

Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and Citizenship

By Victoria Bernal

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How is the internet transforming the relationships between citizens and states? What happens to politics when international migration is coupled with digital media, making it easy for people to be politically active in a nation from outside its borders? In *Nation as Network*, Victoria Bernal creatively combines media studies, ethnography, and African studies to explore this new political paradigm through a striking analysis of how Eritreans in diaspora have used the internet to shape the course of Eritrean history.

Bernal argues that Benedict Anderson's famous concept of nations as "imagined communities" must now be rethought because diasporas and information technologies have transformed the ways nations are sustained and challenged. She traces the development of Eritrean diaspora websites over two turbulent decades that saw the Eritrean state grow ever more tyrannical. Through Eritreans' own words in posts and debates, she reveals how new subjectivities are formed and political action is galvanized online. She suggests that "infopolitics"—struggles over the management of information—make politics in the 21st century distinct, and she analyzes the innovative ways Eritreans deploy the internet to support and subvert state power. *Nation as Network* is a unique and compelling work that advances our understanding of the political significance of digital media.

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Editorial Review

Review

“In the study of nationalism today, Eritrea presents us with an intriguing case, both because of its intensity and because of its grounding in a spatially dispersed but digitally networked diaspora. *Nation as Network* offers an insightful analysis of this case, documenting in fascinating ways both emerging new forms of citizenship and the changing contours of the Eritrean public sphere. This book is an impressive contribution to our understanding of a vitally important contemporary topic.”
(James Ferguson, Stanford University)

“Bernal insightfully delves into the role the new media—especially the internet—has been playing in the precipitation of transformations of the meanings of nation, citizenship, and sovereignty in an age of transnational migration and globalization. Unlike most other studies that conceive of the internet as a technological product, she conceptualizes the internet as a cultural one, and, more important, she underscores the transformative power with which it facilitates social change.”
(Gaim Kibreab, London South Bank University)

“*Nation as Network* is as fine an ethnography as has been written on the contemporary shaping of a diasporic public sphere by participation in digital media. Such web communities are everywhere today, but Eritreans were among the first and the most venturesome, and Bernal follows them with a keen sense of their imagination, as well as their realities, from the very beginning.”
(George Marcus, University of California, Irvine)

“In her ethnographic study of Eritrean diaspora politics, anthropologist Bernal makes valuable contributions to current scholarship in communication technology and diaspora politics as they jointly create a new definition of citizenship in the emerging reality of globalism.”
(*Choice*)

About the Author

Victoria Bernal is associate professor of anthropology at the University of California, Irvine, and the author of *Cultivating Workers: Peasants and Capitalism in a Sudanese Village*, coeditor of *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism;* and editor of *Contemporary Cultures, Global Connections: Anthropology for the 21st Century*.

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