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Mallari, Samantha

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Samantha Mallari

Victoria Bernal's ethnographic study, *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and Citizenship,* evaluates how Eritreans living in the diaspora challenge existing norms and definitions of citizenship, sovereignty, and nationalism by remaining connected to their homeland via cyberspace. The book follows the gradual development of three political websites: *Dehai*, *Asmarino*, and *Asante*, and posts from before, during, and after the Eritrean-Ethiopian border war that occurred from 1998-2000. The author uses "participant webservation" to understand how the diaspora's involvement in Eritrea has evolved from the 1990s and into the new millennium.[1] Bernal chronicles how diaspora involvement in the state transforms from one of nationalistic support, to one of critical skepticism, complicating the dichotomy between the diaspora and homeland.

Bernal communicates her findings throughout her work by developing key concepts of infopolitics and sacrificial citizenship in order to describe the relationships between people and the state in lieu of media censorship, displacement, and violence.[2] Websites developed and enlivened by diaspora contributions broaden the concept of citizenship to include those who affect the infopolitics of a state, and those who possess worldviews shaped by what the state does and fails to do. In Chapter 1, Bernal provides readers with the historical background needed to understand Eritrea's political and social environment. The Eritrean government in the 1990s imposed an "ethos of sacrifice" that praised people's willingness to serve and die for the state at all costs.[3] Consequently, an implicit social contract even between those in diaspora and the Eritrean state was established to promote participation in the form of sacrifice through complete obedience to the state. However, the means for which the government gained this support caused increasing criticism, especially during Eritrea's border war near the turn of the century. In the tense climate of war, the harsh censorship, lack of free press, and the firm punishment of dissenters sparked the perfect foundation for the diaspora to mobilize and affect politics in their homeland through cyberspace.

The following chapter introduces *Dehai*, a pioneering web platform that allowed the Eritrean diaspora to comment on Eritrean politics. *Dehai's* diverse base of contributors substantially impacted the political landscape.[4] However, despite its location in the geographic void of the internet, *Dehai* is by no means an all-inclusive space. Cultural boundaries remain visceral. This fact forms a paradox of infopolitics and the internet: readers and posters build the website, and the barriers that limit how people can use it.[5]

As greater political tensions unfold in the homeland, new independent and secular websites arise—*Awate* and *Asmarino*. In these spaces, the diaspora assumes a new role as a voice for those that could not speak up against the government in Eritrea. Web posts and debates highlight how these spaces opposed censorship and political injustice, through the development of unofficial memorials,[6] debates over gender inequality,[7] and the development of an alternative history that establishes the nation as diverse, and the people as independent from the state's control.[8]

Throughout the book, Bernal makes evident the tensions between Eritreans in the diaspora and those in the country. Eritreans, in general, perceive life in the diaspora as easier; yet, the lived realities of those in diaspora are ones of struggle. Many face economic hardship and social discrimination.[9] Also, those within and outside Eritrea contest who has the right to publish and censor. This contrast leads to the need for more perspectives from Eritreans actually living in the country, so that readers and scholars can ascertain the impact of the posts on the lives of Eritrean citizens. This study could also benefit from an analysis of social media, alongside the websites under review, as it would provide a greater all-encompassing view of how Eritreans in the diaspora react to Eritrean politics and culture, and how they manage to build a sense of sovereignty, nationalism, and identity through a variety of cyber platforms.

The author's discussion of women and religious groups also raises provocative questions concerning the treatment of minorities. Cyberspace's backlash against the opinions of female posters demonstrates how social barriers are reproduced by active contributors even when cyberspace eliminates geographical barriers. Bernal also manages to briefly touch upon how the treatment of Christians and Muslims differs in the websites analyzed.[10]

Comparisons between various minorities' opinions and how they are treated on the web would illuminate underlying discrimination, suggestive of how minorities are treated within and beyond the state.

Overall, Bernal's work sets a new standard for historians by legitimizing modern-day technology's inclusion in historical analysis as an effective tool of insight into the lives of its users and the construction of their histories. The importance of this work lies in the fact that the flow of information and communication through technology comes with social strings and political agendas attached. The research presented rewrites how we should define what constitutes a citizen and illuminates a paradox in virtual involvement in developing post-colonial countries: virtual political involvement is only as free and boundless as those that contribute to it. Although it is too early to predict whether the internet will change how future generations mobilize with or against the state, Bernal proves that internet mediums undoubtedly carry enough momentum to change the future of politics and personal subjectivities all over the globe.

Notes

[1] Victoria Bernal, *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace and Citizenship* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 26.

[2] Ibid., 27.

[3] Ibid., 37.

[4] Ibid., 75.

[5] Ibid., 88.

[6] Ibid.,120-139

[7] Ibid., 140-170.

[8] Ibid., 115.

[9] Ibid., 45, 53.

[10] Ibid., 96-97.