diaspora in the West.¹² While International Wikipedia remains off-limits to most Chinese, even the separate Chinese Wikipedia has undergone apparent self-censorship (French 2006).¹³ In the end, a parallel Chinese-controlled net encyclopaedia, *Baidu Baike*, whose content is congruent with Beijing's directives, was invented and rapidly made accessible to most Chinese.

Ohmae's 'predictions' thus downplayed the possibility that the rapid growth of Chinese industries would eventually condition the Western economy, rather than China being dependent on the market's alleged moral imperatives. So powerful is the impact of new communication tools, that Internet nationalism can be said to open a new chapter in the history of Chinese nationalism, allowing for a redefinition of Han exclusiveness and 'foe-bashing' (Gries 2006). Moderate and liberal intellectuals who oppose ethnic chauvinism are routinely cursed as 'traitors' online. Through the Internet, chain reactions of cyber bullying against both perceived enemies and internal 'traitors' have been instigated, while 'slurs like "little Japs" (*xiao Riben*) and "devils" (*guizi*) are pervasive in Chinese Internet chatrooms' (Gries 2005: 837). Similarly, Han chauvinists hailed the People's-Army repression of peaceful Uyghur demonstrators in Xinjiang in 2009, with diaspora nationalists in the chatroom inciting further bloodbaths. In contrast, websites run by the Uyghur American Association (f. 1998) documented each stage of the mounting repression.¹⁴

How far can these outbursts of hate speech and patriotic 'indignation' be considered spontaneous? Is Chinese extremism over-tolerated or even driven by the Communist Party and state bureaucracy? China's Internet is one of the most regulated in the world; censorship and the control of individual opinion and behaviour remain pervasive. News about China's censorship has circulated widely among global public opinion (see Jacobs 2009). Restrictive measures were attempted in a number of countries after 11 September, but censorship was previously mostly limited to totalitarian regimes like those in Iraq and North Korea, as well as China.

On the other hand, Internet-based ethno-political networks cannot be easily constrained by state regulations and boundaries. Attempts to control the web over ideological content and ethnic dissent can occur only at the price of curtailing fundamental human rights. In this way, transnational actors and political entrepreneurs may partly be able to overcome the censorship imposed by authoritarian or sultanistic regimes to veto the political activities of religious minorities and ethnic movements. Even China's 'Great Firewall' can be circumvented, although the violators may then find themselves at the mercy of China's draconian laws.

Thus, a superficial observation may yield the impression that these are 'spontaneous' manifestations of a buoyant and expanding Han nationalism. To what extent instances of apparent spontaneity are tolerated or 'guided' by

Chinese officials—for instance by using counterfeit agitators and *agents-provocateur*—remains an open question. However, many of the most uncontrollable exchanges have occurred in highly Westernised, ‘open’ diasporic contexts, where the threat of state sanctions cannot apply and anonymity is more likely to remain as such.

A possible clarification may be found by contrasting China’s case with countries which enjoy full democratic rights. India can serve as a particularly helpful counter-balance.

Yankee Hindutva

In June 1984, the Indian army’s suppression of the Sikh insurgency led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in Amritsar’s Golden Temple alienated a considerable part of the Sikh population, formerly loyal Indian citizens. The ensuing assassination of Indira Gandhi by one of her Sikh bodyguards was followed in November 1984 by indiscriminate anti-Sikh pogroms at the hands of youths from the ruling Indian National Congress Party. These events catalysed the attention, emotions and strategies of the diaspora (Singh 1999, 2006; Tatla 1999). Radicalisation particularly affected the younger and more assimilated emigrant generations. As a consequence, radical groups grew stronger in the Sikh diaspora in Britain, Canada and the United States. Radicalisation peaked with the bombing of the Air India Flight 182 jumbo jet on the Toronto–Montreal–London–Delhi–Bombay route on 23 June 1985. This was entirely conceived within the Canadian diaspora, so much that Prime Minister Paul Martin defined it as a wholly Canadian affair and declared the anniversary of the bombing to be Canada’s national day of mourning. Many of the victims, including the pilot and co-pilot, were Sikhs. This tragedy led to a generalised rethinking and soul-searching within communities of the *khalsa* (the collective body of all baptised Sikhs). Over the years, community gatherings increasingly emphasised more-cultural and apolitical endeavours. The boom of *Bhangra* dance, originally from rural Punjab, was transformed into a pan-Indian diasporic fashion. Political activities became more cultural and civic in various guises and shapes, as with anti-racist and anti-discrimination groups, or by mobilising in defence of the ‘Five Ks’ (*Panj Kakkar*) or sacred symbols of Sikhism, just as the turban was being banned in France. Militant initiatives tended to focus on human rights within the diasporas and beyond, rather than responding impulsively to homeland callings. As a consequence, the radical Khalistan movement lost momentum, particularly in Europe (Singh 2006: 95–6). In a way, cultural initiatives de-radicalised the diaspora by creating an environment suitable for the transmission of more-tolerant Sikh values and culture. In the ensuing years, Internet events like the launch of a ‘Sikh *cybermuseum*’ began to engage larger and larger sections of the Sikh population in important historical debates redefining the essence of Sikhism as a religion, an identity and a culture (Ballantyne 2006: 2; Chilana 2005). A new journal, *Sikh Formations*, was launched in 2005 to reconnect the diaspora with the homeland through scholarly debates ‘to understand Sikhs, Sikhism, and Sikh identity within the context of a new and dynamic setting that

embraces globalisation, transnationalism, and other related processes'.¹⁵ With its focus on cultural content, rather than ethnic boundaries, this and similar open initiatives have probably done a better job than most 'counter-terrorist' measures to de-radicalise the diaspora. However, at the same time, an opposite trend prevailed within Hindu communities abroad, particularly in the USA.

Among the forms of Internet-led nationalist extremism, pan-Indian *Hindutva*, often wrongly referred to as 'Hindu fundamentalism', has risen as an alarming threat to international stability (Jaffreot and Therwath 2007). It is part of a larger phenomenon of diaspora politics fostering extremisms that may eventually fit broader US foreign-policy goals in the subcontinent and elsewhere (Bhatt and Mukta 2000; Mathew and Prashad 2000; Mukta 2000; Rajagopal 2000). In India itself, the phenomenon first peaked with the media-hyped demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992, which involved the participation of high-ranking Hindu nationalist MPs (Jaffreot 2007; Rajagopal 2001) and which began catalysing both diaspora radicals and local fanatics.

However, despite some setbacks under Indira Gandhi's state of emergency (1975–7) and then under the rule of the extremist Bharatiya Janata Party (1998–2004), India has maintained liberal institutions since independence, full democratic functioning and a plural articulation of power, which Arendt Lijphart identified as the Indian way to 'consociational democracy' (1996). Despite military rule, similar pluralist and consociational institutions have been broadly preserved in Bangladesh (Baxter 1998) and, to a much lesser extent, Sri Lanka (Wilson 2003) and Pakistan before the US-led 'war on terror' (Nasr 2001).

The trend challenging this tradition of tolerance became particularly pronounced among Hindu-Americans. It has therefore been aptly named *Yankee Hindutva* (Bose 2008; Mathew 2000; Mathew and Prashad 2000; Sud 2008). This can be identified as a network of US-based Hindu extremists, who attempt to raise acute patriotic awareness amongst Hindu-Americans ('hyphenated' Hindus). Radical homeland politics are promoted in order to 'help deracinated youth feel "Hindu" in the various community gatherings' (Mathew and Prashad 2000: 528). Accordingly:

The Internet allowed the migrants a safe space to express a jingoistic nationalism that is not recommended in the spaces of corporate America. In the isolation of the Internet, scores of technical-professional migrants washed away the stain of their corporate existence by exercising a jingoistic nationalism... In the isolated Internet, many Indian Americans found their Indianness... many of them adopted the frameworks of the energetic pro-*Hindutva* activists whose electronic messages have become more prevalent since the destruction of the *Babri Masjid* (Mathew and Prashad 2000: 528).

Virtual *Hindutva* is particularly linked to 'the proliferation of software engineers from India' and 'the intoxication of unfettered communication on the web', where the expansion of Hindu extremism enables 'small groups to acquire impressive dimensions in virtual real estate, and to express themselves as forcefully as they

might choose' (Rajagopal 2000: 484–5). Some Hindu Right leaders have shifted from lauding Adolph Hitler's achievements to glorifying the valiant struggle of Israel and Zionism against Arab-Muslim 'encirclement' (Rajagopal 2000: 485). Islamophobia and anti-minority hatred became the main glue amongst sectors of the diaspora who had lost touch with their homeland's tradition of tolerance. Here the influence of neo-conservative thought displaces the values once championed by world-acclaimed philosophers, poets and leaders like Radindranath Tagore, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Mahatma Gandhi, who had struggled for a pluralist, tolerant and articulate vision of India—in fact, Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindutva acolyte.

Online Mobbing and Digital Outcasts

Susan Sontag (2003: 344–5) cogently expresses the infelicities of living amongst a mobilised diaspora:

The risk of being punished. The risk of being isolated. The risk of being injured or killed. The risk of being scorned. We are all conscripts in one sense or another. For all of us it is hard to break ranks; to incur the disapproval, the censure, the violence of an offended majority with a different idea of loyalty. . . . To fall out of step with one's tribe; to step beyond one's tribe into a world that is much larger mentally, but smaller numerically—if alienation or dissidence is not your habitual or gratifying posture, this is a complex and difficult process.

Sontag's words echo effectively the rule of the intimidating mob in the diaspora. The concepts of 'online mobbing' or 'cyber bullying' thus become essential in any exploration of the dynamics of radicalisation taking place within the World Wide Web.

Acting as individuals rather than group members and struggling against formidable odds, moderate members of ethnic diasporas often try to counter the growing ultra-nationalist hegemony prevailing in their midst. Their balancing, yet threatened, role is taken into account here in connection with our emphasis on radicalisation. Beside the case of dissenting US Jews feeling under constant scrutiny by Zionist organisations, countless mobilised diasporas experience daily the tragedy of internal polarisation, particularly if under pressure from an existing 'nation-state' (Safran 1991, 1999).

One might compare the radicalisation within diasporas to the sober situation at home. Non-Zionist (not necessarily 'anti-Zionist'), pacifist, liberal and orthodox Jews in the diaspora who have shown sympathy for the Palestinian cause face constant marginalisation and blame as 'self-hating Jews'. According to Findley (1989), the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has actively attempted to suppress free debate in the diaspora. But the debacle has been widely discussed in the pages of *Ha'artez* and other liberal Israeli media, reflecting a relatively more open attitude about these matters in Israel than within the diaspora in the USA. For Yakov M. Rabkin, Jewish opposition to Israel is reconfigured as a '*threat from within*', with

serious consequences for those who do not align themselves to the mainstream (Rabkin 2006). And, from within Israel itself, the late Baruch Kimmerling powerfully denounced how 'fewer Jews in the diaspora had any moral qualms about depriving millions of Palestinian Arabs of all civil rights and most human rights' (2003: 18–19). It is important to note that pressures to fall in line with the vociferous mainstream (blame, marginalisation and even dismissal from job) are usually more noticeable within the US than in Israel itself, where opposition is more tolerated and occasionally encouraged—insofar as it remains 'under control'. In other words, diasporic individuals face unique forms of ostracism by vociferous radicals, and not infrequently they are bullied into supporting the patriotic cause.

Sometimes, as in the case of organised crime and terrorism, the methods of controlling dissent can become very violent: members of the banned International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) used assassinations and bombings against moderate Sikhs who opposed them, their argument being that the Sikh nation was under threat.

In general, many chat-room discussions and non-moderated blogs of commentaries on ethnic issues reveal visible signals of the deteriorating standards of civic tolerance, while conditions of anonymity multiply the ostracising effects of hate speech (Eriksen 2011). This can include forms of anonymous, semi-anonymous and even open harassment, as with the case of Han and Hindutva ultra-nationalists or the European Far Right. Of course, anonymity is often strictly necessary to guarantee personal safety where speech freedom is at stake.

Conclusions

New communication tools have made available previously inaccessible information to greater numbers of people, inciting the formation of global, cross-boundary ethno-political networks. But has the Internet also contributed to the erection of new inter-communal barriers? Has it widened pre-existing communication gaps?

This article has responded affirmatively to both questions by focusing on the online radicalisation of global ethnic networks. It has explored one of the 'dark sides' of the Internet: that portion of increasingly vociferous *netizens* who use digital technologies to promote hostility, aggressive patriotism, xenophobia, conflict, ethnic exclusion and, eventually, war.

Although cyber communities have provided avenues for peace, prosperity and conflict prevention (Brainard and Brinkerhoff 2006; Brinkerhoff 2009), the evidence gathered in this article indicates that unregulated use of the Internet can enable quasi-spontaneous outbursts of hate speech via incitement to conflict by virtual peer pressure, often turning the Internet into a locus of radicalisation. While in 1996 only a 'handful' of websites advocated hate towards out-groups, ten years later the figure had risen to 2,300 (Douglas 2007: 155). These figures may still exclude several cases of 'cyber-hate' otherwise classified as ethnic or nationalist. Most important, the Internet has contributed to the organisation of significant extremist networks pushing both

homeland politics and the host country's foreign policy towards confrontation and conflict. In some cases, as in mainland China and India, it played a role in the attacks on ethnic minorities, inciting domestic politics to take the path of human-rights abuses.

Two approaches have been combined here: Anderson's concept of long-distance nationalism and my own focus on de-differentiation and radicalisation in the diaspora context. The latter, explored in previous work on ethnic conflict and theories of nationalism (Conversi 1994, 1995), stresses the specific situation of the diaspora in relation both to the host society and to inter-generational cultural continuity. I finally argue that the diaspora's condition of isolation and anonymity encourages an increase in 'online mobbing' against dissidents who, fearing marginalisation, are asked to fall into line with the us/them and black/white dichotomies of the extremists.

Diaspora politics have often entailed an above-average amount of radicalism, with or without the Internet. In these cases, the abdication of responsibility is partly due to the relatively safe placement abroad of the diaspora's most successful members and elites. Having secured a living in the host society, socially mobile elites no longer face direct risks and can thus delegate the 'dirty jobs' either to their homeland's policing institutions or, in the case of stateless nations, to local radicals who then have to bear the brunt of the state repression. In fact, stateless and state-linked diasporas can safely confront each other in many host countries, while the blood is spilled in faraway lands. The diasporas' 'vicarious nationalism' can be figuratively compared to the corporate de-localisation of industries and labour. Here, multinational industries abdicate all sorts of responsibility about social rights and the environment by delegating repressive functions to local *apparatchiki*, like the Chinese Communist party, or corrupt their way to power through the import of corporate-friendly legislation.

However, the causes of radicalisation should not be found in the Internet itself: the medium is not the message, nor the messenger. The Internet remains an ideal locus for building more dense networks of activism and, indeed, promoting peace and monitoring human rights (Brinkerhoff 2009). More pressing causes can be found in a conjuncture of mutually reinforcing factors: globalisation's homogenising effects, a lack of civic and cultural education, diaspora anomie and uprootedness, failed inter-group communication (mostly predating the advent of the Internet), the absence of comprehensive cultural policies and, increasingly, the state promotion of ethnic and patriotic chauvinism.

The worst possible solution for tackling the problem of Internet radicalism would be to devise forms of Internet censorship, control and supervision. Recently, several experts and leading personalities advanced the possibility of an Orwellian alliance between authoritarian regimes, mega-corporations, 'security' forces and the US government to 'filter dissent' and monitor global Internet usage.¹⁶

Obviously, new communication technologies are not to be confused with globalisation *per se*. Globalisation is a larger political, economic and cultural process, which has benefited from technological innovations and advances, but could eventually function independently from them.

The political influence wielded by ethnic diasporas *qua* lobbies is famously more decisive in US foreign policy than elsewhere. The expanding role of diaspora politics can be seen perhaps as a form of ‘really existing globalisation’, depending on the meaning which one can attach to such an ambiguous concept (Conversi 2009c, 2010). Nationalism belongs to a broader pattern of Westernisation, but the phenomenon I address might in principle work independently from it. In fact, ‘Internet nationalism’ is made possible by the appropriation of new technologies, which are *per se* devoid of ethnic, geographic or civilisation connotations. In this way, new non-territorial bounds and networks have been built within virtual communities which are nevertheless obsessed by territorial imperatives, in the form of either defending territorial integrity or asserting more aggressive territorial expansion.

Finally, because online vitriol and actual violence do not always occur in tandem, or in a sequence, nor are directly linked, these connections need to be further explored. And, as the causal linkage between online statements and offline actions remains relatively under-researched,¹⁷ this points to an important area requiring further research and theorising.

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Notes

- [1] Data from The World in Action, <http://www.avaaz.org/eb/about.php>. The site has been under severe cyber-attack by a suspected combination of authoritarian governments like China, and US corporate giants (https://secure.avaaz.org/en/massive_attack_on_avaaz_a/?fp, last accessed 15 March 2012).
- [2] In his rather optimistic note on President Obama’s entrance into the White House, his advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski (2008: 1) argued: ‘For the first time in history almost all of humanity is politically activated, politically conscious and politically interactive. Global activism is generating a surge in the quest for cultural respect and economic opportunity in a world scarred by memories of colonial or imperial domination’. For an even more enthusiastic analysis, see Brzezinski (2009).
- [3] Arguably, there are exceptions to this binary distinction, as in the case of the Gypsies/Roma who, however, rarely engage in radical politics, particularly not radical nationalism (Sigona and Trehan 2009).
- [4] This could psychologically be evaluated with the methodology which Reips and Buffardi are proposing in this issue.
- [5] The first email using the ‘@’ sign was apparently sent in 1971 (see Ray Tomlinson, *The First Network Email*, <http://openmap.bbn.com/~tomlinso/ray/firstemailframe.html>, un-dated, last accessed 15 May 2012. Personal note: I first used email in 1988 while connecting a computer situated in the University of London with one situated in La Jolla, California).
- [6] Besides social networking, Skype could count, in 2009, 30–40 million daily users operating at any given moment from over 500 million personal accounts.

- [7] In this special issue, Reips and Buffardi derive Facebook users' narcissism from their Facebook profiles. By using an adapted methodology, a new study could possibly be derived to confirm the 'narcissism of small differences' hypothesis.
- [8] However, when face-to-face is difficult or impossible, ICTs can enable many diasporic individuals to reinstall personal relationships with and within families (see Bacigalupe and Cámara, this issue).
- [9] In an effort to capitalise on US patriotism in the aftermath of 9/11, Serbian nationalist websites circulated news of Bin Laden's 'Balkan connections' and a supposed al Qaeda secret network in Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia (Bock-Luna 2007).
- [10] According to the 2000 US Census Bureau, this amounted to a mere 113,661 individuals (0.04 per cent of the US population), in comparison to the 1,300,000 Albanians living in Turkey, according to the 2007 Turkish census.
- [11] See 'Censored in China: Google, Microsoft, Yahoo! and Cisco Systems go along with government bans', (2006) *US News and World Report*, 140(7): 29, last accessed 11 April 2010 (no longer available online); 'Google China attack episode: is Microsoft to blame?', *Infosecurity*, 7(1): 6, <http://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/view/6491/google-china-attack-episode-is-microsoft-to-blame/>, last accessed 15 May 2012 (Note: many of the original URLs relating to China's Internet policies and US Internet giants may have been changed or removed).
- [12] On the Chinese government's priorities for 'harmonisation', see 'China: censorship keywords, policies and blacklists for leading search engine Baidu, 2006–2009', *Wikileaks*, Release date: 2 May 2009, URL:http://wikileaks.org/wiki/China:_censorship_keywords%2C_policies_and_blacklists_for_leading_search_engine_Baidu%2C_2006-2009 (Note: last accessed through *Wikileaks*' mirror site, 15 May 2012; all original *Wikileaks* URLs and documents had been suppressed by December 2010 and their continuous availability on the Internet is in doubt due to the US/corporate financial blockade; read the important statement claiming, among other things, that 'Mass interception of entire populations is not only a reality, it is a secret new industry spanning 25 countries' since at least 11 September 2001: <http://wikileaks.org/>); 'Baidu's Internal Monitoring and Censorship Document Leaked (1) (Updated)', <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2009/04/baidus-internal-monitoring-and-censorship-document-leaked/>, last accessed: 16 September 2010/15 May 2012 (not yet removed at the time of publication).
- [13] See also 'Is Wikipedia China Really Wikipedia?', *CBS News (Public Eye)*, 30 November 2006, URL: http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-500486_162-2218394-500486.html.
- [14] See the Uyghur American Association's main webpage at <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/>.
- [15] *Sikh Formations*, <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/rsfo>.
- [16] See, for instance, Sergey Brin (interviewed by Ian Katz), 'Web freedom faces greatest threat ever, warns Google's Sergey Brin', *The Guardian*, Sunday 15 April 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/apr/15/web-freedom-threat-google-brin>, accessed 20 April 2012; Ian Katz, 'Google's Sergey Brin: state filtering of dissent threatens web freedom', *The Guardian*, Wednesday 18 April 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/apr/18/google-sergey-brin-web-freedom>, accessed 20 April 2012;
- [17] The issue of the causal linkage between online statements and offline actions is addressed in this issue by Kathrin Kissau (2012).

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