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Diasporas and the role of social media on militant/ political activities: The Basque diaspora in Argentina in the spotlight

ABSTRACT

The role of politically motivated and engaged diasporas go beyond the mere reinforcement of state nationalism or states itself, but also promotes and supports subnational/sub-state ethnic groups' agendas, both reinforcing and weakening states' nationalist agendas. Sub-national/sub-state political groups, such as of Kurds, Uyghur, Tamil minorities, among others, tend, in many cases, to find support over its diaspora to advance a specific political agenda (such as greater autonomy, independence, etc). Also, such groups and related diasporas appropriate the Internet as a tool for political engagement, communication, financing, lobby and even moral support. In this article, I seek to understand and conceptualize such appropriation(s) having the Basque case (focusing on its diaspora in Argentina) as the main object of analysis.

Introduction

Diasporas have historically occupied a secondary role in the study of international relations, despite the fact that international migrations are a subject of great importance – even more now with the massive migration of Syrian refugees towards Europe – though in the past twenty years the subject has gained more relevance. To Varadarajan: 'much of this literature has generally tended to converge on understanding and explaining diasporas as disrupting the narrative of "politics as usual"' (2010: 6).

But once those migrants settle, create roots and their families develop in a new country – and there is the formation of a diasporic identity that bond together the members of this group – the focus of study usually shifts towards money remittances and the diaspora as propaganda or pressure groups focused on the hostland. Generally, the political aspects of diasporas, such as active players in homeland politics from abroad, received less attention by scholars. Hall (1993; Hall et al. 2003), Gilroy (1993), Appadurai (1997, 1998) or Bhabha (1994) view diasporas as hybrid subjects who challenge the very logic of nation states and state nationalism while considering diasporas the result of trauma (expulsion, forced migration, slavery, exile, etc.) within a post-colonial orientation.

Such viewpoint under-emphasize the role of diasporas in reinforcing (state) nationalism and nation-state itself as it disguises or covers the role of states in utilizing diasporic communities for nationalistic projects, what Varadarajan calls 'domestic abroad', where states 'are actively involved in constituting sections of their diasporas not just as part of a larger deterritorialised nation, but a new constituency that is connected to, and has claims on, the institutional structures of the state' (2010: 5).

It is possible to affirm that diasporas both reinforces and weakens states and their nationalistic agendas depending on a set of conditions and intentionality. In the case of stateless nations' diasporas, they tend to weaken states' nationalist agendas – in some cases even by supporting militant groups, such as the case of the Kurdish (Hassanpour 1992, 1996, 2003; Can 2007; Smets and Segul 2016), the Tamil (Tekwani 2003; Wayland 2004) and in some degree the Basque diasporas – even though they might reinforce agendas of political and pressure groups, as well as of sub-national/sub-state entities.

Internet reinforces a diasporic identity, understood as the result of the relationship between an original (imagined) culture and amalgam of the host nation identity hybridized with the own form of identity produced by diaspora members or their self-image as members of a diaspora (Hepp et al. 2011). The distance that may separate 'original' groups from the diaspora sometimes impose problems to the maintenance of the diasporic identity that tends to lose their language or some other identitary characteristic. Internet, then, became a tool in which tensions and processes of (re)construction of identity(ies) take place.

Internet, as the mass media, and the focus of this article, creates a sense of global connection (Naghibi 2011), giving the community a platform for political engagement and action and, according to Can (2007: 130), Internet 'has become the weapon of choice for diasporic communities' and 'activist groups, within ethnic diasporas, have the potential to become a strategic asset their home countries and territories can draw upon to help them achieve regional politico-military objectives' (cited in Tekwani 2003: 175–76). Internet is a space not only for simple communication or identity maintenance, but also

a political space for the promotion of ideologies and political agendas that, in themselves, shape the belonging and the identities of those engaging in the space.

In the following sections, I will conceptualize diasporas and the Basque diaspora in particular in the light of several established theories, as well as present a brief analysis of the different ways in which minority/stateless groups take ownership of the Internet in order to promote political action and to engage politically as background to show the similarities and differences to the (online) behaviour of the Basque diaspora.

Conceptualizing (Basque) diaspora

Despite the lack of agreement regarding the precise meaning of the concept of diaspora, I will work with the idea that 'diaspora' can be defined as the 'trans-national collectivity, brokenapart by, and woven together across, the borders of their own and othernation-states, maintaining cultural and political insti-tutions' (Tötölyan 1991: 5), also as a population dispersed from its homeland, with collective memory and idealization of the homeland, as well as a strong ethnic consciousness and solidarity with co-members of the group (Cohen 1997: 180) and an exacerbation of allegedly common and ancestral traits that are periodically reinforced (Billig 1995; Renan 2007).

In this regards, the Basque diaspora can be understood as the community of ethnic Basques that were born – or descended from those who were born – in the historical territory of the Basque Country or Euskal Herria (Zazpiak Bat, or the seven historical provinces in one single Basque Country), comprising territories now divided by France (Iparralde or Northern Basque Country, part of the new community of Aquitaine) and Spain (The Basque Autonomous Community and Foral Community of Navarre) and migrated elsewhere or, in the case of this thesis, to the Americas from the fifteenth century up to today.[1]

The Basque diaspora is scattered all over the world, as well as Basque associations or *Euskal Etxeak*,[2] which are present in almost 30 countries, but Argentina, with more than 90 of such institutions, is the country where dias-pora politics is stronger as well as it is the country that received the largest number of Basque migrants over the past centuries. It is a fact that Uruguay, Chile and Venezuela (in Latin America), the United States and Italy also have the presence of more or less active left-wing nationalist political groups; none-theless, their activities were not as relevant as in Argentina.

Basques at the diaspora – altogether with Basques in the homeland – form a nation, an ethnonational group (Connor 1994), a group of people that believe they are related since ancient times, maintaining traditions and herit-age and passing it to the next generation, and sharing a sense of uniqueness (Smith 1991) also with the Basques at the homeland.

This Basque imagined community (Anderson 2005), or imagined transna-tional community (Appadurai 1997), is made up of individuals who may never meet each other, but they imagine themselves as members of the same ethno-group or ethnodiasporic group, sharing common traits, despite the differ-ences. 'The different Basque diasporic groups preserve their ethnic identities by considering and 'imagining' themselves as a part of a global Basque ethnic community' (Totoricagüena 2004: 10); therefore, they feel like members of the same Basque nation or ethnonational group (Connor 1994).

Despite political and ideological differences, as well as nationalistic points of view, Basques in the diaspora kept seeing themselves as one group, one

1. Concerning the process of identity building of Basques and their relationship with Spain, Oiarzabal and Molina (2009: 705) note: 'Within the framework of the liberal revolution, Basque regionalism was a movement of ethnic leaders who attempted to create a dual identity: Ethnic-Basque and Civic-Spanish. The relation between regional and national identities was not immutable; they tended to clash in times of civil wars and revolutions. In fact, the linking of Basque local laws to the traditionalist insurrection during the Second Carlist War (1872–6) brought about the vehement abolition of the Basque autonomous system. The Spanish nationalist elites considered Basque identity an intrinsic element of the peripheral traditionalist revolt that had firmly rejected the democratic State founded by the Revolution of 1868, which ended with the proclamation of the Spanish Republic in 1873'. See also Álvarez Gila (1996).

2. *Euskal Etxeak* is the plural of *Euskal Etxea* or Basque House/Club.

3. During the 1970s, some of the *Euskal Etxeak* changed their statutes to impose some 'non-political' or 'apolitical' status to themselves (Totoricagüena 2004); in other words, to some degree they kept defending the independence of the Basque Country on the lines of the PNV's Aranist ideology, but forbade the political activities of the newcomers, generally left-wing nationalists.

4. See, for instance, Granja Sainz (2002).

5. *Abertzale* means 'patriot' in the Basque language, a common denomination for both supporters of the right-wing PNV as well as left-wing political parties (such as Batasuna, EH Bildu, ANV, etc) and organizations.

6. Defunct. Founded around the year 2000–01, Jo Ta Ke Rosario began as a group of friends, members of the *Zazpirak Bat*, the local *Euskal Etxea* and of the *Centro Navarro* (Navarrese Centre) of the same city – and the same street. Among Jo Ta Ke's objectives were the defence of the rights of Basque prisoners and creating awareness in Rosario and in Argentina about the Basque Country independence movement.

7. Now defunct, it was founded by Daniel Bilbao in 2000, their main activity as was a newsletter to members of the diaspora and discussion groups in different languages to connect the diaspora.

8. Group affiliated to Askapena – part of the so-called Basque Movement for National Liberation, a term used to identify the political movement formed by different organizations

nation, forming a diaspora (or diasporic) identity (Totoricagüena 2004: 147; Oiarzabal and Molina 2013: 28) that synthesizes or combines both the Basque and the host country identities in a transnational way (Vertovec 1999), meaning that relates Basques socially, economically and culturally within multiple boundaries and societies.

As Oiarzabal and Molina (2013: 92) mentioned, 'the self-perpetuation of Basque identity in the Diaspora is very much based on the pride and affection for assumed characteristics, such as uniqueness or singularity of such an identity'. Basques are physically connected to their host countries, yet they remain psychologically and emotionally connected to their Homeland. Basques in the diaspora kept, with different degrees, traces of their homeland culture, while shaping it with elements from the country they were born or chose to live.

The Basque diaspora online

According to Can (2007), subalternized organizations and groups tend to be among the first to appropriate Internet as a tool for (re)construction of identity and propaganda in order to be able to tell themselves their own history and not let states dominate every version of it as a way to overcome the hegemonic discourse (Mbembe 2003; Vitorino 2016) – of the state or in the Basque case, the hegemonic discourse of the Basque government and its main political party, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV-EAJ), within traditional associative structures.

The *Euskal Etxeak* are hegemonized by the PNV from the 1930s onward, and Internet was among the few ways for left-wing nationalist groups to reach the diaspora without having to go through or being censored by those who were proxies or financially dependent on the Basque government (run by the PNV almost uninterruptedly since the end of Franco's dictatorship).[3] The challenge[4] to the hegemonic discourse within the Basque Clubs posed by the left-wing nationalist individuals arriving from the 1970s onward is also reflected online.

As mentioned by Oiarzabal and Molina (2013) and Totoricagüena (2005), before Internet Basques had to rely on their clubs to receive news and updates from the Homeland, but some clubs would not allow material and information coming from political parties such as *Herri Batasuna* (left-wing *Abertzale*[5]) to reach the members of such clubs. During the 1990s, one way for homeland political groups such as the *Herri Batasuna* to communicate with the diaspora was through sending e-mails and publications to the *Euskal Etxeak* and for it to then be distributed among members, even on the eve of the Internet, the club's webmaster or any other person in charge would not allow any material divergent from PNV-approved ideology to reach club's members.

In a way they would impose a censorship to any material that did not fit their ideological standards. But with the widespread use of social media and other online tools, Basques at the diaspora have to rely less and less on their club's goodwill, thus opening up a space for broader contestation.

Internet will play a major role in the coming years as a way to bypass the control by the *Euskal Etxeak* of the 'diaspora ideology' imposed by the PNV, allowing different groups to spread their beliefs freely. During this period (and specially from the 2000s), politically active groups started to emerge.

For years, groups and initiatives such as *JO TA KE* Rosario[6] (No Stop Rosario), *Asociación Diaspora Vasca*[7] (Basque Diaspora Association – ADV), the *Euskal Herriaren Lagunak*[8] (Friends of the Basque Country – EHL), the

Red Independentistak[9] (Pro-Independence Network), *Askatasunaren Bidea*[10] (Path towards the Independence), *A Casa/Etxera*[11] (Back [to] Home), *Foro Debate Diaspora Vasca*[12] (Basque Diaspora Debate Forum), *Diaspora Borrokan*[13] (Fighting Diaspora), *Eusko Alkartasuna* (Basque Solidarity – EA),[14] *Akelarre Kultur Taldea* (Akelarre Cultural Group),[15] among others, have both online and offline, been competing for the space and the minds of the Basques in the Diaspora, promoting a more radical nationalistic agenda, maintaining ties with the Basque Nationalist or *Abertzale* left-wing parties in the homeland and spreading support for Basque political prisoners.

The groups mentioned above can be loosely divided into two main categories according to their main struggle: First, those groups focused more on culture and divulgation of an idea of Basqueness (as well as of the independence of their homeland), and second, groups that focus more on political action, mainly on the cause of Basque political prisoners – though it is not uncommon to see an overlapping of such agendas from time to time.

It is not to say that all or even any of such movements had the intention to become an alternative to the traditional spaces of the diaspora, such as the Basque Clubs (though Askatasunaren Bidea works as an alternative Basque club in a city without any of such), but rather they wanted to influence positively the diaspora in order to present a different political approach to the mainstream one and, sometimes, act as a complimentary tool to the traditional spaces.

In other words, it was and is all about imposing an alternative discourse, rather than substitute or even demolish traditional spaces. Nevertheless, to many, such traditional spaces such as the Euskal Etxeak are inseparable from PNV's own *Abertzale* ideology; therefore, such groups would present a threat to the diaspora itself. In the end, some, if not all of such groups, ended up forming alternative spaces of their own, and an ever bigger alternative left-wing space that is at the same time complementary to the traditional ones and new, bringing new elements and creating new spaces, both offline and online,[16] for discussion, meeting and (re)production of (diasporic) identity.

Internet, then, became a space for propaganda, dissemination of (new) ideas and alternative agendas of a sector of the Basque diaspora that, many times, would still be part and attend to the old institutions – such as members of Jo Ta Ke Rosario that had two main agendas depending on the environment they were inserted.

Inside the Rosario Basque association *Zazpirak Bat*, they promoted more cultural events, roundtables and conversations with representatives from the homeland and promoted the idea of an independent Basque Country, whereas outside the *Zazpirak Bat*, they focused more on the defence of Basque prisoners and more proactive left-wing agendas with other groups and political parties from Argentina. Many times, however, the aforementioned groups had to promote activities in alternative spaces or find other locations to express freely.

As discussed, Internet is a tool that helps politically engaged diasporas to enhance reach and penetration; it creates (a) transnational space(s) where physical communities, such as diasporas, 'extend themselves into cyberspace and [become] cybercommunities' (Oiarzabal and Molina 2013: 39). Internet also helps the diaspora as a whole to safeguard their identity and to maintain close(r) ties to the homeland and even to intervene politically – the Kurds are a vibrant expression of such, as was the Tamil diaspora and their crucial support to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrilla.

of many social and political areas having in common the left-wing Abertzale ideology. Its main goal is to achieve the independence of the Basque Country while organizing national and international solidarity activities and supporting Basque political prisoners, promoting the agenda of Basque solidarity outside the traditional diasporic space.

9. They focus on bringing debates and activities related to the goal of a Basque independent state both in the Basque Country and at the diaspora.

10. A movement and a project of an alternative Euskal Etxea, is a cultural collective from the city of San Miguel, in the region of Buenos Aires, Argentina, founded in 2009, focused on acting as an alternative space to the Euskal Etxeak.

11. The collective A Casa/Etxera (Back to home) is a rather obscure left-wing Abertzale political group dedicated to the rights of Basque political prisoners in the homeland, founded in 2014.

12. The forum was founded in the Basque Country in 2003 as a space for discussion among different political actors, groups and individuals, within the homeland political sphere to deal with different aspects of the political and social reality of Euskal Herria. The initiative reached Argentina in 2006, but it was only in 2007, July, that it began its activities. Basques from both Argentina and Uruguay joined the initiative to create a plural space for debate and reflection among citizens of both countries. Now defunct.

13. Diaspora Borrokan (Fighting Diaspora) was a short-lived initiative by left-wing Abertzale groups and individuals, in 2006, during the Basque National Week, in Cordoba, Argentina, to join together different actors from the left-wing diaspora. Now defunct.

14. Eusko Alkartasuna (Basque Solidarity) is an *Abertzale* and social-democratic political party founded in the Basque Country in 1986 after a split from the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) led by former lehendakari (Basque president) Carlos Garaikoetxea.

15. The groups ideologically affiliated to Eusko Alkartasuna, though completely independent and was born as a local initiative in Argentina's countryside influenced by the many and diverse groups within the diaspora and the homeland to work horizontally in informing the local diaspora about current issues of the homeland, generate an 'opinion and learning forum'. Akelarre Kultur Taldea has a blog since 2008, though it has not been updated since 2013. The current status of the group is dormant.

16. Lacking ideological space inside the Basque clubs, individuals and groups found online a space to build networks and enhance specific struggles and demands.

17. For more, see Nur-Muhammad et al. (2013), Ben-David (2012), Can (2007), Oiarzabal and Molina (2010, 2012, 2013), Díaz Bizkarguenaga (2015), Díaz Bizkarguenaga and Tsavkko Garcia (2015) and Tsavkko Garcia (2012, 2013, 2015a, 2015b).

It is possible to affirm that the Internet was and is an important tool for communication, propaganda and political action, and even pivotal for some of the groups analysed (in particular ADV, who mostly relied on online boards and mailing lists to forward its activities), yet most of the groups interviewed (in different degrees) favour(ed) face-to-face contacts for more pressing and important questions. In some cases (specially concerning EHL and Askapena), due to the fear of persecution and external interference in their communications, or as in the case of Jo Ta Ke, Internet was not as important for the daily activities of its members as they were all from the same city and from basically two centres, the Basque and the Navarrese, on the same street – a particular case indeed.

Internet and social media

Mass media works as a one-way identity maintenance tool, whilst Internet provides a two- to multiple-way tool and a space for identity shaping and (re) construction, a 'hybrid space' (Bhabha 1994) and even a 'third space' (Karim 2003) where uneven identities and those shaped by different realities (such as of Basques in the homeland and in Argentina, with all the influences of neighbouring identities and politics and a particular process of identity construction) coexist and influence each other.[17]

The Internet, understood as 'a community-forming device, where users meet and interact, thereby constituting social networks and online communities – placeless, de-territorialised and without face-to-face interaction' (Oiarzabal and Molina 2012: 1469), surpasses the mere printed paper and the geographical and territorial boundaries and begins to encompass the entire world population, without physical barriers, that has an Internet connection, thus allowing the existence of consciousness of other people, groups, languages and ideas while the creation of a common identity in the midst of diversity.

In the Basque case, individuals and groups from different parts of the world can deliberate in a single virtual space, creating a virtual public sphere of Basques both from the diaspora and from the homeland. As a communicational tool, as well as a space for propaganda, the dissemination of ideas and political agendas, Internet seems to work as intended.

It is important to note, as does Bakker (2001), that communities, diasporas or even nationalisms (of any kind or Basque specifically) predate Internet. Oiarzabal and Molina notes, however, that internet 'might facilitate the formation of a diaspora, because it might help to regain and/or increase its consciousness of belonging to the same human group as such' (2013: 31). In other words, diasporas predate Internet, yet, Internet might help on the formation of new ones as well as Internet potentiates identities and relationships that already exist in the concrete world (Amaral 2017).

Online social networks (such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo Groups, etc.) are a suitable place to analyse the contact between individuals of a community. In the Basque case, one can verify the ample usage of such platforms as a way to maintain contacts as well as forming linkages (Tsavkko Garcia 2012) in an environment full of symbols that leads to a search to comprehend the surrounding. Individuals who share common symbols and see themselves as part of a broad ethnic/national community – with different intensities, though – tend to connect in virtual communities and create links while sharing experiences and reinforcing ethnic ties (Díaz Bizkarguenaga and

Tsavkko Garcia 2015) recreating existential spaces (Zahar and Elhajji 2011) without the need of a (physical) territory.

Methods

This article is based on an ongoing Ph.D. thesis focused on the online relationship of left-wing *Abertzale* political groups in the homeland and at the diaspora in Argentina. A qualitative perspective was adopted, with a review of bibliographical material both for the analysis of the Basque diaspora as well as for other stateless diasporas. I also performed a field trip to Argentina in 2015 where I conducted a series of interviews with leaders of the aforementioned groups with open and closed questions altogether with the collection of propaganda material and the analysis of posts in social media, websites and blogs.

The Basque diaspora in Argentina has a remarkable diversity of political organizations, yet some of these organizations continue to be little studied, and from this arose the interest in changing the traditional focus from the diaspora hegemonic institutions, such as the Basque associations, and seek to understand the history of smaller groups, some ephemeral – many no longer in activity – their development, relationship and contacts with groups of similar ideology in the homeland.

For this article, however, the focus is on a brief comparative analysis of a set of stateless diasporas, with emphasis on the Basque one, with the goal to demonstrate the (similarities of the) use of Internet and social media tools to promote political agendas and political engagement online.

The Basque nationalist left environment in Argentina is reduced, and sometimes individuals who do not necessarily profess such ideology end up participating in such groups or in their activities as a way of politicizing the diaspora beyond what is common to traditional institutions. In this way, we speak of perhaps only a few dozen highly engaged individuals plus a universe of few hundred irregular members, although these estimates may be overoptimistic. Their quantification is highly difficult as there is no evidence of the existence of any membership list.

Aside from the field trip to Argentina, I attended, as an observer, various activities of the Basque nationalist left and close-linked groups, as well as held informal conversations with various members of the Basque nationalist left; I also participated in activities of different groups and attended the VI Congress of Basque Collectivities Abroad in 2015.

Discussion

Ehrkamp (2005) refers to a 'transnational belonging', the desire by members of a diaspora to help those back home whose 'contacts and networks developed to achieve this goal result in the creation of transnational social spaces' (Can 2007: 129). Also, Glick Schiller debates on the concept of long-distance nationalism, a 'set of identity claims and practices that connect people living in various geographical locations to a specific territory that they see as their ancestral homeland' (2005: 570).

We can find examples of politically engaged diasporas within the Kurds (Hassanpour 1992, 2003; Can 2007; Smets and Segul 2016), the Tamil (Tekwani 2003; Wayland 2004), the Uyghur (Yitzhak 2012; Nur-Muhammad et al. 2013) and Palestinian (Baeza 2011; Aouragh 2011; Ben-David 2012) – among others – communities (of long-distance nationalists), as well as the Basque, where individuals living outside their homeland (whether from the first, second or

third generations onward) play a political role that goes beyond representing national interests abroad (Varadarajan 2010). Quite the contrary, they play (or at least try to) a role of influencing homeland and host nation politics with a set of goals from the support of liberation groups, to lobbying and promote political and ideological actions as independent and self-aware groups.

The Kurds are a good example of stateless diaspora, according to Can (2007: 120), 'due to activities outside Turkey, the Kurdish cause evolved from a domestic Turkish matter to an international cause, thus bringing global attention on the day-to-day lives of Kurds living in Turkey'. The Kurdish diaspora, a stateless nation involved in conflicts not only with Turkey, but also with Iraq, Iran and deep into the Syrian conflict, has played an important role in creating awareness as well as lobbying for the Kurdish cause specially through modern media and the Internet (Can 2007; Smets and Segul 2016).

With Internet, such mobilizations become easier and, maybe, more effective in terms of awareness and engagement as Internet can be understood as a 'new space to express opinions, share ideas and broadcast news' (Can 2007: 130). Donya Alinejad (2010) states that Internet challenges boundaries and enables diasporas to have an impact on their host country (as well as on their homeland, I would add), and she argues that blogging and engaging online serves as both political activity itself and as the impetus for political activity.

Internet, as the mass media, creates a sense of global connection (Naghibi 2011), giving the community a platform for political engagement and action, and according to Can (2007: 130), Internet 'has become the weapon of choice for diasporic communities' and 'activist groups, within ethnic diasporas, have the potential to become a strategic asset their home countries and territories can draw upon to help them achieve regional politico-military objectives' (cited in Tekwani 2003: 175–76).

Internet allows for broader reach of diasporic publications whether newspapers, blogs, Facebook pages, etc., but it is important to note that it also allows for the same disagreements and conflicts found before its widespread use. In other words, the ideological conflicts and disagreements found throughout history, written in newspapers and magazines, just take a new form online, reaching a wider audience, but still reproducing partial views or partial political positions. As mentioned by Loureiro (2015: 1–2), writing about the newspapers of the Armenian diaspora in Brazil, such media reproduced 'divergent ideas', and there was no consensus of a project for Armenia or for the diaspora itself. Such conflicts were and are (re)produced at the Basque diaspora both online and offline on a daily basis as well.

For Romano (2002) and Can (2007), Internet allows dispossessed and stateless groups to redefine themselves and challenge dominant states, helping in the process of (re)construction of identities. It goes beyond mass media, as it allows for instantaneous, borderless, multidimensional and multi-directional connections. At the one hand, Internet has the potential to strengthen democracy and democratic processes within and beyond states (Rheingold 1993). On the other hand, it has the potential to threaten governments and regimes (Tekwani 2003), as well as has the potential to impose a state ideology over diasporas (Varadarajan 2010).

As an example of online engagement and political struggle, in 2016, in a Reuters article, Isabel Coles (2016) wrote that 'Iraq's Kurds have declared independence in cyberspace with a new domain name that has provoked the ire of a neighbour hostile to their aspirations', a move that Catalonia had initiated when they obtained their '.cat' domain – a challenge to the Spanish state, which then was coalesced by the top-domain level 'eus' for the Basques.

The Uyghur diaspora, another stateless nation, uses Internet (more specifically Facebook) to express 'the concerns of diaspora Uyghurs for the political and social issues in motherland' (Nur-Muhammad et al. 2013: 15), such as human rights abuses, oppression, criticism to China's policies towards the Uyghur people, etc, but also as a tool for the (re)construction of their ethnic identity and to demand the independence of 'East Turkestan'.

The case of the Tamil diaspora, again a stateless nation, is yet another example of a diaspora playing a key role in supporting homeland groups and institutions (Tekwani 2003; Wayland 2004) – in this case, the long struggle for the liberation of their nation from Sri Lanka and the support for the LTTE, active from 1976 to 2009 – and, more interestingly, being to a great extent, the result of the conflict itself.

The Palestinian diaspora is well known for its academic and literary production and also uses the Internet as a tool for propaganda, identity maintenance and to act politically, for instance, supporting the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) platform (Ben-David 2012). Also, the Eritrean diaspora appropriate the Internet suggesting 'new formulations of citizenship and sovereignty and the ways the nation is imagined as community' (Bernal 2006: 163).

Conclusion

This phenomenon of politically engaged groups within the diaspora, as shown, is not exclusive of Basques, as mentioned earlier. In different levels of the various governments of Europe, says Can, organizations such as the pan-European Confederation of Kurdish Associations in Europe (Kon-Kurd, in Brussels) or Yek-Kom (Association of Kurdish Organizations in Germany), among others have objectives ranging from 'support to Kurdish separatism in turkey to the construction of a pan-Kurdish identity to political think tanks that lead projects on Kurdish human rights' (2007: 127).

Other diasporic groups have similar organizations defending not only the interests of diaspora members, but also acting on homeland politics with 'a common interest in their location of origin and a foundational identity that is rooted in that place which defines an in-group, in spite of the fact that people may or may not have ever personally interacted with one another in real time and space' (Hiller and Franz 2004: 733).

Internet allows for a 'distributive political voice' through the diversification and intensification of movements (Malini 2017) making it possible for a message to reach broader and diversified audience(s) and, also, giving voice to those that were silent of being silenced, promoting the discourse of minorities without the need of a single leader but substituting it for nodes, for a set of different leaders with equal or similar importance in a network mediated by social media tools, a distributive logic of leadership or, in the Basque case, a distributive logic of groups acting politically over the diaspora but within an ideological umbrella (i.e. the Basque left-wing *Abertzale* ideology).

Basques tend to follow the trend of other peoples mentioned in this article when concerning the more militant aspect of the Internet – or its use as a tool for political action. Basque left-wing nationalist groups tend to get less involved in current homeland politics (such as immediate legislative issues), focusing more on the different aspects of the nationalist movement and pressing for specific issues (such as the right to decide, the amnesty of political prisoners, etc), as do Kurds with their plight for independence and for freedom of speech, etc.

In other words, the focus of such groups is less of daily politics and more of bigger yet specific agendas. All researched groups use, used or at least see

the importance of the Internet and social media tool for political militancy, though in different degrees and shaped for each group's particularities. This is true to other stateless minorities, such as Kurds or Tamil. Internet plays a major role on identity maintenance in the (Basque) diaspora (Oiarzabal and Molina 2013) as it can, through social media websites, 'create a sense of familiarity and intimacy among regular users which bears some resemblance to real-life interaction' (Eriksen 2007: 10).

Akelarre Kultur Taldea, for example, maintained a website with current news concerning homeland politics, but mostly as a curator, rather than giving broader opinion or even with the intention of influencing homeland politics. EHL, ADV, Jo Ta Ke, among others also preferred to pinpoint specific issues (yet broad ones) to intervene politically – such as the political prisoners, amnesty, the broader idea of independence, etc – but they rarely interfered in the homeland's daily politics.

Even with Internet and social media tools and the possibility of knowing the daily reality of the Basque Country, individuals and groups tend to focus their efforts in a broader agenda, in using Internet to organize, to call for meetings and demonstrations, as a tool for communication and propaganda for bigger issues than the everyday (local) worries. Other organizations, such as the Foro de Debate de la Diaspora Vasca or Independentistak, heavily relied on the Internet as to forward policies, propositions, manifestos and propaganda.

It is important to note, though, that different groups have or had different approaches concerning the use of social media tools. To some it had relative importance, to others they would never exist without (Internet) or at least would have a much smaller role and relevance. Bottom line, Internet is an important tool, sometimes vital, whether for simple communication among individuals and groups, to keep in touch with friends and relatives (and other political activists), or to find ways to spread propaganda, lobby and finance political agendas, influencing homeland politics in real time, allowing for diasporas to have a saying on pressing issues and engage politically even far away from the homeland. Internet is inseparable from the political activities of diasporic groups with the aim of promoting alternative spaces or discourses; it is not possible to be immune to the Internet, however the degree of adherence to social networking tools varies – whether in the Basque case or in others.

The Basque case has many similarities, as demonstrated above, with other stateless diasporas (from the usage of social media to the formation of a diasporic identity and its politicization), but also enough differences to demand a study of their own, as well as it opens the door to new studies focusing on the use of social networks as a tool for the maintenance and (re)construction of identities between diasporic groups and their use for political engagement.

From the Kurdish diaspora, to the Tamil or the Basque one, for a different set of reasons, among which the maintenance of ethnic identity, individuals at the diaspora join into associative institutions and tend to form politically engaged groups that can operate inside or outside such traditional institutions (as it is the case of Basques) appropriating the Internet and its social networks in order to facilitate communication and political action to play a (significant) role on homeland politics and flourishing in a distributive environment laden with symbols that are constantly reproduced and reinforced, also reinforcing the identity bonds or linkages between individuals strengthening the feeling that they are indeed part of a (larger) community and actively contribute to its perpetuation.

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