Nation Building Online: A Case Study of Kurdish Migrants in Germany

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1   Introduction

The endeavor of nation-building has become easier due to the invention of the Internet. Via the quick transmission and processing of ideas, news, and images, Through Internet geographically longer distances are overcome, enabling an exchange of information in an up to now unknown form. Peoples of various nationalities and ethnicities discover themselves and each other through various online social groups and communities. The transmission of symbols, characters, and myths on websites, e-mail lists, in chat rooms, discussion forums, web blogs, and online newspapers and journals thereby make the engineering, maintenance, and dissemination of "national" identities in transnational cyberspace simpler, cheaper, and much faster than before (cf. Bakker 2001, Diamandaki 2003, Brinkerhoff/Brainard 2003, Eriksen 2006, Ding 2007, Adamson 2008).

Internet and Diaspora[1] research confirms that digital nation-building is a real phenomenon, especially in the case of diaspora communities without a nation-state (e.g. Tamils from Sri Lanka, Tibetans from China, and Kurds from the Middle East). In addition, these groups use the Internet to introduce themselves to the international community as independent ethnicities or nations.

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[1]   The term "Diaspora" is used to refer to the dispersion of religious or ethnic groups from their homelands/ home region, either forced or voluntary. The word is also used to refer to those people as a collective group and community.

With the help of digital lobbying (via online petitioning, demonstrations, awareness training, protest campaigns) they seek to organize support for their objectives. These groups use the Internet to directly influence politics on the international stage (cf. Breidenbach/Zukrigl 2002, Diamandaki 2003, Smith 2004, Geser 2004, Wayland 2004, Vertovec 2005).

This article deals with the process of nation-building of the Kurdish migrants in Germany. The Kurdish diaspora in Germany is one of the world's largest ethnic groups without its own nation-state, numbering approximately 700 000-800 000 members. The Kurdish migrants within Germany are politically relatively very well organized (cf. Emanuelsson 2005, Russel-Johnston 2006, Navend 2008). The central question of this article is, does this process of nation-building through a digital Diaspora without its own nation-state exists within a Diaspora community in Germany and if it does, how is it organized in the virtual cyberspace?

2   Theoretical Framework

The article deals with the theoretical framework of Benedict Anderson's concept of a nation as an "imagined community" or an "imagined nation", a construct in the hearts and minds of the members of that nation. The members of the imagined community feel bonded to a symbolic or real homestead. This bond is supported by language, symbols, myths, and history. Anderson calls these the "raw material of nationalism" (Anderson 1983). These characteristics are transmitted across borders and throughout generations. The collective symbols are disseminated via print media among members of the linguistic or ethnic community, taking a central role in the development and maintenance of group identities, e.g. national identity (Anderson 1983). Therefore nation-building does not crucially depend on physical proximity of the community's members among each other, but upon imagination: "in fact, all communities

larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities need to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson 1983).

According to Anderson, a concrete example for this imaginative process is the reading of a daily newspaper. This "takes place in withdrawn privacy, in the 'lion's den of the mind.' Each reader is conscious that his ceremony occurs simultaneously with thousands (or millions). He is convinced about their existence, but no idea about their identity. Significant is the chronological, always recurring flow (mornings at a certain time evenings again at a specific time) of the ceremony" (Anderson 1983). And further Anderson states that "as the newspaper reader observes how exact duplicates of his paper in the subway, at the barbershop, and in his neighborhood are consumed, he uninterruptedly obtains the certainty, that the imagined world is clearly rooted in everyday life (…). The fiction [percolates] softly and steadily into reality thereby engendering this noteworthy confidence in an anonymous community, which is an unmistakable characteristic of a modern nation"(Anderson 1983).

These features of an "imagined community" apply in the same way to the Internet. In the globalized and digital world of the 21st century, the Internet offers the same opportunities as print media did in the 18th, 19th, and to some extent in the 20th century.[2] Certainly, the speed of dissemination, its options of form and the difficulty of control by government institutions, above all for diaspora communities scattered worldwide, leads to an acceleration of this process. Therefore, the Internet could be seen as an extremely effective medium for nation-building (cf. Bakker 2001, Diamandaki 2003, Eriksen 2006).

Anderson himself recognized the potential of the Internet for nation building. In regard to migrants, An-

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[2] Zenith of nation-building in Europe

derson pointed out that mass communication and especially the communication opportunities the Internet offers give migrants' groups the ability to communicate day-to-day with their home region, allowing the maintenance of a "long-distance nationalism" within the migrant communities. Some active members of the migrant communities want to participate in the politics of their countries of origin (cf. Anderson 1992).

The present article will apply Anderson's concept of the "imagined nation" to the Internet use of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. Our aim is to determine if the Internet is used for the purpose of nation building within a digital diaspora community and if the Internet accelerate Anderson's concept of nation building?

3   Current status of research: An Overview

The online occupation with the phenomenon of nation-building is far more developed in the English-speaking literature than in the German one. The process of nation-building through the Internet has been acknowledged by many studies. The socio-political and cultural effects of nation-building, so clear in the offline world, are shown to apply to digital diaspora communities as well. Anderson's idea of the "imagined nation" is frequently applied.

Diamandaki states that "the advantages which the Internet for such groups offers – diaspora communities without nation-states of their own – are immense." Furthermore, it is "clear, that for stateless nations the politics of identity has found in cyberspace an ideal medium for publicity and even mobilization" (2003: 6). Bakker is convinced, that "nationalism is flourishing on the Internet," (2001: 4). Eriksen believes, "one of the most interesting findings in recent research on the use of the Internet is that this technology is often used to strengthen rather than weaken national identities." Furthermore, "the Internet is the key technology to keep nations together" (2006: 3). He goes on to argue that "the

power of national myths, symbols and history" (2006: 3) produces in many diaspora communities a national identity that sees political organization and generates a process of nation-building on the same level in the offline world.

In Germany so far, there are no scholarly works that concern specifically with the question of nation-building on the Internet. While some researches touch on the issue of digital Diasporas and explain partially the advantages the Internet can serve, they use socio-cultural or ethnographic frameworks and do not include the perspective of political science (e.g., Grassmuck, Wahjudi, and Olsowski 2000, Breidenbach and Zukrigl 2002, Sökefeld 2002 and Asadi 2003). These hardly delve into the concrete political consequences of the development of digital nation-building for the respective diaspora community, the homeland and also the country of residence.

There is a variety of scientific papers about the Kurds, the Kurdish diaspora and media. However these works discuss either the political activities of the Kurds in Turkey (cf. MacDowall 1996, White 2000, Özcan 2006) or the use of traditional media (satellite television and newspapers) by the Kurdish diaspora (cf. Hassanpour 1997, Argun 2003). They all do not discuss the particular role of the Internet for the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. Let's see what is the Kurdish internet in Germany is like.

4 Kurdish nation-building on the Internet in Germany: A Case Study

4.1 The Study Group: Kurds in Germany

The Kurds have a large diaspora with an estimated 1.2-1.5 million members in Europe. The overwhelming ma-

jority of them (700 000-800 000) live in Germany.[3] Their original homeland was divided by new state borders after World War I. This happened by reason of the establishment of Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq as nation-states. An independent Kurdish state was not established. During the 20th century, that national segregation caused a number of military uprisings by the Kurds in all four mentioned nation-states. The suppression of these revolts in all four states went along with, most of all, the deportation of entire Kurdish "tribes" into exile or a total ban on the Kurdish language and culture in the mentioned states. This led to an official assimilation policy, that in every instance following elicited revolt. During the 20th century millions of Kurds from Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria were pushed to leave their homes and head westward (cf. Amann 2001, Curtis 2005, Russel-Johnston 2006).

The Kurdish diaspora in Germany and in Europe plays an important cultural and political role for Kurds worldwide. Historically the Kurdish diaspora contributed pivotally to the development of a Kurdish national consciousness, both within the diaspora as well as in the home regions. For example, the Kurdish language, literature, and music were banned for a long time in Turkey. In response, members of the diaspora placed special worth on maintaining and developing Kurdish culture. Despite government bans and prosecution, Kurdish T.V. stations were established in Europe that transmitted in their homelands. Newspapers and journals were printed and distributed in their homelands through the Kurdish underground. At the same time, in the 1980s many scientific and cultural institutions were established for the development and research of Kurdish language, culture, and literature in Germany and throughout Europe[4] (cf. Bruinessen 2000, Ostergaard-

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[3] This number is an approximation due to the official admission reports, where German statistics report migrants' nationalities and not their ethnic backgrounds.

[4] The Kurdish Institutes in Berlin, Paris, and Brussels are only a few examples.

Nielsen 2001, Argun 2003, Van den Bos/Nell 2006, Navend 2008).

4.2 Method

For an empirical analysis of the effects of the Internet on the development of nationalism among the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, an online study was carried out in a time span of six weeks (from July 01st-August 15th 2008).[5] For this, four analytical steps were taken:

In the first step, we attempted to obtain, as complete as possible, an overview of the existing Kurdish websites in Germany. For these fifteen chosen word combinations (search strings) such as "Kurdish websites," "Kurdish politics," etc., were typed into the "Google" search engine in both German and Kurdish. The criteria for a selection were: first, a clear and identifiable reference to Germany (e.g., German language, domain.de, textual reference); second, a recognizable "Kurdish reference" for the site (e.g., Kurdish language or persons of Kurdish origin as site providers); third, a clear and identifiable political reference on the website (such as politics as a rubric or topic in discussions or articles, the website's motivation, name of the website).

To deal with the dynamic nature of the content and existence of Internet sites, the URLs of the relevant Kurdish websites were referenced in a special data file. Following this, a snapshot of the relevant websites was saved on a local file. Using this process, 103 websites that are relevant for the present study were found.[6] Ad-

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[5] The study was carried out as a part of the research project "Political potential of the internet- the virtual Diaspora of migrants from Russia and Turkey in Germany", funded by the Fritz-Thyssen-Foundation. The project was carried out between April 2007 and September 2008 at the Institute for Political Science at the University of Muenster/ Germany.

[6] It certainly must be added that the report cannot be called upon to have found and analyzed all of the relevant Kurdish websites with reference to Germany. Rather, the 103 selected sites repre-

ditionally, the 103 sites were evaluated by design elements, such as colors, music, symbols, maps, Kurdish history, and myths that are respectively represented on the start site or in the rubrics at the bottom of the website.

In a second step, we chose from these 103 relevant websites ten highly relevant websites with a strong political reference for a qualitatively detailed content analysis. On the one hand, the sites were analyzed regarding the formal aspects of Internet address and domain, information about the site provider, accessibility of all site components, available interaction products, and user frequency (through hits or via number of new submissions in a regulated period of time). We also analyzed political and contextual aspects of the site, including covered themes, cited information sources, central arguments, and continuing political activities.

Then, in the third step, a site provider and user poll was taken for the ten highly-relevant sites over a period of four weeks (July 15th - August 15th).[7] The survey of the ten website providers inquired about the motive, goals, target groups, migration background, networking and knowledge of similar political sites, as well as the evaluation of the political potential of these sites. Eight providers responded to the survey. With the polling of Kurdish users, on the other hand, the personal user behavior of the Internet regarding political themes took priority. Altogether, 136 users from Germany participated in the user poll for the selected websites.[8]

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sent, for an Internet user, the simplest and fastest findable Kurdish sites from Germany.

[7] It must be also added, that we did not ask about the political relationship or dependence of the polled providers and user to any kind of Kurdish political organisation or ideological group. The self determination of the polled users and providers as Kurds was for our study significant enough

[8] Those participants were not randomly selected for the survey. They voluntarily participated in the survey and carried it out in their own direction. Therefore these results are not representative of all Kurdish site users, because of a possible bias due to self-selection (cf. Kissau/Hunger 2009).

Finally, in the fourth step, we performed a link analysis of the 103 reviewed sites. This process produced data about the virtual networking of the various German-Kurdish websites, providing an indication of thematic proximity online, somewhat comparable with the performance of sources in scientific texts. Regarding the existing links between the websites, the user of the site will be referred to other websites with similar content. This refers to the navigation and "surf-behavior" of the user. Moreover, the number and quality of links on a site increases its relevance and transparency on the Internet making it easier and faster for search engines to find. Therefore, users can be steered more easily from other websites (McNally 2005: 3011).

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Constructing the "imagined nation" on the Internet

Elements: Symbols and Signs on the Websites

Anderson asserts that national identity is transported via symbols, myths and maps. If we look at the Kurdish websites one of the first findings we can see is that symbols and signs of Kurdistan, mostly the well known Kurdistan map[9], the Kurdish national flag, and the national colors, red, green and yellow, are dominant on the websites (see Figure 1). All 103 websites in the sample display at least one "national symbol", a "national figure," a "national site,"[10] or the "national flag" of the Kurds. These become much more conspicuous on

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[9] The map integrates the historical living spaces of the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria within a "national border." Also, this map is the product of a collective imagination of one common land, "Kurdistan," and never existed in the form under international law and never before as a unitary state.

[10] For example, Hasankeyf, a ruin in southeastern Turkey, is more than 3 000 years old.

the ten reviewed highly relevant websites. The "national symbols" can be already found in the web address (e.g. www.kurdistan-post.com), the site logo (e.g. www.palpalo.de, see Figure 1 or yxk-online.com) or in the rubrics at the bottom of the sites (e.g. the rubric "Kurdistan" for www.kurdmania.com).

The rubric history, culture, personages, myths, "national heroes," religions and "national sites" were located on almost all of the researched websites (forums, portals, web blogs). These rubrics have the function of prompting users of the websites to form their own historical home, and therefore to cultivate a common national identity. Through the agency of an equal knowledge about their own "nation" with a common history, national heroes, myths, and symbols, this national identity should by strengthened for the users. Therefore, these rubrics, alongside the agency of political as well as historical information, are granted a central role in the creation of a national consciousness (cf. also Bakker 2001, Diamandaki 2003, and Eriksen 2006).

Figure 1:　　　Logo of the Website „PalPalo.de"

Source: http://www.palpalo.de [05.02.2009].

Tools: Online- Newspapers/ Radios, Portals and Forums

Anderson states further that the main tools to spread the idea of a nation are mainly newspapers and Radio. It's highly interesting to see, that the tools used on the internet to create a digital Kurdish nation are also mainly

traditional media tools such as Newspapers and Radios, which are now transformed into Online-Newspapers, Online-Radios etc. However, thank to the internet, they can be reached now worldwide and anytime. Web blogs and personal homepages are much fewer to see (see Table 1). It should be noted that also the political reference was very distinct for all Kurdish websites.

Table 1:   Format of Kurdish political websites in Germany

	Percent of websites (N=103)
Portal	13.7
Online-Newspaper/ Radio	50.0
Web blog	11.8
Forum	17.6

Source: authors' data.

Online papers (e.g. www.kurdistan-post.com) contain current news of politics, culture, and development, especially in reference to Kurds and Kurdistan. On the online forums, e.g. www.rojakurd.de, Kurds, predominantly from the diaspora, exchange their opinions and experiences about political and cultural themes concerning Kurds and Kurdistan. For the information portals, e.g. www.efrin.net, www.amude.com and www.rizgari.com, the content was primarily about politics, economics, and social events in the Kurdish homeland as well as in the diaspora[11] The bloggers, e.g. www.kurdistan-blogg.de, discuss events in the context of Kurds and Kurdistan, but also about topics in their homelands and the diaspora.[12]

The primary goal of group and association sites (e.g. www.yekkom.com, www.komkar-info.org or

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[11]   Europe, U.S.A., Caucasus, and the Arabic world
[12]   For example, the discussions about the entry of Turkey into the E.U. and its consequences for the Kurdish minority in Turkey or the current politics of the Iraqi, Syrian, and Iranian governments vis-à-vis Kurdish minority or the banning of the broadcast station ROJ TV in Germany.

www.pen-kurd.org) is to promote awareness of the national Kurdish identity in the diaspora and to preserve this for a fair length of time.[13] The political activities of various Kurdish groups and organizations are announced by the other formats in multiple languages (German, English, French, Italian and Swedish languages dominate along with Kurdish, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish). Furthermore, most of the club and group sites report from Germany about current political themes (with reference to Kurds) or about the European diaspora and Kurdistan respectively.

Online communities (for example www.kurdos.de or www.palpalo.de) create another kind of Internet presence. These online communities are primarily harmonized with Kurds living in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. This becomes clear by the language options. The websites and the discussion forums are primarily in German. Kurdish is the second language. News, pictures, poems, and activity announcements are primarily provided in German. The forum discussion is also in German. The anomaly of these kinds of Internet presence is that alongside the already named subject area and access to music portals and photo galleries, they offer downloads. The contents are often free of charge and include Kurdish music and pictures from historical sites (e.g. Hasankeyf or the Diyarbekir Castle) or landscapes in "Kurdistan".

A newer form of web presence is the online encyclopedia (e.g. kurdica.com). According to the provider, the site illuminates the "culture, language, religion, and history of the Kurds, in all their lands of ancestry and in the diaspora."[14]

As aforementioned, the predominant majority of the forms of Kurdish online content have a few central points of commonality:

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[13]   This comes from the exact analysis of the rubric "About us" on the sites, or the information of the polled user.

[14]   http://www.kurdica.com [30.11.2008].

1. In almost all sites the common Kurdish history, society, politics, language, literature, and historical sites (e.g. Hasankeyf in Turkey) and personages are discussed at length. Background information on the various "massacres" of the Kurds (e.g. "Enfal campaign" in Iraq during the 1980s) are extensively covered as well.
2. The users have access to Kurdish television and radio (e.g. ROJ TV, Kurd 1, or Denge-Mesopotamia Radio) on most of the Internet sites. Additionally, the websites serve their own television and radio programs or link to documentation on German television that deals with Kurdish issues.
3. A majority of the Internet content appeals for demonstrations, petition campaigns, and political/cultural activities such as seminars and concerts designed around the themes of Kurdistan and the Kurdish cause that can be found in the online and offline world.

Online events (Seminars, schooling, panel discussions, concerts)

The websites are offering the users advanced opportunities on the websites to strengthen the communities "we consciousness". In addition to the detailed representations of Kurdish history, symbols and myths, the user is also provided with scores of training and advanced training possibilities. These are in the forms of online seminars, language courses, virtual conferences and concerts. Users from Germany and throughout the world can access the products. Furthermore, they can exchange information about topics such as Kurdish identity, culture, politics, and the diaspora.

Content

Anderson argues in a later interview (cf. euro topics, Monday, August 6, 2007) that the Internet especially gives migrant groups the ability to communicate on a day-to-day base with their home region, allowing the development of "long-distance nationalism" within the migrant communities. This assumes that the online activity keeps the home region in the forefront of the minds of the community members, leading us to expect that the focus of the websites is mainly the home region of the community. Our analysis of the contextual bias of the German-Kurdish websites shows that the Kurdish home region and the territorial states are at the center of the topic selection of the 103 studied websites (with 92.2%). An international content is likewise very clear. Often, this is the case when international news or events deal directly or indirectly with Kurds or "Kurdistan." In addition to the content regarding the home region, Germany is also in the center, but certainly the content predominantly refers to Kurds. The Kurdish diaspora in Germany forms, with its political and cultural activities, another central focus of the websites (13.3%).

Throughout most of the websites, forums, blogs, and discussion forums, the topic "politics" is dominant, particularly "Kurdistan" and the Kurdish question. It is noted that there is already a recognizable political reference in the name.[15] With more than 80.4% of the websites, the political reference was already detected in the rubric "About Us." Also bottom rubrics, thematic blocks, and online brochures are predominantly biased towards political content. They have a contextual central focus on "Kurdistan" and the Kurdish culture (history, myths and symbols)

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[15]   with more than half of the websites

Actors

It is also interesting to see who the creators of the websites are: Our Analysis of the providers of the Kurdish websites in Germany shows that the providers are often associations and non-commercial organizations such as NGOs and political parties (more than 55%), and individuals (more than 32%). Thus, it is evident that especially the German-Kurdish diaspora associations frequently support online newspapers and information portals. They are the driving force behind web blogs, encyclopedias, forums, and online communities. Commercial websites made up only 4% of the German Kurdish Internet sites (see Table 2).

Table 2: Providers of Kurdish political websites with reference to Germany

	Percent of websites (N=103)
Association/non-commercial Organizations	55.4
Individual/private	32.7
Commercial Organizations	4.0
Not clearly recognizable	6.9

Source: authors' data.

The majority of the providers fled their home region because of their commitment to their Kurdish identity. The providers of the ten polled Kurdish websites are all first-generation immigrants who entered Germany as political refugees at the beginning of the 1990s. They maintain the status of politically recognized refugees or have already in part German citizenship. An overwhelming majority of them (nine out of ten) have a degree or study. The majority of providers operate the websites in their free time. In explaining their motivations for running their websites, the majority of the providers stated that they want to contribute something by themselves to the creation and support of the Kurdish national identity. All providers made clear that the roll

of "Kurdistan" in their political and social online and offline activities enjoys top priority. The following statement of a provider for an online newspaper brings this to the point: "In my whole life I've been active for the freedom of Kurdistan. Kurdistan plays a central role for me."

4.3.2 Representing the "Imagined Nation" to the Global Public

Networking of the websites

The tools used to present the Kurdish nation to global public are mainly networking, the use of various languages on one website and campaigning on the websites.

A link analysis of the 103 studied Kurdish sites shows that most Kurdish sites are linked to each other. Alongside the actual linkages between the German Kurdish sites, there is also a special collection of links that lead users to worldwide Kurdish websites. These contain data and texts about the history, society, culture, and politics of the Kurds. This special collection of international links creates a kind of online archive that can be accessed at any time worldwide. An excellent example of this type of link is the site www.akakurdistan.com, where the provider states that, because the Kurds have no nation-state of their own and therefore no national archive: "This site, a borderless space, provides the opportunity to build a collective memory with a people who have no national archive" (www.akakurdistan.com, 02.12.2008).

Our link analysis shows that the Kurdish websites are very strongly linked internationally. Thus, there are links between Kurdish websites in all European countries as well as Kurdish websites from North America, Caucasus, and the Middle East. This makes the international content of the Kurdish Internet distinct. Many

domain addresses of the Kurdish websites end with
.org, .com, or .net and relatively few with .de.

The Internet appears to facilitate the cohesion of
Kurdish migrants in Germany, according to our survey
of providers. The statements of the following providers
are typical for the gross majority of the polled Kurdish
website providers: "[…] one knows the other and al-
ready exchanges information among themselves and
then publicizes it each time on his or her website […]";
"we have different political opinions and paths, but we
often exchange our experiences, provide technical help
and political solidarity if need be, and sometimes even
campaign together."

Language

Another tool to represent the Kurdish nation to the
global public is the use of various languages on one
website. A phenomenon, observable in the Kurdish web
presence, is that many sites (38.2%) are available in
various languages. Therefore, they are not only in Kur-
dish or German, but also in English, French, Spanish,
Italian, Swedish, Arabic, or Persian, to name a few ex-
amples. "Kurdistan" and the Kurdish question always
take centre stage on these sites. It is interesting that the
sites partially differ in the content. It is also remarkable
that, for example, the German version often includes
topics regarding the Kurds and Kurdistan in Germany
and Europe. The Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic, and Persian
versions arrive primarily at the topics what are played
out in the Kurdish homelands. This altogether leads to
the assumption, that the versions of the sites, which use
the language of their resident lands, are themed more on
foreign affairs (from a Kurdish perspective). In the
meantime, there are definitely more topics available in
the languages from the region (Kurdish, Turkish, Per-
sian, and Arabic) which are concerned with domestic
policy (from a Kurdish perspective). Examples of such

multi-lingual sites are www.pen-kurd.org, www.yxk-online.com, www.rizgari.com or www.efrin.net.

Campaigns

A very common tool for trying to influence the international politics via Internet is to organize online campaigns. Our study shows, that there is a high presence of online- campaigns, petitions, appeals, signature accumulations, and so forth on the researched Kurdish websites. Alone in the summer of 2008, a number of campaigns ran on the Kurdish sites from Germany. For this, the online campaigns "Save Hasankeyf" and "End the German ban on ROJ TV" are good examples. They run on many of the researched Kurdish websites, and to some extent, on social networks, such as studivz.net and MySpace. For the first campaign, the German and Swiss governments were petitioned to back down from the financing of a retaining dam building project in southeastern Turkey. In the frame of the Turkish government's planned dam project, the "Hasankeyf" archeological site in southeastern Turkey would be buried. Along with that, more than 100 Kurdish villages in the region would have to be relocated. The second online campaign opposes the ban on the Kurdish broadcast station-in-exile, ROJ TV, in Germany. The ban was declared through a resolution passed by the German Department of the Interior (cf. Hahn 2008)

Reception

As already noted, along with the analysis of the 103 relevant websites for this study and the poll of the providers of the 10 selected Kurdish websites, 136 users were also surveyed through an online questionnaire about their Internet behavior. A variety of questions about the political interest and activities of the Internet users was posed. Their responses indicate that nation

building, which is accelerated through the providers, is also welcomed, required, and accelerated by the users themselves. This is displayed in the political interests of the users of the Kurdish websites. They – as did the studied site providers – concentrated on themes from their home lands and concerning "Kurdistan." In the survey, the overwhelming majority of the users (91.1%) predominantly showed interest in the politics of their home lands (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria (see Table 3).

Table 3:   Paramount political interests of Kurdish Internet users in Germany

	Percent of Kurdish Internet Users in Germany (N=135)
Homeland	91.1
Country of Residence	8.9

Source: authors' data.

It also became clear that the users of the ten websites are very politically active. For example, 83.6 percent of those polled stated that they have already discussed politics. More than 70 percent have written letters-to-the-editor or a guestbook entry with political content. 72.9 percent of the users have participated in online campaigns such as signature collections, fundraisers, and electronic petitions. Also, more than half of those polled, 56 percent have participated in an online demonstration or a voting procedure. 33.8 percent said that they have already written an e-mail to a politician (see Table 4).

Table 4:   Political activity of the Kurdish Internet users
from Germany

	Percent of Kurdish Internet users from Germany (N=133)
Discussed Politics in a Forum/Chatroom	83.6
Composed a Letter-to-the-Editor or Guestbook Entry	70.7
Participated in a Signature Collection or Fundraiser	72.9
Participated in an Online Vote	56.0
Sent an E-mail to a Politician	33.8

Source: authors' data.

Clearly, web-based activity plays an important role in the political process. One sees, for example, that the majority of the surveyed Kurdish online users have already tried to inform others about political events (79.9%). Furthermore, they report persuading others with their own political mindset (58.6%). Many of them (60.0%) have attracted online participants for political offline events, or have even organized political action on the Internet by themselves (see Table 5).

Table 5:   Impact of political Internet activity of Kurdish
Internet users in Germany

	Percent of Kurdish Internet users in Germany (N=136)
Informed Others about Political Events	79.9
Persuaded Someone with Their Own Political Mindset	58.6
Won Participants for Offline Political Events or Have Themselves Organized Political Action Online	60.0

Source: authors' data.

5   Conclusion

As already mentioned in the introduction, in Benedict Anderson's theory, the nation is an "imagined community" (or "imagined nation"). The togetherness of a community, its imaginativeness about togetherness and identification with the "nation" about myths, history, symbol, and figures, is renewed. According to Anderson, the dissemination occurs predominantly through the print media. The present article arrives at the conclusion that in many cases the Internet assumes the role of print media nowadays. By reason of the local-independence and speed of communication, the process of nation-building is made easier. The case study of the Internet's use by the Kurdish diaspora in Germany supports this assumption.

The Internet takes a central role for the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. In its efforts to maintain the historical home "Kurdistan" in Kurdish collective memory, it is creating a national identity. The German Kurds are distinctly instrumental in the formation of a homeland and in maintaining the cohesion of a diaspora community. This diaspora-identity is also strengthened through online communication by other Kurdish migrants worldwide. Therefore, the Internet can be distinguished in this case study as a vehicle of nation-building by a diaspora community without its own nation-state in Germany.

Our research shows that there already exists a "virtual Kurdistan" with virtual national borders. These borders have never existed in the real world. The overwhelming majority of site providers and users clearly acknowledge these borders, but they are not existent as an independent state under international law.

It also appears that the Kurdish diaspora in Germany, through the political group interests in the digital world, the linking among themselves, and through collectively organized campaigns, as well as in their lands of residence and also by international organizations, have achieved an influence over international politics.

Furthermore, the diaspora communicates through different languages on the websites of the world community.[16] With this kind of Internet appearance, political and cultural campaigns (e.g. demonstrations, conferences, and exhibits) are also organized in the offline world. This is a concrete sign that there is a connection between the online and offline world. Both merge into each other. The Internet disseminates the existing collective identity and powerful symbols across geographical distances. This creates a national consciousness what is comparable with national consciousness in the offline world (that, according to Anderson, is "only" imagined).

Another highly interesting finding is that there exists a long-distance-nationalism, described by Benedict Anderson, within the digital Kurdish diaspora. The Kurdish diaspora is monitoring the daily political activities in their countries of origin (Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey). Through Internet campaigns, which are related to the political situation of the Kurds in their countries of origin, they are participating (via campaigns in cyberspace) in the political discussions regarding the situation of Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria.

A comparison of our findings to current literature on the Kurdish diaspora and new media demonstrates that there are not other particular studies which have analyzed the online identity formation process of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. However, the "virtual nation Kurdistan" is also analyzed in previous studies in the Netherlands (cf. Van den Bos/ Nell 2006) and in parts in the United States (Argun 2003). A comparison to studies that have analyzed the identity building process of migrant groups in Germany on the Internet (cf. Sökefeld 2002) demonstrates that the Kurdish digital diaspora is highly political active, while other groups, analyzed in other studies (for instance Alevis in

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[16] With the help of multilingualism, stakeholders within the digital Diaspora seek to inform policy makers about the interests and problems of the Kurds.

Sökefeld's 2002 study), are more active in building a collective cultural identity.

It can be concluded, that the Internet has enhanced Benedict Anderson's idea of nation building (via faster transport of symbols, myths and history on the Internet). In the case of the Kurdish diaspora the Internet:

1. Offers the possibility to create a national Kurdish archive online. In the offline world a creation of national archive for all Kurds is currently not possible,

2. offers a freedom of opinion and a freedom of speech for the Kurds, which is partially marked illegal in the offline world

3. makes a broader reach of the political ideas regarding nationalism of Kurdish political groups/organizations possible and

4. connects the Kurdish diaspora with the daily politics of their home region (Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran) and with diaspora members all over the world.

Lastly, diaspora communities without their own nation-states are not the sole "stakeholders" that aspire to nation-building on the Internet. Other studies (cf. McCreadie/James 1998 in Geser 2004, Bernal 2006 and Ding 2007) demonstrate that both older and newer states consciously cultivate online nation-building within their diasporas.

A good example of state-sponsored nation-building is China. Its foreign office maintains Internet specialists for this purpose. With a strong presence within the targeted, worldwide, and digital Chinese diaspora, the office advocates national consciousness of all Chinese throughout the world. Thereby, the government hopes for (through raising awareness for China within the diaspora) active lobbying by the digital diaspora for Chinese politics in their host countries. Also, it would like to win investment from the diaspora for China (cf. Ding 2007).

Eritrea is another example of a (young) state that also utilizes the possibilities of the Internet. That's espe-

cially the case in the nation-building process to link its worldwide diaspora after independence in May 1993. The Internet is used by the digital Eritrean diaspora to conduct discussions about the new state (cf. Bernal 2006). It is also relevant that the Internet harbors a potential to advocate for pan-nationalistic structures. Therefore, the "national" structure stands no longer in the foreground, but in a common language-based "imagined community." A concrete example can be the Internet appearance of Spanish-speaking immigrants from South- and Latin America in the USA. Compared to the predominant Anglo-Saxon mainstream media, it supports their "special identity" on Internet sites in Spanish. Therefore, the national homeland identity (e.g. Mexican, Cuban, Uruguayan, and Argentine) is exchanged for a "pan-Latino" identity moored only in the common language of Spanish (cf. McCreadie/James 1998 in Geser 2004). The possibilities of Benedict Anderson's "imagined nation" have obtained a new dimension through Internet.

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