NETWORKED PUBLICS: INTER-ASIAN PERSPECTIVES ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Papacharissi, Zizi. "The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere." *New Media & Society* 4, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 9–27.

> Papacharissi's article considers whether the communicative technologies afforded by the Internet are conducive to the activities that are traditionally located within the public sphere–rational discourse (from Habermas), representing diverse groups (from Fraser), and latent revolutionary potential. Papacharissi uses the concept of the "virtual sphere" to incorporate the influences of the Internet's particular characteristics upon the activities located in the public sphere.
> These include things such as facilitating anonymous discussion and a lack of spatial sensibility and density. Papacharissi's overall evaluation of the Internet as new public sphere is mixed: she argues that the Internet provides a "public space" that allows for increased political participation, but that it does not yet constitute a "public sphere." The distinction seems important, in terms of thinking about the analytical lenses through which we can understand "mediated activism"–what kind of forum does it operate in, if not that of the "public sphere", as broadly understood by Habermas?

Barker, Joshua. "Playing with Publics: Technology, Talk and Sociability in Indonesia." *Language & Communication* 28 (2008): 127–142.

> Barker's piece, on the *interkom* network in Indonesia, provides an interesting lens to think about the "mediation" of mediated activism: the analog network, consisting of wires connecting sets that consist of a microphone and headset, was built by hobbyists through the informal economy, rather than via top-down infrastructural means. The *interkom*'s community is at once more spatially circumscribed (by virtue of the connecting wires) and more diverse (by virtue of all sorts of noises being passed down the lines: songs, sounds, talk) than the sociability engendered by the anonymous community of newspaper readers.
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> As Barker notes, the community formed through the *interkom* does not think of them centrally, or primarily, through the lens of politics, but rather through the lens of sociability: a diffuse term that encompasses the desire to be together, to *experience* together, in some sense. (Barker himself cites Simmel as a source for thinking about sociability). There was a close interaction between the physical upkeep and maintenance of the lines and the desire for community: communities that wanted to drift apart, or stopped caring, simply allowed the lines to fall apart, whereas other lines were strung up in the same neighborhood to allow for multiple

kinds of talk and social interaction on the different streams. People also made a careful distinction between 'on-air' personalities and the off-air counterparts, a balancing act perhaps not required of newspapers. The primary affect engendered by the *interkom*, as Barker notes, was fun—not a sensibility usually associated with the form of the public, or necessarily, with the trope of activism.

Dwyer, R., and C. Pinney. *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India.* Edited by R. Dwyer and C. Pinney. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2002.

> Pinney and Dwyer's volume is an edited collection of essays, all concerning the relationship popular film (primarily Hindi popular film) and notions of the public sphere, broadly construed. Pinney, in the introduction, contrasts 'public culture' with 'popular culture', which seems a contrast worth disentangling more thoroughly: what different valences do the terms 'public' and 'popular' have, especially in regards to the affective sensibilities of culture?
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> In terms of essays through which to think about how a public may be formed through avenues of consumption and 'popular culture,' Pinney's introduction and Sandra Freitag's essay—on the place of perception and visual culture in the marking of the consumer and the public in South Asia—are good places to start. The volume as a whole provides ways to think about the politics of popular culture, though there is not much on the larger question of how the popular (represented here by film, though one could now think of Internet culture along similar lines) plays into the constitution of the public.

Mazzarella, William. "Beautiful Balloon: The Digital Divide and the Charisma of New Media in India." *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 4 (2010): 783–804.

> Mazzarella's piece is on the discursive networks and 'performative efficacy' of the conversations and movement surrounding the ICT4D (information technology for development) movement in India in the early 2000s and late 1990s. It is a useful piece for thinking about both the discursive networks in which media objects operate, and the very real ways in which the performance of this discourse can come to effect material changes, even in unanticipated ways.
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> Mazzarella's piece also highlights the importance of paying attention to time: it was the particular configuration of developmentalist desire and surging consumerist interests in the late 1990s that made projects in ICT4D (with their rhetorics of practicality and messianic change) affectively and intensely powerful during this particular moment. His point—that in order to critically think about communication technologies and the discourses that empower and arise around them, we must be sensitive to the *unexpected* and *emergent* potentials and applications of them—seems especially relevant when considering the claims that are made in regards to the (re)mediation of activism.

Cody, Francis. "Publics and Politics." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (2011): 37–52.

Cody's review is useful not only for its summaries of key theories of the public (Habermas, Anderson, Warner et. al), but also for the way in which he illustrates how structures of media are central to theorizations of the public and the possibility of collective action—in some sense, there needs to be as much (if not more) work done on the *means* by which people come to constitute come to constitute themselves as publics through mediated forms and discourses as on the nature of the collective actions that they are able to achieve.

Cody writes that "the very communicative means by which publics come to know themselves as such, enabling collective action amongst strangers, often appear to sit at the limits of human awareness and control (38)." To this end, Cody points to recent work from media anthropology that gives a more concrete form to the media processes and products that allow for the (re)formations of the public.

Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* no. 25/26 (January 1, 1990): 56–80.

Fraser's critique of Habermas' term "public sphere" is incisive, and insightful. Noting first that an idea of the public sphere—an arena distinct from the state, a "theater in modern societies where political participation is enacted through the medium of talk"—is indispensible for critical theory, she then takes up flaws in Habermas' particular representation of it.

Fraser points out four assumptions central to the Habermasian notion of the public sphere that need to be questioned: first, the assumption that differences can be "bracketed" and that debates can be conducted amongst people "as if" they were social equals; second, the assumption that a proliferation of public spheres and voices is "a step away" from a greater democracy; third, the assumption that "private issues" have no place for disucssion in the public sphere; and last, that a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp break between civil society and the state.

Fraser puts forth the idea of there being multiple public spheres, arguing that there cannot be a unified public sphere, with "zero degree culture", but that there may indeed be a space in which participants in different publics can talk across to each other. What becomes a "common concern," Fraser says, "will be decided precisely through discursive contestation." She distinguishes between *weak publics*, who can't influence state decision-making but can influence "public opinion", and *strong publics*, who can influence both opinion and decision-making, and suggests that the major question is one of accountability: how to make strong publics accountable and responsive to weak ones.

Donald, Stephanie. *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

This book addresses what seems to be a perpetual debate in the material on publics in China: whether it can be understood as civil society and/or public sphere. Donald looks at Chinese cinema, and concepts of civility, as a lens through which to understand publicity and secrecy in Chinese society. It is a much more compelling take on analyzing the social structures and struggles in Chinese society than the usual trope of whether a true civil society exists or not.

Tierney, Therese. *The Public Space of Social Media: Connected Cultures of the Network Society*. Routledge, 2013.

Tierney's book is particularly compelling because of her background in architecture—she explicitly notes that she is approaching the question of online communities from the perspective of an urbanist. Tierney focuses on social media in her work, and wishes to document "how social media forms connections between human beings and physical space." Tierney argues that online communities are formed through social practices similar to those that work upon communities that share physical space.

This, she argues, makes online social communities *interdependent with* (instead of independent from) the everyday social practices and activities of the offline, "real" world, such as leisure or work. Looking at social media, Tierney argues, has consequences for how we come to imagine the function of public spaces, and urban design, out in the concrete world.

The second chapter of the book, on varying kinds of publics, and the creation of *publicness*, seems particularly key in light of our interests in mediated activism: Tierney's description of the networked public as one that is formed *through* the entanglement of networked relations and physical spatiality is worth some thought, given the dearth of material that links the formation of publicness with the physicality of public spaces.

Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle. "Small Media for a Big Revolution: Iran." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3, no. 3 (March 1, 1990): 341–371.

Sreberny-Mohammadi's piece looks at the communications network that was central to the 1979 revolutionary movement in Iran, and particularly the legitimacy that was attached to popular, informal means of communication. She notes that "traditionalism can be extremely innovative in its use of small media technologies, development of political rhetoric and mass appeals in order to maintain its cultural authority." The "small media technologies" that Sreberny-Mohammadi looks at could then, in some sense, be seen as precursors to the technologies that facilitated later mediated activism.

The opposition, in the years leading up to the 1979 revolution, grounded itself in *hey'at mazhabi*, informal and localized religious gatherings that were key for gathering and disseminating information. Sreberny-Mohammadi notes that Islam was at the heart of "public sphere" activities in Iran—something worth keeping in mind when examining mediated activism in the Middle East/North Africa region.

Technologies utilized by the opposition and revolutionaries included cassette tapes: Khomeini's speeches were distributed over cassette tapes which were copied in makeshift studios and widely distributed through the bazaars and *hey'at mazhabi*. Sreberny-Mohmmadi refers to this technique of propagating and passing on sermons and messages as Khomeini's "electronic pulpit", or *minbar*, a term that acknowledges as a central the Islamic roots and nature of both the rhetoric on the tape and the avenues of its spread.

Another technology that Sreberny-Mohammadi discusses is the *elamieh*, photocopied leaflets. Some were hand-written, others were typed and mimeographed or photocopied. They were distributed hand-to-hand, or read aloud in public places. Importantly, they were a key part of polarizing public opinion: accusations and rumors against individuals, the shah, and the SAVAK forces were circulated via the *elamieh*.

Anderson, Jon. "'Cybarites', Knowledge Workers and New Creoles on the Superhighway." *Anthropology Today* 11, no. 4 (August 1, 1995): 13–15.

Anderson's brief piece, which is a comment from the early days of the Internet outside of the United States, notes that in his observations of Middle Eastern discussion boards and groups on the Internet, he has seen that while the Middle East *itself* was not an immense presence (Israel and Turkey being the only two "wired" countries of note in the region, at the time) online, the Internet was being utilized extensively by the Middle Eastern diasporas of "emigres, students and professionals"–usually in the "hard sciences"–to communicate with each other.

Anderson notes that there are a variety of communicative methods employed by the diasporas online: daily digests, subscriber-only mailing lists that serially push out messages, to newsletters that are subscribed to. He also observes that specific countries are attached to the various lists, but that few people *in* those countries show up on them—online communication is much more about linking together the diaspora. Anderson thinks *publication* is a more apt descriptor of the activities taking place on this list, as opposed to *communication*–one may think about the shift in temporality that was taking place in these mediated spaces over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s.

Things posted (or published) include information on cheap flights and wedding announcements, wire news copy, alternative news sources, alarmist pieces like Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* and counterproposals, speculation, and shouting down various members (including women who pointed out the male-

dominated nature of the community, or perceived "outsiders", such as university professors, offering an opinion). Anderson also makes a distinction between "talk" and the "publishing" that is going on in these online fora.

The most intriguing claim of Anderson's, given the timing of this piece, is that "the liberal, humanist traditions of Islamic and Arab high culture" are inherently tied to the print and literary media, and so cannot translate to these online fora.

Perry, T.S. "Electronic Mail-Forces for Social Change." *IEEE Spectrum* 29, no. 10 (1992): 30–32.

Perry's piece is also brief, but a close examination of how "electronic networks" (particularly email and fax) enabled informal networks of communication that subverted or skirted official media channels: Perry uses the attempted 1991 coup in the former Soviet Union, and the Tiananmen Square protests in China, as examples to demonstrate how these electronic networks facilitated the passage of messages and information (primarily from outside the country in question to within the country, instead of locally).

Of particular interest are the pathways that Soviet citizens had to use in order to access e-mail and the Internet (via calling computers in Finland) until the U.S. allowed for connections between the Internet and Soviet networks. Within the Soviet Union, direct-dial bulletin boards were operated out of individuals' homes, and informally exchanged messages amongst each other. The two major privately-owned networks in the Soviet Union–Glasnet (a nonprofit network set up by NGOs, one based in SF) and Relcom (a for-profit network)–are also mentioned as important for intra-country communication both before and during the attempted coup.

Fax machines, more than the Internet (as the PRC government did not allow for transnational data flow at the time of the protests), are described as key tools in the Tiananamen Square protests: expatriates "sent faxes to any PRC number that they knew, rotating fax numbers, since regular recipients of forbidden information risked arrest. At friendly faxes, the information was received, stripped of identifiers, and distributed." The government, however, was successful at stemming the flow of information, if not at outright stopping it up altogether.

Zheng, Cindy. "Opening the Digital Door: Computer Networking in China*." Telecommunications Policy* 18, no. 3 (April 1994): 236–242.

Zheng's article gives some insight into the state of early electronic networks in China. They were mostly institutionally-based, expensive to use, and restricted in their user bases. Zheng's depiction of early computer networks in China provides an informative contrast to Perry's description of the fax machine's widespread availability and usefulness in terms of activist organization.

The first network that utilized China's .cn domain was CAnet in 1987: an email network sponsored by the Institute of Computer Application and the University of Karlsruhe in Germany. It used the Chinapac public packet-switching network for international connections, but was very expensive to use, due to the costs for both sending and receiving messages and using the lines.

The Chinese Research Network (CRN) was an email network that connected users at nine participating institutions throughout the country, with about 200 users. It was limited to computer and network-related research. The email network was linked up to the European Research Networks (RARE). The costs to use the system were more distributed than with CAnet.

Chinapac was a packet-switching network set up by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), it went live in August 1993. There were switching centers in each province, municipality, and autonomous region; access could be established via dial-up or leased line. The MPT kept all major routers under its control, forcing people to connect only through them. Rates were assumed to be high.

There were other research centers and projects that were setting up computer networks; but these were specialized centers, and there does not seem to have been extensive public use of Chinapac, due to its cost.

Sudha, S. "Compu-Devata: Electronic bulletin boards and political debates," *SAMAR*, no. 2 (Summer 1993).

Sudha's article looks at the India-D newsgroup, and the postings and discussion tactics used by religiously-focused posters to spread their message on this "secular" newsgroup. The newsgroups and diaspora that Sudha examines are, for the most part, U.S.-based. Sudha, in contrast to Anderson, uses the metaphor of "talk" to describe the interactions that are made possible by the newsgroup.

Sudha notes that there are several posters from within India itself posting to the newsgroup, again in contrast to Anderson's observations about Middle Eastern newsgroups. (There is a distinct similarity between the kinds of users utilizing these newsgroups: the Indian users, Sudha notes, tend to be from elite instutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology, or research centers like the Bhabha Atomic Research Center.)

India-D's editorial policy was fairly loose: postings were not censored for religious or political views. The subscriber base of India-D was about 7000, mostly middle to upper class. The religious/political views that were espoused the most often over this newsgroup could be categorized under the umbrella of "Hindu nationalism": postings and re-reporting of articles about BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, the largest of the nationalist/right-wing parties), and revisionist history towards a Hindu-

focused lens.

The postings are long and frequent: 3-5 times a week, and long extracts of text, repeated over several issues of the newsgroup (a technique Sudha later characterizes as an "electronic media blitz"). Sudha emphasizes that this tactic is used by interest groups of all persuasions, "seeking to widen their audience among 'their' middle classes."

Mitra, Ananda. "Nations and the Internet: The Case of a National Newsgroup, 'Soc.cult.indian.'" *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 44–75.

Building on Anderson's notion of the nation as communal construct, Mitra examines the changes that computer-mediated communication have wrought upon the processes of nation-imagining and construction. Mitra links these changes in nation-imagination to the changes in the diaspora itself: now educated and wealthier, they are no longer spatially concentrated in "Korea-towns" or "Little Indias" in their new countries of residence, they are more often scattered across wider distances. Mitra claims that computer-mediated communication, specifically 'newsgroups' delimited by nationality or communal identity, is being used to recreate a sense of national community and identity by this newer diaspora.

The newsgroup postings, Mitra describes, are primarily textual in nature—a distinction is drawn here between interactive/non-interactive parts of computer-mediated communication. Two particular characteristics of computer-mediated communications that Mitra highlights are the textuality of these fora—as opposed to methods of communication that required spatial proximity and visibility—and their ephemerality. Community in these fora is thus a process of ongoing interaction and discussion, a question of discovering one's "tribal allegiances" (to go back to Appadurai and Rheingold), instead of historical continunity and reference. Mitra, however, pointedly notes that 'no particularly new or alternative ways of thinking about the traditional structural contradictions are emerging on the Internet', suggesting that while it may be true that the means of imagining the national space are starting to change, linking this up to more direct political action may be harder to do.

Mitra pays close attention to the phenomenon of "cross-posting" across different newsgroups, positing it as an activity that is particularly relevant to the constitution, boundary-making, and maintenance of identity and national image online. Cross-posting—posting a message across different newsgroups—is, Mitra suggest, particularly relevant to consider in terms of the production of national and communal identity because of its widespread dissemination; instead of an image of India beiing limited only to an audience that identifies itself as belonging to the Indian newsgroup, the images have the capacity to spread out over a much wider audience thanks to cross-posting. It is this ephemeral ability to spread widely, and

quickly, outwards across communities that Mitra highlights as a distinctive feature of computer-mediated communication.

Rahimi, Babak. "Cyberdissident: The Internet in Revolutionary Iran," November 4, 2013. http://www.gloria-center.org/2003/09/rahimi-2003-09-07/.

> Rahimi's piece argues for the Internet's position as a space conducive to dissent politics in Iran. The piece also provides some historical context for the use and development of the Internet in Iran, and some reasons as to *why* the Internet in particular may be a medium uniquely suited to the conduct of dissenting politics in the country.

> Rahimi notes that, in contrast to China, Iran's earliest encounters with the Internet came via academia—and most of the national domestic network is still based in the academic network. Iran also developed a telecom network relatively independent of state control, due to tensions between the agencies responsible for telecom and information services, the High Council of Information and the Data Communication Company of Iran (under the control of the post office). Commercial ISPs (such as IRANET) appeared in 1994 and challenged the state-provided services, eventually becoming the stronger players in terms of service provision. The early provision—and dominance—of commercial services has led to continuing tensions with government regulators in terms of content and control of what happens through the Internet.

> Rahimi also notes that the Islamic Revolution, as it occured in Iran, had a special relationship with technology, in that it was an essential tool in disseminating and consolidating the revolutionaries' message (something not mirrored in, say, Saudi Arabia), and so did not immediately seek to regulate and curb Internet growth and usage, as it was useful in spreading their own theological messages and news. This echoes a point made by Sreberny-Mohammadi—that these media channels were useful to *all sorts* of protest and revolutionary movements, not merely ones seeking democratic reform.

> Iran's methods of censorship—mass blocking of IP addresses and websites and filtering are reactive, in contrast to China's self-censorship driven, proactive models of filtering content. The Iranian government, Rahimi notes, is also behind China in terms of technological capabilities to filter and surveil its Internet traffic—something worth keeping in mind when one thinks about the environment in which networked publics and collective action operate. The field of surveillance and repression are as varied as the tools through which online publics coalesce.

Li, Shubo. "The Online Public Space and Popular Ethos in China." *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 63–83.

> Li's piece examines four major BBSes in China: CFidonet, SINA forum, Xici Alleys and Tianya BBS. Of these, CFidonet was the earliest, starting in 1991; it is now

defunct. Li emphasizes the state control over the physical backbone infrastructure of the Internet as a phenomenon that "determines the culture-scape of the Chinese web."

Li locates the beginnings of BBSes, and the early development of a kind of networked culture, in southeastern China. This was where BBSes were started (CFidonet, the earliest telnet-based BBS, had 63% of its nodes in southeastern China) and were originally operated by the social elite; who were technically savvy and well-read. Li argues that these early, idealistic users deeply affected the culture surrounding BBS participation: it was one, she says, that was driven by the desire for a "new public culture, explicitly aiming for civic virture." This desire for a more open, democratic forum for discussion, Li says, impacted the ways in which the early BBSes were governed and the way in which complaints were handled.

Xici Alleys, in particular, because it facilated covert, small group communication, had boards on topics such as Christianity and Western political theory that survived somewhat longer than boards on other sites.

Tianya BBS had a rather unique audience composition: a literary magazine, *Tianya*, set up a forum—TianyaScope—attached to Tianya BBS to engage with its readers and provide an outlet for intellectual debate from its contributors. This, combined with Tianya BBS' absorption of other BBS audiences, led to a remarkably mixed crowd—half intellectual and half plebeian, according to Li.

Democracy, Li, says was a major attraction of the forums: there were even protests on Tianya BBS and SINA forum that led to a more open governance structure. Offline activity, such as public seminars and gatherings, also began to spring up from Tianya BBS activity, aiming to link the public with the intellectuals featured in TianyaScope. Newspapers even began to take note of online boards and posts to follow.

A particular kind of post, the "brick-post", became emblematic of these online BBS spaces. Li describes the "brick-post" as a "mixture of facts and rumours, conspiracy theories and logical inferences", written in a visceral style "displaying masculine strength, dotted with shouting, swearing, sarcasm and symbolic violence." Talented brick-post authors, Li notes, could spur offline action. Brick-posts were very much a masculine form of expression, setting up the norms for a gendered online space.

However, Li notes that the discussion of civic matters tapered out around the early 2000s, with the coming of foreign venture capital to Chinese dotcom companies that led to commercialization and a focus on leisure and hobby-based discussion, and proactive shutdowns and censorship that splintered the communities who concentrated on discussions of civic action.

Li also points to an evolution of the Chinese online space: with many more people coming online, the dominant kinds of conversation have shifted from "rational deliberation" to something more carnivalesque: the derision and hatred of social elites, playful vandalism, and online fame seekers, all of which Li lumps under the moniker of the "freak show". Li concludes by saying that altering the "public ethos" is as much a part of the state's strategy to control its citizens as the better known technological components of the Great Firewall.

Grier, David Alan. "Politics, Control, and Computer Networks: The Chinese Student Lobby of 1989." *Commun. ACM* 41, no. 5es (May 1998): 137–145.

> Grier's article looks at the Chinese student diaspora in the United States in the wake of the Tiananamen Square protests, and their efforts in trying to get emergency immigration reform passed. Grier's piece tries to resolve a paradox of political participation via computer-networked communication; the paradox being that computer networks both centralize and decentralize participation and power in the community.

> Using the lens of "control" drawn from Beniger and information science—wherein actions tending towards centralization or decentralization are moderated by feedback passed up and down the chain of authority, and action towards a predetermined goal thus coordinated—Grier looks at the electronic fora and networks utilized by the Chinese student diaspora in Canada and the United States in the wake of the 1989 Tiananamen Square protests. Network structures, Grier notes, allow for a more dynamic political structure, as intermediaries blocking potential action can be bypassed, and feedback passed directly up to those in control.

> Grier provides a history of these online fora: the earliest was a listserv, CHINANET, started in 1986. Its leadership started the Usenet group soc.culture.china in 1987, which led to *Electronic News for Chinese Students* in 1988, a weekly digest with an editor and 13 assistants, all volunteer. When the protests started in 1989, three more fora were set up in quick order: *News Digest*, *VISANET*, *china-net*, and *China News Group*.

> All of these catered to diasporic concerns—primarily around emergency immigration relief, and reporting action from China, and news of interest to Chinese in North America rather than trying to influence actions in China itself. Three of these networks: *News Digest*, *Electronic News* and *China News Group*, merged to form *China News Digest*, which had unified style guidelines, an editorial board and organized distribution—its subscriber base eventually numbered up to 4000.

> *China News Digest* took an active role in lobbying for immigration relief. Grier maps out the varying flows of power and discussion that characterized the forum during this time: at times it was a more democratic, bottom-up discussion board, at other

times, it served as a mirror to the more traditional media outlets and messages that were pushing forward the immigration relief bills in Congress.

Chopra, Rohit. "Global Primordialities: Virtual Identity Politics in Online Hindutva and Online Dalit Discourse." *New Media & Society* 8, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 187–206.

> Chopra's article posits that online Hindutva (right wing Hindu nationalist) discourse and Dalit (low-caste liberation) discourse—which are implacably oposed to each other, as ideologies—share similar discursive traits in their online performance. Chopra attributes this similarity to the status and symbolism that was attached to IT (information technology) itself in the early days of liberalization in India in the 1990s. Chopra names this similarity "global primordiality", and characterizes it as an attribute that emerged in and through the development of IT and cyberspace as public fora and tools.

> Chopra examines several Hindutva and Dalit websites to discern how these discursive traits are being utilized by these communities. This is in contrast to other pieces here, which are more about interactive fora, and user-generated discussion and effect, rather than fixed textual pieces.

> Chopra notes that while both Hindutva and Dalit online communities stake claims to global primordiality, the authors of this discourse are primarily associated with Hindutva ideology: privileged elites in the technological field who subscribe to Hindu nationalism. He then goes on to provide a picture of Internet connectivity, and the concomitant desirability of infotech-related jobs, as one that is primarily beneficial to and driven by a small segment of the upper-caste, upper-class elite population in India. Outside of this limited population, he notes, the Internet has failed to impact people's lives in any significant fashion.

> Chopra's piece is more about *historiography* on the Internet—about the ways in which communities choose to present and imagine themselves in presentation— rather than about the modalities of interaction between networked users. Global primordiality, Chopra argues, is the mode of discourse that Hindutva supporters and leaders—the majority of cyberspace denizens—have authorized as a form of cultural and social capital, and it is *this* reason that Dalit sites have taken to using it as well, because of the measure of credibility and strength that it can provide.

> – Chopra concludes by noting that the online medium "may create new problems of thinking politics and conceptualizing praxis, but equally they may offer fresh solutions to problems, old and new."

Bernal, Victoria. "Eritrea On-Line: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and the Public Sphere." *American Ethnologist* 32 (2005): 660–675.

> Bernal's piece draws together several strands of thought on diaspora, nation-making, and the affordances allowed by modern communications and information

technology. Looking at interactions on a website for the Eritrean diaspora, dehai.org, Bernal looks at two central threads that she sees as central to the formation of publics on-line—threads that link together diaspora and cyberspace in some fundamental ways.

Key to this analysis is the notion of "community", which Bernal rightfully argues is central to the discourses of both diasporic and online communication. Community, Bernal argues, is linked to the production and propagation of violence (and in this she draws from Michael Warner's work on publics), and so they need to be understood in tandem with each other. Crucially, for the purposes of this bibliography, Bernal argues that dehai.org and its conversational space represented a kind of public conversation and forum on Eritrea that was simply not possible anywhere else, and certainly not in-ground in the country itself as it emerged from Ethiopian rule.

Dehai was a messageboard and newslist that predated the Internet proper: it was started by Ghidewon Asmeron in response to the lack of space to discuss Eritrean nationalism or independence on a more general African affairs listhost, socioculturalafrica. Asmeron worked at AT&T in Maryland at the time, and in conjunction with two Eritrean computer science students at the University of Maryland, he began Dehai in 1992. In some sense, then, the "real world" life and emergence of the Eritrean nation was a direct cause for Dehai's creation: it was not begat in a void. And as such, it came to represent the ideals that its (mostly elite, and geographically scattered) community hoped for in terms of public discourse in the space of the nation-state itself.

Bernal looks at postings made through the 1990s—dehai's heyday. She indicates the end of dehai's dominance–its positioning as an alternative (or entirely new) public sphere–in 2000, with the end of the 1998 border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the springing up of many new Eritrean websites, most of which traced their lineages back to dehai. The postings, she says, reveals the norms of open discussion that were central to Dehai as a community unto itself: nostalgia for a Dehai past was as much a part of the community as up-to-date discussions on the border war, community in-jokes, or discussions of isolation and diasporic life abroad.

Like other sites discussed in this bibliography, Dehai was linked to off-line actions as well: primarily organization and fundraising for the Eritrean military during the border war, but also community meetups. Dehai—and perhaps the form of the online messageboard more generally—also allowed for conversation to take place between interlocutors who may not have been able to interact with each other in Eritrea itself because of the limitations placed on communal possibility (ethnic grouping, class groupings etc.) This, Bernal says, was an opportunity for participatory citizenship that wasn't available in Eritrea itself as an everyday practice.

Rafael, Vicente. "The cell phone and the crowd: messianic politics in the contemporary Philippines." *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 399–425

Rafael's article is centrally concerned with a form of public organization that doesn't always find much voice in the discussion and debate around the public sphere: the notion of the "crowd." His article examines the "People Power II" protests that unseated the president at the time, Joseph Estrada, and the strands of communal organization and mediation that permeated it; i.e. the crowd and its massive presence, and the cell phones that everyone in these crowds supposedly had. Rafael speaks of the "communicative fetish": the notion that these new communicative technologies could transcend longstanding class and social divisions, coupled with the idea that it was middle-class interlocutors who could harness that power to direct the "crowd".

The cellphone, Rafael writes, is a device that is seen to powerfully transcend the failing state infrastructures that it helps bridge (the postal system beset by delays, the increasingly hard to obtain landlines). Indeed, in the terms of the middle-class interlocutors who were the primary driving force behind People Power II, the cellphone is an extraordinary tool: always at reach, capable of rapidly mobilizing people and harnessing the intangible threatening potential of the crowd. Rafael's piece then looks at the discourse surrounding cell phones in newspapers and messageboards, mostly perpetuated by a middle/upper middle class audience. Terms like "mania" are associated with cell phones; their extensive usage is seen as something beyond normal.

Rafael looks at texting in particular as representative of a new kind of sociality: one that doesn't require learned postures or languages, but is conducive to mobility, if not eloquence. There is also a power in *multiplicity*, texts forwarded and reforwarded; this power, Rafael argues is a new skin for an old desire: to see meaning reside in an "unimpeachable" external authority. It is, in some sense, a desire for *technological* revolution without necessarily invoking deep social revolution (indeed, the People Power II protests had help going from Catholic Church authorities.) The technological revolution is one that calls for transparency in governance, for a certain kind of recognition from authority, rather than a radical restructuring.

Contrasted to this is the alternative sociality provided by the physical bodies of the crowd; a sociality that the technological revolution claims to muster but, as Rafael notes, is actually something far more embodied, affective, and temporary, and far less easier to capture and harness to a particular, limited purpose. Rafael's primary source for his observations on the crowd come from an online posting about the first People Power protests in the late 80s. The writer, identifying herself only as Flor C., notes that it was the anonymity of the crowd that provided her with a measure of excitement and protection. She especially notes the transformative power of the crowd in traditionally guarded middle-class spaces such as the mall.

Patience—and a kind of slowness of movement, and of change—are foregrounded in her description.

Rafael closes his account by describing another rally; the "Poor People Power" rally held in protest of Estrada's arrest, populated by supporters (mostly lower-class, mostly rural) trucked in from the surrounding countryside. These protestors, and their crowd, are not afforded the same transformative agency by newspaper accounts or authorities such as the Catholic Church, and Rafael notes this attribution of silence and a kind of helplessness are as central to the narrative of the crowd as the transformative cell phone.

Lewis, Orion A. "Net Inclusion: New Media's Impact on Deliberative Politics in China." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 4 (2013): 678–708.

In this article, Lewis comes up with a framework for determining the democratising impact of new media communications (here primarily Internet-based communications; such as microblogs and search engines) on Chinese state-society relations. While acknowledging that the Chinese government has perhaps the most sophisticated and deeply-rooted form of surveillance and proactive online censorship today, and that a perhaps overly-optimistic sense of technology's democratising influence has been operating in the West, Lewis nevertheless notes that the Chinese public sphere—limited in his discussion to questions of the political, and of state-society relations—is a site of evolution, and that discussions that continue on *despite* governmental restrictions (such as the Bo Xilai case) need to be accounted for.

The key characteristic of the public sphere, Lewis argues, is the availability and transfer of independent information; rather than any lack of state intervention or control. Lewis structures his measurement of the deliberative impact of new media around a few key features: first, that issues of "collective importance" are discussed, secondly that there is "rational-critical" discourse (something worth reconsidering as an achievable ideal, in light of the popular and the affective) about these topics that allows for the formation of policy preferences, and thirdly, that the media can operate as a backchannel to public opinion, transferring information from the "periphery" to the "core". Whether or not this is information that is *acted* upon—and whether that matters—is left unaddressed, though Lewis notes that the ideal would be equally-empowered citizens talking back to the government.

Lewis then describes his empirical work: comparing QQ to other traditional publications to see if they reported sensitive issues (that is to say, issues important to the Party, and controlled by propaganda departments) with any significant difference in frequency from traditional print publications. Lewis notes that QQ does cover sensitive topics more often, and with less "shielded language" tactics than print publications. (It should be noted that Lewis only looked at commentary and news posted by the *editors* of QQ, rather than user-generated and facilitated discussion, so this is most likely a conservative estimate). While deletions and blog

shutdowns are still the norm (and restrict access to independent information to those who do not have the savvy to already look for it), there does seem to be evidence of dynamism: of Internet-popularized stories making it to the traditional press, and driving public reaction, in less predictable ways than the censors expect. Lewis also looks at norms of deliberation and mechanisms of "vertical accountability" (i.e. possibilities for citizen feedback). In both cases (perhaps unsurprisingly), the results are mixed. While critical-deliberative discourse has increased as a result of new media forms, Lewis finds that *all* kinds of discourse, including extremist stances, have proliferated as a result of the new media form—and that this proliferation has perhaps caused intimidation and the dampening of critical/persuasive strategies of deliberative discourse.

As far as vertical accountability, Lewis finds that this too has increased; both in measures of positive state response to online-organized activities–such as cancelling projects in the wake of online-organized "protest walks", /and/ in terms of repressive censorship. One curious form of accountability Lewis uncovers is a kind of virtual detective work: people posting pictures of officials and evaluating how much their clothes and personal items cost, in order to suss out who is gaining financially from corruption. Again, results are mixed, the "human flesh search engines" that post pictures and incite debate also act as cyber-vigilantes, sometimes tracking down and harassing people off-line.

El-Nawawy, Mohammed, and Sahar Khamis. *Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

El-Nawawy and Khamis' volume looks at the relation between online practices and the notion of the *umma*, or the greater Islamic community. In doing so, they set up a particularly compelling theoretical framework through which to conceptualize the notion of an Islamic public sphere and practice. El-Nawawy and Khamis look at the everyday conversations and online interactions that occur at three popularly-trafficked "Islamic" websites, islamonline.net, amrkhaled.net, and islamway.com (all, it should be noted, are Sunni websites—there is some coverage of Sunni-Shia interaction, and Shia websites, but no coverage of persecuted sects like the Ahmadiyya, whose very claim to belonging in the *umma* is contested, and sometimes violently.)

El-Nawawy and Khamis contend that the *umma*, as an organizing framework, is useful in thinking about the notion of the Habermasian "public sphere" as it applies to Islamic public discourse and community-making. It is worth thinking about whether their argument about the *umma*–based, as it is, in a zone where community, publicity, and authority do not necessarily reside in secular spaces–could apply to *activism* in this sphere as well: can activists draw authority and collective force from non-secular claims, or are they necessarily restricted to the space of the secular, or the "modern"?

Pal, Mahuya, and Mohan J. Dutta. "Organizing Resistance on the Internet: The Case of the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 5, no. 2 (2012): 230–251.

This essay looks at the discursive and communicative strategies of the ICJB, an international coalition of NGOs, people's organizations, and individuals banded together to campaign for the victims of the 1984 Union Carbide disaster in India. The essay positions itself as a study of how activist organizations mobilize and create discursive space against the dominant socioeconomic power structures online. Key to Pal and Dutta's analysis is the notion that the Internet is allowing activist coalitions to connect local issues to global politics, transcending geographical constraints; and that the Internet allows for the circulation of independent information that may be suppressed or ignored by traditional media.

Pal and Dutta then look at the specific example of ICJB, which is led by a coalition of survivor groups on the ground in India, and has member organizations in several developed nations, including India and Japan. They focus on the ICJB website, which they argue provides an important complement and platform to the group's off-line activities: there are forums, places to start and circulate petitions, fundraise, etc. on the site, all of which contribute to the group's offline presence and outreach. The website functions as an information center during protests, providing fax and phone numbers of companies and embassies, as well as a site for documentation of activist doings.

The discursive strategies utilized by the ICBJ on its own website fell into three categories, according to Pal and Dutta's grounded theory analysis: a. contesting "the truth", b. celebrating agency and c. calling for action. The ICBJ website also allowed the organization to engage in the multiple spatialities of activity alluded to earlier: the struggle in Bhopal could be cast in national and international terms through the online form. Pal and Dutta then engage in a close reading of the ICBJ website, noting things like hyperlink use and placement in contesting the official accounts of what transpired in Bhopal, the emphasis on the agency of activists and survivors through documentation of protest actions and dissemination of petitions (which they argue creates a transnational space for activism through the sharing of local experiences), and encouraging translocal and transnational participation in the Bhopal effort through invoking and calling for people everywhere to contribute ot the movement.

Pal and Dutta do not study *form* (i.e. thinking about what, say, a petition allows and does not allow for in terms of the possibility of action), rather, their study is much more about *content*. As such, it's not easy to tell what is particularly specific about the *online* medium in this discussion of mediated activism, besides an invocation of transcending geographical boundaries. However, it does give some valuable insight into the discursive strategy that is utilized by activist groups in disseminating their message.

Kraidy, M. "Contention and Circulation in the Digital Middle East: Music Video as Catalyst." *Television and New Media* 14, no. 4 (2013): 1–15.

Kraidy's article looks at the spread of an Iraqi music video in order to better understand the mechanisms by which this popular media form might be understood as an object that constitutes a public around and about itself. In this, Kraidy draws from Michael Warner's notion of the public as an entity that can be summoned into being, and dismissed as peremptorily. Kraidy argues that rather than seeing music videos purely as demonized objects of titillation, unconnected to political possibility, music videos need to be seen as providing a space for an alternative articulation of politics, where the music video functions as a space for contention.

Kraidy's claim is that music videos function as "instruments of visibility in an economy of attention scarcity." The relationship of the online form—things like clickbait petitions, for example–to attention scarcity is one that hasn't been thoroughly explored by the pieces mentioned here, and is certainly worth further examination.

Kraidy looks at the discussion surrounding the pop singer Shadha Hassoun's music video *Wa'd 'Arqoub*, a video thematically linking itself to the U.S. occupation of Iraq, through the trope of Hassoun's character in the video having a U.S. soldier for a lover—the video features scenes of fleeing refugees, images of explosions and military hardware, etc. Several interpretations and reactions to the video subsequently took over online, ranging from derogatory to enraged to appreciative and supportive. Kraidy claims it is this space of contentious reaction and discussion that allows for political possibilities.

Kraidy also examines the discursive nexus of nationalism and sexuality in which the video operated: noting that the central figure of controversy, Hassoun herself, had contradictory things to say about the video, sometimes embracing it, other times distancing herself from it and shifting focus to its controversial director, Yehya Saade. The public discussion centered around the fact that the video combined two distinct (and perhaps contradictory) registers: that of the wider nation (the U.S. soldier and military hardware, explosions), and the very intimate (Hassoun and her U.S. soldier lover in the back of a military truck, Hassoun dancing for the audience, chained to a fence.)

It is worth noting that Kraidy's discussion of the public is characterized by its fleeting nature. In contrast to more Habermasian-centered theories of the public and their mediation, here the public is not a fixed space, nor a permanent entity, but rather something altogether more fragile and uncertain in its constitution. Nevertheless, the formation of the public could perhaps be seen as a move against the inertia and attention scarcity inherent in the symbolic economy at work today, and it is in this *movement*, this choice to react and be drawn into discussion, that a potential for politics can perhaps be witnessed.