EASA Media Anthropology Network
e-Seminar Series

http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm

E-Seminar on Thomas H. Eriksen's working paper "Nations in Cyberspace"

(23 – 30 May 2006)

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Dear all

I'd like to open the 11th EASA Media Anthropology Network e-seminar by thanking Thomas Hylland Eriksen (University of Oslo) for kindly agreeing to present his paper "Nations and Cyberspace: Nationalism and Social Communication" which is a short version of an Ernest Gellner Lecture he recently delivered at the LSE. The full lecture is due to be published in the journal Nations and Nationalism in 2007. The e-seminar will run on this mailing list for a week from today, ending on Tuesday 30 May at 9 pm GMT. A transcript of the seminar will be posted on our website early in June. A PDF of the paper is available at

http://media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm

Thomas H. Eriksen is an anthropologist who specialises in the study of ethnicity, nationalism, and globalisation, with an ethnographic focus on Mauritius, Trinidad and Norway. He has recently published a book on the public profile of anthropology titled Engaging anthropology: The case for a public presence. Oxford: Berg.

The discussant will be Mirca Madianou (Cambridge University) whose book Mediating the Nation: news, audiences and the politics of identity, London: UCL Press, came out in 2005. Mirca is currently researching the uses of communication technologies (esp. internet and mobile phones) by transnational families.

Once we have heard from Mirca later today and Thomas has responded to her comments, the discussion will then be open to all on the list. Please remember that in order to ensure a wide range of questions and comments, individual participants are allowed no more than 3 postings per seminar. Also, please make sure that your postings are brief and that they have a concise, relevant subject line (this listserv rejects empty subject lines).

I look forward to a productive discussion. It's over to Mirca now, with many thanks for your contribution!

John

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Comments on Thomas Hylland Eriksen's paper 'Nations in cyberspace' (short version of the 2006 Ernest Gellner lecture, London School of Economics 27 March 2006)

by Mirca Madianou (Department of Sociology and Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge).

Thomas Hylland Eriksen's 'Nations in cyberspace' is a thoughtful and thought provoking paper on a timely issue. The proponents of the social communication approach have long considered the impact of electronic media on nationalism and the nation-state. If print capitalism (Anderson, 1983) and education (Gellner, 1983) catalysed the emergence of the

nation-state, then what role do television and more recently, the internet have on processes of nation-building and nation-maintenance? Crucially, this is not merely a theoretical question; such debates are reflected in a number of policy decisions about immigration and multicultural politics thus having tangible consequences in people's everyday lives. For example, the reader may recall the moral panics surrounding satellite television for allegedly preventing the integration of immigrants in Germany (for a discussion see Aksoy and Robins, 2000). More recently, debates about the role of the internet in radicalising identity politics have echoed similar concerns.

Eriksen states his argument clearly: 'Nations thrive in cyberspace'. Far from being the global village (McLuhan, 1964), cyberspace emerges as the symbolic terrain in which nations (actual and in waiting) struggle for visibility and recognition. Eriksen points out in the paper's abstract that 'in a "global era" of movement and deterritorialisation, the internet is typically used to strengthen, rather than weaken, national identities' thus echoing Anderson's argument about 'long distance nationalism' (2001).

This deterritorialised nationalism, however, need not always be 'virulent' as Anderson suggests. Eriksen draws our attention to four different types of cybernationalism (namely, independence struggles in absentia, stable hyphenation, surrogate nationhood and the virtual province). Although some of the above (for instance, independence struggles in absentia) can be seen as forms of long distance nationalism, Eriksen extends the argument about nationalism in the electronic age by pointing out that 'virtual nations need neither be oppositional nor secessionist' (p. 10). As the example of maroc.nl suggests, what is at stake is the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994) within the Dutch polity rather than a diasporic yearning for a lost homeland. Eriksen pushes the argument even further and argues compellingly that the 'most common form of virtual nationalism' is quite simply the deterritorialisation of the existing (and I would add, established) nation. This can take place either through state sponsored policies (the example of the Chileans of el exterior), or as his anecdotal evidence suggests, through the increased sociality that the internet facilitates: the sheer possibility of keeping in touch with friends and family, with the news, the gossip and the weather, as the Norwegian family in Guatemala did (p.10). This observation is in line with Miller and Slater's (2000) arguments about the internet in Trinidad as enacting and furthering 'Trinidadianess' through the consolidation of previously virtual social relationships with the Trinidadian diaspora and the presentation to the outside world of what it means to be 'Trini'.

At this point, one might ask whether it is possible to still talk about nationalism and identity, or whether the above examples simply suggest social interaction and sociality. A social communication perspective implies that it is precisely this sociality that supports an identity. But is it possible to overemphasise the importance of identity in such communicative practices? I would have liked this part of the paper that deals with sociality (not the state sponsored policy of Chile, but rather the use of the internet by immigrants to maintain links with friends and family) to be further developed.

I now want to briefly turn to an observation that raises a couple of wider questions about the modernist theories of nationalism and the foundations of online research. I will begin with the latter. The argument in this paper about the types of online nationalism is based on the analysis of different websites. My question here is who actually uses these websites? How representative can a website be of a whole community or ethnic group? Is it not inevitable that a website that claims to represent a whole population will most likely be representing the official view of a given community? For example, the author notes that the Kurdish websites have 'few if any feedback opportunities for the users' (p.6) indicating that they are not as

interactive and participatory as they might be. The author writes that the Tamil and Kurdish websites are supplemented by personal websites and blogs - it would be very interesting to know the content of these websites and the extent to which they share, or contest the views of the official ones. Although, of course, a website is a much more complex type of text it still raises the methodological questions surrounding textual analysis: to what extent can we infer meanings from the analysis of the websites (especially if they are not including or inviting the participation of their users)?

This observation connects with my second question which involves a critique of the modernist debates of nationalism. Modernist writers (including the representatives of the social communication approach) whilst making an argument about the construction, the building of the nation-state, have assumed that cultural homogenisation is actually achieved. Could it be, however, that Kokoschka's painting was never (entirely) replaced by a Modigliani? By neglecting a bottom-up approach modernist writers may have overstated the case of homogenisation and glossed over the everyday contestations of nationalism. It is in this context that the understanding of the consumption of the above websites could cast light on how nationalism is reproduced or, even possibly, rejected.

The author notes that "a main objective for most of the nationalist websites [.] is to make the plight, the virtues or the beauties of this or that nation known to members of the 'global village'" (p.13). Islam.no, for instance, aims 'to rectify the negative image of Muslims' (p. 8). These observations suggest that these websites are the means through which a community presents itself to the outside world; it would be equally fascinating to see how the members of the same community decide upon this self representation. This process reminds me of Michael Herzfeld's cultural intimacy (1997), a concept that refers to the tensions between collective self-knowledge and collective self-representation. Cultural intimacy can explain how nations present a homogenous and harmonious identity to the outside world whilst allowing for a degree of internal contestation as long as this is not brought to the attention of the outside world.

All these are thoughts I have been grappling with in recent years - I hope that the above can stimulate further discussion. Thanks to Thomas for providing me with the opportunity to re-engage with these debates. I am very much looking forward to the discussion.

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Many thanks for those comments, Mirca!

It's over to Thomas now for his response, after which the discussion will be open to everyone on the list. To participate, please email your comments and questions directly to medianthro@abyznet.net

Best

John

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Response to Mirca Madianou

Reading Mirca Madianou's comments on my essay brought three recent events from my part of the world to mind: (1) The cartoon controversy, (2) a curious event involving a football referee, and (3) a woman of Indian origin who wished to wear a sari during a Constitution Day parade. I'll return to these examples in a minute, arguing their relevance.

Mirca's criticisms are sound and pertinent. She asks about the representativity of particular websites, the actual importance of diasporic nationalist websites, and how internet communication is connected to social interaction. It is important to keep in mind the qualitative difference between the various parts of the Internet. Email lists are more personal (more invasive?) than websites; chat creates groups while email creates dyads; and blogs are public diaries and a bit more. A novelist I know says that her blog is her virtual lunchroom. Working at home, she needs a space where she can exchange gossip and criticise the government.

In order to answer Mirca's questions about social significance, one would have to do offline research (which I haven't done, at least not systematically – others have, but not as far as I know on the websites she mentions specifially); other indicators would be numbers of visitors and so on. Some of the websites I mentioned are professional journalistic ventures, while others are set up by self-appointed community leaders or by people driven by ideological convictions. Such websites need not be de facto representative for «a community» at all. What is fascinating is the fact that one needs no formal credentials to «represent» a nation in cyberspace. A group of students can create something which looks convincing and

authoritative. The playing ground was levelled with the appearance of the newspaper; now, with the Internet, it is virtually being flattened. As a consequence, it appears that efforts of homogenisation (which, I agree, may not have been all that successful) are now bound to fail at a societal level, but perhaps not at the (virtual) community level.

The ambitions of my essay were really quite modest: to show how the Internet creates conditions of creating and reproducing deterritorialised virtual communities, and that this takes place in a variety of ways involving different forms of nationalism. More research, including fieldwork, is certainly needed – if I'm not mistaken, there are members of this forum who are carrying out some of this research as I write.

I'd like to use this opportunity to expand on some other aspects of identity work via the Internet, which were scarcely dealt with in the essay, which are to do with the power of symbols and the possibilities for extremists to dominate the unregulated media world which is the World Wide Web.

Let me begin with the perhaps least significant example. One of the three Norwegians who had been selected to referee the European Cup finals between Arsenal and Barcelona allowed himself to be photographed, by the local newspaper Drammens Tidende, wearing a Barcelona outfit. This took place only a few days before the match, and much to his surprise, the event became known to the entire football world in a matter of hours, leading to his having to resign from the match immediately. (Some of the viewers would actually have been happy to see all three being replaced, but that's another story.) In fact, the original plan had been to let him be depicted wearing Arsenal colours as well, but they didn't stock the right size in the local sports shop. Conclusion: Symbols matter, meanings travel fast, and complexity tends to be reduced in global cyberspace. Nuances also disappear in Internet-based communication about nationhood. Everything is blunted, everything tends to become fast and two-dimensional.

The cartoon controversy, thoroughly debated by now (my take on it is available at http://www.culcom.uio.no/publikasjoner/THE-cosmopolitanism.html), led to an apparent polarisation between «the secular West» and «political Islam». Strikingly, the entire public sphere was immediately taken hostage to these opposing positions. People who might otherwise have spent their energy discussing inclusion in the labour market for immigrants, discrimination in schools and so on, had to decide whether to support a conservative Danish newspaper known for its hostile views on Muslims or a handful of angry imams who called for restrictions on the freedom of speech. Conclusion: The fast electronic media, perhaps especially the Internet, are eminently suitable for that reduction of complexity which is commonly associated with nationalist ideology and other forms of identity politics. Debates can easily be hijacked by extremists presenting themselves as «typical» or «the voice of the common people».

The third example is relevant only indirectly. In Sandefjord, a smallish Norwegian town known for its political conservatism, a member of the august 17 May Committee (17 May is Constitution Day, celebrated with flag parades and large amounts of beer and ice cream nationwide) was a woman of Indian origin.

Seeing that all women (but not the men!) in the committee had to wear a bunad, that is a traditionalist Norwegian costume, in the parade, she requested to be allowed to wear a sari instead. Her request was turned down, and there was a minor media scandal. This example – a woman who would wear a sari (Indian) while waving a Norwegian flag (Norwegian) – illustrates some of the difficulties faced by websites like maroc.nl and islam.no: to defend a

complex identity without being accused of having divided loyalties or stigmatised forever as a stranger. Conclusion: Such complex identites are often difficult to defend in entrenched nationalist public spaces, but the Internet, especially the WWW, easily accommodates them, not least because it is deterritorialised.

I'm looking forward to reading what others have to say about nationalism and the Internet over the next few days, and meanwhile, thank you Mirca for your thoughtful and relevant comments.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

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Many thanks for that response, Thomas! The discussion is now open to all subscribers to this mailing list. Please remember to write directly to medianthro@abyznet.net (i.e. not to me) with no attachments and keeping your postings brief.

Best wishes

John

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What I have been impressed by in this exchange is the rapid development from paper, through Madianou's response to Eriksen's reply. The point that emerges is that it is much harder to assess the significance of a web presence than we have admitted in the past. Even in our (with Don Slater) original research in Trinidad we found there were Indian nationalists who had a major presence on line which basically signified only that no one would take them at all seriously in any other media. It can also be that the internet is used by Diaspora groups to channel their residual nationalism in a manner that lowers, rather than augments, their interest in and involvement in nationalism otherwise.

This, to my mind, establishes the particular responsibility of anthropologists interested in media, which is to concentrate as much as possible on assessing the consequence of a web presence, rather than documenting that presence. Because to assess the consequence requires the much more multi-faceted, long term relationship to off line and on line activities that anthropology can commit to, and that most other approaches neglect. What we want to know is whether this presence effects remittances, a shift in the pattern of marriage, a political schism, a conduit for weapons sales, or in this case a shift in the form of nationalism itself.

The second point that emerges from what Madianou notes is the most ambitious of Eriksen's claims, comes from considering the form and materiality of a relatively autonomous identity that exists largely on-line. Perhaps we need to approach this from the other end, and examine groups that have come into existence only on-line. Could Second-Life, or Cyworld one day become sorts of nation? They may already have their own currencies and symbols. If so,

would the identity politics that results be analogous to those of traditional territorially based identities? At what point does this move from, as Madianou suggests, a form of sociality, to an issue of identity? Anyway thanks to both authors for pointers in these directions.

Danny Miller

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Hello list

One of the important arguments of Thomas H. Eriksen rest on the idea of what a nation is. He starts with Gellner's definition, but criticizes it shortly after. He needs a theory of nationalism in order to accomplish his objective. Because that theory in itself is a controversial theme in current social science, he has a difficult task if he wants to propose one.

If he wants to do so, he may consider tell us if there are differences in three concepts he uses: internet nationalism, virtual nationalism, and transnational nationalism. All of this, as opposed to territorial nationalism (which possibly Gellner's definition is all about).

Eriksen identifies seven modes of internet nationalism: state-supported, surrogate, pre-independence, multiculturalist, oppositional, and diasporic. Therefore, although new modes could arise in the future, we have a classificatory scheme to start.

Eriksen main proposal is that Internet is a vehicle for nationalism. He also proposes that Internet is a communication technology which has the potential of making political boundaries congruent with cultural ones.

We already know that television has this effect, so the good news is that other mass media can accomplish it. What we don't know, and Eriksen seems to have the same problem, is how this happens, what is the mechanism by which nationalism is build through the mass media. It would be also interesting to read his argument about congruency.

Finally, the comparison of territorial nation-state and patrilineal kinship system, and internet nationalism with matrilineal systems is very interesting, so he could tell us more about it.

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I've greatly enjoyed reading TH Eriksen's paper and the first few exchanges and hope that many others on the list will contribute a comment or two!

Thomas mentions migrant Trinidadians (Miller and Slater 2000) and Norwegians who thanks to the internet can now strengthen their ties to their respective homelands from afar. I find that this also applies to people living in their own countries of origin. For instance, in 2003-4 I did fieldwork in a Kuala Lumpur suburb into the uses of internet technologies for local activism and government. The internet has allowed residents not only to mobilise against the local authorities at critical times, but also to engage in 'small talk' and other activities, both online and offline, during calmer periods.

Who are these local authorities? This is not East Timor or Kosovo; they are not UN ('global') or US/EU surrogates, but rather an inextricable part of the Malaysian polity. The notion of local-global articulations would be misleading here, as the crucial nexus here is local-national. So the internet is slowly extending the ongoing process of state formation and nation building across the Malaysian culture area, even when people are engaging in activism that is at times highly critical of the state.

For one thing, the internet allows locals to interact with numerous other locals, i.e. fellow Malaysians living in the same locality, in so doing strengthening their middle-class Malaysian cultural competence across divides of ethnicity, religion, profession, etc. Their public discourse is unmistakeably Malaysian, and this includes when they're dealing with international issues such as the cartoon controversy.

I was wondering if Thomas (and others on the list) had anything to add on this question of internet and national cultural competence?

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Thanks to Danny Miller and Francisco Osorio for their views, which point in opposite, but equally fruitful, directions. Of course you are right Danny, as I've already conceded; merely documenting the presence of various nationalisms on the Internet says little about their importance. What I've been saying is that this is a place to look, which could shed light in interesting ways on received theories of nationalism. I do not think that Gellner is simply wrong, Francisco, but on the contrary, that he provided an analytical framework worth engaging with, and in dialogue with modernist (Gellner, Anderson) theory of nationalism, a task for students of nationalism consists in showing in which ways and to what extent particular nations are becoming deterritorialised in the present era. Far from being a departure from modernist theories, this perspective adds a new dimension to it, while also emphasising (in a very un-Gellnerian way) variation.

Personally I can think of several "groups" that I belong to that would either not exist at all or at least not exist in their present form without the Internet -- ranging from Oslo Byforum (Oslo city forum), a network of concerned urbanists, to the transnational (but thin on the ground) collectivity of admirers of Soft Machine. Connected in various ways and to varying degrees to offline worlds, such collectivities may occasionally mobilise their members socially or politically. The question asked by Danny Miller about identity is a central one. A main argument in Miller/Slater's pioneering "The Internet: An ethnographic approach" was that their informants tended not to distinguish between "virtual" and "real life" social domains. This doesn't just mean that they are seamlessly integrated, but also that a person's or group's identity could be manifest chiefly or even exclusively on the Web without being a

"virtual identity". A difference between television and the Internet family of technologies is that the latter is so much more decentralised than the former and therefore difficult to control by, say, the state or a large semi-monopolist like Microsoft. So when does an online community become central to the identity of a number of persons? I would hazard the guess that in the case of the websites I've examined, there are deep and shallow players involved. Again, it would be interesting to hear about extant research including offline fieldwork.

The analogy between matrilineality and deterritorialised nationhood, deliberately introduced where the essay ends, so that I didn't have to develop it, was meant to be suggestive of the complex problems faced by territorially scattered nations. While the territorial nation-state fuse diverse resources into one principle (like a classic patrilineal system), deterritorialised nations are, for obvious reasons, more difficult to legitimise and maintain on an everyday basis (matrilineal systems also tend to be more complex than the patrilineal ones).

Thomas

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Regarding Internet and national cultural competence

I have enjoyed reading Eriksen´s paper and the exchanges!
As referring to my research on the Kashubians I join John Postill´s comment that "a person's or group's identity could be manifest chiefly or even exclusively on the Web without being a "virtual identity"".

Contrary to my first assumptions, the Kashubians do not distinguish between "virtual" and "real life" social domains. Based on my online-interviews they were even a little bit upset when I asked to what extend the internet has contributed to their cultural representation. One person emphasised that the internet is just a tool for their representational intentions and therefore is not indispensable for the strengthening of their ties.

On the other hand this medium played an immense role regarding the population census 2002 in Poland. In order to register the Kashubian language by name and not under the category "other languages", they organized a protest against the commissar. This appeal took place mainly online, since the printed press was not willing to support it. Furthermore the internet kept the Kashubians up-to-date about the resulting outcomes. Thanks to this initiative, one year later they could rely on these outcomes and establish Kashubian as official language in some areas.
In fact, the internet extends the process of cultural and national competence which does not presuppose a distinction between "virtual" and "real" interaction and organizational forms. On Friday I go to Poland to do offline research in order to find out more about the social significance of the internet. But I think there is no doubt about the connection between internet communication and social interaction (as Mirca Madianou stated). As John Postill noted, our interpretation of this medium depends on the qualitative differences between the various parts of the Internet. The Webpage I am researching on is a private one and officially aims at the strengthening of the Pomeranian identity. On the forum the participants exclusively refer to Kashubian matters and are earnestly engaged in discussions, e.g. how to deal with discrimination. One journalist uses this page to publish some

controversial articles and the responses referring to them show that there is no homogenous and harmonious identity. But this seems not to be the aim of the Kashubians. They solely search for cultural representation and recognition of their language and use the internet "as a tool".

I'm looking forward to reading critical comments and responses regarding cultural/national representation and the role of the internet.

Best regards,
Alexandra Wangler

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Thanks for an interesting paper Thomas!

Although, just finishing a paper on the relevance of the ICT technologies for Diasporic communities and the way that the meaning of tradition is negotiated, debated, transformed and made into an icon for Diasporic identity among Kolkata intellectuals, I was a bit surprised by the, according to my opinion, very general level of the discussion in the paper. The relevance of the ICT technologies for Diasporic groups is well documented, (UNDP takes up the issue in a report in 1999, I pointed it out in an FRN report in 2000 and so on) As Daniel states, merely documenting the presence of various nationalisms on the Internet says little about their importance and significance, and as I understand Thomas, he agrees to this. According to my opinion, the most crucial issues now ought to be to investigate the dynamics and processes involved in the construction of nationalism through the ICT technologies and the implications of it. (See also Francisco's point)

Some comments……

I think that basic methodological standpoints needs to be defined, as for example approaches to how to analyse online interaction and the nature of online communication, including also issues as i.e. the use of and significance of meaning and symbols in an online context. The relationship between the on- line and the off-line is crucial, as Daniel points out. How should we grasp and frame the relationship between online interaction and the actual social and cultural formation. Does it and in what ways does it have impact on the life worlds of the subjects. I will point out that those issues have already been widely debated on this list.

The relationship between Diaspora, media and Transnationalism might be elaborated. It is suggested that the new technologies provides the possibilities for Diasporic groups to strengthen their ties to their respective homelands from afar. It is true, but I consider the relationship to be much more complex. The new forms of media have placed the Diasporic communities in the centre of intersecting communication flows. (See also Rosa Tsagarousianou, 2004) The Diasporic communities are built upon relationships between the specific Diasporic group, the home country and sections of the Diasporic community situated in other locations. The flows of interaction are not one-way, but multidimensional. In the terms of micro sociology and micro history Diasporic communities might be described as the microcosms at the centre of general connections, local and global forces and communication

flows. Identity and identity formation is shaped in this intersection between the Diaspora, the home and other sections of the Diasporic community.

Another point that I want to emphasise is the nature of Diasporic communities and identity formation. The experience that I have encountered is that the form of identification differs between generations, i.e. the first generation migrants might be prone to emphasise the relationship to the home country and tradition in identity formation while The identification might take another form in the second generation and so on. Another suggestion that I want to put forward is that the level of identification might change. For example Daniel suggests that the new communication technologies might lower, rather than augment, their interest in and involvement in nationalism. It ought to be interesting to see if national identity might loose in force in favour for an identity based on other criteria with the new communication forms. I.e. Indian Diasporic communities are often described as a homogeneous group from an outside perspective, but internally the group is differentiated. Maybe, levels of identification based on factors as ethnic belonging, caste or community might become very important in the new context.

Thomas states that websites are the means through which a community presents itself to the outside world. In my reading, Diaspora websites form arenas where life in the Diaspora is explored, reflected upon and debated. Cultural and traditional meanings are created, reproduced, transformed and contested online. The notion of belonging and identity might be defined. In the terms of Tsagarousianou (2004) The Diaspora websites form spaces of communication where remote localities and their experiences come together and become synchronised into Complex landscapes characterised by multidimensionality and multiplicity of flows.

The last point that I want to question a bit is Thomas statements regarding electronic media and reduction of complexity. I'm not at all sure that I agree to this point. My own experiences is that the ICT technologies also might emphasises diversity and multiplicity…..

Kerstin

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I think Kirsten's last remark about complexity may refer to the following passage from Thomas' response to Mirca:

>>
Conclusion: Symbols matter, meanings travel fast, and complexity tends to be reduced in global cyberspace. Nuances also disappear in Internet-based communication about nationhood. Everything is blunted, everything tends to become fast and two-dimensional.
>>

I, too, have problems with this conclusion. I don't recognise this cyberspace, but perhaps over the years I've become one of Thomas' 'deep' users. A more likely explanation, I would hazard,

is that we Internet users * as a whole * are getting better at separating the wheat from the chaff; this process is in fact becoming institutionalised. For example, self-appointed cybervigilantes tick you off these days if you forward via email urban legends or scams, and they'll often refer you to websites specialising in these epidemics.

Looking at Internet communication diachronically, over the past 15 or so, I suspect we would find growing sophistication in the production and sharing of contents of all kinds, from music to auctioning to nationalist propaganda. To survive in an increasingly harsh environment, internet contents are becoming ever more cultural niche-specific and more embedded in trusted social networks and organisations.

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I am very intreagued by the Eriksen paper and the following discussion. Part of what intreagues me is the way the discussion seems to have emerged.

The initial position that Eriksen Critiques is that nationalism is being disrupted by media crossing national boundaries. He makes a convincing argument that this is not the case, at least not in all cases.

But as Mirca effectively critiqued, he does not manage to set up an object 'nationalism' or 'virtual nationalism' in the process of critiqueing the idea of disrupted nationalism.

To me this is the problem with setting up nationalism as the question. It is like discussing 'democracy.' It is a category that is partly worked in order to to be very inclusive, and thus has tends to have dynamics of vagueness implied in its use. Nationalisms operate partly by being poorly defined.

Thus what do we mean when we say a 'nationalism' is consolidated? Eriksen points out that the 'nationalism' is often of a new form, even using a new language (e.g. English).

So what is it that is being consolidated? He also points out the variety of forms he has observed, and that not all of them correspond to historically more territorialised forms.

Mirca emphasises what seems like a more individualised interactionist view of 'sociality' but I am not sure that the ways in which people congregate under tendentially empty signs like nations in cyberspace can be fully reduced to individual interactions.

I think that Eriksen's point about people having varying levels of involvement, and dipping in and out of their involvement in these sites is pertinent. It reminds me of Ron Inden's take on complew agencies, where people's involvement in collectives is a matter of degree, and varies across time or between moments and incidents.

Surely here are the ethnographic questions: it is not nationalism, but varied social practices that are at issue here. My point being - are these nationalist sites the most significant forms of identification on the net? What about mass multi-user roleplaying games? Some of these are so large, and have such a strong economy asssociated with them in terms of trading characters

and items that they rank like small states in terms of their GDP. They also invoke such strong involvement that people drop dead at their screens after days of playing non-stop.

My point is that by starting the debate with questions of nationalism and identity, we obscure the issue of how involvement and participation in social practice is, at least in my opinion, the ground of identifications, and that this need not mean nationalism. If we are going to discuss nationalism, which seems like a legitimate topic, we need to do so in the context of other powerful forms of involvement.

Daniel

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Daniel Taghioff

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Thank you Alexandra Wangler, John Postill and Kerstin Andersson for your comments!

Kerstin, you are absolutely right. The original (long) version of my essay was a lecture given to an audience of academics working with nationalism, and few had engaged with the new media. Publishing a version of it on this media anthropology website, I anticipated (correctly, as it turned out) comments and objections from people who knew a lot more about diasporic use of internet technologies than I did. So thank you for enlightening me.

I wonder if it cannot be simultaneously true that electronic media reduce complexity (they are "colder", in McLuhan's usage, than real-world interaction) and enhance diversity (because of the anarchic nature of the Internet)? Single-minded fanatics/enthusiasts/devotees can easily sift and filter what they get on the Internet, leaving out anything not to their taste/interests. Benedict Anderson emphasised the role of the broad-spectered newspaper in creating abstract ("imagined") public spheres, seeing it as instrumental in the development of broad common references and shared preoccupations; the Internet, where specialisation is much easier, has different effects. But one cannot generalise about "the Internet"; one of the points I originally tried to make was that nationalisms on the Internet are really very diverse and that the technology itself is being used in qualitatively different ways (e.g. centralised/one-way and decentralised/interactively). In other words, the early commentators on the Internet, while they (and I should include myself here) were wrong in many respects, they/we were right in claiming that the lack of territoriality on the Internet must create problems for policymakers and others aiming to integrate populations culturally on the basis of place.

When John speaks of Malaysians who strengthen their local (yet abstract) identity on interactive websites etc., occasionally in defiance of the Malaysian government or at least independently of its censorship, this is not quite the same thing -- it sounds more like the 18th century salons where incipient French civil society flourished, and it is a great topic to explore further. The cultural competence (or intimacy) required to take part in a lot of online forums, and developed through them, is similar to what scholars of nationalism speak of in the context of standardised educational systems and national mass media, but online it is less inclusive and not territorially bound (at least in theory). The question is to what extent people living in diasporic conditions prioritise engagement with issues "at home" or in their country of

residence. In Paula Uimonen's thesis on the Internet and civil society in South-East Asia, she contrasts Malaysia with Laos (a country where very few have access to the Net); in the latter case, it appears that some of the most active Laotians on the Net live abroad, using the Web and mailing lists to criticise the government, communicating with dissidents in Laos in ways which would have been impossible without this technology. Just as Alexandra reports, regarding Kashubians in Poland, the Internet is not being used to strengthen a "sovereign and limited" imagined community, but communities at the sub-national level (segments of the national population) or -- as in the case of diasporic nationalism on the Internet, deterritorialised ones.

Best regards
Thomas

Jesse de Leon (Dalhousie University)
deleonjh@gmail.com

I'd like to join everyone before me in thanking Thomas for sharing his fascinating paper.

My only substantive issue with the paper is the implied position that, were it not mostly for the transnationalizing efforts of migrants aided by the Internet's technologies, the natural trajectory of the immigrant is towards assimilation. This does not address the active and institutionalized efforts at exclusion enacted by the nation-state and by many of its native-born population towards immigrants and their descendants. Often, this exclusion is based upon an ideology of race, upon the idea that immigrants and those born of immigrants are always already Other than the authentic indigenous population by virtue of being visibly different. I recall Lisa Lowe's point that she is always an Asian American and never just American (Lowe 2003), or as James Clifford observed, with diasporas many times being the product of exclusion, the rise of a diasporic consciousness can be seen as making the best of a bad situation (Clifford 1997:257). In other words, diasporas are one of the consequences of the political ideology of race.

This ties into a broader point I want to make about nation-states and national identity. In many ways, nationalist ideology and racialized ideology are tied together, or at least are allied ideologies. Nation-states base their legitimacy in part on being the political manifestation of the nation, or being the nation writ large. The logic of nationalism demands that nation-states have homogenous populations, else the legitimacy of the state is called into question -- if a nation-state rules because it is the representative of a people, what happens when other peoples exist within its territory? The empirical answer is that the nation-state suppresses these other nations, through direct and indirect violence (think of Native Americans in the former and African Americans and their economic and geographical segregation in the latter, but especially immigrant populations as well). If a nation-state's people are essentially the same, then those not of the nation-state and its people are essentially different, essentially Other. This talk of essential difference, of course, is linked to the pseudo-scientific discourse of race, which supplies the essentialized categories necessary for many of nationalism's constitutive fictions (in this way, I think Nazism is really nationalism taken to its logical extreme, but that is a digression).

Now then, what is really interesting is when one considers what nation-states are like today, in light of the new era of mass migration. Nation-states claim to represent the nation, but what

happens to that notion when part of the nation exists outside the territory of the nation-state? As Thomas' paper mentions, a nation-state can try to incorporate its diasporic members into its national and political imaginary, as in the case of Chile's 14th region, and I will add the example of Haiti's Tenth Department too. But wouldn't the host country of those diasporic people object to the meddling of external actors in the host country's territory? Shouldn't the host country object, particularly because the new (or rediscovered) ideology of multiculturalism is already attempting to incorporate the otherness of migrants within the framework of the nation-state?

Here I will mention the results of the Canadian Ethnic Diversity Survey, which found that Filipinos in Canada scored highly both in their sense of belonging to their ethnic group and to Canada. They are loyal both to the Philippines and to Canada, in other words. I think this speaks to Sasskia Sassen's observation that globalization, instead of weakening the nation-state, merely requires its rearticulation. David Graeber's article on globalization being the re-emergence of older patterns of transnationalism is also interesting in this regard, particularly his point that today's situation of an international elite in Europe using an international language mostly incomprehensible to the elite's countrymen and living in cities with working class neigbourhoods composed of people drawn from around the Mediterranean echoes the situation in medieval Europe. My essential point is that what we might be observing is a new or reinvigorated transnational order, where members of a nation-state do not need to be exclusively loyal to that nation-state to be incorporated within it. So is race being decoupled from nation today? I think that race is actually still being deployed in the service of the nation-state, especially within the discourse of multiculturalism. It is, of course, an attempt to incorporate heterogeneity within a nation-state, or rather, an attempt at homogenizing heterogeneity. "Regardless of race or colour or creed, we're all Canadian here," is the message being promoted here in Canada. But multicultural discourse also obfuscates the differences between immigrants and already existing oppressed minorities (African Canadians and Natives in Canada's case). It hides the historical oppression of minorities under the sameness of multiculturalism: Koreans are the same as Haitians, Ojibwa are the same as Poles, and the French are the same as Nigerians. So race still has political consequences even in the brave new multicultural world.

Moving onto specific details of the paper, I will echo Kerstin Andersson's differentiation of diasporic communities based on generations. My research on Filipino bloggers also shows that a useful dichotomy can be constructed between first generation individuals and those born within a host country, particularly in the matter of political concerns. This is also like the Dutch Moroccans and their attempt to address only other Dutch Moroccans.

There is also the matter of this quote from the paper: "Most of the immigrants are arguably in a better state in their new country than they would have been in their country of origin: They are free from persecution," etc. (p. 2). Thomas, do you mean immigrants or refugees? Downward mobility is a common situation for many immigrants, after all, with the stereotypical example of doctors driving taxicabs.

So, thoughts?

Jesse de Leon

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Clifford, James (1997). "Diasporas". In Clifford, James, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (pp. 244-277). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Canadian Ethnic Diversity Survey
Statistics Canada
http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-593-XIE/89-593-XIE2003001.pdf
Now then, I'll have to apologize but this only contains half of the information I referred to and does not have the data on Filipino's sense of belongingness to Canada. I got that information from my supervisor, who has the inside track on this kind of thing, but who also left for New Zealand for a month. I can try and get it from her when she gets back, so please email me if you would like to know more about this.

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Sassen, Sasskia (1998). Globalization and its discontents: essays on the new mobility of people and money. New York: The New Press.

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Dear all

Just a quick reminder that our ongoing e-seminar on Thomas H. Eriksen's "Nations in Cyberspace" paper closes this Tuesday night GMT. As always, we're open for business over the weekend (the network never sleeps), so keep those comments and questions coming in!

Best wishes

John
ps Short questions/comments are also welcome, incl. one-liners.

Narmala Halstead (University of East London)
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Dear Thomas and list,

I have read your paper and the various comments with much interest: in turn, I would like to draw on my ongoing research on Guyana and migrant localities in New York to contribute to the discussion and bring out usage of the internet which argues that persons occupy spaces of the modern rather than that of the national. My research suggests that the usage of the internet in its forms of diasporic media collide with efforts to orchestrate or re-imagine the

nation as in the case of Guyana and the Guyanese diaspora. Last month in Guyana, a government minister and two members of his family were brutally gunned down by bandits. Law enforcement officials have pointed to linkages between the bandits and the village of Buxton on the East Coast in Guyana believed to be at the centre of political violence. Local media reports and other commentaries have pinpointed the killings as political and it is being read as an effort to engineer a different kind of coup against the government in the run up to general election later this year. However, the internet is being used to suggest that the killing was domestic and there are efforts to implicate the minister's immediate surviving family to the disgust of various locals.

This use of the internet assumes a mythological external Guyanese community: this community is assumed to be both different from the idea of the nation and its visibility as one produced through politically-orchestrated inter-ethnic tension and assumed to be ignorant about the political violence and its histories enmeshing citizen, media and state in Guyana. Elsewhere, I have discussed the oppositional relationship between state (as an entity separate from the government) and nation where "absentee citizens" inhabit an external imaginary (Halstead n.d., see Trouillot 2003). In turn, the processes around the state produce the citizen through a mode of violence. More recently criminal deportees from the USA have organised themselves into "ethnic bandits", occupying the ethnic stronghold of the village of Buxton, known as a site of violence and terrorism particularly by East Indian residents in nearby villages who have suffered from the bandits' attentions, in some cases, fatally.

The bandits align themselves with the ethnic cause of political elites and are part of an entangled political landscape which has attracted extreme vigilantism. This entanglement is currently demonstrated through a media furore where a leading East Indian businessman has been placing whole page advertisements in the local newspapers alleging various political conspiracies. The businessman claims there are strong political reasons for certain key law enforcers to turn a blind eye to the violent Buxton enclave. He is at the centre of spiralling local suspicious and speculation about who wants to topple the current government from power which has now turned into a media frenzy. The businessman now wanted for drug-trafficking by the U.S. and claiming this to be another conspiracy has also attempted to bring the U.S. into the centre of the debate.

The businessman is seen a hero by segments of the population for his role in "securing" national security against the political bandits. But the latest media debate and his accusations have once more brought out the ways the U.S. is located in local understandings of the political process. This is not accidental or just part of the current situation of selective violence in Guyana. Rather, it points to the ways the "outside", a local term which signifies a powerful external imaginary envisaged as America challenges the idea of the nation and makes visible the precariousness of the concept of the state.

Various locals in Guyana, are glad that they have a "national hero" (a status unaffected by the allegations against the businessman) to defend them against the bandits. This means that these various Guyanese can continue to engage in global networking activities, make use of the internet as sociality forums and sites to learn about degrees abroad, for instance, and to express themselves in a "modern" way in opposition to a prescribed national one. I use the notion of the modern in this instance in terms of Guyanese understandings of being modern vis-à-vis forms of knowledge and competence: inthis regard, it is about people knowing how to belong in global settings and outside of particular prescribed cultural and political identities.

In the pre-dominant Guyanese migrant locality of Richmond Hill and its environs in Queens, New York, accounts which focus on the violence in 'local Guyanese newspapers' align with myths which reproduce Guyana as a site where everyone is in immediate danger of their lives and ignoring spaces which may mediate this violence. This reinforces the way migrants see themselves as separate from this political site. Current efforts on the internet to claim them as supporters and re-inscribe them as particular nationals have to both contend with this separation and their "knowledge" of the political histories and current violence. These efforts also have to deal with migrants' expressions of themselves as modern which, in some instances, allow for emphasis on "cultural authenticity" through diasporic connections.

I point here to the wearing of ethnic clothing among Guyanese East Indians in New York which also brings out a different emphasis on the sari than that mentioned by Thomas. Among these migrants, this is a new fashion rather than a revival and suggests that this is a kind of re-fashioning outside of a particular politicised identity in favour of a politicised cultural one. Being of Guyanese East Indian origins, I knew the sari to be an exotic item among Guyanese East Indians in Guyana. I was somewhat intrigued/perplexed when several migrants in New York offered to buy me saris as efforts to make me wear one in specific settings whilst I visited them during my research. The wear of ethnic clothing co-resided with their "everyday attire" and I have since written about how this allowed them different spaces for being "real" (Halstead, in press). Interestingly, many of these migrants returning to Guyana were setting the trend, so that their Guyanese counterparts were also being attired more and more in ethnic clothing at specific sites and instead of the usual so-called western type attire. This provided for inside-outside connections which both transcended a particularised space of national identity and redefined it within cultural imaginings. This, I feel, also has connections with the ways the state is seen as distant and where citizens re-emerge as cultural persons inhabiting a particular imaginary.

I have been working on this for sometime and have a lot of material so apologies if this is overlong.

Best wishes, Narmala

Dr Narmala Halstead

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___ n.d. Inhabiting the outside: citizenship, violence and diaspora. Paper presented at SANA, Atlanta, 2003.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2003 Global transformations. Anthropology and the modern world. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan

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Jens Kjaerulff (Aarhus University)
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I want to pick up from a couple of points made so far, beginning with one I have sought to plead for myself in previous seminars on this list, and so was deligthed to see Danny Miller state so cogently:

On Wed, 24 May 2006 08:06:45 +0100
"daniel" <d.miller@ucl.ac.uk> wrote:
[...]
> [...T]he particular responsibility of
> anthropologists interested in media [...] is to concentrate as much
> as possible on assessing the consequence of a web presence, rather
> than documenting that presence. Because to assess the consequence
> requires the much more multi-faceted, long term relationship to off
> line and on line activities that anthropology can commit to, and that
> most other approaches neglect. What we want to know is whether this
> presence effects remittances, a shift in the pattern of marriage, a
> political schism, a conduit for weapons sales, or in this case a shift
> in the form of nationalism itself.
>

More than assessing consequences, let's also be reminded that a (potential) consequence in it's own right, of doing multi-faceted, long term 'on-the-ground' fieldwork, may be that the conceptual categories by which we envision and approach our objects and objectives, may shift (e.g. Hastrup 2004).

Mirca's point on cultural homogeneity in 'modernist' (and I add post-modernist) writings arguably has a trajectory to various field work based approaches to (eg) identification and community (Barth 1969, 1983, 1993), as well as 'globalization' (e.g. Tsing 2005), to stay with two conceptual domains at issue in the interesting paper Thomas has here given:

On Tue, 23 May 2006 12:53:40 +0100
"Mirca Madianou" <mm577@cam.ac.uk> wrote:
[...]
> Modernist writers, [...]
> whilst making an argument about the construction, the building of the
> nation-state, have assumed that cultural homogenisation is actually
> achieved. Could it be, however, that Kokoschka's painting was never
> (entirely) replaced by a Modigliani? By neglecting a bottom-up
> approach modernist writers may have overstated the case of
> homogenisation and glossed over the everyday contestations of
> nationalism.

I propose a (related) reflection on a different dimension to Thomas paper which I see as potentially significant in terms of how to theorize internet usage, exceeding contexts of nationalism.

Thomas seems, as it were, to variously imply 'a stable situation' as opposed to the scenario under consideration. We read about a 'global era of movement and deterritorialisation' (1), of an 'unstable situation where a certain proportion of the population are neither full members of the nation nor foreigners' (2); of 'principles of belonging brought in tension with each other' (14); and (strikingly) of 'the complex contemporary nation states' as a novelty resembling (something as old-fashioned as) 'matrilineal systems'!

What I question is whether such 'unstability and complexity' is, at heart, particularly novel or unique to 'a global era', diaspora nationalism, or internet usage otherwise?

I recognize the assumption, yes, widely held in social life as in social science. However, looking to older studies of (say) matrilineal systems in anthropology (eg Turner 1957), or classics in sociology (eg Dewey 1929), I wonder if it is (yet a) cyberbole or fast-lane sociology strawman? Looking to the unspectacular everyday practices of work and family life among part time 'teleworkers' in the Danish villages that comprised my field location for 16 months (on which my dissertation on 'internet and change' is based), 'uncertainty and complexity' writ-small seems a trivial stable. What difference might this perspective make for (eg) conceptualizing internet usage at this mundane level of practice?

Paraphrasing Thomas' paper (p.15), I propose a perspective where, 'in an imperfect world, ... internet resources help create a sense of social and cultural cohesion' that is also sought by other, more mundane means in the course of living a(ny) life. This perspective reduces the spectacular internet to a rather mundane social/cultural device (albeit a novel and versatile one), but it raises the stakes in terms of the comparative and analytical potential considerably.

I propose a great merit of Thomas' paper on Nations in Cyberspace is, not this topical area per se, but the wider debates in anthropology and social science that it invites us to draw on. Studies of Internet engagements could be taken in new and inovative directions I believe, were they more broadly conceived. In turn this entails, 'paradoxically' as Miller and Slater point out, that we concern usselves less with just 'internet', and more with broader empirical and analytical contexts of internet engagement.

One such 'conceptual' domain that I would be excited to hear other thoughts on from broader perspectives, is the 'uncertainties' and 'tensions' I have here briefly sought to sketch, as I believe internet engagements could be conceptualized very differently from such a perspective, although I have so far not managed to think this through very clearly. Thanks for the excellent provocation Thomas, looking forward to more.

// Jens

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Kjaerulff 2005: Internet and Change (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation)
Miller and Slater 2000: Internet, and Ethnographic Approach
Tsing, A. 2005: Friction
Turner, V. 1957: Schism and Continuity

Thomas Hylland Eriksen (University of Oslo)
t.h.eriksen@culcom.uio.no

Dear all,

Been enjoying the last exchanges from our cottage down the coast. With my new Bluetooth modem, I no longer have any excuses for not dealing immediately with my email. (Should we call it progress?)

Jesse de Leon, writing from and on Canada, takes issue with the implied position that, were it not mostly for the transnationalizing efforts of migrants aided by the Internet's technologies, the natural trajectory of the immigrant is towards assimilation.

Although I do not support this view, I realise it may be inferred from the essay, which began as a critical discussion of Ernest Gellner's theory of nationalism, his notion of "social entropy" and emphasis on "shared high culture". If it may have been possible to achieve anything like social entropy in the past, it is far less likely now, I said. Several have objected to this view; Mirca said, in her initial comment, that Modigliani may have been far less dominant than the received wisdom implies. My answer is yes and no. At the level of culture (language, everyday habits etc.), the drive to homogeneity has been strong and often effective in many countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. At the level of identity, as Jesse rightly points out, the issue is less straightforward. As early as around 1960, social scientists were talking about "the unmeltable ethnics" in the USA, and more recently, it has been quipped that the only thing that seems to have melted in the USA is the melting-pot itself. (So much for Israel Zangwill's early-20th century play, where the term was first introduced...) Some elites retain a strong group identity by choice; some stigmatised groups have a strong group identity thrust upon them. Neither is "fully assimilated", regardless of Internet and cable access. So what is new? Well: Transnational networks can be stronger and more efficient; deterritorialised identity politics becomes viable; it may be easier to achieve some degree of cultural continuity and a strong group identification when the group is online. This apart, groups living in states have been and will be, to varying degrees, "entropy-resistant", by choice or through coercion, and this is an endemic situation in a nation-state.

Do migrants generally benefit from migrating? I think research in various North Atlantic countries has shown that the overall answer is "usually, they do", sometimes through negative freedom (from war, oppression, persecution), sometimes through positive freedom (through new opportunities for themselves and their children).

I also do not agree that "globalization, instead of weakening the nation-state, merely requires its rearticulation". That rearticulation, engaged in by countries like Canada for years, could be the beginning of the end for a community which is imagined as "sovereign and limited", and it makes me think of the increasing, ultimately unbearable weight of the medieval epicycles, as telescopes became more advanced, on the eve of the Copernican revolution. I therefore agree with Daniel Taghioff who addresses methodological problems of positing "nationalism as the question". Jens Kjaerulff and others question the "implied stability" of a classic modern situation, suggesting that the current situation brings less newness than I may have implied. Jens mentions Danish teleworkers who do not seem to be embroiled in complex issues of identity and cultural change; but my Ph. D. student Marisa d'Mello, who has studied Indian ICT workers (of the "Neo-medieval" kind; they travel to Europe often etc.), reports serious problems of identity there. Anyway, to paraphrase Manuel Castells this time, it doesn't matter if this is new or not; what matters is that this is our present world that we are trying to understand. And when I look at this world, I often see deep tension between principles of belonging (often of the kind mentioned by Jesse and others), between ambivalence and

fundamentalism, divided and single loyalties, deterritorialised identities confronted by hegemonic ideologies of territoriality. Had I been more rigorously empirical (in the anthropological sense) at the outset, the discussion might have been more precise, but on the other hand, we might also have had less to discuss...

Narmala Halstead's Guyanese example somehow echoes John Postill's example of middle-class Malaysians who strengthen their shared identity and exchange political views on the Internet, but it is also a reminder of the potential of the Internet for spreading rumours and conspiracy theories (I suspect many Internet users are less sophisticated than you, John -- just read an article about people who had lost everything they owned to Nigerian e-mail scammers...) Narmala's important research in Guyana and New York seems to show, in the context of the present discussion, simultaneously that Internet use is seamlessly integrated into the translocal life of migrants and elite travellers; and that it occasionally is elevated to the status of "real virtuality" (another concept from Castells). Whether the identification invested and/or harvested is "modern" or "national" would have to be an empirical question.

Best regards,
Thomas

Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinsson (Temple University)
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I've followed the discussion on the list with interest and I'm wondering if Thomas Hylland Eriksen - and others who have contributed to the discussion - might be interested in looking at this website (http://www.slingmedia.com/us/) and comment on the arguments made with the slingbox in mind?

What is the slingbox? On their website they state: "groundbreaking piece of hardwired ingenuity that will literally transform the way you watch television. The Slingbox enables you to watch your TV programming from wherever you are by turning virtually any Internet-connected PC into your personal TV. Whether you're in another room or in another country, you'll always have access to your television."

  All the best, Zig.
-
Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinsson

Elif Toker-Turnalar
elftok@yahoo.com

'Doctors driving taxis/cabs', and immigrants who still only speak their mother tongue after 30 years plus of being in the 'Accepting' country

Assimilation??? Exclusion???
Which is it to be?

Best,
Elif Toker-Turnalar

Jesse de Leon (Dalhousie University)
deleonjh@gmail.com

All right, Thomas, obviously you and I agree to an extent about assimilation and identity regarding immigrants, but we clearly arrived at our positions from different intellectual paths. Perhaps you're right that multiculturalism is inherently incommensurable with the culturally homogenous nation-state (or rather, incommensurable with the discursive construction of the culturally homogenous nation-state). Perhaps the definition of "nation" will change, which is essentially multiculturalism's project, or perhaps "nation" will be dropped from "nation-state", which I think is what you are suggesting (bringing with it a host of political, social, and economic changes). The future looks to be interesting, but then again, it always is.

I also don't dispute that the lives of many or most migrants improve when immigrating. After all, that is the point of migration for a lot of them. I just don't like the characterization of immigrant source countries as being full of "persecution, acute material insecurity and hopelessness . . . [with little] educational and professional opportunities." I think the dichotomy that you create between the host country as land of plenty and the source country as land of poverty is too black and white and does not include the complicating examples of, for example, millionare Chinese investors and Indian IT workers. After I wrote my initial message, I wondered if perhaps our different take on the immigration experience was because of our different geographical locations. Perhaps immigrants to Scandinavian countries don't tend to include these high class cosmopolitan elites? Their numbers aren't insignificant, either, and certainly their social and economic impact are felt quite keenly in certain parts of North America.

Regards,
Jesse de Leon

Jesse de Leon (Dalhousie University)
deleonjh@gmail.com

I'm afraid I don't understand your question entirely. Do you mean that the existence of immigrants unable to speak their host country's majority language negates my point about downward mobility existing among many immigrants? If so, you'll have to illustrate your argument more thoroughly.

Or do you mean that many immigrants also choose not to assimilate, and that therefore the downward mobility experienced by many immigrants is not the result of exclusion, but essentially the fault of the immigrants themselves for their unreasonable stubbornness? Certainly immigrants, being exactly like non-immigrants, would tend to prefer to live and associate with other people who speak the same language and share the same culture. However, immigrants have traditionally been employed in low status and low-paying jobs. As Manuel Castells observes, that is the point of immigration in a capitalist society:

"The advantage of immigrant labor for capital stems precisely from the specificity of their inferior position in the class struggle, which derives from the legal-political status of immigrants. From the point of view of capital this status can be modified in minor ways, but not transformed, because it is the source of the basic structural role of immigration" (Castells 2004:267).

Put more simply, in capitalist societies immigration has traditionally been encouraged because immigrants are vulnerable to repression and immigrant workers can be paid far less than indigenous workers. Immigrant labour also serves to keep wages down, for as Castells observes: "[I]mmigrant workers do not exist because there are 'arduous and badly paid' jobs to be done, but, rather, arduous and badly paid jobs exist because immigrant workers are present or can be sent for to do them" (Castells 2004:267). The argument that indigenous workers simply do not want arduous work falls apart when one considers that arduous work such as mining is gladly taken up by indigenous workers when that work is well paid (Castells 2004:267).

Since immigrants traditionally possess low-income jobs, then they can only afford to live in low-income areas. Combined with housing and job discrimination against immigrants, the result is the formation of what are essentially ghettoes, such as the various Chinatowns around the world. If immigrants associate mostly with other immigrants, then they will have little opportunity to practice the majority language of their host country. And therefore you find the existence of "immigrants who still only speak their mother tongue after 30 years plus of being in the 'Accepting' country". You will note that at no point in this process did immigrants choose to be badly paid and to be able to afford only certain kinds of housing, and you will also note that even the choice of immigrants to live among coethnics was also strongly dictated by exclusionary practices against them. Contrary to that outcome, one can easily imagine a community where immigrants are not economically and geographically isolated from the general population, if only they had less discrimination against them in terms of housing and work.

This analysis, however, is mostly based on economies centered on manufacturing and industry and does not take into account the postindustrial "knowledge economies", which would add another level of complexity to the discussion of immigrant labour. But I hope this answered your original question.

Jesse de Leon

Reference:

Castells, M. (2004 [1975]). "Immigrant workers and class struggles in advanced capitalism." In Mobasher, M.M. & Sadri, M. (eds.), Migration, globalization, and ethnic relations: an interdisciplinary approach (pp. 250-282). Upper Saddle River NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

>On 5/28/06, Elif Toker-Turnalar <elftok@yahoo.com> wrote:
>'Doctors driving taxis/cabs', and immigrants who still only speak their mother tongue after
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>Assimilation??? Exclusion???
>Which is it to be?

>Best,

Thomas Hylland Eriksen (University of Oslo)
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Jesse questions facile black/white dichotomies between host and recipient countries, and I'd just like to concur with this as briefly as possible. Norway has a modest 5,000 quota for "highly skilled immigrants" which is never filled (people with internationally marketable skills don't seem to want to come here voluntarily!), but we still have a great variety of class and educational background among refugees/immigrants. Many Iranians and Chileans who arrived here in different periods must have experienced a downward mobility in some respects (but increased freedom and security in others). In Scandinavia, like in some other West European countries, moreover, there is also an interesting influx of seasonal workers from Poland, Lithuania and other Central European countries, some of whom are highly skilled. So the point is well taken.

Cheers,
Thomas

Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinsson (Temple University)
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Maybe I should follow up on my Slingbox note and request for comments. What trigged the note is this statement made by Thomas "A difference between television and the Internet family of technologies is that the latter is so much more decentralised than the former and therefore difficult to control by, say, the state or a large semi-monopolist like Microsoft." (see message below). I'm not sure if we can make such distinction anymore between technologies like TV and the Internet - and this is certainly also true with radio technology and devices like the ipod. Technologies collapse or convergence in one another are also an indication that we do not only have to look at the fate of the imaginary of the nation from the point of view of end users of such technologies (like diasporas) but also the producers of such technologies (I realize that end users are also often producers) - like the producers of the Slingbox.

 All the best, Zig.

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)
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Dear all

Having just reviewed our discussion so far, I think Thomas is right when he says that had he presented a more empirical, ethnographic paper we probably would've had less to talk about! These are some of the threads I make out from the foregoing exchanges:

1. Modernist/social communication theories of nationalism, and how to engage with them in relation to the Internet; to what extent are nations becoming deterritorialised, partly through internet technologies?

2. Internet and sociality v identity; don't we lose sight of social ties and social interactions when we focus on identity? at what point do mediated processes move from sociality to identity as their focal point?

3. The technological potentialities (affordances) of net technologies; does the net's speed and unidimensional nature foster crude nationalist ideas, conspiracy theories, etc? or are users generally becoming more sophisticated and selective over time? is technological convergence, e.g. TV/internet, blurring old/new media distinctions?

4. Studying the web presence of nationalim and national cultures is not enough; anthropologists are well equipped to assess the social consequences of these web activities.

5. Careful with our own assumptions as to the motivations and 'natural' trajectories of migrants, e.g. Scandinavia and N. America may be very different in this respect.

It's time now for concluding remarks and clarifications before we close this session tomorrow (Tuesday) at 9 pm GMT. As usual, please write directly to medianthro@abyznet.net

For my part, I can't resist responding to Thomas' point about the Internet having great potential (already amply demonstrated) for the spread of nationalist propaganda, false rumours, conspiracy theories, Nigerian scams, etc. I couldn't agree more, and have written a paper arguing this very point (Postill 2005). This is precisely why so many websites devoted to fighting them have sprouted up, and terms such as Nigerian scam have entered the general vocabulary (to the chagrin, I should imagine, of Nigeria's tourism authorities).

But here we must be careful to distinguish amongst these varied 'small genres' (Spitulnik 1996, 2002). Whilst scams benefit the conmen behind them and cause financial harm to their targets (whatever their beliefs), conspiracy theories can benefit entire groups in that they provide added 'evidence' about the evil intent and actions of their opponents. In other words, they bolster the group's parochial worldview. The trouble is that on the Net it's very hard to prevent 'your people' from coming across other viewpoints and arguments. This is nicely demonstrated by Birgit Brauechler (2005) in her study of the war uses of the internet in the conflict that pitted Moluccan Christians and Muslims a few years ago (here the conflict was primarily ethno-religious, not nationalist). So demagogues on the Net have to work extra hard to protect their constituents from the 'evil lies' of others.

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Susan DiGiacomo (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)
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Dear Thomas and all,

The article focuses on those nations which have (1) lost their territory; (2) are dispersed for political reasons; (3) have large temporary diasporas overseas; (4) or have many citizens working temporarily or permanently abroad. The article appears to assume that the Internet is where these variously deterritorialized nations are virtually re-territorialized in cyberspace. Let me offer a different kind of example.

Something that has always been obvious to me is the way in which the Internet comes framed in territorial packages. Until not very long ago, the e-mail addresses and websites of individuals and institutions in Catalonia (where I live and work), a stateless nation mostly within the boundaries of the Spanish state, ended in ".es", for España. This is a labeling problem similar to labels on most Catalan products and the license plates on cars registered to Catalan owners. Until recently, even the website of the Catalan autonomous government ended in ".es". In 2001, a citizens' group, the Associació puntCAT, formed around a petition to establish a ".cat" Internet domain. It took four years for the Internet Cooperation for Assigned Names and Numbers to approve the application.

What Catalans want is to be visible on the global stage as themselves, and not as counterfeit Spaniards, and ".cat" enhances that visibility. Anyone who saw this year's Champions League (Barça/Arsenal) final match on television or in person will also have seen Barça supporters with signs reading "Catalonia is not Spain." The ".cat" Internet domain makes the same point in cyberspace. What is being defined here is a domain of cultural sovereignty, a cultural and linguistic space distinct from Spain.

All the best,

Susan DiGiacomo

Elif Toker-Turnalar
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Firstly I just wanted to give a one liner comment as encouraged by John.
Secondly, I am inclined to agree with you when you say that people can be stubborn and that they do naturally prefer to be around others that speak the same language and share the same culture as themselves.

What it looks like is the further development of 'each to their own' even as technology pushes the human to new frontiers!

Jens Kjaerulff (Aarhus University)
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By conclusion I wish say that I entirely disagree with, and distance my vision of anthropology from, the view that we should have less to discuss, if what we discuss is more empirically informed, as it was suggested and as John now seems to embrace it. We might well find DIFFERENT things to discuss, sure. That was indeed a point I sought to argue in my last contribution.

And, yes, as Thomas pointed out in his brief reply to me (below), we are trying to understand 'the present world', but I argue that it matters how we approach and conceptualize that present world all the same, and that various 'pasts' are at issue here, whether or not we like to confront and reflect on it explicitly. We might be less likely to recycle old wine on new cyber-bottles if we are prepared to engage a wider range of anthropological 'pasts', while simultanously trying to confront our conceptualiations with the broadest possible range of what we can observe 'out there' and not just on the Net. To stay with the concluding remarks in Thomas paper, if we could entertain the idea that complexity and pluralism are indeed a 'stable' of living more widely than just the context of recent migration and national identity as it now comes forth on the internet, an analysis of the latter could be much more versatile and perceptive, and in turn potentially also have much broader ramifications. Issues of 'change' crop up in countless studies involving a focus on the internet (as is the case also in Thomas paper), yet 'change', and the flip side 'continuity', oftentimes seem strikingly undertheorized, if not downright assumed. Why would you assume for instance Thomas, that Danish teleworkers should not be "embroiled in complex issues of identity and cultural change", whereas Indian ICT workers are?

Don't get me wrong, I liked your paper Thomas, as I sought to point out in referring to the conclusion on internet as a "resource helping to create a sense of social cohesion and cultural integration" (p.15), I just wanted to try (I'm still trying :-) ...) to expand on the scope of that conclusion.

// Jens

Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinsson (Temple University)
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This might be of interest to the list.
 The Mass Media's Construction of Gender, Race, Sexuality and Nationality. An Analysis of the Danish News Media's Communication about Visible Minorities.

Pdf file of the dissertation available at: http://www.rikkeandreassen.dk/publikationer.html

All the best, Zig.

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)
jpostill@usa.net

Jens wrote:

>
> [...] I entirely disagree with, and distance my
> vision of anthropology from, the view that we should have less to
> discuss, if what we discuss is more empirically informed, as it was
> suggested and as John now seems to embrace it.

Just to clarify this point, I wasn't trying to propose a certain 'vision of anthropology'; I was only suggesting that Thomas' non-ethnographic paper seems to have led to a flurry of ethnographic examples from list members, that's what I meant by 'we probably would've had less to talk about'.

John

Francisco Osorio (University of Chile)
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Dear list

I'm always surprised for the knowledge produce by our list. I didn't know the Chilean government has one of the few (if not the only) website for nationals abroad (actually, the first woman to be a president in Chile, Michelle Bachelet, asked this month to the congress a law to allow them to vote while being abroad as a truly 14th region). A Norwegian scholar taught me this. It recalls me also a small debate that Mihai Coman and I had in previous seminars where I knew that the Culture at a Distance School studied Romania, a point a Romanian scholar as Mihai were not fully aware (at the end, I was in part right about my knowledge, but Mihai had to check).

Francisco Osorio

Guido Ipsen (University of Dortmund)
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Dear list,

Naturally, the prototype for integrating nationals who live abroad is Switzerland. The Swiss who live distributed throughout the world are usually dubbed "The Fifth Switzerland". I, being Swiss and living in Germany, participate in the benefits. I am being sent a journal for Swiss abroad on a regular basis and I can participate in any and all elections and plebiscites even though I do not have a place of residence in Switzerland right now.
The website for Swiss abroad can be found under
http://www.ch.ch/schweiz/00156/index.html?lang=en

So, even manifested by media, we may participate actively in Swiss culture and politics. I really think this is a good model for other countries.

Gruezi!

Guido

Erkan Saka (Rice University)
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Once again I am upset that I am late in participating the discussion. But thanks Thomas for the paper you share with us and all discussants. Here is a short list of notes I have taken so far to share with you [in fact there were more but it is late now:( ]:

* A week ago chief editor of CNN's Turkish partnership said extremists are overrepresented in the web, it is time to represent the mainstream when he was talking about their recently started official blogs. I take most cases of the nationalist presences in the web as attempts to colonize a medium which is supposed to be chaotic and free... In this context, I don't think Thomas' paper should also be interested in what happens 'below'. I could imagine Thomas' work as a documentation of particular elite projects...

* Again relatedly, I agree to some extent with Daniel who underlines the cases of nationalism emerges. there might not be a need to have a particular meaning of nationalism. What is important are the ways in which nationalist consolidations happen.

* I am a bit suspicious about what Daniel said about multiplayer roleplaying games: What I observed in some of those games is that alliances emerge around national identities. In www.baranfranca.com I met many Turks and I was about to join a Turkish gang before I was killed (!). It didn't look like I was the only one to join co-ethnics..

* It could be interesting if Thomas mentioned more about the offline and online relations. I know that Kurds' web presence is connected to off line nationalist movements. In fact, in most of cases Kurdish web presence is continuation of already formed offline establishments. I am super interested in those movements who would start online mainly and then have offline consequences.

Much love to y'all from Istanbul,
Erkan

Kerstin Anderson (Gothenburg University)
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Sorry John, I've been off-line for a couple of days, (holiday in Sweden) you find references below.

Thanks for an interesting discussion!
One last question for Thomas.....

What about the relationship between nationalism, deterritorialised nationalism and e-governance?

 Some final reflections......

I think that Thomas has taken up some very interesting questions regarding the implications of the new technologies in his comments; concerning transnational networks, de-teritorrialised identity politics, cultural continuity and group identification in relation to the ICT technologies.

I fully agree to the issue emphasised by Daniel Slater and Jens, the relationship between the on- line and off- line is a crucial issues. Empirical research and field work makes is possible to investigate the implications of internet activities and communication in a local setting, how it enters into and affects people's life worlds in divers ways. (I.e. social structure, interaction, cultural expressions and formations, tradition, ethos, worldviews and so on) Whether or not an approach starting with identity or sociality (Daniel) is the correct device, I leave out, as for myself my interest lies firmly within the frames of a phenomenological approach and the approach developed in radical phenomenology. (Kapferer, Deleuze)

Also, I have enjoyed the discussion on migrant groups, being myself interested in one of those cosmopolitan elite groups, the Kolkata intellectuals (the Bengali Hindu community) that have a long tradition of elite migration. In the 19th and early 20th century they went abroad for education, and also the British often used the well-educated Bengali intellectuals for administrative purposes in other parts of India and other colonial countries. Contemporary migration consists mainly of professionals, academics and students going abroad for higher education and the IT sector has appeared as a new area.UK, USA and Canada are main areas of settlement.

 Kerstin

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Thomas Hylland Eriksen (University of Oslo)
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Dear list,

I've been away for a couple of days; actually I have been co-organising (with a philosopher) an exhausting, but very rewarding, seminar on Herder and anthropology, both philosophical

and sociocultural, but this e-seminar has been at the back of my mind for much of the time. In the German Romantic version (where Herder was an important source of inspiration -- the jury is still out on whether he was misrepresented or not), the Volk is a linguistic community attached to place through emotional, experiential attachment, common sentiment and what we would call love of culture, and various other ties, including an aesthetic appreciation of the natural beauty of the Heimat. (Race had nothing to do with it at this early stage.) Although Herder and the Romantics did not write about communication technologies or industrialism, their nationalism is rightly considered, by most theorists, an important development with a rich legacy worldwide. Now what if Erkan is right in supposing that strong ties can form online and only at a later stage lead to offline communities? My hunch is that some kind of "Herderian" community necessarily exists, if only at the level of the imagination, prior to the development of online nations/identity groups. They may well be elite phenomena (just as the Sturm und Drang in Germany and innumerable early nationalist movements elsewhere were of and for the educated urban classes), but no less interesting for that. At our seminar, the philosophers and historians focused on the texts, while the anthropologists were more interested in the social interpretations and effects of Herder's ideas. This is congruent with what many of my commentators have argued during this discussion, most recently John Postill in his very useful summing-up: that a study of the online communities is incomplete without an assessment of their social ramifications or contexts. To Jens, sorry if I misunderstood you, I haven't read your thesis on Danish teleworkers yet, will get back to you when I have. In an important sense, as many scholars from Marshall McLuhan to Daniel Miller have reminded us time and again, technology use may profitably be studied as extensions of things we already do. The Internet is used, by the groups I've looked at and many others, to enhance their sense of belonging in the world and existential security. Although this point may seem trite to many of the specialists reading this list, it is far from self-evident to many others. Whether Susan is right in stating that the Internet always comes framed in territorial packages is a matter of discussion, but it is clearly not chiefly an uprooting, fragmenting technology, but is used, in many ways and for different purposes, to re-embed that which has been disembedded.

Herder would have nodded eagerly.

* * *

Thanks everybody, and especially John for taking the initiative to this e-seminar; it has been intellectually rewarding and stimulating, and not least, the exchanges over the last week have taught me things about nations in cyberspace that will definitely find their way into version 2.0 of the essay.

Best regards
Thomas

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Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
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Dear all,

I have been extremely busy while this e-seminar was going on, but read everything and have been enjoying it. I thank you all. Just want to point out, especially now that Herder has been rightly invoked, that some of the themes touched during the exchange have been also very present in fiction, from Salman Rushdie and his King puppets (where a country develops from the model of a website) to William Gibson and his Forbidden city (where a country develops completely online). Maybe these two are what Max Weber would have called the 'ideal types' and there are all kinds of possibilities in between (and perhaps there are some more ideal types). This general theme is now being debated in fiction, social sciences and art. The challenge for anthropologists is to understand its particular configurations and their many-stranded implications. In the last couple of weeks I have been following, through an e-list of Indian artists, the debate on the reservation of seats in universities in India for 'backward castes'. What has amazed me about the process is how those who favour reservations are being silenced by the rest of the artists on the e-list and how much the organization of anti-reservations protests relies on electronic media, and especially on the internet. The 'soul' of that community of artists, who stand together against the destruction of shanty towns and seem to hold liberal views on other issues, seems to be firmly established on their economic standing and caste categories when it comes to the reservations issue.

Thanks again and I look forward to the upcoming discussions,

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina

John Postill (Sheffield Hallam University)
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On that final note from Gabriela Vargas-Cetina, I'd like to close this session on "Nations in Cyberspace" by thanking Thomas H. Eriksen for his numerous postings despite his many other commitments. Special thanks, too, to our discussant, Mirca Madianou, for getting the seminar off to a good start, and to all other participants. A PDF transcript of the seminar will be up on our website shortly.

Our next e-seminar is scheduled for this coming 20-27 June. Sebastian Ureta, a sociologist at the Catholic University of Chile shall be presenting a paper on TV practices in Chilean working-class households. The discussant will be Jo Helle-Valle who is a social anthropologist working for the National Institute for Consumer Research in Oslo, and has recently led a project on the domestication of digital ICTs in Norwegian homes.

The seminar will hopefully run on a brand new listserv -- more on this soon from Jens Kjaerulff who is busy setting it up from Vancouver as we speak!

Best wishes

John