How small are small numbers in cyberspace? Small, virtual, wannabe ‘states’, minorities and their cyber conflicts

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Introduction

This chapter argues first, that established mainstream media and their online equivalents usually support what different theorists call state-like, hierarchical, or vertebrate political forms of organization crucial to state/status quo survival. Second, that independent, alternative or peer-to-peer, networked media, usually support transnational, rhizomatic, cellular networks, such as ethnoreligious and sociopolitical movements or diasporic minorities and dissident networks within. Third, that small states and minorities are especially vulnerable to both these modalities, as they are frequently too small, too new or too insignificant to have been adequately mass-mediated in the past, so any representations by the mass media are registered automatically as negotiated in the global public sphere.

Further, by examining small states' and minorities’ online representations, this chapter seeks to contribute empirically, to Appadurai’s notion that a geography of anger is fuelled by the media, but its spark are the uncertainty about the enemy within and the anxiety about the always incomplete project of national purity so that 'these geographies are the spatial outcome of complex interactions between faraway events and proximate fears, between old histories and new provocations, between rewritten borders and unwritten orders' (Appadurai, 2006: 100).

Small states
As Jeanne Hey argues, despite of decades of study, no satisfactory definition has been found, rendering smallness useless as an analytical tool, as some scholars can have in mind microstates with a population of less than 1 million, small states in the developed world, and small states in the third world, former colonies (Hey 2003). Stereotyping small states, means conceptualising them insular, insecure, underdeveloped, unstable, vulnerable, limited in foreign policy, passive and reactive states, incapable of instigating change in the world system. Exceptions to these descriptions refer to the flexible, creative, networking/alliance building capacity and risky behaviour, under specific locals and systemic opportunities some of these states display, such as Luxemburg.

If we were to accept Hey’s solution to this definitional problem and its repercussions, that ‘if a state is perceived as small either by its own people or by others, it should be considered a small state’, then we would have to rigorously engage with issues very much related to how some of these states are represented, perceived and mediated in the global public sphere; what that means for their capacity building capabilities; how their image is mediated by the global media and communications; what are the circumstances behind these representations on the systemic, global politico-economic climate of both international, transnational, regional and local levels of societies, corporations, cultures and individuals; and even more significantly for this particular discussion what are the structurational dynamics in relation to media networks and their current transformations due to competitions created through the new information communications technologies, for instance alternative or grassroots media, independent direct publishing, digitization, and copyright and financial challenges to name a few.

Currently, states are asked to operate in an environment of importation logic, aggravated by the consequences of internal and external protest in the global scene as ‘the protesting actor irrupts onto a scene that is already affected by a loss of meaning, that is destabilised and challenged by the crisis affecting the universality of political models’ (Badie, 2000: 201) namely then from multi-variant tensions deriving from dependence and diffusion of the Western model of government. Following Badie’s argument, individuals uncertain of the failure of states and their diplomatic and
military monopoly, which already feels foreign, choose to ally themselves to networks of global solidarity, where citizenships, nationalities and identities converge, compete or collide. The weakening of the periphery of the periphery through westernization/importation ‘accelerates the relativization of citizenship allegiances…[has] the unusual effect of reactivating transnational cultural actors’ and this reactivation has much to do with ‘the call of empty social spaces linked to the bankruptcy of imported states’ (ibid. 203).

If ‘traditional culture is associated with the media and encouraged politically to inflame the allegiance of the receiving public and to prevent the traditional culture from serving the ends of protest activity’ (ibid. 207), then to what extent is this successful in relation to smaller states, their representations and their cultures, especially under the current transformation of the global media due to the challenges of fast virtual communications and enhanced capabilities these afford the receiving public?

This chapter engages with these questions by looking at online discourses and images produced by the global media, mainstream and independent/grassroots media, official/unofficial websites of small states, wannabe small states, minorities seeking independence and statehood, secessionist movements, individuals and collectivities from these communities. The regions used here as empirical examples are Transistria/Pridnestrovie, Vanuatu, Papua, Lebanon and Estonia and the main media examined for all cases are BBConline, CNNonline, English.aljazeera.net, The Guardian online and for each case individually relevant local and regional online publications, by the groups and individuals described above. Methodologically and theoretically, this work expands research on ethnoreligious and sociopolitical cyberconflicts and the cyberconflict model to include cultural cyber conflict (Karatzogianni, The Politics of Cyberconflict 2006) through engaging the work of Arjun Appadurai Fear of Small Numbers (2006).
The ‘Virtual State’ in wannabe States: The case of Pridnestrovie

People simply presume that the terminal entity for loyalties, policy decisions, and moral authority is, for better and worse, the state. This presumption is so deeply ingrained in the culture of modernity that is not treated as problematic…Thus with the state deeply ensconced as a cast of mind, as an organizing premise, the initial –indeed the only - response to the collapse of states due to war, internal strife, or other calamities is to rebuild them….The state-preserving habit opposes partition and favors forcing antagonistic groups to remain together on the grounds that a rebuild society and state will lead to degrees of stability and progress such that the antagonisms and hatreds will give way as conditions improve, as if hatred derives from rational calculation as to what is in the best interest of those who hate.

(Rosenau, 2003: 342)

The Guardian, in ‘Welcome to Nowhere’ informs us that we will struggle to find Transistria or Somaliland in an atlas, because they do not officially exist. Gwyn Topham, the author, asks ‘But can you holiday there?’ His reference is a series of the BBC Holidays in the Danger Zone: ‘another level of non-existence: a whole swath of regions, conflict areas and breakaway states, off the political map, unrecognised by the international community, where people stubbornly continue to live. These are the sort of places Simon Reeve has chosen to visit’. According to Reeve, if you are an 18-year old, you go to Peru and Thailand because it is exotic, so if you want to push the boundaries, this is your next destination: the unrecognized regions ‘where gunmen and poverty are recurring themes’ and ‘the scenery is pretty special. Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, the central highlands of Taiwan - they're stunning, the sort of stuff that makes you go - [mimes jaw dropping]’. We encouraged to visit these places as tourist destinations, since the trips to Peru and Thailand, which of course everyone can afford, are not ‘special’ anymore.
For example, this is Transistria, Trasnister or Pridnestrovie - depending on your political mood - described by Reeve:

You could probably get here for a long weekend. From Chisinau, the Moldovan capital, you can just get a bus or a taxi to Transnistria for the price of a bag of chips. If you're on the bus, just sit at the back and keep quiet. But even being stopped by the Transnistria immigration officials is going to be a fun experience; if you're the sort of person who's prepared to go there then you want that sort of thing.

(The Guardian 28 April 2005)

His tips are ‘in these countries $5 goes a long way; if you want to see something, you might find there are "special entrance fees" that will get you in; you probably need a visa - but the rules are fairly flexible, you aren't going to Sweden’. Also: ‘here have been some fabulous traveller's tales and encounters en route - from buying fake passports and drinking snake's blood to finding a field full of abandoned missiles.’ (ibid.) Again in the Guardian, another wonderful article on the region:

…for the surreal breakaway para-state of Transnistria on the east bank of the river Dniestr looks at first glance like a miniature version of the old Soviet Union. In the heart of the capital, Tiraspol, a giant redstone Lenin stands proudly before the Supreme Soviet. It makes me feel almost nostalgic….. What does Transnistria matter to anyone who is not, as I am, a lover of the Tintinesque and a connoisseur of obscure east European conflicts?’

(Ash May 19, 2005)

Similarly, photographs of the region in cyberspace are often followed with ‘Forget Cuba, there is only one place you can experience Soviet-style communism as it really was’ (Kirk, undated). Remarkably, a tourist unable to visit inside military facilities (as you do!) comments on globalvoices.org: ‘The old Bendery fortress located inside a military base. We were not allowed to visit it […]. Too bad. I think that because of
paranoically keeping itself closed, [Transnistria] loses lots of tourists - and not just the political ones’ (Khokhlova September 22 2006).

A rather different approach on the issue is taken by Global Security, an online think tank which advertises ‘reliable security information’ on its site, that Moldova has sought peaceful solutions to its ethnic and security problems including offering the largely Russian population of the separatist Transdniester region broad autonomy. Alas, ‘bolstered by the presence of Russian troops, Transdniester continues to hold out for independence, thus denying Moldova control over significant industrial assets and its border with Ukraine’. These ‘separatists’ are involved in ‘money-laundering and the manufacturing and smuggling of weapons, as well as trafficking in human beings and drugs’ (globalsecurity.org). Along the same lines, Tom Casey, Washington spokesman, commenting on a referendum held in the region favoring independence (97 per cent voted for independence), states that the ‘US does not recognize the independence referendum held yesterday in the Transnistrian region of Moldova… As the international community has made clear, Transnistria is a part of Moldova, and yesterday’s efforts by the Transnistrian regime should not be recognized as anything other than an attempt to destabilize Moldova’ (Casey 18 September 2006)

Although the ‘Moldovan Dniester Republic’ (MDR) is not recognized by the international community, BBC reports Russia has called this referendum free and fair, a number of deputies in the Russian parliament, the State Duma, have called for recognition and that ‘critics argue that polls were not free and fair on the grounds that, by international standards, Trans-Dniester does not have a free press or a multi-party democracy’ (Petru 11 December 2006). To enlighten us, Al Jazeera English constructs the conflict this way: ‘Trans-Dniestr declared independence in 1990 in Soviet times in response to fears that Moldova's Romanian-speaking majority would join up again with their Romanian neighbours to the south. A brief war erupted between the two sides in 1992, halted by Russian troops who remain despite promises to leave, guarding de facto crossing points and 20,000 tonnes of Soviet-era munitions’ (Al Jazeera English 20 September 2006). Or according to the Washington Times, it is ‘a black hole—a part of Moldova over which Moldovan authorities exercise no control’ that ‘diminishes the prospect of integration with European and transatlantic
institutions, and it also serves as an all-purpose excuse for the failure to produce results’ (Lindberg 1 June 2004). And not surprisingly, NGOs are there yet again to offer and publicize online their invaluable services to the region ‘controlled by the clan of its president….’:

In 2006, People in Need introduced a project to support Transnistrian non-governmental organizations. In close cooperation with its Ukrainian and Moldavian partners, PIN will identify potential participants of the project who will subsequently be provided with management training specifically focused on non-governmental organizations and effective support for their activities.

(People in Need)

This so far portrayed as special, fun, unimportant, criminal, undemocratic, destabilizing, steeped-in-cultural-conflict region is a product of a process that many nation-states had to face in the 1980s and 1990s: ‘the pressure to open up their markets to foreign investment, commodities, and images and the pressure to manage the capacity of their own cultural minorities to use the globalized language of human rights to argue for their own claims for cultural dignity and recognition’ (Appadurai, 2006: 65). In the Caucasus it happened to Moldova with Transdniester, to Georgia with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to Russia with Chechnya, the latter readily supporting the wannabe independent states, but shy of discussing the ‘enemies’ within. The obvious alliance between the three de facto independent states is presented by the Tiraspol Times (Tiraspol is the country’s capital) as follows: ‘According to the memorandum filed by the three non-UN members, Georgia and Moldova are presenting a threat to the world’s security since they are carrying out military and political provocations against the already de facto independent republics and imposing economic blockades on them’ (The Tiraspol Times 30 November 2006).

As Appadurai argues such state insecurity is especially marked ‘where the states have lost clear links to mass politics, where ambiguous or selectively favourable economic policies are imposed on behalf of wider global interests or forces, and where states have begun to substitute fundamentally culturalist policies for developmentalist ones’
This cultural struggle, which integrates war and politics at the borders with vigilance and purification at the centers, is exarcebated by the media in general and by new communication technologies in particular. The fight to win the global war of messages, propaganda and ideas has often produced unpredictable results, especially in cyberspace.

For instance, the answer to the aforementioned discourses on the Pridnestrovie is the official site of the Moldovan Dniester Republic set up specifically to counter most of what they see as Moldova's disinformation campaign (<http://www.pridnestrovie.net>). It is a site that deliberately attempts to contradict these descriptions, which utilises the latest web technologies and explains the MDR position professionally one by one, using the language of political marketing and national rhetoric: ‘10 Things you didn’t know about Europe’s newest country: Double of Iceland's population, Multi-party democracy, Signed UN human rights charters, Market based economy, A total of 35 nationalities live here, OSCE-ruled elections, "Clean" report from EU border monitors, Historically never part of Moldova, Industrial powerhouse, Government success’. Each one of this links leads to much longer versions, directly addressing thematically the negative reports of the region and the administration’s performance in the global media. We are informed that on the smuggling front:

A border monitoring mission from the European Union has been checking the transit of goods on Pridnestrovie's borders since 2005, filing monthly reports on its finding. The result? A "clean" bill of health for Pridnestrovie, confirming similar reports by officials from the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) saying that there is no evidence that Pridnestrovie has ever trafficked arms or nuclear material.

(<http://www.pridnestrovie.net>).
national and global politics (largely produced by official institutions and procedures) and the maps of sacred national space (produced by political and religious and movements). In this particular case, Pridnestrovie is seen as a destabilizing region for Moldova and the neighbouring countries, the EU enlargement project and the US hegemonic order, especially in relation to Russia’s hegemonic aspirations, energy disputes and legacy in the region. As such, it is represented by mainstream media as a forgotten, a soviet era tourist destination, stubbornly seeking independence and protecting its Soviet population from Moldova and its neighbors. The speed and insecurity of virtual communications has put the unrecognized state in the defensive on the on hand, but on the other has allowed for online representations that attempt to counterbalance the online discourses and ‘misinformation’ as they see it from the established media, online equivalents and several other organizations framing the issue, such as Global security.org. As today’s ethnic groups number in the hundreds and thousands, their mixtures, cultural style and media representations ‘create profound doubts about who exactly are among the “we” and who are among the “they” in the context of rapid migration or refugee movements, how many of “them are now among us” (Appadurai, 2006: 5). Pidnestrovie reflects this problem, in the effort by the inhabitants of the region to defend their culture and their majority against latin, Romanian, and Moldovian state culture of what they see as ‘historically never part’ of Moldova, feeling they entered ‘a forced marriage’ (<www.pridnestrovie.net>) when they were assigned to Moldova under global institutions and agreements. In essence, they are then defending the purity of their national space, and they do so by skilfully using online media technologies. To put it simply, following Appadurai, globalization and its technologies can expose pathologies in the sacred ideologies of nationhood.

**Rapid urbanization on the ‘happiest place on earth’: The Case of Vanuatu**

How can friend kill friend, neighbor kill neighbor, even kinsman kill kinsman? These new forms of intimate violence seem especially puzzling in an era of fast technologies, abstract financial instruments, remote forms of power, and
large scale flows of techniques and ideologies…. Such violence, in this perspective, is not about old hatreds and primordial fears. It is an effort to exorcise the new, the emergent, and the uncertain, one name for which is globalization.

(Appadurai, 2006: 47)

In the pacific island of Tanna in the state of Vanuatu every 15th of February for more than fifty years now young men play the "Star Spangled Banner" on bamboo flutes and dress up as American soldiers. Villagers at Sulphur Bay worship a mystic figure John Frum, who is often explained as the war-time GIs who introduced themselves as "John from America." BBC reports that ‘devotees say that the ghost of a mystical white man first appeared before tribal elders in the 1930s. It urged them to rebel against the aggressive teachings of Christian missionaries and the influence of Vanuatu's British and French colonial masters. The apparition told villagers to do all they could to retain their own traditions’ (Mercer 17 February 2007). Through this homage to the US, disciples hope their ethereal saviour can be encouraged to return. ‘It's a little bit weird but it makes me feel really patriotic’ is one of the comments by an American visitor who travelled to Tanna to see the festivities. In the same BBC article we are informed that about 20% of Tanna's population of 30,000 follow the teachings of one of the world's last remaining cargo cults and that other islanders can barely disguise their contempt for it:

A Christian youth worker told me how he thought the cult was childish. "It's like a baby playing games," he insisted. "Those people are holding on to a dream that will never come true," he said. I put this view to Rutha, who's married to Chief Isaac's son. She was unfazed. "I don't care what they think," she says gently without a hint of displeasure. "John is our Jesus and he will come back." The John Frum Movement is still trying to entice another delivery of cargo from its supernatural American god.

( ibid.)
In another BBC article, Vanuatu is featured as a story, due to its ranking as first among the ‘happiest places’ on earth (the others were Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica and Panama) (Winterman 13 July 2006). This time we get a different story on the cargo cult, it is not the Americans they are worshipping, it is the English: ‘Up until now Vanuatu's biggest claim to fame was the island of Tanna, where locals worship the Duke of Edinburgh as their divine leader. Why? Because local legend tells how their spiritual ancestor ended up in England and eventually married a queen’ (ibid.) It is very useful also to be informed, predictably, as in most representations of these islands: ‘But it is far from paradise lost, with limited employment opportunities and poverty’ (ibid.) To the credit of the reporter, we get to read interviews from environmental volunteers, the British Friends of Vanuatu and others. Another interesting aspect were responses to the online article with many readers leaving messages of how puzzled they were about Colombia: ‘drug cartels, left wing guerrillas and right wing death squads do not sound like my idea of happiness’. This links to the constructions of images of places in the global public sphere and the stereotypifications constantly produced and reproduced by the global media, especially since the retooling of American hegemony in the media sphere.

The impression we receive from these two articles is that there is a cargo cult, different details of what it is about, but the first article quotes an anthropologist explaining it as cultural preservation against the missionaries and what they saw as oppression. However, the reasons they are praying for more cargos full of American commodities to arrive are not discussed. During this research on the ‘happiest place with the third world economy and an interesting cult’, Al Jazeera English featured a story about Vanuatu being in a state of emergency in March 2007. The lead of the article starts with ‘Ethnic violence has been stoked after the recent death of a woman was blamed on witchcraft’ (Al Jazeera 5 march 2007). A state of emergency was declared after ‘clashes between islanders’ killed 2 and injured 10 people, while 140 were arrested by police. Policemen are interviewed for the piece, and the council’s representative who is worried about tourism. The only other worthy information is that ‘Vanuatu, with a population of about 200,000 people, comprises more than 80 islands and lies about three-quarters of the way from Hawaii to Australia’ (ibid.)
Further, the representations of these articles refrain to discuss further the realities and causalities behind the cult, the history of colonisation and post colonization (Vanuatu served as a base for the Allies during the second world war, images of the island during the time can be found online, and was decolonized in 1980), while the current clashes between islanders are ‘ethnic’ explained in relation to ‘witchcraft’, instead of being unsettled by rapid urbanization and mixing of their populations. Ethnic identity as explained by Appadurai is ‘a special flash point for the uncertainty brought by wider processes of demographic change, economic fear, and population shifts, exacerbated by the excesses of mass mediation and state or quasi-state propaganda machines…the mix of social certainty and uncertainty becomes volatile and metastatic violence can develop’ (Appadurai 2006: 104). To the outside world reading about Vanuatu, these issues are still dealt with explanations that are inadequate and dangerous. Small numbers and their idiosyncrasies are themselves produced by socio-economic and cultural processes in which the media, and the ‘great powers’ before them and with them are complicit. Sadly, Vanuatu, the periphery of the periphery, is also a case very much ‘unreported’ and untouched by the anti-globalization movement and the independent media traditionally siding with the oppressed.

Capturing the liberal imagination: The Case of Papua

Small numbers are also a worry because they raise the spectre of conspiracy, of the cell, of the cell, the spy, the traitor, the dissident, or the revolutionary. Small numbers introduce the intrusion of the private into the public sphere, and with it the associated dangers of nepotism, collusion, subversion, and deception. They harbor the potential for secrecy and privacy, both anathema to the ideas of publicity and transparency that are vital to liberal ideas of rational communication and open deliberation.

Minorities are the only powerful instance of small numbers which excite sympathy rather than distrust in the liberal imagination, and that is because
they incarnate that numerical smallness of which the prime case is the number one, the individual.

(Appadurai, 2006:62)

Referring to the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka OPM) and the ‘opposition to Indonesian control’, the Global Security website puts it down to cultural differences between Indonesians and the indigenous population: ‘complaints about the Javanization of Irian Jaya exacerbated tensions. The cultural conflict was aggravated by indigenous people's perceptions that they were being left behind economically by a flood of Indonesian immigrants coming in via the central government sponsored transmigration program’ (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/papua.htm>).

Notice the use of the words ‘complaints’ and the indigenous people’s ‘perceptions’ that they were being left behind. Of course, yet again, as in the case of Pridnestrovie, we are not left wondering what the American position is on the issue: ‘The US Government asserts that the Free Papua Movement has committed human rights abuses including hostage-taking and summary executions, and it may be targeting US citizens or US companies in Irian Jaya Province for hostage taking or for sabotage’ (ibid.) To appear balanced, we are also informed that the independence movement is accusing the Indonesian government of the same and US mining conglomerate Freeport McMoRan for environmental abuses in West Papua. Interestingly, a small touch is added in the end of how ‘some critics, however, say there are other motives. What there is now is outrage of an unprecedented level with Jakarta for this effort to divide the province with an almost explicitly stated motivation of weakening the political independence movement’ (ibid.)

In an article commenting on the Papua ‘unrest’ against the US-based Freeport McMoRan, BBC reports from Jakarta that ‘the roots of Papuan discontent are deeper and more intractable’ (Johnston 23 March 2003). Even if we are not told what these roots are (we are given a bit of a clue after a three line historical background mentioning Dutch colonization and Indonesian annexation not honouring Papua self-rule granted by the Dutch), the International Crisis Group is quoted explaining that the Freeport protests reflected broader frustration and anger over the role of the
military in Papua, lack of justice for past abuses and the failure of special autonomy to improve the welfare of the people. The report also refers to the issue of asylum seekers from Papua to Australia and ‘a prominent Papuan nationalist, Edson Waromi, says that the recent arrival of 43 Papuan asylum seekers in Australia was designed to bring attention to the problems in the province. The boat they arrived on carried a banner saying in English: ‘Save West Papua people souls from genocide, intimidation and terrorist from military government of Indonesia’ (ibid.) This reports gets even better when it mentions that Condoleezza Rice and Tony Blair visiting Jakarta are required to make a statement that they are committed to ‘the unitary state of Indonesia’, indicating they do not support independence for Papua or any other part of the country. This is an example of good reporting using sources that are discussing the issue domestically on the different parties, regionally, and in geopolitical terms.

Here is another BBC reporter, based in Sydney this time, on the Australian camps set up as disincentives for the Papuan refugees: ‘The Prime Minister, John Howard, has insisted this is not the end of the road for the detention centre on Nauru….’ Then he explains that Australia ‘was worried about the number of people heading for its shores from Indonesia’ and that ‘the thinking was that the prospect of being shipped off to an isolated corner of the South Pacific would be a powerful deterrent to asylum seekers. The Australian government has said the policy has been an outstanding success and that the flow of people has been reduced to barely a trickle’ (Mercer 14 October 2005). Lastly, we are told that the UN ‘complained’ about the conditions of detainees and welcomes the decision to remove detainees from Nauru. Nowhere in this piece any other side of the story except that of the Australian government is aired or discussed. Of course Australia has to deal with its own history with the indigenous populations.‘Minorities, refugees and oppressed peoples are marks of failure and coercion: They are embarrassments to any sponsored image of national purity and state fairness…’ (Appadurai, 2006: 42)

Interestingly, Al Jazeera reports on the Australia’s decision to revise its refugee evaluation after outraging Jakarta by granting asylum to 42 people from Papua. Again, Howard is featured as saying that Jakarta’s record is improving and that Australia should not encourage the region’s independence. However, in an article on the protest against the mine mentioned earlier, Al Jazeera chooses to quote the Human
Rights Watch urging Indonesia's government ‘to allow an independent investigation into the violence in the region and to ease restrictions on foreign journalists and aid agencies entering the province’ (Al Jazeera English 9 April 2006). On the asylum seekers issue, CNN quotes a refugee advocate, and does not fail to mention that Howard’s tough stand against illegal immigration has been at the center of his four consecutive election victories and that he is facing one in 2007 (CNN 23 February 2007).

The pro-independence sites, such as www.freewestpapua.org, westpapuaaction.buz.org, http://www.greenleft.org.au/2007/700/36334, http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/papua.htm, http://www.eco-action.org/opm/wpau/00/wpau00.html are used as information sites, framing the issues, initiating events, but also as mobilizing and organising global solidarity for the Free West Papua campaigns. This is typical and in accordance with previous research on ethnorelligious and sociopolitical conflicts (in this case a combination of both), as we have seen in the past with the anti-globalization, anti-corporate, anti war movements and Chinese cyberdissidents, the ethnoreligious cyberconflicts (and their exclusionary fixed identity discourses) between Israeli and Palestinians, Indian and Pakistani and the use of the web by terrorist groups to organise mobilise and recruit, such as Al-Qaeda (Karatzogianni 2006). The Papuan independence movement is a case where sociopolitical grievances and tensions of the indigenous populations are converged with the ethnoreligious elements of difference and exclusion brought by the Indonesian regime. The discourses are in sociopolitical terms in the independent media solidarity with the Papuans (reminiscent somewhat to the solidarity for the Zapatistas), while domestically in the region some ethnoreligious issues are at play.

There are different tribes in Papua and according to the 2000 consensus 78% of the Papuan population identified themselves as Christian with 54% being Protestant and 24% being Catholic. 21% of the population was Muslim and less than 1% were Buddhists, animists are not recognised according to Indonesian policy <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papua_(Indonesian_province)>. Indonesia, with more than 200 million population, 300 distinct native ethnicities and 742 different languages and dialects has faced many bloody ethnoreligious conflicts, such as the massacre of hundreds of Madurese by a local Dayak community in West
Kalimantan and conflicts in Maluku, Central Sulawesi


**Exorcizing Uncertainty - Reactivating the Geography of Anger: the Case of Lebanon**

The case of Lebanon is a case of an established small state with many and diverse groups fighting for dominance, while at the same time Lebanon is fighting for its own survival as a democratic state, relying on the ideas of equal representation of these extremely diverse groups. Appadurai writes that ‘…the metastasis of war we call terrorism and the rapid-fire spread in the discourse of terrorism as a name for any variety of anti-state activity has decisively blurred the lines between wars of the nation and wars in the nation’. The nation itself, following Appadurai, is steadily reduced to the fiction of its ethnos as the last cultural resource over which it may exercise full dominion (2006: 23). Lebanon is a state that has been long caught between its efforts to appear sovereign and in control of its population and openness, projecting the image of the ‘Switzerland of the Middle East’, in order to gain Western approval, tourism and investment. It has also been caught between the minorities within its own borders, and its own marginalization and weakness in regional politics. The Israeli-Hezbollah war in 2006 was an example of how under the condition of social uncertainty ‘violence can create a macabre form of certainty and can become a brutal technique (or folk discovery-procedure) about “them” and, therefore, about “us” (Appadurai, 2006: 6). Violence becomes ‘a means for establishing sharp lines between normally mixed identities’ (ibid. 89). In this last section, the idea is to test these theoretical insights against a sample of the coverage the 2006 Lebanon war and its related cyber conflict.

*Sampling Lebanon’s war: Main areas of coverage June-July 2007*
Sample One: June 4-24 Violence (Lebanese army attacks camps, Beirut bomb, UN Peacekeepers killed, ceasefire talks, stories on combatants killed)

Sample Two: July (Assaults against camps intensifies, descriptions of fighting)

Sample Three: July 10-12 Country profiles Lebanon on Year On (Stories on ‘political paralysis’, reconstruction, etc)

Sample Four: Opinion pieces from/on the main protagonists and personalities (Fatah al-islam, Hezbollah, Israel, Lebanese government and army, politicians from different factions in Lebanon, Palestinians, Syrians and Saudis, US backing, the international community)

Sample Five: Social aspects of the war and interviews with local populations by local and international media outlets

Sample Six: Lebanon’s cyberconflict July 2006 onwards - (IDF’s intelligence unit hacks Hezbollah tv station, radio and sites)

The following elements of analysis were used to look at the above sample (Philo and Berry 2004)

• Main areas and prominence, explanations and causes of conflict
• Who got to speak and circumstances
• News headlines and interviews
• Victims and casualties coverage to examine the language used to describe motives and rational
• Retaliation and Response
• Perspectives, censorship, restrictions and propaganda wars

Most mainstream media, most of the time, run the same story, sometimes the same narrative, and even the same exact discursive palette, as if they are written by the same person. Few examples on discursive/ideological difference: CNN tends to refer to ‘UN peacekeepers’, while most else use ‘UN soldiers’, France 24 will use ‘islamist camp’, will most other use ‘Lebanese camp’. There is immense surrealism, metaphor and banal imagining of violence, ven in the choice of words to describe the situation there by the mainstream media: ‘Lebanon political paralysis’ (BBC 10 July 2007);
‘Escape is impossible’ (The Guardian 12 June 2007); ‘Political squabbling’, ‘A son awaits to join Hizbullah to avenge shattered family’ (The Guardian) ‘Commando action in Lebanon camp’ (Al Jazeera English 22 June 2007); ‘Lebanon army starts camp “clean up”’ (Al Jazeera English 12 June 2007). An interviewee for the BBC is quoted as saying: ‘I saw an arm lying in the street...someone picked up the arm, despite the damaged flesh and pulled off the ring to steal it’ (Asser, 9 July 2007).

‘Abu Omar looks like an Arab version of the Scandinavian god Thor’ is another example, where a Guardian journalist describes one of the new generation of Palestinian militants in Lebanese refugee camps (The Guardian, 12 June 2007). This is an example of how the Hezbollah proved far more media savvy than its enemies giving controlled access to the world’s media. Hezbollah’s press officer Hussein Nabulsi took CNN’s Nic Robertson to a tour of Southern Beirut, while Charlie Moore described a Hezbollah press tour of a bombed-out area in southern Beirut on 23 July 2006 as a ‘dog-and-pony show’ due to perceived staging, misrepresentation of the nature of the destroyed areas, and strict directives about when and with whom interviews could take place. On top of that there were more scandals on staged photos with individuals appearing in multiple photos. Reuters withdrew over 900 photographs by Adnan Hajj, a Lebanese freelance photographer, after he admitted to digitally adding and darkening smoke spirals in photographs of an attack on Beirut (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Israel-Lebanon_conflict#Media_controversy>).

Alarmingly, the sample shows that the most interesting debates and opinion pieces tend are to be found in online partisan and propaganda media. This realization prompted me to conduct an email interview with Dr Dany Badran, Assistant Professor in English and Critical Linguistics at the Lebanese American University. Badran, who follows both Lebanese and outside media, said that such misrepresentation characterises the majority of media coverage about Lebanon. Yet while this is more or less (and unfortunately so) anticipated in Lebanese reports on Lebanese issues – Lebanese newspapers, radio stations and televisions are predominantly owned by the politically and ideologically affiliated – it comes more of a surprise when ‘responsible’ and highly credible international media sources follow similar lines. Badran especially mentions the case of the Al-Jazeera reporting of news during the July 2006 war in Lebanon as an instance where one man’s political agenda dictates
the views of an entire network, with a vast area of audience coverage and reach, while he finds himself constantly resorting to tabloids:

The extreme pro-Hezbollah (and ultimately anti-government) stance adopted by the network particularly in the face of the international community is logically difficult to justify. The leader of the Progressive Socialist Party leader, Walid Jumblat, gives his interpretation of the situation in a television interview, where he argues that that position reflects the Prince of Qatar’s power struggle with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Prince’s opposition to KSA is highlighted through his support of all what KSA opposes (Hezbollah) and opposition to what the kingdom supports (the Lebanese government – and by extension the international community). This fairly serious outcome of a personal political agenda has, unfortunately, influenced and swayed many of the Al-Jazira news audience, confusing many by making biased emotional appeals. It, however, posed less of a serious threat to the serious/critical news follower who already knows that Al-Jazira is a personally owned TV station which sensationalises news, possibly in the interest of ratings and/or personal political agendas. The main problem with such media representations, or misrepresentations for that matter, is that their effects can be disastrous for the silent followers (who mainly watch sensational TV), the self-proclaimed intellectuals (who predominantly read the arguments of flashy reporters but rarely the counter-arguments) and the highly critical readers (who have faith in the academic integrity of colleagues). Such distortion only encourages readers and news followers to consolidate existing biases and reinforce existing ideologies without seeking out a logical explanation to events and probable causes. Comments from readers on news websites are clear examples of just those points.

As for us, the silent majority of the Lebanese, we are generally finding it harder and harder to listen to these extremely biased, contradictory and confusing views. Here’s another example. While following a live coverage of the last day of fighting in the Nahr Al Bared Palestinian camp in the south of Lebanon, I intentionally flipped through all the Lebanese television channels, both pro government and opposition. The first thing that struck me (being a
linguist) is the use of descriptive words. While all the pro-government reports referred to the Fateh Al Islam group as ‘the terrorist group’, ‘the gang of Shaker Al Absi’, the pro-Hezbollah channel referred to them as ‘the fighters of Shaker Al Absi’. This not only struck me as odd, but rather dangerous. The attempt at ‘neutrality’ in portraying a group which has started its ‘activity’ by killing (so I avoid the more loaded word ‘murdering’) Lebanese army soldiers sleeping in their tents is, well, not neutral to say the least. Being in the opposition (yet effectively part of the government) should not put to question the status of a group which endangers the safety of soldiers and citizens alike. These views are very confusing to say the least. And so, ironically, I find myself consciously resorting to tabloids. How absurd!

Thanks to the internet and live 24/7 coverage, directly uploaded by journalists and bloggers onto cyberspace, the media had an unprecedented tactical and representational effect on policy. As Marvin Kalb (February 2007: 5) writes in his report ‘The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Asymmetrical Conflict’:

For any journalist worth his or her salt, this should spark a respectful moment of reflection. Not only this new and awesome technology enable journalists to bring the ugly reality of war to both belligerents (and others around the world), serving as a powerful influence on public opinion and governmental attitudes and actions; it also became an extremely valuable intelligence asset for both Israel and Hezbollah, and Hezbollah especially exploited it.

(February 2007: 5)

Hezbollah whenever possible, pointed reporters to civilian deaths among the Lebanese, a helpful jesture with heavy propaganda implications. Early in the war, reporters routinely noted that Hezbollah started the war, and its casualties were a logical consequence of war. But after the first week such references were either dropped or downplayed, leaving the widespread
impression that Israel was a loose canon shooting at anything that moved. “Disproportionality” became the war’s mantra…

(ibid. 9)

An example Kalb gives is BBC’s 117 stories on the war, were thirty-eight per cent fingered Israel as the aggressor, only four per cent fingered Hezbollah. While a YouGove poll of British viewers, showed 63 per cent believing that Israel’s response had been ‘disproportionate’. Fox news favored Israel, CNN tried to be balanced, and ABC, CBS and NBC were more critical of Israel than Hezbollah (Kalb, 2007: 14).

The effect of the internet on the coverage of the war and related cyberattacks

There were three major developments in relation to the internet in this war: a. the internet causing leaks in military intelligence; b. millions of bloggers taking sides and influencing public opinion; c. hacking of the signal of the Hezbollah tv station, hacking for Lebanon, hacking for Israel.

Firstly, during the war UNIFIL (the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) was accused of release information on its websites which would be regarded as ‘actionable intelligence’, as ‘It was part of UNIFIL’s responsibility to report violations of the ceasefire…but presumably this information was to be conveyed through confidential channels, not on the internet…These postings, similar to others during the war, coincided with heavy fighting in the region’ (Kalb, 2007: 17).

Secondly, blogging became a ferocious tool for the different groups engaged in the conflict, pro-Israeli and pro-Hezbollah bloggers (Kalb quotes a source for 63 million as of January 2007):

The effect was nonstop pressure on journalists to look over their shoulders --to conform either to extremes on both sides or to stick to the middle of public opinion. If “proportionality” was the theme of the day, most reporters would try supporting or rejecting the theme but
always keeping it at play. It was easier and safe to be in step with the public than to be walking into the wind’.

(Kalb 2007: 24).

This pressure put on by bloggers to either conform with extremes or stick to the middle of public opinion perhaps explains the impression the sample gives of a very uniform approach from mainstream media.

Thirdly, there are the conflict related cyberattacks. According to the report from Eli Lake, in the middle of newscast and programming from Hezbollah’s Al Manar station, Israeli technicians hacked the signal and replaced it with a 90-second spot with a gun site superimposed on a crude drawing of Hezbollah’s leader, Sheik Hassan nasrallah, looking at the ground. The image was punctuated by the sound of three gunshots and framed on the top with the words, ‘Your day is coming, coming, coming’. On the bottom of the image of Sheik Nasrallah were the words: ‘The state of Israel.’ For the next 90 seconds, the message is clear: ‘Give up. Resistance is futile’. The station managed to stay on the air through broadcasting from alternate studios. One former Defense Force official familiar with the operation said that ‘the aim of psychological warfare is to get the Lebanese to see terrorists are actually terrorists who are endangering you, to understand that Nasrallah is masquerading as the liberator of Lebanon’. Israel also hacked Lebanese phone line with recorded messages urging listeners to turn in Hezbollah fighters and operatives (The New York Sun 2 August 2006).

The Lebanon conflict and its media coverage raises many questions in terms of the extraordinary influence of global public opinion through blogging on the mainstream media. It is also the first time cyberwar is not only used by a state, but it is freely admitted as a legitimate weapon of warfare and recognised as a threat to the monopoly of military intelligence. Lastly, it proves that in asymmetric warfare the weaker party wins, if they play the media game right.
Conclusion

This research involves a large amount of data about the countries mentioned here. Some are more developed than others, however the purpose of this is to understand better how the internet and cyber conflict affect small states in war, wannabe states and minorities. Presently I am undertaking similar research in respect to conflicts in Kosovo, Abkhazia, Baluchistan, Fuji, Solomon Islands, the Hmong in Laos and the Caprivi strip in Namibia, Ivory Coast in an effort to compare different regions and small countries experiencing similar issues and find patterns on how these are represented, or perhaps more accurately, simulated in an era of fast virtual communications.

It is likely, that minorities and small numbers benefit from ICTs far more their powerful enemies. In all these places, the mainstream media tended either to represent them as ‘trouble in paradise’, sided with the status quo state in cases of secession, or failed to engage seriously with the deeper roots of the conflict. In the advocacy or action websites, what is called currently by the popular press in France ‘the 5th power of the internet’, has enabled players to punch above their weight and at least enter the competition for the battle for the ears of the global public opinion.

I have argued elsewhere that states need to become more networked to deal with the current networked resistances be them socio-political or ethnorenigious and that these resistances need to become more conscious of their hosting environment if they are to be attempting conflict transformations in today’s global politics in the an era of fast virtual communications (Karatzogianni 2006). Further, I have placed myself in favor of the potential contained in network forms of social organisation as a basis for constructing resistances to repressive apparatuses and to the world system as a system of global control (Karatzogianni and Robinson 2004). Appadurai, although he recognises that we still live in a vertebrate world, albeit one that the state is not the only game in town, argues that ‘alongside this exists the cellular world, whose parts multiply by association and opportunity rather than by legislation or by design. It is
also a product of globalization – of the new information technologies, of the speed of finance and the velocity of the news, of the movement of capital and the circulation of refugees’ (Appadurai 2006: 129). And more importantly: ‘We need to watch them, for the coming crisis of the nation-state may lie not in the dark cellularities of terror but in the utopian cellularities of these new transnational organizational forms’ (ibid. 137).