Modern Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands: The Case of the Kurds

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Introduction

A sense of persecution and victimization is an important element in any ethnic revivalist movement. Persecution based on ethnic identity justifies mobilization and politicization of ethnicity in order to defend oneself and one's group. Because ethnic nationalist movements must define themselves in relation to other groups,[1] threats (among other things) can justify the need to rise up and defend the group in question.[2] Likewise, a humiliating incident or a defeat, can serve as a springboard to a larger, more unified, politicized movement.

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1   Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 141-84.
2   For more on ethnic identity formation in reaction to threats, see David Brown, "Ethnic Revival: Perspectives on State and Society," *Third World Quarterly* 11 (1989) 8-11. Paul Brass adds that "The only certainty is that every nationalist movement has always justified itself in terms of existing oppression or anticipated oppression by a rival group" (*Ethnicity and Nationalism* [London: Sage, 1991] 43).

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In a globalized world where media images are immediately broadcast everywhere, the emotional power and catalyzing effect of such a defeat is greatly magnified. Modern communications technology facilitates the quick channeling and organizing of popular feelings of bitterness into mobilization and action. Participation in protests, and the knowledge of similar protests undertaken worldwide by fellow group members (which is also facilitated by a global media network), in turn inculcate a greater sense of ethnic consciousness and politicized ethnic identity. Thus, the catalyzing effect of a humiliating blow may be stronger today than it ever was.

Using the Kurds as an example of a stateless, repressed, territorially divided and dispersed national group, the article argues that revolutionary advances in communications have drastically affected the development of ethnic nationalist challenges towards the state. Much has been written about the homogenizing effect of mass media and the destruction of cultures not well connected to modern communications technology.[3] But it is often overlooked that such technology also has a liberating potential. The communications revolution provides many new opportunities for the ''formation and preservation of identities independent of territoriality,'' allowing dispossessed and stateless groups to redefine themselves and challenge dominant states.[4] Easier access to printing, photocopying and publishing technologies allows almost anyone, as opposed to just the state and state-sanctioned groups, to publish a book, newspaper or newsletter. Access to radio, satellite television, telephones, the Internet, cameras, tape recorders and video recorders allows people to disseminate ideas widely and to communicate with others even against a controlling state's wishes.[5]

The Kurdish Context

The analysis presented here accepts that the Kurds are an ethnic group unto themselves, in the sense of Hutchinson and Smith's definition of an ethnie: ''A named population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture,

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3 For example, Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad Versus McWorld* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

4 M. Hakan Yavuz, "A Preamble to the Kurdish Question: The Politics of Kurdish Identity," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 (1998), 13.

5 For example, in the years just before the Iranian revolution, tape recordings (a fairly simple technology) of Paris-based Ayatollah Khomeini's anti-regime speeches were smuggled into Iran and disseminated widely throughout various cities, radicalizing opposition to the Shah and setting the stage for Khomeini's take-over. For more on this phenomenon, see Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

Abstract. This article examines the effect of modern media and communications technology on ethnic nationalist resurgence, using the Kurds as a case example. Television, satellite communications, the Internet and easy access to publishing technology now facilitate ethnic nationalist challenges to state hegemony and monopoly of information. Additionally, modern media and communications technology can turn a humiliating defeat into a catalyst for a more unified, stronger, ethnic nationalist movement. Globally broadcast images of such a defeat arouse the passions and indignation of even those people who only nominally identify themselves with the ethnic group in question. At the same time, communications technology such as telephones, faxes and e-mail facilitate the channeling of such indignation into immediate group protest and action which, in turn, strengthens the ethnic identification of action participants.

Résumé. Cet article analyse la relation entre les nouvelles technologies de communication et la résurgence des nationalismes ethniques en se basant sur le cas des Kurdes. Aujourd'hui, la télévision, les communications par satellite, l'internet et l'accessibilité aux véhicules de publication créent des conditions favorables à la remise en question de l'hégémonie de l'État sur l'information par les mouvements ethniques nationalistes. Grâce aux technologies modernes de communication, une défaite humiliante peut être le catalyseur du renforcement et de l'unification d'un mouvement ethnique nationaliste. La diffusion des images d'un défaite contribue à accroître les passions et l'indignation des gens qui s'identifiaient uniquement nominalement avec le groupe ethnique en question. En favorisant la transmission immédiate de cette indignation aux militants de ce groupe ethnique, les technologies de communications telles le téléphone, le télécopieur et le courriel contribuent à fortifier la détermination de ces derniers.

a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members.''[6] The Kurdish homeland generally lies within the Zagros mountain range, where the modern-day borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria intersect. Kurdish is an Indo-European language related to Persian; the two major dialects spoken today (and not completely comprehensible to each other) are Kurmanji and Sorani. Seventy-five per cent of Kurds speak Kurmanji and practise Shaffiite Sunni Islam, while the other 25 per cent are divided between Shiite Muslims (15 per cent) Alevi, Christian, Jewish, Yezidi and Ahl-i-Haqq faiths.[7] A strong tribal element, a shared memory of a mountain pastoral nomadic past, awareness of the homeland *Kurdistan* (roughly speaking, the mountainous region described above) and distinct social practices combine with language and history to form a Kurdish culture and ethnicity. This culture has maintained its distinctiveness and integrity throughout the centuries.[8]

The redrawing of the Middle East's political borders after the First World War affected the Kurds profoundly. The Kurdish ''homeland'' lay

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6 John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.
7 Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington: Crane Russak, 1992).
8 Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1991), 28.

precisely where the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria were intersected, thus dividing the Kurdish population among these countries and making them an ethnic minority in each state. The Kurdish population within these four states today numbers between 23 and 28 million, with an additional 800,000 expatriate Kurds living abroad, mostly in Europe (a very rough estimate).[9] They form around 20 per cent of Turkey's population, 15 per cent of Iran's, 27 per cent of Iraq's, and less than 10 per cent of Syria's.[10] The Kurds in all four of these nations found themselves subject in the twentieth century to strongly nationalist, centralizing and repressive Turkish, Iranian and Arab governments bent on assimilating the (respectively) non-Turkish, non-Persian or non-Arab ethnic minorities. Because of the large numbers of Kurds in each of these countries, the governments of the region viewed them as a potential threat to their nation-building and modernizing policies.[11]

Factors Important to Kurdish Nationalism's Adoption of Modern Media Technology

There are four main factors affecting Kurdish nationalist movements' adoption of modern communications technology and its resulting impact: (1) The aforementioned physical division of the Kurds, which exacerbated linguistic, cultural and political distance between Kurdish groups; (2) repression of the Kurdish ethnic minority by the states in which they live; (3) modernization—a general process in which increasing proportions of the population become urbanized, separated from agricultural and pastoral ''traditional'' lifestyles, exposed to new ideas, subject to increasing state intrusion into everyday life, inserted into state educational systems and integrated into a market economy; and (4) Kurdish population movements, including refugee movements, migration and

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9   Sabri Cigerli, *Les Kurdes et Leur Histoire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999), 20. Determining the size of the Kurdish population is difficult, given the political sensitivity of the question and a lack of reliable census figures. Cigerli qualifies the numbers cited: "Nous avons trouvé des chiffres différents dans les ouvrages que nous avons consultés sur les Kurdes. Nous avons choisi les chiffres moyens pour le territoire. Les Etats concernés et les Kurdes ne donnent pas le même nombre d'habitants. Par exemple, selon le Président de la République turc, les Kurdes en Turquie sont au nombre de 12 millions, alors que les Kurdes avancent le chiffrent de 15 millions." Amir Hassanpour also cites figures of around 700,000 Kurds in Europe in 1995 in ''MED-TV, Britain, and the Turkish State: A Stateless Nation's Quest for Sovereignty in the Sky,'' paper presented at the Freie Universitat Berlin, November 7, 1995.

10   Ibid., 20-22.

11   Such a view may have been well founded, given the policies in question—the nationalist visions of all these countries either refused to acknowledge the existence of the Kurds (Turkey) or sought to exclude them as a group from any substantive role in the state (Iran, Iraq and Syria).

the formation of diaspora communities outside the Middle East.

The first two factors increased the *necessity* for Kurds as a group to adopt strategies to counter their physical division and repression. The last two factors gave the Kurds the *opportunity* to take advantage of revolutionary changes in communication technologies and globalization.

Division of the Kurds

The redrawing of the Kurdish region's political map after the First World War caused territorial-political divisions amongst the Kurds and, hence, greatly exacerbated Kurdish cultural and linguistic divisions: "The Kurds of Iraq, without giving up their Kurdishness, gradually became more Iraqi and even to some extent Arabicised, those of Iran more Iranian, and the Kurds of Turkey more Turkish. It is true that an awareness of common Kurdish identity and abstract ideas of common interest have never entirely disappeared, but a widening gap in culture and attitudes has prevented common action."[12] The Kurmanji-speaking Kurds of Turkey (roughly 50 per cent of the overall Kurdish population), educated in Turkish schools, adopted the Latin script to write Kurmanji. The Kurmanji and Sorani speaking Kurds of Syria, Iraq and Iran, however, wrote their dialects of Kurdish in the Arabic script of their respective countries' schools.[13] For Kurdish nationalists intent on unifying the Kurdish people, and cognisant of the need for a single standardized Kurdish language, such a situation posed grave problems. In addition to the difficulties arising from Kurdish dialects that are related but largely unintelligible to each other, the different educational systems of the states in the region led to the absurd situation of a Kurmanji-speaking Kurd from Syria, Iraq or Iran not being able to read something written by a Kurmanji-speaking Kurd from Turkey.

Kurdish nationalist elites aspired to overcome such divisions. In particular, they felt that their national aspirations depended to a great deal on the establishment of one national, standardized, Kurdish language. Kurdish scholar Amir Hassanpour provides ample evidence to this effect, and gives examples of Kurdish leaders' attention to the linguistic issue dating as far back as the seventeenth century: "The two tasks, political (i.e., formation of a Kurdish state) and literary (i.e., writing and compiling in the native tongue) were considered by Khani

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12 Martin van Bruinessen, "Shifting National and Ethnic Identities," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 (1998), 40.

13 There exist several dialects of Kurdish. The two most major ones are Kurmanji, spoken in all countries where Kurds live, and Sorani, which is spoken in Iran and Iraq (Amir Hassanpour, "The Internationalization of Language Conflict: The Case of Kurdish," in Eran Fraenkel and Christina Kramer, eds., *Language Contact—Language Conflict* [New York: Peter Lang, 1993], 112).

[a leading seventeenth century Kurdish intellectual] to be two sides of the same coin. He did not view language cultivation as an end in itself. A prestigious literary language, together with a sovereign king, was the hallmark of a civilized and independent Kurdish nation.''[14] Hassanpour also describes twentieth-century efforts of Kurdish intellectuals ''to promote their language by standardizing it and developing it into a vehicle of modern education, mass media, literature and culture.''[15] But just at the time when the Kurdish masses were emerging from the illiteracy that likely hindered the nationalist projects of Kurdish elites before the 1960s,[16] different writing systems continued to pose obstacles.

If one accepts Benedict Anderson's argument that standard written languages were crucial to the formation of national communities, the importance of such a problem should not be minimized:

> Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers . . . formed . . . the embryo of the nationally-imagined community.[17]

Some readers may dispute the central importance of a standardized and written language to Kurdish nationalism, given the argument made here that most Kurds recognize themselves as Kurds and thus, in effect, already possess a national identity. It is also questionable how far a single standardized Kurdish language would go towards eliminating other sources of division amongst the Kurds, stemming from trib-

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14 Amir Hassanpour, ''The Pen and the Sword: Literacy, Education and Revolution in Kurdistan,'' in Peter Freebody and Anthony R. Welch, eds., *Knowledge, Culture and Power: International Perspectives on Literacy as Policy and Practice* (London: Falmer Press, 1993), 42.

15 Hassanpour, ''The Internationalization of Language Conflict,'' 133.

16 Until around the 1960s, most Kurds were overwhelmingly rural and had not attended school, so print nationalism suffered some early setbacks: ''The first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*, was published in Cairo in 1898. . . . It played a profound role in fostering national awakening among the literati. The paper raised the status of the Kurdish language at a time when printing and its cherished product, journalism, were monopolized by the dominant languages, Arabic, Persian and Turkish. However, the literati of the time were no more than small circles; they could hardly form a 'reading public' as it had emerged in Europe since the latter part of the eighteenth century'' (Hassanpour, ''Med-TV, Britain, and the Turkish State,'' 5).

17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 47; emphasis in the original.

al, religious, regional and class differences.[18] What is important to the argument presented here, however, is the perception of Kurdish nationalists and elites regarding the necessity of a standard unifying Kurdish language—given this perception, the status quo of political-educational-linguistic division will be seen by them as highly unsatisfactory, and they will seek out remedies for the situation. Hence, if need is the mother of all invention, then the Kurds' perceived need to overcome their divisions is certainly a major stimulus for the adoption of newly available methods of communication.

Repression of the Kurds

Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, in addition to suppressing almost any expressions of dissent towards the state, placed severe restrictions on the use of Kurdish. Turkey, although in most respects more democratic than the other three states, went the furthest in suppressing Kurdish ethnically based dissent and Kurdish culture and language:

> The rise of a European-style nation-state system in the Middle East emphasised the development of a common language as an important vehicle for modernisation and nation-building in the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies of the region. Consequently, Kurdish languages became victimised by a "series of state-sponsored policies designed to diminish, and in one case [Turkey], simply annihilate them altogether." In fact, Article 26 of the 1982 Turkish Constitution makes it a criminal offence to use the Kurdish language in Turkey, in any form. Article 89 states that "no political party may concern itself with the defence, development, or diffusion of any non-Turkish language or culture; nor may they seek to create minorities within our frontiers or to destroy our national unity."[19]

The exact text of Article 26 states: "No language prohibited by law [Kurdish is prohibited] shall be used in the expression and dissemination of thought. Any written or printed documents, phonograph records, magnetic or video tapes, and other means of expression used in contravention of this provision shall be seized by a duly issued decision of a judge or, in cases where delay is deemed prejudicial, by the competent authority designated by law."[20] Although Turkey eased its blanket ban on Kurdish in 1991, it continues to restrict its use severely: "A popular Kurdish singer who sang for years in Turkish, Ahmet

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18   For more on these divisions, see Philippe Boulanger, *Le Destin Des Kurdes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998) 228-31.

19   Nader Entessar, "The Kurdish Mosaic of Discord," *Third World Quarterly* 11 (1989), 86.

20   A. Blaustein and G. Flanz, *Constitutions of the Countries of the World: Turkey* (New York: Dobbs Ferry, 1994), 13.

Kaya, recently announced he would start using the Kurdish language when he performed. He was promptly arrested and charged with separatist propaganda-making."[21]

Abbas Vali adds the following observation: "Kurdish dissent can find no expression in Turkish democracy: it is tantamount to treason, and must remain clandestine and armed. Hence the persistence of armed opposition to the state in the Kurdish provinces of the southeast organised and led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) since 1984."[22] Although Vali argues that the closing of all legal channels for Kurdish dissent in Turkey led to the pursuit of change through illegal, violent means (the PKK), the same line of reasoning applies to Kurdish ethnic nationalist adoption of communication technologies: repression of Kurdish in Turkey turned any use of the language into an expression of dissent. After being denied legal access to educational, print, radio and television media in their home countries, Kurds were forced to look elsewhere for these resources.[23] Perhaps it should not be too surprising that the most important Kurdish initiative to find alternate modes of expression, the formation of MED-TV, originated with a group of Kurdish intellectuals who were predominantly from Turkey, the state pursuing the most severe curtailment of the Kurdish language, culture and communication.

In Iran, Iraq and Syria, state repression was aimed more at expressions of political dissent than at Kurdish language and culture. The monopolizing of political information and communication channels by these states pushed Kurdish nationalists there to seek the tools to challenge such information hegemonies. But before discussing the Kurdish adoption of new communication technologies, the factors that placed Kurdish groups in a position to adopt them should be discussed.

21 Selcan Hacaoglu, "Turkey—Music of Rebellion," *Associated Press*, February 25, 1999; http://mnsi.net/-mergan95/25-2-99-AP-music-of-rebellion.html.
22 Abbas Vali, "Where Kurdish Identity and Civil Society Clash," *Warreport* 47 (1996), 27. Although founded in the mid-1970s by Abdullah Ocalan in Ankara, the PKK did not emerge in any significant form until it began its operations in 1984.
23 For a more complete discussion of repression of the Kurds, see *Warreport, Special Feature: The Crushing of Kurdish Civil Society* 47 (1996); "Democracy at Gunpoint," *The Economist: Turkey Survey* (June 8-14, 1996); and David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1996), chaps 9, 19, 20 (Turkey); 8, 14-18 (Iraq) and 10-13 (Iran).

Modernization

Until the 1950s, the Kurdish society and economy was still largely traditional, with feudal agricultural modes of production predominating.[24] With a relatively small middle-class intelligentsia to lead the way for a population suffering from high rates of poverty and illiteracy, the Kurds as a group would hardly have seemed likely to integrate later into their movements the most technologically sophisticated communication media.

Modernization, however, introduced changes that increased the size and dynamism of the Kurdish intelligentsia, as well as improving the education level of the general population and exposing them to the larger political arena of the region. In the 1950s, major changes in rural Kurdish agricultural production began to take place, in part due to peasant uprisings (and the resultant exodus from the conflict zones), as well as government land reforms. Rural-urban migration increased, and the Kurdish working class and bourgeoisie began to grow. Migrant Kurdish labourers and immigrants settled in the metropolises of the Middle East—cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Baghdad, Damascus, Teheran and Isfahan. Larger numbers of Kurds entered the skilled artisan and professional work force, swelling the numbers of Kurdish mechanics, printers, electricians, lawyers, doctors and journalists. Increasing levels of education and participation in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the Middle East became available to the Kurdish populations.[25]

This process of modernization created a Kurdish population thirsty for information that addressed the changing issues affecting their lives. It also provided Kurdish nationalist movements with trained professionals, such as journalists, technicians and entrepreneurs.[26] In northern Iraq, which has been under autonomous Kurdish rule since the end of the Gulf War in 1991, Kurds took over Iraqi radio and television broadcasting stations and publishing outlets, and began producing communications for Kurdish nationalist movements such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The Kurds of Turkey, Iran and Syria, lacking such an opportunity, nonetheless found other sources for breaking government monopolies of information, particularly with the Kurdish diaspora in Europe.

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24 Amir Hassanpour, ''The Kurdish Experience,'' *Middle East Report* 189 (1994), 4.

25 Ibid., 4-5.

26 For a more complete argument on modernization's role in creating an ethnic middle-class intelligentsia that spearheads a nationalist movement, see Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976) 26-38, 45-47.

Kurdish population movements and the formation of a diaspora community

In addition to acquiring modern education and skills, the large numbers of Kurds who settled in the Middle East's various metropolises were exposed to new ideologies, and many became involved in left-wing Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi or Syrian opposition movements. When these organizations refused to recognize politicized Kurdish claims to national group rights, however, many of their Kurdish members broke away to found their own specifically Kurdish opposition movements. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey was founded in this way. The party's principal founder and leader, Abdullah Ocalan, was a university student in Ankara and originally a member of a Turkish revolutionary youth party (Devrimci Genc): ''Ocalan gathered six political colleagues to initiate a specifically Kurdish national liberation movement based on Marxism-Leninism. It was decided to sever all connection with Turkish Left groups. In 1975 Ocalan and his first followers withdrew from Turkish territory into the Kurdish marches, concentrating on building up a following in those areas from which they came.''[27]

Particularly in Turkey, state policies often succeeded in assimilating Kurds who moved to non-Kurdish regions—in some cases such people no longer considered themselves Kurdish at all, while others retained some sense of Kurdish identity but spoke Turkish instead of Kurdish as their mother tongue. Deeply worried and disturbed by such trends, Kurdish nationalists placed great importance on breaking state monopolies of communication and information and reviving Kurdish language and ethnic consciousness. Subversive movements such as the PKK emerged to challenge the state's policies towards its Kurdish minority.[28] However, the formation of substantial Kurdish diaspora communities, particularly in Europe, provided Kurdish nationalist leaders with another (and in some cases related) avenue from which to challenge state communication monopolies.

A combination of political, economic and social problems forced Kurds on a massive scale to seek refuge outside the region, mainly in European countries.[29] The freedom of expression in Europe gave them

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27 McDowall, *The Kurds*, 418.
28 For an informative analysis of the PKK's methods and role in contradicting and challenging the Turkish state's official discourse and raising Kurdish ethnic consciousness, see Ismet Imset, *The PKK* (Ankara: Turkish Daily News Publications, 1992); and Ismail Besikci, *Kurdistan and Turkish Colonialism* (London: Blackrose Press, 1991).
29 Osten Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 61. For additional information on Kurdish emigration, consult *Warreport, Special Feature*; Ahmet Icduygu, David Romano and Ibrahim Sirkeci, ''The Ethnic

the opportunity to educate, publish and communicate as they wished.[30] The large size of the Kurdish diaspora community (in excess of 800,000)[31] made publishing, education and broadcasting economically feasible. Higher incomes in the West also gave them the means to invest in, and acquire, modern communication technologies.

It is significant, however, that the diaspora Kurdish community has maintained links with the Kurds still living in Kurdistan, and communications originating from Kurdish groups in Europe have an impact on Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, as described below. A Kurdish journal (*Ronahi*) published in London provides the following anecdote written by a Kurdish student:

> Several months ago, with a friend, I went to the British Library—Oriental Section—to look for a book written by Ahmadi Khani (1650-1706). Fortunately we found it. The manuscript . . . (a metrical Arabic-Kurdish dictionary for children) was written in the beginning of the 1700s and while we were looking through the faded pages of it, I was lost in thought. . . . After almost three hundred years, two students from different parts of Kurdistan were for the first time coming across a book of a leading Kurdish poet and scholar in a library in London. If there is a disgrace for the Kurds, is this not enough?[32]

The Kurdish Strategy of "Plugging-in" to Modern Communications

"New communications technology does not only erode the concept of sovereignty but also offers a new space for marginalized groups to overcome their arbitrary divisions by the nation-states."[33] Clandestine photographs or videos of state oppression often help politicize, mobilize and unite opposition movements. In a globalized world, documented evidence of state repression is also used to garner support from others, such as populations and states friendly to the movement, human rights groups, international tribunals, and other nongovernmen-

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Question in an Environment of Insecurity: The Kurds in Turkey," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (November 1999), 991-1010; and Halkawt Hakim, ed., *Les Kurdes par delà l'exode* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992). Migration and forced displacement from the Kurdish regions was particularly heavy during the state repression of the 1920s and 30s, as well as after the PKK launched its insurgency in 1984.

30 Such freedoms have in some cases led largely assimilated "Turkified" Kurds in Europe to "rediscover" their Kurdish identity. For more on this, see Claus Leggewie, "How Turks Became Kurds, not Germans," *Dissent* 43 (Summer, 1996) 79-83.

31 Quoted in Cigerli, *Les Kurdes*, 20.

32 Wahlbeck, *Kurdish Diasporas*, 177.

33 Yavuz, "A Preamble to the Kurdish Question," 20.

tal organizations. Most importantly, state monopolies on information and its distribution are broken. In Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, videotapes documenting Iraqi torture and executions of Kurds were captured from Iraqi security buildings during the post-Gulf War uprising. One of the most popular video rentals there is ''Saddam's Crimes,'' and, as one Kurdish shop owner explained, ''some people may sleep through 'Rambo,' but if you ask them about any part of 'Saddam's Crimes' they can recall every point in detail.'' Captured local Iraqi television stations in the region are now used by the Kurds to broadcast programmes dealing with previously forbidden topics and to ''acknowledge once-banned histories and heroes.'' Videotapes with foreign programming are also smuggled into the region, breaking Baghdad's former monopoly of information.[34] From Turkey, the PKK smuggles out videos of its raids on Turkish positions as well as footage glorifying the guerrillas and the life they lead. Photographs and videos of Turkish atrocities are also smuggled out, with the aim of garnering international support and mobilizing support from more Kurds from abroad.

The Kurdish diaspora community has also taken full advantage of new communications technologies to resuscitate their threatened culture and language. Desktop and electronic publishing have been used in Europe to counter Middle Eastern state censorship of Kurdish subjects: ''Kurdish writers living in exile have made a key contribution to the development of a standardized written Kurmanci, as well as an extensive literature. Many Kurmanci texts originally published in Sweden and France, ranging from grammars and dictionaries to novels and journalistic work, have subsequently been republished in Turkey.''[35] Pro-Kurdish newspapers such as *Ozgur Politika*, which is banned in Turkey, are published in Europe and smuggled to the Kurdish regions.

Ozgur Politika and other ''subversive'' texts are also directly accessible to Kurdish regions on the Internet. Before 1995, the number of Kurdish web sites numbered less than 20; in January 2001, an AltaVista keyword search of ''Kurd'' drew 29,463 references—75 of the first 100 of which referred to either news articles on the Kurds or to Kurdish web sites. The same search discovered 23,972 references to web pages related to the Kurdish issue. Sites such as ''Kurd.com'' and ''Kurdish.com'' both contain hundreds of links to other Kurdish sites, with content available in English, French, German, Turkish and the Kurdish dialects of Kurmanji, Sorani, and Zaza, among others.[36]

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34   Aliza Marcus, ''City in the War Zone,'' *Middle East Report* 189 (1994), 21.
35   Michiel Leezenberg, ''The Kurds and the City,'' *Journal of Kurdish Studies* 2 (1997), 62.
36   Kurdish groups such as the PKK, PUK, KDP, KOMALA and KDPI have all established websites in addition to those dealing with Kurdish culture. In September

E-mail is an inexpensive, difficult to regulate, widely accessible medium for exchanging ideas, disseminating information and organizing ethnic nationalist projects globally. The Internet is often used as a forum for discussions and arguments on ''forbidden'' subjects.[37] Electronic communication can be easier and cheaper to access than older forms, such as print media, as exemplified by Arm The Spirit, a Canadian anti-imperialist organization that disseminates information about the Kurds and other issues: ''A member of Arm The Spirit stated that the group started the KURD-L news list back in 1995 at a time when there were very few leftist or Kurdish groups active on the Internet, and that the interest shown in the list by Kurds and their supporters in countries all across the world has inspired them to continue their Kurdistan solidarity work. When publishing a printed magazine became too expensive for the group, the Internet provided a much cheaper means of reaching many people, even in places far away.''[38] For the majority of Kurds still residing in the Middle East, however, Internet resources are generally unavailable. Discussions, news and information garnered from the Internet make their way back to Middle Eastern communities in indirect ways, such as by word of mouth or in documents smuggled into the region.

Another form of communication originating from the diaspora Kurdish community has, however, had a dramatic impact on the

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1997, the author discussed the existence of Kurdish Internet sites with a group of four Kurds working in an Ankara restaurant. All four had recently migrated to Ankara from destroyed or impoverished villages in Turkey's Kurdish region. Only one of them had heard of the Internet. By connecting his laptop computer to the restaurant phone line, the author was able to connect to a server in Istanbul and proceeded to show them a handful of Kurdish Websites. They were completely stunned that such sites could exist and remain beyond the reach of Turkish censors. One said, ''I like this Internet. Do you need a computer to use the Internet?'' When informed that a computer was indeed necessary, they immediately began to discuss the prices of computers, the hardware necessary to use the Internet, and whether the author could return the following day to show them more sites. The discussion was accompanied by many worried glances towards the entrance of the restaurant.

37   Conflicts fought on the Internet have sometimes gone to absurd lengths. In the wake of Ocalan's capture, *Time Daily* ran an online poll asking ''Should the United Nations support the creation of a Kurdish state?'' The poll engendered a vociferous reaction, *Time Daily* writers were awash in form-letter hate [e-] mail with subject lines like 'I am protesting you' and 'demand for your apologize'—and the poll was under assault . . . from a Turkish university, and students were armed with a CPU to match *Time Daily*'s—the university's powerful server. The bots were identified and blocked by the IP and cookie-based defences, but they churned out so many voting attempts that defending against them overwhelmed *Time Daily*'s own server''(''When robots attack online polls: a report on ourselves,'' February 26, 1999; http://members.xoom.com/ . . . h-university-protest.htm; this URL no longer functions).

38   akin@kurdish.org, ''Kurdish Liberation on the Internet,'' February 3, 1998.

"homeland" community: In 1994, by establishing MED-TV, a Kurdish satellite station based in London and Belgium, the Kurds became the world's first stateless "television nation."[39] The station's principal founder was a Kurd from Turkey, Hikmet Tabak, who "fled his home on the Turkish/Armenian border in 1992. The UK granted him political asylum. He and 20 others launched MED-TV back in 1994. They had just £5,000 in the bank. A poet, author and film maker, Tabak was one of the few with any experience of making programmes. None of the founders had any knowledge of how to run a satellite station; Kurdish TV journalists and directors are not that common. 'But we saw our society slowly disappearing and knew we had to do something to stop this decline, he says. So they called British Telecom for advice . . . '."[40] MED-TV has given the Kurds a tool with which to counter the disproportionate power of states over information:

> Transcending the international borders which since 1918 have divided the land in which Kurds live, the channel allowed the Kurds, for the first time in their history, to establish a powerful mode of communication among themselves, and undermine the state-centered geopolitical order that has reduced them to the status of helpless minorities. For the first time in their divided history, the Kurdish people can now see their own lives, their own reality, reflected on television screens across the world. Iranian Kurds can speak to Turkish Kurds in phone-ins, and Iraqi Kurds can see how fellow Kurds live in Europe. For a few hours every night, the world's largest stateless nation has a home.[41]

MED-TV, probably more than any other factor, is promoting ethnic consciousness amongst Kurds in the twenty-first century. Its broadcasts are the most popular programmes in the Kurdish world. Satellite dishes on the roofs of buildings have proliferated in many towns in southeastern Turkey since 1995.[42] Residents in Diyarbakir (the world's largest predominantly Kurdish city, located in southeastern Turkey) and throughout Kurdistan assured this author that "everyone watches MED-TV; if they don't have a satellite dish, they go to the home of

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39   Nick Ryan, "Television Nation," *Wired Magazine*, March 1997. Amir Hassanpour adds: "The launching of a daily satellite TV channel, MED-TV, by the Kurdish community in Europe is the first case of the access of stateless nations and minorities to transnational television" ("MED-TV, Britain, and the Turkish State," abstract).

40   Ibid, 45.

41   Amir Hassanpour, "Satellite Footprints as National Borders: MED-TV and the Extraterritoriality of State Sovereignty," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 (1998), 53.

42   Observation of the author after several visits to the region in the summer of 1994, 1997-1998 and the summer of 1999.

someone who does or to a cafe that has it.''[43] ''Peasant families in Kurdistan have even been known to sell cars and whole herds of goats to buy a satellite dish—often at considerable risk from local security forces.''[44] The Turkish government itself estimates that around 90 per cent of people in the Kurdish region of Turkey watch the channel: ''It is watched even by 'village guards' hired by the government to fight PKK; also, the refugees of the war who relocate 'in shanties in western towns invest in satellite dishes to see it.' ''[45]

  Programming on MED-TV runs the gamut from a plethora of news and political programmes to children's shows, music, drama and documentaries, mostly in Kurmanji Kurdish, but also in Sorani, Turkish, Zaza, Persian, Aramaic and Arabic. MED-TV not only defies

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43 By 1998, the author's Turkish was fluent enough to pursue in-depth conversations with Kurds in Turkish Kurdistan. In Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian Kurdistan, conversations were either held in English, French or Turkish, or translated to one of these languages. Conversations were held with children, shop owners, labourers, farmers, shepherds, professionals, students and members and officials of Kurdish parties in Iraq (mainly the KDP and PUK). Visits to Iraqi Kurdistan were made in July 1994 and September-October 2000; to Iranian Kurdistan in July 1999 and September-October 2000, and to Syrian Kurdistan in June-July 1998. Every person with whom the author spoke who identified themselves as Kurdish confirmed that MED-TV was the favourite television viewing of Kurds. This was in spite the explosion of private cable television stations in Turkey offering a wide variety of programming. A PUK official in Turkey added that this also held true for those Kurds in Iraq, Iran and Syria who could access the channel. Despite the fact that MED-TV was generally seen as being associated with the PKK, a group often at odds with the PUK, KDP and others, the official conceded that it was his favourite channel as well (interview with the author, March 5, 1999).

44 Ryan, ''Television Nation,'' 46. Hassanpour provides details of the risks viewers face: ''Throughout the Kurdish provinces, the police and the gendarmerie destroyed the receiving equipment. For instance, in Eruh (Batman), the army banned the sale of dishes and warned the public not to buy them. . . . When MED-TV announced the forthcoming broadcasting of the 'Kurdistan parliament in exile' (12 April, 1995), the police raided coffee-houses which had satellite dishes, arrested the viewers and destroyed the receiving equipment. The Kurdish newspaper *Yeni Politika*, now banned in Turkey, published reports of the arrest and torture of viewers (see, for example, reports in *Yeni Politika* in May 1995, especially on 11 May, 1995). 'In spite of repression, one shop sold about 150 dishes a week. A Kurdish technician whose shop was raided by the police said that dish installers in Kurdish areas face repression. Fearing to speak on camera, he said that he installed 15 dishes every evening under the cover of darkness' '' (''Satellite Footprints,'' 70; Hassanpour takes this last quotation from *Beating the Censor*, A Frontline News report produced by Tony Smith and Tim Exton aired on Sweden's Channel 1, 25 September, 1995). MED-TV itself has been raided by police at its Belgian, British and German offices (no incriminating items were found) and some of its staff attacked by unknown assailants (Ryan, ''Television Nation,'' 92).

45 Hassanpour, ''Satellite Footprints,'' 70; quotes from ''Turkey Said to be Considering Allowing Kurdish Broadcasts,'' *Turkish Daily News* (Ankara) June 2, 1996.

Turkish law by broadcasting in Kurdish, it also challenges official government interpretations of events and political issues by providing its own news coverage and political discussion programmes which often address taboo subjects (such as Kurdish claims to self-determination). The impact of this should not be underestimated, since television's audiovisual medium is more powerful than radio or print media and is able to cross "boundaries of illiteracy, language, regionalism, age, gender, and religion."[46]

If the Turkish state had permitted the Kurds to have media in their own language, a station such as MED-TV could have developed under the supervision and control of Turkey.[47] Kurdish intellectuals, however, had no option but to found their own independent media in Europe—thus attaining greater freedom of expression. Turkey is, in fact, very aware of MED-TV's role in promoting Kurdish nationalism, and has sought to stifle the nascent station.[48] Satellite dishes are smashed by security forces in southeast Turkey and the owners are harassed. Several Turkish diplomatic initiatives have focused on trying to get the station's licence revoked in Britain and Belgium; previous satellite providers such as France Telecom were successfully pressured not to renew MED-TV's license.[49] Turkey has also pressured the private sector to not deal with MED-TV, with the result that many banks, legal firms and other businesses refuse to do business with the Kurdish station, for fear of being denied Turkish contracts.[50]

MED-TV has also been an inspiration to other stateless peoples: the station has been approached for advice and possible sharing of air time by representatives of Punjabi, Tamil and (surprisingly) Armenian groups. No co-operative projects have emerged, however, mainly be-

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46 Ibid., 53.
47 In 1992, however, the idea of Turkey providing Kurdish programming was dismissed by Prime Minister Demirel as "unconstitutional" (Amir Hassanpour, "Language Rights in the Emerging World Linguistic Order: The State, the Market and Communication Technologies," in Miklos Kontra, ed., *Language: A Right and a Resource* [Budapest: CEU Press, 1998], 228).
48 Hassanpour states that, " . . . it is clear that every second of MED-TV's broadcasting seriously undermines Turkish sovereign rule. The logo 'MED-TV,' which is always present in the upper left corner of the screen, is an assertion of Kurdishness (the Kurds are Medes not Turks). It also asserts Kurdish rights to statehood. The logo's colours of red, yellow and green are the colours of the Kurdish flag; moreover, the flag itself appears frequently in the programming, ranging from news and information to entertainment and culture. The daily menu begins with a grand orchestra performing the Kurdish national anthem, *Ey Requib* (O Enemy!). The ever presence of the Kurdish national flag and anthem means that MED-TV has the power to treat the Kurds not as an audience but as citizens of a Kurdish state." ("Satellite Footprints," 59).
49 Ibid.
50 Hassanpour, "Language Rights," 233.

cause MED-TV was concerned to keep its image above reproach, given the close scrutiny of British officialdom, among others.[51] On April 23, 1999, MED-TV's licence was revoked by Britain's Independent Television Commission (ITC). The ITC finally accepted Turkish charges that MED-TV broadcasts were inciting Kurds in Turkey to violence, and gave the following explanation for the station's closure: ''Whatever sympathy there may be in the United Kingdom for the Kurdish people, it is not in the public interest to have any broadcaster use the United Kingdom as a platform which incites people to violence.''[52] By July 1999, however, a ''new'' Kurdish satellite station obtained a licence in France. Named ''Medya-TV,'' the station is generally perceived as the heir to MED-TV, it is run by many of the same people and confounds Turkey's efforts to silence an independent Kurdish media. A British cultural television station (CTV) has also begun allowing several hours a day of Kurdish cultural programming on its satellite waves. It seems that efforts to silence Kurds and prevent their access to media outlets has only magnified and multiplied their voices.

Turkey's efforts to silence MED-TV did not end in Europe, however. Maintaining that MED-TV was a ''mouthpiece for the terrorist PKK,'' Turkey began aiding the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP) to launch its own ''KTV'' television, an ''anti-PKK TV station.''[53] The KDP was worried that broadcasts from MED-TV were increasing PKK popularity amongst Iraqi Kurds, to its detriment.[54] Recognizing their common interest in opposing the PKK, Turkey's ironic decision to assist the KDP to establish its KTV network was an attempt to ''fight fire with fire.''[55] Hence the Turkish government unoffi-

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51 Author's interview with MED-TV co-founder Hikmet Tabak, August 27, 1999. Given historically competing claims of Armenian and Kurdish nationalists for parts of the same territory, as well as the role of some Kurds in the Armenian genocide, it is somewhat surprising that MED-TV was approached by Armenian representatives.

52 ''Britain Shuts down Kurd TV Channel,'' Reuters, April 23, 1999; http://www.mnsi.net/-mergan95/23-4-99-Reu-med-tv-closed.html; this URL no longer functions.

53 ''KDP Launches Anti-PKK TV Station,'' *Arm the Spirit*, February 22 1999; http://burn.ucsd.edu/-archive/kurd-1/1999.02/msg00019.html; this URL no longer functions.

54 KDP officials deny that KTV was established as an anti-PKK station. They state that its purpose is simply to give a voice to Iraqi Kurdistan, its people, its reality and its culture (author's interview with KDP Ankara representative, Safeen Dizayee, June 11, 1999).

55 The Turkish government seems very much aware of television's importance—for instance, although the movie *Braveheart* was shown throughout western Turkey, the government did not permit the film's showing in the eastern (Kurdish) regions of the country for fear that Kurds there would see too close a parallel between their own situation and that of Scottish people's oppression at the hands of the English.

cially conceded that if it could not stop Kurdish satellite broadcasting. MED-TV founder Tabak, however, actually expressed pleasure at this, stating that "no matter what they [anti-MED-TV stations such as KTV] say, as long as it is in Kurdish, good. The Turks are breaking their own rules by allowing this."[56]

Communications technology, and MED-TV in particular, have thus played a large role in heightening Kurdish ethnic consciousness, ethnic politicization and perhaps even ethnic unity.[57] Those active in establishing and running MED-TV are explicit about the role of the television station: "MED-TV hopes to assist in the regeneration of the Kurdish language and the identity of this dispossessed nation whilst informing the Kurdish public of the world, national and international events."[58] Tabak states that the station

> gave great confidence to the Kurds. Before, they felt they could not accomplish anything. MED-TV crossed all borders, got Kurds from different countries to know each other. Before, only smugglers carried this kind of consciousness across borders. The station got Kurds to understand each other. It also started to bridge Kurdish dialects. People got more used to different dialects and religious sects. Cross-communication between Kurds at the political level has also been crucial—the station is an arena for mutual expressions and a tremendous accomplishment. Unity has been achieved on the screen at least. It is, in fact, a great revolution for Kurdish solidarity and unity.[59]

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56 Author's interview with Hikmet Tabak, August 27, 1999.
57 *Ethnic consciousness* can be defined as the extent to which people identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic group and the value they attach to such identity. In this sense the term is similar to Brass's "ethnic self-consciousness" (Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 26). *Politicized ethnicity* refers to the extent that people view their ethnic group as a nation, measured by their claim to national rights of statehood, autonomy and/or at the very least, special cultural and political rights based on their nation's difference from others within the state. See David Brown "Ethnic revival: perspectives on state and society" and Nader Entessar, "The Kurdish mosaic of discord," both in *Third World Quarterly* 11 (1989), 1-17 and 83-98, respectively. *Ethnic unity*, rather than an unrealistic perfect harmony within the ethnic group, refers to the extent to which group members display unity vis-à-vis outsiders, refusing to help them harm other members of the ethnic group.
58 MED-TV, "Kurdish Satellite Television," brochure published in London, Fall 1995 (quoted in Hassanpour, "Satellite Footprints," 55).
59 Author's interview with Hikmet Tabak, August 27, 1999. For a dissenting opinion regarding MED-TV's role in uniting the Kurds, see Philippe Boulanger, *Le Destin Des Kurdes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998) 228-31. Essentially, Boulanger argues that MED-TV's images are not absorbed onto a clean slate—viewers mediate what they see through their own particular culture and frames of meaning, causing a Shiite Sorani-speaking Kurd from Iran to perceive the station's offerings quite differently from an Alevi Zaza-speaking Kurd from Turkey, for example.

The impact of MED-TV has also begun to multiply—in addition to KTV, the other main Kurdish group in northern Iraq, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), founded yet another Kurdish satellite station, KurdSat, in the spring of 2000.

Technology as a catalyst

Modern media have heightened state opposition in yet another way: instantaneous and simultaneous global television images combined with communications have aroused popular passions and immediately channeled them into identity-building and reinforcing action.

Threat, humiliation or symbolic defeat of a group can profoundly affect its members, heightening their ethnic consciousness, politicization and unity.[60] When Turkey abducted PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan from Kenya in the spring of 1999, the immediacy of the reaction was startling: ''When Ocalan was captured in Africa, he was put on a Turkish plane at 2 a.m. in Nairobi, Kenya. In less than two hours this event was broadcast in Europe, and protests began at 5 a.m.''[61] With the aid of satellites, television cameras were able to broadcast events as they were happening and telephones, and fax and Internet were able to pass the information on rapidly to virtually all members of the Kurdish community worldwide.[62] Before time could even begin to calm their passions, Kurds, feeling bitter and victimized, were then able to use communications technology to organize and stage protests internationally and simultaneously. Many observers of Kurdish protests at consulates and embassies across the Western world were so surprised at the speed and simultaneous nature of the demonstrations that they believed the protests were organized in advance. They were not, al-

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60 Some psychological studies dealing with this and related issues include J. Martin and A. Murray, ''Catalysts for collective violence,'' in R. Folger, ed., *The Sense of Injustice: Social Psychological Perspectives* (New York: Plenum, 1984) 95-139; Crawford Young, ''Patterns of Social Conflict: State, Class and Ethnicity,'' *Daedalus* 111 (1982), 91-110; and Abbas Valy, ''The Kurds and Their 'Others': Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics,'' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 18 (1998), 82-95.

61 *RFE/RLIraq Report*, 23 April 1999; http://www.mnsi.net/-mergan95/23-4-99-Irq-Report.html.

62 Based on conversations with the directors of Toronto's Kurdish Community Centre and Kurdish demonstrators in Toronto and Montreal. Demonstrators that the author spoke with had either heard of Ocalan's capture directly from MED-TV, or received a telephone call or e-mail (from others who heard the news). They then called family and friends in the community to organize immediate demonstrations in front of the Israeli and Greek consulates in Toronto and Montreal. Some had received telephone calls and e-mails from friends and family in Europe and the Middle East who told them they were doing the same things there.

though the habit of previous protests (during Ocalan's pre-capture bid for asylum in Italy and other countries) meant that organizational communication lines for such protests were already in place in the Kurdish community. Telephones, faxes and e-mail reached most Kurds within a matter of hours, and it was not a big step to then pass a ''let's demonstrate at the consulate/embassy'' message along. The day after Ocalan's capture, Kurdish newspapers published in Europe, such as *Ozgur Politika*, contained articles and headlines urging their readers to ''Exercise your right to protest.''[63] Only two to three days after were buses hired to bring in Kurds from farther afield for organized rallies in the various capitals around the world.[64]

Participation in protests followed by evening news images showing fellow Kurds participating in similar protests worldwide strengthened the mobilization process. Television images have emerged as the most powerful communication medium, able to reach the population instantaneously, even the illiterate, and proving much more capable of stirring up emotion than print or oral communication alone.[65] A Kurdish man arrested at a demonstration in front of the Israeli embassy in Montreal stated, ''When I saw [on television] Apo [Abdullah Ocalan] captured, handcuffed and blindfolded by the Turks, I had to do something. He has done and sacrificed so much for us.'' The man was also keen to point out that Kurds everywhere, and not just Kurds from Turkey or those who supported the PKK, demonstrated.[66]

For Kurdish nationalists troubled by the Kurds' historic lack of unity, it is significant that not only Turkish Kurds demonstrated in solidarity with Ocalan. Major Kurdish protests erupted in Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan as well. In Iran, these demonstrations then turned against the Islamic regime.[67] Many of the Kurds protesting in Western cities were from the

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63 Andrew Buncombe, ''Diaspora hear the word on Kurd TV,'' *The Independent* (London) February 19, 1999. The article adds that, ''From the poverty-stricken peasants in the mountains of Eastern Turkey to the relatively wealthy immigrant businessmen of north London, Kurds around the world retain a remarkably effective network of information and news'' (12).

64 One of the directors of Toronto's Kurdish Community Centre told the author that it took them two to three days to reserve buses and organize transport for those who wished to go to Ottawa and demonstrate in front of the Turkish embassy there.

65 Hikmet Tabak stresses that it was not MED-TV per se that agitated people into action. Rather, it was the humiliating images broadcast by Turkey of Ocalan blindfolded and held in captivity that inflamed popular passions. These images were broadcast by the television stations worldwide (interview, August 28, 1999).

66 Discussion on November 16, 2000, immediately after the man's appearance in court in Montreal. The defendant was from the Kurdish region of Turkey and had had refugee status in Canada since 1997.

67 ''While impossible for independent journalists to verify figures due to restricted access, it seems clear that major disturbances took place. That pro-Ocalan

non-Turkish parts of Kurdistan. This points to the catalyzing effect that television images of Ocalan's capture had on most Kurds, including non-supporters of the PKK. Ocalan, irrespective of his ideology, is a symbol of Kurdish defiance, and his capture was seen by Kurds everywhere as yet another humiliation and defeat. The fact that several powerful nations, including the United States and Israel, seemed to have had a role in the affair, added to the Kurdish sense of victimization. The *New York Times* carried the following account: ''My mother never had any particular sympathy for Ocalan or his organization. . . . But when she saw the pictures of him in handcuffs, she cried.''[68] Hence MED-TV and other media reporting on Ocalan's capture benefited Kurdish nationalists, turning a defeat into an opportunity and a catalyst for the further politicization and mobilization of Kurdish masses.

If modern communications technologies can in fact be used to the advantage of ethnic nationalist movements, then the predictable response of states such as Turkey is to attempt to deny such movements access to the media: hence Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and to a lesser extent, Iran's, heavy censorship or outright banning of Kurdish media in both print and broadcast form. Given the existence of diaspora communities and easy access to communications technology in a globalized world, however, such repressive efforts on the part of states are unlikely to bear fruit. Turkey understandably feels threatened by MED-TV, since by its very existence the station challenges basic principles of the Turkish state.[69] But if Turkey, an important North Atlantic Treaty Organization member and European Union hopeful, chooses instead of repression to democratize more fully so as better to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms of minorities, the rule of law, good governance and social equity, its Kurdish minority could come to feel like an enfranchised part of the republic, thus removing the impetus for ethnic nationalist attempts at secession. The same holds for Iran and Iraq. In a more democratic milieu, where one can express one's identity freely and enjoy basic minority rights of freedom and cultural practice, people may forego secessionist programs.

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demonstrations erupted into protests against the Islamic regime points to both the transnational volatility of Kurdish issues and underlying dissatisfaction of Iranian Kurds with the regime'' (WKI Press Release, March 3, 1999, www.clark.net/kurd/prIranViolence.html).

68 Stephen Kinzer, ''Nationalism is Mood in Turkey's Kurdish Enclaves,'' *The New York Times*, May 16, 1999.

69 These include the notion that Turkish is the sole permissible public-sphere language in Turkey. For a more thorough discussion of the founding principles of the Turkish Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Iraqi state vis-a-vis Kurdish rights, see McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*.

In the short term, however, states such as Turkey, that are challenged by ethnic nationalist movements, would do well to avoid humiliating their opponents. Televised images of a blindfolded, captive Ocalan, framed by Turkish flags in the background, may have cost Turkey more in the long term than it gained. Although Turkish domestic opinion may have militated against it, treating Ocalan more as a respected prisoner of war would have done much to ease Kurdish reaction to his capture, and perhaps set the stage for a reconciliation. Six months after Ocalan's capture, Kurds in Turkey nurtured a great deal more anti-government sentiment and readiness to take up arms than a year earlier.[70] Other observers describe the same phenomena regarding Kurdish nationalist sentiments: ''The Turkish government says that few Kurds support the idea of Kurdish nationalism and that nearly all are happy with the life Turkey offers them. But a four-day tour through Kurdish provinces of the southeast indicated that the opposite may be true. Throughout the region, Kurds appear more conscious of their identity than ever. It is difficult to find any who do not support the nationalist cause and even the armed rebellion that has been under way since 1984.''[71]

Conclusion

Two major phenomena—the political-territorial division of Kurds and their repression by host states—created the impetus and need to ''plug-in'' to modern communications technology. The perceived need of Kurdish nationalist elites was both to attempt to unite the Kurdish ethnic group and to circumvent state monopolies of information and communication. Modernization and urbanization of Kurdish society as well as Kurdish population movements, particularly the formation of a large diaspora community in Europe, placed critical numbers of Kurds in a position to take advantage of new communications technology. This allowed the formerly voiceless, dispossessed Kurdish ethnie to nurture and propagate their threatened Kurdish national identity. Crucial tasks, including the standardization and propagation of the Kurdish language, the codification of a Kurdish history and culture, and the challenging of state discourses that deny or suppress Kurdish identity are now pursued through the use of technologies such as satellite broadcasting, Internet and desktop publishing.

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70 In conversations with the author, especially in the Diyarbakir, Van and Hakarri Kurdish regions, ''average'' Kurdish farmers, tradesmen and students expressed a great deal more anti-government sentiment in the summer of 1999 than in 1998. This is, of course, the impression of the author. Given the situation in Turkey, opinion polls or surveys of the Kurdish population remain out of the question.

71 Kinzer, ''Nationalism is Mood in Turkey's Kurdish Enclaves.''

Within this context, and given a reasonably well-defined sense of Kurdish identity, events highlighting the Kurds' sense of persecution and victimization served as catalysts, furthering feelings of Kurdish nationalism. In short, Turkey's capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan increased Kurdish ethnic consciousness, politicization and unity. More importantly, it was not simply his capture that produced this effect, but the instantaneous media coverage of the event, which caused the subsequent Kurdish reaction and awareness throughout the global village.

Whether or not such a phenomenon can play itself out in a similar way with other stateless nations is a question that should be addressed. Nationalist elites of groups who experience circumstances similar to those of the Kurds, and who wish to counter their people's subjugation, will find that modernization and a significant diaspora community in the West are two of the main factors that determine their ability to use modern communications technology in their favour. The fact that Basque, Punjabi, Tamil and Armenian groups approached MED-TV about joint undertakings suggests that modern communication technology will, if it has not already, find its way into many ethnic nationalist hands. People often learn by the example of others.