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**Solidarity on the Internet
A Study of Electronic Mailing Lists**

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Abstract

The thesis investigates how a specific Internet technology is being used to build solidarity with a political movement in the Americas: the struggle to end the "internal colonialism" of the Indigenous peoples and nations. The research can be situated within the field of alternative global media and communications.

Electronic mailing lists are a popular method of group communication on the Internet. Mailing lists – also known by the names of the most common software programs, Listserv and Majordomo – allow the interactive, automatic exchange of e-mail among a specific group of Internet users. Mailing lists are collaborative media, a fairly new media form in which the content is produced as part of the communication process.

Since 1989, electronic mailing lists have been used as a media and communications channel for the public exchange of commentary and news related to the situation of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas; the study is an analysis of the current activity. The research method included a literature search and a survey of 15 mailing lists on this topic conducted in early 1995. Research ethics were a primary concern. Research questions focused on defining the essential features of the technology, the basic characteristics of the creators and users of the mailing lists, and the solidarity functions of the lists.

The analysis is critical of the popular view of the Internet, the vision that the technology itself is democratic and to use it will encourage democratic social relations. Some undemocratic aspects of the technology and communication process are discussed. A concluding chapter contains suggestions for making the mailing list process more effective.

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I would like to thank all those friends and colleagues who have helped me understand various situations, relations and ideas discussed in this study. Mahsi. Gracias. Meegwetch. Thank you.

Declarations

This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Journalism Studies.

This dissertation is the result of my own independent work and investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A bibliography is included.

I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organizations.

Susan O'Donnell
August 1, 1995

If you have come here to help me,
You are wasting your time ...
But if you have come because
Your liberation is bound up with mine,
Then let us work together.

– *Aboriginal woman, anonymous.*

Pessimism of the intellect
optimism of the will.

– *European man, famous.*

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1. Introduction

Overview

The catalyst for this thesis was the author's interest in how the Internet, a new media and communication channel, could be used strategically to build public support for the self-determination goals of the Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas.

Just why a "new" media and communication channel is necessary for this purpose was highlighted by Lorna Roth's (1992) analysis of how the mainstream media handled the "Oka crisis" in 1990. The event began similarly to other confrontations that now occur regularly in Canada – Indigenous community members and activists blocking a road to protest a development project on their territory – but it ended in a six-week confrontation between armed Mohawk activists and a contingent of 2,500 Canadian soldiers. The media institutions in Canada, caught off-guard with only a handful of journalists who knew enough about the "Mohawk self-determination" issue to be able to explain to the public what was going on, resorted to sensationalizing the violent aspects of the confrontation and downplaying attempts for a peaceful negotiated solution. Roth concluded that:

If Canadians have learned anything from the Mohawk/government confrontation, it is that no cultural community is monolithic and that *all* peoples must work respectfully to build new bridges to mediate intra- and intercultural differences. Furthermore, every conceivable peaceful means to facilitate this (re)construction process must be used. And when these bridges are built with the support of more enlightened Canadian journalists, the passageways across them must be left as free and undistorted as possible. (1992:160)

Canada has treaty relationships with many Indigenous nations. The researcher, a Canadian citizen of Irish and French heritage, shares with Roth an interest in finding new ways to increase respect for these relationships and support for the self-determination process. For more than five years now, an Internet technology has

been used as a communication channel linking Indigenous peoples and others in the Americas. The research will investigate this activity to understand how it works to encourage solidarity with Indigenous peoples.

The technology studied is interactive, automatic electronic mail, commonly known as electronic mailing lists. The focus is on mailing lists that encourage solidarity with Indigenous peoples but the findings will to some extent be relevant to mailing lists set up to support other self-determination struggles. It is hoped that this study will be a useful analysis on how global alternative media can be used to support democratic social change.

The research data were collected from a literature review and from a survey of 15 mailing lists conducted in early 1995. The remainder of this chapter is a discussion of other research in the field, the survey method, and the background to the issue. The next chapter introduces the research subjects by profiling two of the mailing lists surveyed. Chapter three analyses the essential features of the mailing list technology. Analysis of the survey data is the focus of chapters four and five. The concluding chapter contains suggestions for making the mailing list process more effective.

Related research

The literature search produced only one reference to previous research on mailing lists and few references to research on other e-mail communications conducted outside a laboratory or institutional setting. In part, this lack of research is understandable because the Internet is a new communications medium, but there was also a lack of social science research on telecommunications in general, and in particular on how telecommunications have been used to support movements for democratic social change. In *When Telephones Reach the Village*, the landmark study of the role of telecommunications in rural development, Heather Hudson recalled "hearing about the importance of two-way communications again and again as I investigated the requirements for communications among native people in Canada's remote north," and leaving the North wondering why she had not learned

about the role of two-way electronic communication in graduate school. (Hudson, 1984:xiii) She pointed out that funding for mass media research has most often come from broadcasters and advertisers, government agencies and foundations, or international organizations interested in how the powerful electronic media of radio and television could be harnessed for the purpose of commerce, education or development. On the other hand, research on two-way telecommunications has largely been ignored by social scientists and left to engineers, for whom the criteria used to assess the benefits are based on direct return on investment. "As revenues generally easily exceeded costs by a comfortable margin, there was little incentive to look for benefits beyond those which turned up on the balance sheet." (Hudson, 1984:6) Specifically, Winston (1995) has observed that "technologists are, for the most part, neither adept at nor trained for refined understanding of social relations and cultural forms, and the humanists, for the most part, do not understand how the technology works." In addition, Waterman (1990:77) has pointed out that although there has been a dramatic growth in "alternative" or "democratic" communication globally – among groups which tend to criticize capitalism, such as the environmental, peace, women's, consumer, Third-World-aid, human-rights and new labour movements – there is a general absence of either theory or strategy on alternative international communication.

Among the few references to previous research that turned up in the literature search, most relevant to this study was Hiram Sachs' (1995) ethnographic study of opinion-formation on the PeaceNet computer network based on data collected through interviews with network subscribers. The messages studied were posted on PeaceNet "conferences," or databases which are collaborative media with a static form unlike mailing lists. Particularly relevant were Sachs' findings regarding the centrality of conversation to opinion-formation, the cooperative and reflective nature of the messages posted, and his observations regarding the potential benefits of "lurking" on the network.

Kenneth Laudon's *Communications Technology and Democratic Participation* (1977), a critical analysis of the democratic-participant experiments using new communication technologies which took place in the US in the 1960s, highlighted the importance of universal access and of linking the communication process to political

action. The focus was an experiment he conducted in the early 1970s to find out if the strategic use of telephone conference calls could improve the internal political process of a US League of Women Voters state chapter with 10,000 members. His study raises questions about why the original electronic communication network, the telephone system, has rarely been used strategically to its full potential to support democratic social movements.

The only reference found to previous research on electronic mailing lists was an article in a dairy science journal; the article arrived after the analysis for this study was completed. The research focused on *Dairy-L*, a mailing list established in 1990 to exchange information among professionals advising dairy producers, and was conducted by researchers who had access to the complete history of the *Dairy-L* communication process. (Varner and Cady, 1993) Although the purpose of *Dairy-L* was clearly unrelated to the purpose of the mailing lists discussed in this study, the research focus and the methodology was similar. The researchers shared a common concern: how the mailing list technology could be a more effective tool for group communication. The few research findings relevant to this study will be discussed in later chapters.

After a review of the literature, the researcher decided that the outcome of the project should be an analysis of the mailing list process: a review of the technology itself, a profile of its users, and an assessment of its solidarity functions.

Method

The literature search included a keyword search on the ISI Data Service at Bath University (BIDS database), including the SCI, SSCI and A&HCI Citation Indexes (science, social science, and arts and humanities) covering 7,000 journals worldwide; a keyword search on the BLOPAC database of the holdings of the British Library; an Internet gopher search; and a review of the media, communications and development journals held at the UWCC libraries. This search turned up many references to background materials used to analyze the survey data.

As noted earlier, the literature search produced only one relevant reference to previous research on mailing lists. A survey of the mailing lists themselves seemed the most promising method for collecting data. Sachs (1995) observed that computer networks offer an encouraging environment for content analysis because all the messages are archived, making it possible to analyze changes over time. The mailing lists appeared to be even more "encouraging" for survey-based research because the technology allows information about the mailing lists to be easily collected. In fact so many quality data were potentially available by the survey method that the question of research ethics immediately presented itself, for two reasons. Although all the data collected were "public" data in that the mailing lists are a public media, and the mailing list technology is designed to provide the data to anyone with Internet access who sends a message asking for them, mailing lists are also a communications forum, and compiling data on participants without their knowledge raises concerns about privacy. The second ethical concern was a general criticism of social science survey research because the knowledge it provides gives power to those in control and can lead to an abuse of power. (de Vaus, 1986:9) This criticism has been levelled directly at researchers writing about how the Internet is being used in solidarity with the struggle in Chiapas. Harry Cleaver (1995) has pointed out the potential dangers of making this kind of analysis available to military consultants and right-wing groups who do not support the Maya uprising. Both ethical concerns were resolved to some extent by following guidelines suggested by Anderson and Gansneder (1995). The survey was designed to look at broad categories of users and not individual users, no data was compiled on an individual user, and individuals or

organizations were not named unless they are well-known outside the Internet community. The subscriber names appearing on the sample messages are fictitious.

The survey was designed and conducted following procedures outlined in D.A. de Vaus (1986). Lewis' (1993a) guidelines on methodologies for research on alternative media were helpful, particularly his suggestion to ask questions that focus less on the "effects" of the media and more on the factors involved in the success or failure of the media process. The survey produced descriptive data which were analyzed with the background materials found in the literature search.

The survey period was 50 days from February to April, 1995. The research subjects were 15 mailing lists for news and discussion of issues concerning the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, representing the most well-known and popular mailing lists and others on this topic. Data were collected from four sources. First, the subscriber listings (e-mail addresses of subscribers to the lists) supplied by the mailing list software allowed a profile to be drawn of the subscribers' geographical location and Internet service provider, and the stability of the subscription base; these listings were available from eight of the 15 lists. Second, a listing made by the researcher of all the subscribers who sent messages allowed the calculation of ratios such as the percentage of subscribers who sent messages. Third, all the messages circulating on the lists during the survey period were collected, allowing data to be compiled about the activity on the lists; by day 50, 2,344 messages had been archived, filling 12 floppy diskettes with almost 12mb of data. The fourth source of data was a basic content analysis on a sample of 200 of the messages collected; the sample was selected with simple random sampling techniques and the researcher is confident the sample was representative of the larger population.

The three primary and two secondary research questions were as follows:

Primary questions:

1. What are the essential features of the mailing list technology?
2. What are the basic characteristics of the creators and users of the mailing lists?

3. How do the mailing lists function as media and communications for solidarity?

Secondary questions:

a. What are the implications of these findings for the communication process itself?

b. What are the implications of these findings for solidarity activities?

Background

Over the past few decades, international law has increasingly recognized the right to self-determination of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. (Morris, 1992; Barsh 1986 and 1989) In Latin America, where ethnic homogeneity was considered a necessary precondition in the creation of the nation-state, the goal of the movement for self-determination in the "mestizo" nation-states has been described as the creation of a multi-national state that acknowledges "the free self-determination of Indigenous peoples and the embodiment of those rights through the creation of autonomous regions." (Abya Yala News, 1994:29) In North America, where many Indigenous nations have treaty relationships with Canada or the United States, the core agenda of the movement for self-determination has been described as: "recovery of lands and resources, reassertion of self-determining forms of government, and reconstitution of traditional social relations within our nations." (Jaimes and Halsey, 1992:336)

Achieving these goals will obviously be easier with widespread public support. For this reason, Indigenous leaders have called on all peoples to actively support the struggle. The recipient of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, the Guatemalan Maya Indian leader Rigoberta Menchu – raised in the harsh world of peasant tenant farming and who lived through the torture and murder of her brother, mother and father for their political organizing activities – has on numerous occasions called for allies in the struggle to end the "internal colonialism" of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. In his address to the delegates of the United Nations to mark the 1993 Year of

Indigenous People, Haudenosaunee speaker Oren Lyons ended his description of the struggles in North America – including nuclear and toxic waste dumps on Indian lands, treaty violations, and appropriation of lands and resources – by calling for all peoples to "join hands with the rest of creation and speak of common sense, responsibility, brotherhood, and peace." (Lyons, 1992)

For more than a decade, and especially since the period leading up to the historic 1993 year, opportunities have been increasing for interaction and dialogue among peoples, including informal settings such as the hundreds of powwows annually in North America as well as gatherings and events in both North and Latin America. At least several hundred local, regional, national and international groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are currently working in solidarity with Indigenous peoples and nations in Latin America and North America. (In this study, the North American country of Mexico is grouped with Latin America for historical and cultural reasons.) The international NGOs include the World Rainforest Movement, the Gaia Foundation, Cultural Survival, Survival International, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. International labour and monetary organizations, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank have made substantive commitments to forging stronger links. The United Nations Organization has recognized that "indigenous organizations should be involved in all stages, in the design, implementation, supervision and monitoring of projects within or affecting their traditional lands and territories." (Plant, 1992:23)

Coinciding with the growth of this solidarity and networking activity is a gradual change in the way international development organizations are using the media for "development." Professionals in the field of development communication have been distancing themselves from the development support communication activities associated with earlier, now discredited, projects which attempted to use the mass media to transform Third World societies into Western-style "democracies." (Mody, 1991) The roots of the new approach can be traced to the work of Paulo Freire (1972), the Brazilian educator who believed that human liberation is a political struggle against the forces of dehumanizing colonization and that the role of the educator is to work with oppressed people in a lifelong struggle to remove the causes of the oppression. The most progressive development communication professionals

are now advocating an approach which places peoples' needs at the centre of the equation. In particular, Cecil Blake has highlighted the potential of the new information and communication technologies for Indigenous communities in Latin America; these communities should take the lead in articulating their vision, and the task of development communication professionals should be to help make this vision a reality by "devising communication strategies appropriate for achieving that which they have determined to be their destiny." (Blake, 1993:11)

The past five years have seen an explosive increase in the number of people who use the Internet to communicate. The word "Internet" here refers to the global network of computers that can exchange electronic mail. Indigenous peoples are now a significant presence on the Internet. The Nation of Hawai`i recently published "Self-Determination in the Information Age," a manifesto for using the Internet for networking and solidarity work. (Crawford and Crawford, 1995) In South, Central and North America, Indigenous peoples are setting up public information sites on the Internet over which they have complete control and using existing sites and networks for their own purposes, including solidarity networking. (O'Donnell and Delgado, 1995) Prominent in Latin America are the leaders of the Maya uprising in Chiapas who use the Internet to network with supporters around the world. (Cleaver, 1994) As early as 1984, key international NGOs had signed an agreement to use computers to exchange information, thereby creating an environment for the emergence of non-profit computer networks. (Murphy, 1994:95) The most significant non-profit computer network to emerge is the APC system (Association for Progressive Communications) which by the early 1990s provided environmental, peace and solidarity organizations with a global computer link. By 1995 the APC affiliate networks in the Americas were carrying five active "conference" sites where APC subscribers could exchange news and information related to the struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the US and Latin America.

The Internet is a matrix of thousands of inter-connected computer networks, of which many are non-commercial systems; however, by mid-1995, the Internet could be understood as the public face of a private, global communications system owned and used largely by transnational corporations. It first appeared in 1969 as a small computer network set up by the US defense department to improve communications

with its defense industry and university researchers working on military contracts; the network was later extended to the wider university sector. By the mid-1980s, the backbone of the emerging Internet, the US government-controlled high-speed NSFNET, was opening up to the private sector, which by that time had developed more than 1,000 independent computer communication networks and needed the backbone to link up more efficiently. Increased efficiency was necessary, it should be pointed out, because the transnational economic system, characterized by the division of labour between the production sites of large corporations, "is unthinkable without high-capacity international communication networks." (van Dijk, 1993:398) As late as 1991 it still appeared that the Internet backbone would remain under government control. (Hart et al, 1992). However, the US corporate sector has never wavered in its desire for the "maximization of private control both of information systems and the data coursing through them." (Schiller and Fregoso, 1991:198) The progression to a private Internet was secured in May, 1995, when the US government handed over its control of the backbone to the private sector.

There is clearly a paradox here: "a contradictory position between the obvious potential benefits of systematically applying information technology to community development, and the prevailing market forces which makes the challenge ever-more important and difficult." (Graham, 1994:91) Computer communication is made increasingly important by the growing information-intensity of networking and solidarity work, and the falling cost of computers and Internet access make computer communication more affordable. At the same time, the dominance of private market forces on the Internet means that corporate profits will increasingly be the factor that determines who gets access to the Internet and who is left out. In fact, the demographics of users responding to the most comprehensive Internet survey to date – 90 percent were men, 87 percent were white, 70 percent lived in North America, 33 percent had a university degree, and almost 50 percent used a computer more than 40 hours a week (GVU, 1994) – indicate that the Internet is a communications medium more for the "haves" than the "have-nots."

The fact that the Internet is inextricably linked with the transnational corporate sector of the economy has further implications for Indigenous peoples and their territories. Because land is the principal source of livelihood for most of the world's Indigenous

peoples, large capital investments in a region may disrupt their economic systems and activities. The uneven development within nation-states promoted by traditional investment and development strategies has heightened the historical power imbalances between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the population. (Guppy, 1992)

In particular, the disastrous attempts at large-scale development in areas of Latin America and Canada's North have resulted in the dislocation and resettlement of Indigenous communities and irreparable destruction of their territories. In light of this recent history, one cannot help but view announcements of the planned mega-development of the Internet with more suspicion than optimism – for example, the news that Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft Corporation, has filed plans with the FCC in the US to build a \$9 billion satellite system "to bring modern communications technology to the poorest and most remote regions of the Earth." (IPS, 1994) Clearly, use of the Internet for solidarity work must be accompanied by informed, strategic thinking.

Divisions are already forming between planners with different visions for the Internet, and perhaps not surprisingly, these divisions are along North-South lines. Roberto Bissio has pointed out that: "the 'information highway' being constructed in the US will provide every American high school with a greater 'bandwidth' for data communication than what is presently available in entire countries the size of Argentina." (Bissio, 1993:27) This North-South division can also be conceptualized as a division within the Internet itself: first, there is the global storehouse of information accessed through the World Wide Web (WWW), essentially available only to Internet users who can plug into the Internet backbone; and second, there is electronic mail, the lowest common denominator available to all Internet users. The focus of corporate interest in the Internet is the WWW, the base from which media and entertainment products can be sold. Roberto Bissio believes that "most of the research and development into information products and applications currently being undertaken is likely to be completely irrelevant for Third World situations" because the infrastructure needed to deliver these products – high-capacity, high-speed data links – are essentially located in the First World; for this reason, Bissio has proposed a "low-end," e-mail approach to alternative Internet communications. (1993:29)

E-mail has consistently been the most popular use of the Internet, but it has been virtually ignored by the media and entertainment corporations lining up for their slice of the "information superhighway," presumably because the potential for large profits would appear to be in developing high-volume applications to be delivered to consumers through other forms of data transfer. Electronic mail capabilities were added as an "afterthought" to the original computer network but e-mail quickly became the most-used service. (Quarterman, 1993:38) In 1977, the mailing list technology was developed. The physical core of the specific technology discussed in this study can be described today as a software program (common programs are Listserv, Listproc, Majordomo and Mailbase) which can be loaded onto a computer, making the computer capable of interactive, automatic distribution of electronic mail among a specific group of Internet users. Mailing lists are one of the most popular methods of group communication on the Internet; many thousands of free mailing lists exist for exchanges on different topics, mailing lists that can be accessed free-of-charge by anyone with an Internet address.

The first mailing list for discussion of issues concerning Indigenous peoples began running in 1989 from a home-based computer system in the US. This mailing list was transferred to a computer at a US university in 1991 and has evolved into NativeNet, home to six mailing lists for different aspects of Indigenous issues, such as health, education, languages, and general news and discussion. (Personal communication with NativeNet listowner, 1993) The most popular is *Native-l*, one of the mailing lists surveyed in this study. By mid-1995, at least two dozen different mailing lists existed for the purpose of exchanging commentary and information concerning the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, running on computers located in Canada, the US, or Mexico. Fifteen of these lists were the subject of the survey research. Two will be profiled in the next chapter: *Chiapas-l*, set up to support the Maya uprising in Chiapas; and *Nativelit-l*, established as a forum for discussion of Native American literature.

Mailing lists are collaborative media, a fairly new media form in which the media content is, generally speaking, produced by participants as part of the communication process. The mailing list technology allows interactive communication over vast distances among many participants. The possibilities of two-way electronic media

have inspired communication theorists such as Bertolt Brecht (1930), Hans Magnus Enzenberger (1970), Oskar Negt (1978), Dallas Smythe (in Bruck and Raboy, 1989:9), and Peter Waterman (1990), all of whom have suggested the radical potential of a communications medium which would allow each message receiver to be a potential message sender. However, the mailing list technology is similar to other telecommunications technologies in that its invention, development and diffusion in society is a response to the dominant social relations of the times. (Winston, 1986) Earlier in this discussion, the suggestion was made that the growth of the Internet is not a benevolent attempt to bring an information highway to the masses but a complement to a global economic system increasingly dominated by transnational corporations concerned primarily with maximizing profits. The extent to which the mailing list technology and process reflect the dominant social relations, and the ways in which the mailing lists are being used to challenge these relations – specifically, to challenge colonialism and to support the self-determination struggles of Indigenous peoples and nations – is the focus of this study.

2. The research subjects: Profiles of two mailing lists

This chapter will briefly introduce the research subjects by profiling two of the mailing lists surveyed, focusing on how these lists serve a solidarity function. In part, the purpose of this brief description is to illustrate that each mailing list is a unique communication process created in a particular set of circumstances by a group of people with specific interests. This important point – that each mailing list is unique – can tend to be overshadowed in the discussion in the following chapters, which analyzes the technology and process as a whole.

Chiapas-I

On January 1, 1994, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) rose up in Chiapas, Mexico in resistance to the expropriation and enclosure of lands, which was accelerating the expulsion of Maya Indians and peasants from the countryside into the over-crowded and polluted cities. (Cleaver, 1994) Mexico City will be the largest city in the world by the year 2,000 with a population of more than 25 million. (Thomas, 1994) The expulsions had been increasing in the period leading up to the uprising as the Mexican government sold foreclosed land to transnational agribusiness corporations to help generate foreign exchange to continue paying Mexico's foreign debt. This ongoing history of the expropriation of Indigenous and peasant lands is why the EZLN has labelled NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) a "death sentence" to the Indigenous population. (Cleaver, 1994) The day of the uprising was the implementation day of NAFTA, which had been the focus of intense opposition by a broad coalition of grassroots groups in Canada, the US and Mexico who believed the agreement will increase the power and concentration of transnational corporations and the exploitation of workers in all three countries. In an astute analysis penned within weeks of the uprising, political economist Harry Cleaver (1994) observed that a striking aspect of the sequence of events set in motion by the uprising was "the speed with which news of the struggle circulated and the rapidity of the mobilization of support which resulted." Documents and information

from those in the know were quickly diffused to anyone interested in the uprising, and a primary means of diffusion was the pattern of Internet links already established by the anti-NAFTA coalition.

The mailing list *Chiapas-l* is just one of many Internet information sites and processes set up to support the struggle in Chiapas. Many messages circulating on *Chiapas-l* are archived on other Internet sites and read by Internet users who do not subscribe to *Chiapas-l*. What makes *Chiapas-l* unique among the Chiapas Internet activities is precisely that it is a mailing list, able to diffuse this information by e-mail to people who do not or cannot access these other Internet sites.

Chiapas-l was the most active mailing list surveyed, circulating 175 messages every 10 days among more than 600 subscribers. The primary solidarity function of these messages was disseminating news about the struggle, mostly news articles written by journalists working for mainstream newspapers and alternative publications, particularly the Spanish-language articles from the left-leaning daily *La Jornada*, one of the few papers in Mexico with extensive coverage of the Chiapas situation. Many articles were circulated to subscribers within a day of publication in *La Jornada*, and selected articles were translated into English by the NGO the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico (NCDM) and distributed on the list within several days of publication. Prominent were communiqués written by the EZLN leadership which were published in *La Jornada*, picked up from a WWW Internet site and translated by the NCDM, and then circulated on *Chiapas-l*. The rapid English translation and diffusion of these EZLN communiqués around the world has given *Chiapas-l* a certain notoriety; the *Chiapas-l* list is alone among the lists surveyed to attract widespread attention outside the Internet. Also circulating on the list, to a lesser degree, was news and information written by solidarity organizations: reports of meetings and events taking place in Mexico, the US and Canada, including public demonstrations and other solidarity activities. The Mexican government probably had *Chiapas-l* and its related WWW sites in mind when Jose Gurria, the Mexican secretary of foreign relations, recently announced to a delegation of 150 industrialists from 37 countries that: "Chiapas, please take note, is a place where there has not been a shot fired in the last 15 months. The shots lasted 10 days, and ever since the war has

been a war of ink, of written word, a war on the Internet." (Montes, 1995) The article just quoted was circulated on *Chiapas-l* during the survey period.

Chiapas-l is also a forum for dialogue among subscribers. Many messages circulated were queries from subscribers and responses from other subscribers. All the lists surveyed had a dialogue function but *Chiapas-l* was notable for its high level of self-reflection: subscribers spent a significant amount of time and space discussing the potential impact of their activities. Another notable feature of the discussion on *Chiapas-l* was the highly critical perspective of mainstream news, and in particular, the critical discussion of news circulating on the list itself. There were numerous examples of this during the survey period but a good illustration is the message circulated in response to the article quoted in the previous paragraph:

[Re: War of Ink and Internet] Gurria was attempting to shift the focus of attention from the REAL situation – e.g. the army incursions into Chiapas, the civilian refugees, the starving indigenous people, and the actual armed troops of the EZLN – to a convenient world of make-believe and *virtual* war in which little is at stake...

[T]he immediate needs of the citizens of Chiapas *aren't* being met by the government – and by reducing the situation to a "war of ink and internet" (basically a virtual reality), they are merely attempting to justify their unwillingness to stop the oppression. The government seems to have thought that if it could make people (especially the foreign businessmen Gurria was addressing) believe that the EZLN constitutes nothing more than a few good writers and computer geeks, they would forget about the real war and the real repression.

As flattered as some of us are that we're getting noticed (and Gurria may or may not be overestimating the importance of the Internet in this struggle), Gurria is definitely parting with reality in his understatement of what's going on in Chiapas itself.

In summary, *Chiapas-l* was established in response to a particular event, the EZLN uprising in Mexico, which found widespread support in North America partly because of its links to an ongoing struggle, the anti-NAFTA coalition. The list was unique among all the Internet sites set up in support of Chiapas because it diffused the information by e-mail. *Chiapas-l* functioned as a central source of news and

discussion on Chiapas, making it an invaluable tool for activists and others who wanted to keep fully informed about the situation.

Nativelit-l

In an installation in California's Museum of Man, Luiseño Indian artist James Luna put himself in a display case. Viewing "the body," a Euroamerican woman said to her husband, "Dear, I think he is alive." The husband replied, "Don't be silly; they don't put live ones in museums." (Durham, 1992:423)

Cherokee artist, poet and activist Jimmie Durham has observed that living, breathing Indigenous people are largely invisible in the popular culture in the Americas. Instead, they are exotic objects venerated for their new-age mysticism, or relics from the past, echoes of the days when American cowboys "tamed a wilderness." This popular image follows a narrative aggressively promoted by all the nation-states in the Americas and in particular by the US, a narrative whose central theme is that Indigenous peoples are not colonized peoples. In response to this narrative, Durham has asked: "If Indians are not to be considered victims of colonial aggression, how are we to be considered? ... How might I exist?" (1992:427) It is around these questions of colonization and identity that much of the contemporary literature written by Indigenous peoples can be situated, and these questions were a major theme of the messages circulating on *Nativelit-l*, another mailing list surveyed.

Nativelit-l was established as a forum for the discussion of Native American literature, works written by the Indigenous peoples of the US, Canada and Mexico and neighbouring islands, including Hawaii. During the survey period, the discussion focused on contemporary literature, including poetry, fiction, and criticism. *Nativelit-l* was the third most active list surveyed, circulating an average of 65 messages every 10 days among more than 350 subscribers. The messages were conversations among subscribers; almost no news was circulated other than information about new publications.

A remarkable feature of the discussion was the voices of Indigenous peoples themselves. Many messages were written by professors or other teachers of Native American literature who clearly cared a great deal about the subject and were able to articulate links between the literature and their own lives and experiences. Struggles against colonialism, racism and oppression were common themes of discussion. *Nativelit-l* is both a forum linking Indigenous peoples and a space within which other peoples can share and compare experiences. A primary solidarity function of the *Nativelit-l* list is the opportunity it presents to learn from Indigenous peoples themselves about the meaning of self-determination. *Nativelit-l* also presents an opportunity for others to engage in dialogue with Indigenous peoples, using the shared interest in literature as the vehicle for discussion. An example was an exchange during the survey period between two subscribers of different cultures and backgrounds: the discussion was about Louise Erdrich's novel *Tracks* but the exchange centred on what "feminism" can mean in Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. [See appendices: "Sample message: Dialogue a,b,c."]

Although *Nativelit-l* does not have an explicit political agenda in the same sense as *Chiapas-l*, some *Nativelit-l* subscribers see their work as vital to the self-determination struggle. As one subscriber explained in a message circulated during the survey period:

I think the literature is not just stuff to deconstruct or construct, not just stuff to study and find sophisticated ways to probe and master and all the things critical readers in graduate schools have to learn as survival skills for the market. I think it's about fighting to survive, to keep some sense of worth and reasons to live, some idea of how not to be overwhelmed. Which means we have to see what is to be fought against.

In summary, the voices of Indigenous peoples have been marginalized in popular culture in the Americas, where the dominant narrative promotes the idea that they are not colonized peoples. Much of the contemporary literature written by Indigenous peoples can be situated around the question of colonization and identity, and

Nativelit-l is a forum for discussing this literature and addressing these questions. Prominent in the discussion are the voices of Indigenous peoples; the list presents an opportunity to learn from them about the self-determination struggle. The list also provides a forum to engage with Indigenous peoples in dialogue. *Nativelit-l* is linked on a broad level with the struggle for self-determination.

As noted earlier, one purpose of describing these two mailing lists was to highlight the fact that each list is unique. A second purpose of the discussion was to fix an optimistic picture of the lists in the mind of the researcher, and the reader, an optimism that would endure through the remaining chapters of this study, in which much of the analysis is a rather pessimistic assessment of the Internet and the mailing list technology itself.

3. Essential features of the technology

This chapter addresses the following questions:

1. What are the essential features of the mailing list technology?
 - a. What are the implications of these findings for the media and communication process itself?

The technology discussed in this study is interactive automatic electronic mailing lists, also known by the names of the most popular software programs: Listserv and Majordomo. Electronic mailing lists are also possible in other forms – including manual lists and one-way, non-interactive lists – which do not share the essential features of the technology discussed here.

One could begin with the observation that the popular view of the Internet, promoted by the media hype surrounding its current expansion, is of a democratic technology for the people that holds great promise of a democratic future for all. From this viewpoint, the biggest roadblocks to a wired, democratic world are attempts by the US government and others to introduce legislation that would censor free speech on the Internet and widen the state's capabilities for Internet surveillance. (Meeks, 1994 and 1995a,b) Vocal proponents of this view in the popular media are the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), most notably its co-founder Mitchell Kapor, and *Wired* magazine. The EFF was founded in 1990 in the wake of the hacker crackdown by US authorities. In a manifesto to announce its formation, the EFF described its mission to "raise and disburse funds for education, lobbying, and litigation in the areas relating to digital speech and the extension of the Constitution into Cyberspace." (Sterling, 1992:249) Consider the attitude of technological determinism displayed in the introduction to the manual *Big Dummy's Guide to the Internet*, written by Kapor and published by the EFF (1993):

The digital media of computer networks, by virtue of their design and the enabling technology upon which they ride, are fundamentally different than the now dominant mass media of television, radio, newspapers and magazines. Digital communications media are inherently capable of being more interactive, more participatory, more egalitarian, more decentralized, and less hierarchical.

As such, the types of social relations and communities which can be built on these media share these characteristics. Computer networks encourage the active participation of individuals rather than the passive non-participation induced by television narcosis.

In mass media, the vast majority of participants are passive recipients of information. In digital communications media, the vast majority of participants are active creators of information as well as recipients. This type of symmetry has previously only been found in media like the telephone. But while the telephone is almost entirely a medium for private one-to-one communication, computer network applications such as electronic mailing lists, conferences, and bulletin boards, serve as a medium of group or "many-to-many" communication...

Computer networks do not require tightly centralized administrative control. In fact, decentralization is necessary to enable rapid growth of the network itself. Tight controls strangle growth. This decentralization promotes inclusiveness, for it lowers barriers to entry for new parties wishing to join the network.

Given these characteristics, networks hold tremendous potential to enrich our collective cultural, political, and social lives and enhance democratic values everywhere.

This deterministic outlook sees issues such as dominant social relations and structural inequalities between First and Third World countries as potholes in the smooth road to progress that the Internet will, in fact, help pave over. The other ardent proponent of this vision is *Wired*, the glossy magazine of the cyberspace generation which promotes the philosophy that the future is... *Wired*. Since its first appearance in the US two years ago, the magazine's circulation has risen to 170,000, and a UK edition was launched in 1995. According to *Wired's* Kevin Kelly, "the Internet revives Thomas Jefferson's 200-year-old dream of thinking individuals self-actualizing a democracy." (Ward, 1995) Pressed in a recent interview to account for the fact that many people do not have the resources needed to access the Internet, Kelly explained that: "The issues are not the haves and the have-nots, but the haves and the have-lates

... Let the rich buy the technology now, to make it cheaper for the poor." (York, 1995)

An attack on this newly-wired liberal vision of progress was recently launched by historian John Mohawk in a commentary piece with the pointed title: "Does Wired Magazine Promote a New Racism?" Responding to a *Wired* article by Kevin Kelly (1995) which contrasted a "modern" vision with that of tribal societies which didn't have things like violins and pianos, did not produce Mozart or van Gogh, and were suffering from "a very short life span, perpetual head lice, and diseases that are easily cured by five cents' worth of medicine now," Mohawk countered:

I find in Mr. Kelly's remarks seeds of a racism which in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries formed the rationalizations for the destruction and plunder of American Indian, African, and Asian societies by Europeans who were creating either Christian civilization or Spanish empire or British culture or whatever, arguing somewhat disingenuously that they were doing this for the "cross" or the "arts" when in fact they were neither motivated by moral righteousness nor the opera but were the seekers of plunder ...

Cheer the upside of the technological revolution if you will, but know also that in the coming year, on the margins, tens of thousands of people will be displaced from the countryside to shanty towns in third world cities, and that one of the major factors will be a global economy fuelled by electronic technologies like the one you are celebrating. That fact, and the fact that the future holds the prospect of fewer and fewer people laying claim to more and more of the world's resources has been one of the downside effects of the very civilization Mr. Kelly is celebrating. (Mohawk, 1995)

These are two fundamentally different visions of the Internet: in one, the technology itself can determine democratic social relations because it allows its users to "self-actualize" a democracy; in the other, the Internet technology is bound up in a specific set of social relations characterized by the global exploitation of people, lands and resources. It is against this divided landscape that the mailing list technology will be discussed. The following review is not a thorough assessment but an attempt to highlight some of the undemocratic aspects of the technology that could affect the

communication process. A thorough review of e-mail technology can be found in sources including Lane (1990) and Liu (1994).

The essential features of the technology are as follows: A **listowner** can set up a mailing list on a **server** computer. Any person with an **Internet service provider** can subscribe to the mailing list, free of charge. A **subscriber** can send an **e-mail message** to the server, which will automatically distribute the message to all other subscribers by way of the **information carrier**. Other subscribers can respond by sending their own e-mail message to the server, which will again distribute it to all other subscribers.

The **listowner** is the person responsible for the mailing list. The listowner can also moderate the mailing list, reviewing all e-mail messages coming in to the server from subscribers and approving them for distribution, and approving new requests to subscribe. Having the listowner moderate the mailing list is desirable because a moderator can filter out the messages sent in error to the server. (Liu, 1994:455-476) A mailing list moderator has considerable power over the mailing list process. The person who is the moderator could, for instance, delete or edit a message coming in from a subscriber before it is distributed to other subscribers, an action that could remain undetected by the subscribers. On two mailing lists surveyed, the moderator at times "interfered" with messages by appending comments to a subscriber's message and distributing the appended message, and it is possible that the other moderators also interfered with the incoming messages in a less obvious way. To recognize this fact is not to infer that the moderators of the mailing lists surveyed are abusing their power; there were indications that the moderators used this power conscientiously to ensure an effective communication process, to the benefit of the subscribers to these lists. The issue is raised to make visible the moderator's almost invisible presence in the mailing list process – most subscribers probably do not know who this person is or the power they have over the communication process, or perhaps even that this person exists, because the mailing list technology allows the exchange of messages to appear to be a "computerized" process beyond human interference. On the contrary, the technology in its current form allows one participant to have considerable invisible power over the mailing list process, and no system of checks and balances

exist within the technology that would allow the other participants to detect or challenge an abuse of this power.

Another central – and centralizing – feature of the mailing list technology is a computer, or part of one, called a **server** (as in "servant") because it responds to commands from another computer, called a "client." The client-server architecture is the foundation of Internet-based information services. (Liu, 1994:7) The mailing list software, which can be obtained free-of-charge, can run on different kinds of high-capacity computers but it is usually found running on the servers common in institutional settings; most of the lists surveyed were running on a university server. Server computers used to be expensive machines but their purchase price is dropping and is expected to fall dramatically over the next two years. (The Economist, 1994:26) To start a new mailing list on a new server, the listowner (or the system administrator who provides technical support) will load the server computer with the mailing list software, add the information needed to run and operate the list, and hook up the server to the Internet, where it will sit ready to respond to commands by e-mail from new subscribers. Note that all the information necessary for the mailing list communication process – the addresses of subscribers, the software program which controls subscriptions and guides the reception and distribution of messages, and the archives of past messages – is located in one fairly small, central computer. If the server computer is out of service for any reason, the communication process will be disrupted until the server is restored. Some institutions have back-up server arrangements to avoid this occurrence, but others do not. This type of disruption happened to one mailing list during the survey period: the server had been distributing an average of six messages a day among subscribers for many weeks when suddenly the messages stopped with no warning or explanation. Fifteen days later, the communication process suddenly resumed again, when the listowner was able to distribute an e-mail message to subscribers explaining that a server crash had occurred. Clearly, the centrality of the server makes the mailing list communication process very vulnerable to technical failure. As well, the vulnerability of servers has not escaped the attention of state authorities in the US who have in the past obtained legal warrants to confiscate this type of central computer containing information relating to criminal investigations. (Sterling, 1992:156). In Canada also, a server was

recently withdrawn from public access when the university that owned the server feared prosecution relating to information contained in it. (Bacque, 1994)

An **Internet service provider** is an entity – university, government department, organization, business, corporation, etc. – that owns or leases a direct access point to the Internet. Every subscriber to a mailing list has a relationship with an Internet service provider because only service providers can give out e-mail addresses, and one must have an e-mail address to send and receive e-mail. Every e-mail message passing through the Internet must be sent through – and received through – an Internet service provider. About half of all Internet users have an academic institution, usually a university, as their Internet service provider (GVU, 1994) Others connect through their place of work, a public network, a non-profit network, or increasingly, through a commercial service provider, such as CompuServe, Delphi, or America Online. The major commercial service providers are usually owned by transnational media and communications corporations; Delphi, for instance, is owned by Rupert Murdoch, who has "positioned himself to become the world's greatest media mogul and the first emperor of the information superhighway." (Brummer and Kegan, 1995)

Anne Wells Branscomb (1993) has described the difficulty of trying to define the legal status of Internet service providers (many of whom also provide information to their users) with respect to free speech and censorship on the Internet, intellectual property rights and copyright, jurisdiction of transborder information flows, and network governance. One unresolved legal issue that could affect the mailing list communication process is the nature of the relationship between the service provider and its users, a relationship that at present appears to be undemocratic and wide-open to potential abuse. The type of problem that can occur was described in a message circulated on one mailing list during the survey period. In the message, the man described how every time he logs on to the Internet, he sends an e-mail message to the White House in Washington containing the words: "FREEDOM FOR LEONARD PELTIER." Leonard Peltier is an American Indian in a US jail, where he is considered by many to be a political prisoner, and his situation has been the focus of an international lobbying campaign to secure his release. (Vander Wall, 1992) In

response to the e-mail messages, the White House sent the following e-mail message – not to the message sender, but to his Internet service provider:

Below is an excerpt from a user on your host. The Email server for the White House is meant to serve as a method for people to address the President and his staff electronically with their concerns. However this user has sent 100's of copies of the below message over the past few days and succeeds only in wasting bandwidth. Request you inform the user of Internet protocol.

Thank you,
Tim Heberling
White House Internet Services

The "Internet protocol" referred to in the note is in fact nothing more than a loosely-defined code of ethics; there is no formal protocol agreement among Internet service providers and in fact the "multiplicity of communities suggests that electronic communities may choose to promulgate their own rules of the road on electronic highways and to enforce them with sanctions appropriate to their circumstances and codes of ethics." (Branscomb, 1993:85) In the situation described above, the response of the service provider was simply to forward a copy of the White House's message to the user; however, other Internet users have not been as fortunate. Pressure from the state on Internet service providers has led to Internet connection being cut to users in the US (Sterling, 1992) and Canada (Bacque, 1994). Recently, pressure from commercial sources has led to similar ends. By mid-1995, America Online – the largest single commercial provider for the message senders on the mailing lists surveyed – was cutting off half a dozen of its users per day for "net abuse." (Harris, 1995) New legislation being debated in the US Senate at the time of writing is, if passed, likely to increase pressure on Internet service providers to vet the information produced and distributed by their users. (Meeks, 1995b) The power of Internet service providers to interfere with the Internet connection of their users could have an impact on the mailing list communication process, if subscribers are censored or if they censor themselves to avoid confrontation.

A crucial point concerning Internet service providers is that while in urban North America there are many service providers competing intensely to sign up new Internet users (Johnson, 1995), there are no Internet service providers in many remote areas of North America, such as Canada's North, home to many Inuit and other Indigenous peoples. Likewise, there are no Internet service providers in Latin American countries such as Bolivia, where Indigenous peoples represent more than half the population. This means that people living in remote areas or Latin American countries without providers who want to access the Internet must sign up with a service provider located some distance away and access via a long-distance telephone call, paying long-distance charges to the local phone company as well as any fee assessed by the service provider. While some service providers do not charge their users to receive or send e-mail – a university, for instance – others will. These factors create an imbalance that is particularly acute in Latin America (and Africa), where phone calls to North America can cost many times more than calls the other way. Roberto Bissio, who works with an NGO in Uruguay, has made the following observation:

Northern university students have free access to 20,000 databases through the Internet and do not pay a dime to send megabytes of information to colleagues across the world (including an enormous volume of digitalized pictures of pin-up girls). Yet African NGOs have to disburse up to one dollar per page of outgoing *and incoming* e-mail (even if it is unwanted junk-mail or information requests from inconsiderate northern thesis-writers who hardly ever report back their results). (Bissio, 1993:29)

The result of these two factors – service charges and telephone charges that vary among users – is that one mailing list subscriber will be able to send and receive a message free-of-charge while another must pay to do so. Further, because e-mail messages are data which have a volume, a long e-mail message will take up more volume than a short one and therefore cost more to send or receive. The impact on the mailing list process is obvious: subscribers who pay to send e-mail may tend to send messages less frequently and send shorter messages while others who do not pay will face no such restrictions; or they may decide they cannot afford the incoming messages and will unsubscribe.

This last observation is pertinent to the discussion of the **information carrier**, the cables, wires, and satellite and microwave relays the mailing list messages pass through. The core carrier is the Internet backbone located in the US. At the time of writing, less than one month after the Internet backbone was handed over from the public to the private sector – specifically, to three commercial carriers: Sprint, Ameritech and Pacific Bell – no public announcement has been made regarding future plans, but according to Ken Cottrill (1995), the days of a "free ride" for messages passing through the Internet backbone are numbered. Any predictions at this time about the new pricing structure are purely speculative, but it is possible that the backbone carrier could impose a surcharge for each e-mail message passing through the backbone. The introduction of a carrier surcharge would undoubtedly have an impact on the mailing list process but it is less clear what the precise effects would be.

As noted earlier, a mailing list subscriber in rural and remote locations and in many areas of Latin America must go through their local telephone company – a local information carrier – to access the Internet. Many rural telephone lines are of poor quality, which slows down the transmission speed of sending and receiving e-mail messages or requires multiple transmissions to correct errors. (Hudson and Parker, 1990:201) In remote areas with a satellite link, the link may be of good quality but the high cost of maintaining it may be a problem. (Mayo et al, 1992) In Brazil, for instance, the telephone monolith EMBRATEL cited lack of funds in its decision to cut the satellite link which gave Internet connectivity to the central Brazilian Amazon. (INPA, 1995) Heather Hudson has observed additional problems in isolated Indigenous communities. A community may have only one telephone, located in a police station or government office, making it inaccessible to people apprehensive about entering such places. The leader of an isolated Cree community in Canada pointed out that although a telephone was installed in his community, his people effectively had no access to it because it did not work. (Hudson, 1984:105) In addition, telephone links are vulnerable to political interference. During the "Oka crisis" for instance, state authorities in Canada cut the cellular telephone connections to journalists and Mohawk activists behind the barricades as part of their strategy to isolate the movement from outside support. (Roth, 1992:148)

It is important to point out that the telephone infrastructure, including satellite links, has not penetrated large areas of the Americas, particularly the mountainous regions and the Amazon rainforest in Latin America that are home to millions of Indigenous peoples. In Latin America the telephone infrastructure grew as dictated by the communication needs of the state, which saw its management as "vital to national security." (Baur, 1994:13) In North America, where the original meaning of the phrase "universal service" had few of its current altruistic connotations (Mueller, 1993), many Indigenous communities have no telephones simply because the local telephone companies servicing their regions will not pay to bring in a phone line, and indeed they are under no legal obligation to do so. In Canada, for instance, where the *Telecommunications Act* does not require Canadian carriers to provide service where "unusual expenses" will be incurred, Bell Canada is not obligated to serve beyond 62 metres from the end of the company's distribution facilities. (Personal communication with the CRTC, 1995) An interesting situation is unfolding in Northwestern Ontario, where Bell Canada claims it cannot afford to service many First Nation communities: the Indigenous-run Wawatay Communications Society in Sioux Lookout began negotiations last year with the Ontario government to build its own satellite telephone and data link. (Milne, 1994) Needless to say, the people living in areas with no telephone infrastructure will not be able to participate in the mailing list process.

It would be misleading to suggest that the availability of the infrastructure is the determining factor for physical access to the Internet; it is not the Internet infrastructure per se but the cost of the technology that can prohibit access. (Egan, 1992) The telephone lines and Internet service provider may exist in a particular area but some residents will not be able to afford the access charges. One could add that buying access to the Internet technology is the easy part; the costs of the training required to use the technology effectively can be even more prohibitive. (Jones, 1990) Golding (1994) observed the pattern of unequal distribution of wealth both between and within nations that produces unequal access to communications technology. Bradsher (1995) described new studies which found that the United States is now the most economically divided society in the industrial world and the gap between rich and poor has been rising steadily for the past two decades. It is therefore instructive to point out that Indigenous peoples as a group are, in every country in the Americas

in which they live, the most oppressed (economically disadvantaged). The historical reasons for this situation have been well-documented by researchers who have told the story of genocide, forced dislocations of entire cultures, pillage of lands and resources, treaty violations, and other tactics employed first by the European colonial nations and later by the independent nation-states of North and Latin America in order to claim title to the land. (Brown, 1970; Galeano, 1973; Jennings, 1976; Wright, 1992; Stannard, 1992) (It is in opposition to these tactics to claim Indigenous territories that the self-determination struggle can be situated.) The effects of this sustained assault can be seen everywhere in the Americas today: in Canada, where some of the more than 600 Indian reserves across the country are thriving First Nation communities while others are tiny patches of resource-stripped land supporting communities struggling to establish a viable economic base; or further south, where the first World Bank study on Indigenous peoples and poverty in Latin America found that "in all the countries studied, indigenous people have much lower incomes than their nonindigenous counterparts." (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 1994:41) The point is that Internet connectivity, and the opportunity to subscribe to a mailing list, is unavailable to millions of Indigenous peoples and others in the Americas who do not have the resources to pay for it.

One final point is that the economy of the mailing list technology, and indeed of many Internet-based communication processes, is not well understood. Rafaeli and Larose (1993:277) have observed that collaborative mass media, such as mailing lists, in which the audience or subscriber is the primary producer of the media content as well as its receiver, "represent a new and significant departure from conventional mass media systems." As such, this area is ripe for study and analysis.

Summary

This brief and admittedly pessimistic review of the essential features of the mailing list technology – the listowner, server, Internet service provider and information carrier – would seem to challenge the popular view of the Internet as promoted by *Wired* and the EFF. Specifically, the claim that the technology makes Internet

communications "inherently capable of being more interactive, more participatory, more egalitarian, more decentralized, and less hierarchical" than other mass media forms would appear to be completely without foundation in reference to the electronic mailing list technology, for the following reasons: the listowner/moderator has considerable power to influence the communications process, and the technology serves to make this power invisible to other participants; the server centralizes the flow of communication in a manner that leaves the process vulnerable to disruption and even potentially vulnerable to political interference; the Internet service provider holds a dominant position in relation to the mailing list subscribers which is largely undefined in law and wide-open to potential abuse; and the economy of the Internet – in this particular process, the relationship between the service provider, the backbone carrier, and the local telephone companies – is structured to make the mailing list process more expensive for subscribers in Third World and remote locations, thereby restricting the participation of these subscribers. Finally, the Internet and telephone infrastructure – and therefore the mailing list technology – is physically or economically out of the reach of millions of people in the Americas.

Although the mailing list technology is not inherently democratic, it can be used in new ways to challenge dominant social relations and support organized movements for democracy. However, right-wing and military forces are using the Internet technologies to work against democratic social movements. (Mattelart and Schmucler, 1985; Frederick, 1989; Woolf, 1995; Tober, 1995) Mass media have been used in the past and will continue to be used to promote either democratic or dominant social relations; a media technology cannot be understood without knowledge of who is using the media and how they are using it. This topic will be the focus of the next two chapters.

4.Characteristics of the creators and users of the mailing lists

This chapter addresses the following questions:

- 2.What are the basic characteristics of the creators and users of the mailing lists?
 - a.What are the implications of these findings for the media and communication process itself?
 - b.What are the implications of these findings for solidarity activities?

Subscribers

To say that the subscribers are the receivers of e-mail messages would be to obscure the complex process by which messages are received and meanings made. Therefore this chapter must again begin by challenging a statement from the *Big Dummy* Internet manual quoted in the previous chapter, that: "In mass media, the vast majority of participants are passive recipients of information." Although common in the popular imagination – the phrase "couch potato" springs to mind – the notion of passive receivers is a falsehood not supported by critical research and analysis. In fact, a field of critical study has grown during the past few decades, much of it under the banner "cultural studies," which has aptly demonstrated that people are not in any simple way manipulated by the dominant forces in society, and people can and often do reinterpret and use for their own purposes the messages and information they receive. (Garnham, 1995)

These same observations have been made in other fields of the humanities. Historians of colonialism in the Americas have begun to focus on the "more subtle forms of aggression which leave few written traces in the archives." (Gruzinski, 1992:503) Historian Serge Gruzinski found that in Mexico, the Spanish invasion in the early 16th century provoked a disintegration of the original cultural standards and

"caused new cultural references to be elaborated in the prevailing state of chaos." (1992:504) During this period, the Christian church aggressively imposed its imagery – dogma, Holy Writ, symbolism and iconography – to spread its message: specifically, to "urge what the clerical West understood by such notions as the human person, the divine, the body and nature, causality, space and history, the authentic and the illusory" on the Indigenous population. (1992:505) The Indigenous peoples responded to this onslaught by taking over, and even deforming, Christian imagery by contaminating the imagery of the saint with the imagery of pre-colonial sacred references. Similar findings have been observed in contemporary Latin America, where television viewers have transformed American television formats to suit their own cultural references and needs. (Reeves, 1993:50-51) On a broader level, Ingrid Sarti and others from Latin America have criticized the "cultural dependency" model of understanding First World - Third World relations, because "the model does not recognize that the ruling class is not an all-powerful monolithic block dominating people down to their very consciousness but is instead a class with its own internal contradictions." (Sarti, 1981:327) It important to see the mailing list subscribers not as "passive receivers" but as people with the capacity to resist and organize against various forms of domination, and to strategically shape the mailing lists into media and communication processes that suit their needs.

The mailing lists surveyed are small collaborative media whose subscribers share a specific interest relating to Indigenous peoples. These small groups of subscribers exist within the larger sphere of Internet users interested in Indigenous issues in general. The smallest mailing list surveyed had fewer than 30 subscribers. The largest had about 1,200, and six of the 15 lists had between 300 and 600 subscribers. There were links among the lists themselves and also with other Internet media forms: subscribers could belong to more than one list, some lists were linked to information sites on the APC (Association for Progressive Communications) networks or WWW sites, and subscribers regularly posted the e-mail messages circulated on the lists to other public Internet sites, including newsgroups accessible to millions of Internet users with WWW access. A mailing list can therefore be understood as a media in motion, kept in a state of flux by its subscribers. Its centre is the e-mail messages circulating among subscribers – archived in the central server computer – and its outer boundaries are always expanding, contracting and shifting as subscribers place

copies of the messages on other Internet sites, send them by private e-mail to people outside the lists, or add them to or delete them from their personal archives.

The total number of subscribers to all lists was more than 5,000, but this figure is not significant except as a general indicator of the level of interest in these lists: a subscriber's e-mail address can be shared between two or more people; the same subscriber can be subscribed to more than one list; and the mailing lists surveyed represented only about two-thirds of the lists known to the researcher at the time of the survey. At the end of the survey period, there had been an overall gain in the number of subscribers. However, it would seem that the mailing lists will remain "small" collaborative media, with probably under 700 subscribers, because research on similar media suggests that as the number of subscribers on a list increases, their chances of interacting is accordingly decreased. Rafaeli and LaRose (1993) reviewed why this happens in the collaborative mass media of bulletin boards, which have a static form unlike that of mailing lists. A prevailing theory is that large groupings reduce the expectation of reciprocity and consequently decrease contribution levels, or simply that the more users there are, the more each user can safely assume that someone else will do the job, i.e. respond to information requests from other users. If a high level of interactivity is a priority, the mailing lists will probably remain small media used by subscribers who share a specific interest and can engage in meaningful exchange, rather than as large media for subscribers with interests ranging across a wider spectrum of issues. As more subscribers join the mailing list community, new lists will likely be started rather than expanding the subscription base of the existing lists. As small media, the mailing lists by themselves would not appear to have the potential to link large numbers of people in solidarity actions.

The subscribers remained loyal to their mailing lists at a rate of more than 80 percent overall – meaning that more than 80 percent of subscribers stayed with their mailing list over the entire 50 day survey period – but this figure varied from list to list. Similar to the form of the mailing lists, the subscriber base is also in constant flux, with subscribers leaving and new ones arriving in a continuous and relatively anonymous cycle. There were also indications that some subscribers routinely unsubscribe themselves from the lists for an interval of time and then resubscribe, possibly as a way of minimizing their incoming e-mail during a period when they will

not be available to read the messages. One piece of information that may explain why subscribers leave the lists is the little-reported fact that commercial Internet service providers are struggling with a high subscriber turnover rate; the subscriber base of America Online, for instance, has an annual turnover rate of 30 percent. (The Economist, 1994:20) Perhaps some mailing list un-subscribers are leaving not only the lists but also the Internet. At any rate, subscriber loyalty is relevant to the study because a stable subscriber base would seem to be desirable for long-term solidarity activities. On the other hand, the ease and relative anonymity by which people can subscribe and unsubscribe from the mailing lists, and indeed, to flit from list to list, could be a factor in drawing in new people to the lists.

The 15 lists surveyed included the two set up specifically for subscribers interested in Indigenous peoples in Latin America. However all these collaborative media surveyed are essentially created and used in North America. More than 90 percent of subscribers overall connected to the mailing lists through a service provider based in North America; only three percent connected through providers in Latin America; and the remaining subscribers were based outside the Americas, mostly in Europe. The demographics varied between lists but the pattern was the same. Within this boundary, the subscribers were scattered widely: in North America, in almost every state in the US and most provinces and regions in Canada; in Latin America, in Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador and Chile; and outside the Americas, in Australia and New Zealand, and in Britain, Ireland, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Norway. Almost 70 percent of subscribers connected to the lists through an educational institution, including more than 300 universities and colleges; others connected by way of a commercial or non-profit service provider, or through federal, state, provincial, and local government departments and agencies; or national and local libraries, arts centres, public archives, museums and research institutes, and media institutions and outlets. This diversity suggests that subscribers could bring a wide range of knowledge, interests, experiences and affiliations into the communication process.

As noted, most subscribers were based in North America and only three percent in Latin America, and most connected to the Internet through an educational institution.

These figures reflect the findings of the Internet user survey mentioned in the introductory chapter, which indicate that Internet access is largely restricted to the privileged classes in the First World. Some specific reasons for this imbalance were discussed in the previous chapter. On a broader level, Gillespie and Robins (1989) have observed that digital communications help construct new forms of spatial division that tend to reinforce centre-periphery imbalances on a global scale. Their work is based on theories developed by Canadian historian Harold Innis (1950), who studied the way the "problem of empire" encourages the centralization, rather than decentralization, of power and control over space and time. The fact that 90 percent of the subscribers were based in North America means that the subscriber base is tipped away from the majority of Indigenous peoples: the Indigenous population of the Americas is difficult to estimate (Stiffarm and Lane, 1992) but there are many millions more Indigenous peoples in Latin America than in North America. The demographics of the mailing list subscriber base has at least three implications for solidarity activities. First, the mailing lists would appear to have no potential as popular media or revolutionary media – in the way that radio and video is used in areas of Latin America to share experiences and strategize resistance to oppression (Velásquez, 1993; Beltran, 1993; Delgado, 1993) – because the subscribers do not represent a significant number of the most oppressed sectors of the population. Second, for solidarity activities with Indigenous peoples in Latin America, the mailing lists would appear to be limited to information exchanges among subscribers in North America and a few in Latin America who may not be able to speak for the Indigenous peoples involved. Third, for dialogue and exchange between peoples, the mailing lists surveyed would seem to offer the most promise in North America.

Message senders

Every mailing list subscriber is a potential sender of e-mail messages. However, the survey found that few subscribers used the technology to send e-mail messages to other subscribers. The overall average was 16 percent: less than one in five subscribers to the mailing lists sent messages by way of the lists during the survey period. While this figure varied between lists, most notably that the list with the

smallest number of subscribers had the highest participation rate, the overall pattern was the same. It is possible, however, that had the survey period been longer than 50 days, a higher percentage of subscribers would have been message senders. The study of the *Dairy-L* mailing list found that half the "regular subscribers" to the list sent messages over the 32-month survey period. (Varner and Cady, 1993:2330)

This research finding – that the message senders on the lists surveyed represented less than one in five subscribers – has several implications for the communication process. First, the message senders define the limits and boundaries of discourse on the lists: they determine which issues are discussed, which are not, and how these issues are framed. How this process works in the mainstream media has been described by Chomsky (1989), who believes media should be studied from the perspective of analysing the bounds of expressible opinion and discourse. Of course, the process is not mechanistic: the subscribers can and do interpret and respond to the messages according to their own social situation and cultural references. However, a minority of subscribers are setting the agenda for discussion on the lists.

Second, the message senders control the volume of information sent to subscribers; they help determine who can subscribe to a mailing list and who cannot. Obviously, if the e-mail traffic is more than a subscriber can handle or afford to pay for, she or he will unsubscribe. The mailing lists are "self-regulated" in that there are no rules governing who can send messages and how often but the limits of "self-regulation" varied considerably among lists. Two lists were inactive during the survey period. Of the 13 active lists, the lowest level of activity was two messages every ten days, a total of 5kb in volume; the highest was the *Chiapas-l* list, 175 messages every ten days, a total of 1,100kb. This last figure represents data that if printed on paper would fill a book, every ten days; it was no surprise that the *Chiapas-l* list also had the highest rate of subscriber turnover. In addition, although no data was compiled on individual subscribers, it was apparent on many lists that some message senders were far more prolific than others on many. This observation is significant: certainly one must question the legitimacy of a "democratic" media and communication structure in which a self-appointed minority can limit the access of the majority. Again, there is no intent here to suggest that the prolific message senders are abusing the process or to question their motivations; many among them may be the best

persons to do the job, for a variety of reasons. The point is simply that the "self-regulated" mailing list process is fundamentally undemocratic because the subscribers who take it upon themselves to send messages can limit the participation of other subscribers; if these other subscribers cannot handle or afford the messages, they have little choice but to unsubscribe.

The position that mailing list communication can be undemocratic, clearly at odds with the popular vision of the Internet, is gaining support by new social science research and analysis on computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC is a field of research practised largely by social psychologists in a laboratory setting; the research focus is to determine how CMC between individuals differs from face-to-face communication. Until recently, the dominant CMC theories have suggested that "CMC tends to equalize status, decentralize and democratize decision making, and thus empower and liberate the individual user." (Spears and Lea, 1994:427) These theories have largely been based on the idea that CMC both reduces the visual cues related to status and increases the physical distance between participants, thereby releasing the individual from certain kinds of influence and power relations. Spears and Lea (1994) have challenged this dominant assessment by developing a new model for understanding CMC in which power relations can actually be reinforced in CMC. Their model is based on Michel Foucault's (1977) theory of "panoptic power," suggesting that the "faceless" nature of CMC communication "may often reinforce the bureaucratic or hierarchal dimensions of interaction." (Spears and Lea, 1994:452) Recent research is challenging the old theories along similar lines. (Saunders et al, 1994) This new analysis supports the position that the mailing list communication process is bound up with dominant social relations, and implies that the minority of mailing list subscribers who are the message senders could tend to come from dominant social groups.

The question, therefore, is whether the message senders represent a delimited social group or if as a group they are equally as diverse as the subscribers at large. However, the survey method for this study yielded only limited information about the message senders as a group: the geographical location and Internet service provider of their e-mail address. More information could have been gathered by a different methodology, such as interviews or a questionnaire-based survey of the message

senders and subscribers themselves. The geographical dispersion of the message senders was very similar to the subscribers at large, indicating that geography was not a category that delimited the message senders as a group. The distribution pattern of the Internet service provider category was different in that subscribers with a non-profit service provider sent more messages as a group than subscribers connecting by other means. Significant in this group were message senders connected through the APC network (Association for Progressive Communications), the largest non-profit computer network in the world; case studies on the APC networks have found that its members tend to be activists and NGOs working with democratic social movements. (Sallin, 1994; Lewis, 1993b; Sachs, 1995) As well, the affiliate APC networks were the largest single service provider for the message sender group, hooking up seven percent of all message senders. This finding underlines the strategic importance of the APC networks to the mailing lists surveyed.

Message producers

A message sender can either write the message herself or else forward a message written by someone else. Seventy percent of the messages sent were produced by the message sender, and the remainder were messages they forwarded from an outside source; these ratios varied considerably from list to list. The significance of this finding is that the message producers who are not subscribers are likely not aware that their work is circulating on the lists, and they will not be able to engage in dialogue regarding their work, although the subscribers can comment on the work amongst themselves. This finding also raises questions about the use of intellectual property on the mailing lists, an important issue which can only be touched on in this study.

Most self-produced messages were "dialogue" whereas almost all messages forwarded from an outside source were "news." The dialogue messages were those written in response to a previous message or inviting response from subscribers; the news messages were texts of an informative nature which were presented as fact and

did not specifically invite response from readers. The function of these different kinds of messages will be discussed in the next chapter.

As noted, most of the messages were produced by the message senders themselves, and 30 percent were produced by an outside source. The largest group of outside source producers was journalists affiliated with a newspaper or news agency. In many cases the message senders had evidently found these articles on a World Wide Web (WWW) or other Internet site and forwarded them to the mailing lists in violation of the copyright. One implication of this activity is that when the Internet copyright issue is finally sorted out, the mailing lists may be deprived of their major source of news journalism if measures are put in place that would stop distribution of intellectual property in violation of copyright. The other implication is that the current circulation of material in violation of copyright can be seen as colluding with the exploitive practice in the print media industry whereby journalists – many of them freelancers – are paid for their work on the basis of once-only publication, and any benefits from the outside distribution of the work are not returned to the journalist.

The second largest group of outside source producers was writers working with Indigenous or solidarity groups not subscribed to the mailing lists. Most of these messages were press releases, reports, texts of speeches, conference announcements and similar types of information. Notable was the online Indigenous newsletter *Wotanging Ikche* (Native American News), a bimonthly collection of interesting e-mail messages from a variety of Internet sites, written by Indigenous peoples. Note that the work of journalists with Indigenous newspapers is not circulating on the mailing lists; the "hard" news that does circulate is produced by journalists working for publications that do not have links with Indigenous organizations. The implications of this finding will be discussed in the next chapter.

The remaining four percent of messages overall were produced by writers outside the lists with a wide range of institutional affiliations, including government press offices and commercial publishing houses. Little can be said about these writers but their presence does underline the fact that some message producers are paid for their work and some are not, and the rate of pay likely varies considerably; this would appear to be a significant observation for this new media form.

Survey results summary

The mailing lists are small, collaborative media with a subscription base that ranges between less than 30 and slightly more than 1,200 subscribers. Although the number of subscribers increased over the survey period, the mailing lists are expected to remain fairly small. About 80 percent of subscribers overall stayed subscribed during the survey period. More than 90 percent of subscribers were based in North America, three percent in Latin America, and six percent outside, mostly in Europe. About 70 percent of subscribers were connected to the Internet by a university or other educational institution. Subscribers were based in a wide range of geographical regions, within the North-South imbalance previously described, and they also represented a range of institutional affiliations.

Although all subscribers were, in theory, potential message senders, less than one in five subscribers used the technology to do so. The activities of the message senders varied considerably between lists: on the list with the highest volume, the messages sent over 10 days would fill a book. Subscribers connecting through the APC networks sent more messages as a group than subscribers connecting by other means.

The messages were either self-produced by the message senders, representing 70 percent of messages, or they were forwarded by the message senders and produced by someone outside the mailing lists. Most of the self-produced messages were dialogue, and almost all the messages produced by an outside source were news. Fourteen percent of the messages were produced by journalists affiliated with a newspaper or news agency. Another 11 percent were produced by writers working for Indigenous or solidarity groups or organizations who were not subscribers, and the remaining messages were produced by writers working with various institutions.

5.Solidarity functions of the mailing lists

This chapter will address the following questions:

- 3.How do the mailing lists function as media and communications for solidarity?
 - a.What are the implications of these findings for the media and communication process itself?
 - b.What are the implications of these findings for solidarity activities?

Creating social spaces (and language barriers)

Harold Innis (1950) has shown how new communication technologies open up new spacial and temporal spheres. Mailing lists have been described as "social networkds," places where people sharing common interests connect with one another. (Harasim, 1993) In this sense, all the mailing lists surveyed function principally as social spaces where subscribers promote and negotiate an understanding of the world-views of Indigenous peoples. Subscribers do this various ways, including speaking from their own experiences as Indigenous peoples, disseminating news and information about conflicts on Indigenous territories, reading these messages, discussing aspects of novels by Indigenous writers, and crossing cultural boundaries to make contacts and connections. Each list surveyed was a unique social space in which subscribers dealt with a particular set of interests in a specific way.

An example of how the mailing lists function as a social space was an e-mail message circulated on one list titled: "Crow and rabbit dancing." In the message, the subscriber, an Indigenous man, described an incident he had witnessed on his way to work that morning involving two animals on the sidewalk. His message prompted a flood of messages from other subscribers expressing their opinion of the incident and linking it to their view of the world, and then further messages analysing the

differences between the views. This example is fairly typical of the exchange that can occur on several of the lists surveyed. The overview to this study noted that few media and structured communication processes exist whereby Indigenous peoples can link with others for the purpose of working out their differences. The difference in world-views between Indigenous peoples and others in the Americas has often been cited as the principal reason for disagreement between the two groups. The essential source of disagreement is a fundamentally different understanding of "ownership" of land (Churchill, 1992) but this clash of world-views occurs in many spheres. In Canada, for instance, where Indigenous peoples are prosecuted and imprisoned at rates significantly higher than the rest of the population, an interim report released by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that the Canadian justice system has failed Aboriginal peoples and: "The principal reason for this crushing failure is the fundamentally different world view between European Canadians and Aboriginal peoples with respect to such elemental issues as the substantive content of justice and the process for achieving justice." (RCAP, 1993) Given the need for cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, the social space function of the mailing lists would seem to be primary.

The mailing lists, covering a vast geographical area and involving many cultures, are social spaces rife with language barriers. Exchanges taking place on the lists can reflect one aspect of this barrier: the clash of oral and written traditions. The mailing lists surveyed are text-based communications but Indigenous cultures are based on oral tradition. Orality is not a primitive, pre-literate mode of communication but a way of representing the world that is entirely different from literacy. (Ong, 1982; Innis, 1950) Most Indigenous languages are oral languages and have no written tradition; in Guatemala, for instance, 72 percent of the Indigenous women are illiterate. (Frayssinet, 1995) The issue of literacy and Indigenous peoples in North America is inextricably connected to the European system of education which had the intent of "demolishing the internal cohesion of native societies, thereby destroying the ability of these societies to resist conquest and colonization." (Noriega, 1992:374) To say that many Indigenous peoples have an ambiguous relationship with literacy and the world system it represents is an understatement; one mailing list subscriber described literacy as: "the language the presidents speak." The fact that mailing lists are text-based communications may be a major barrier to the more widespread

diffusion of the technology for solidarity communications. New technologies allowing the e-mail transfer of voices (sounds instead of words) on small amounts of bandwidth have been developed but are not yet widely diffused and will likely introduce a new set of barriers when applied to mailing lists: one immediately thinks of the difficulty involved in wading through many messages on a telephone answering machine.

Another barrier on this social space is the language of communication: the e-mail messages on the lists surveyed were almost all written in English; the exceptions were the two lists dedicated to issues involving Indigenous peoples in Latin America, whose subscribers communicated in both English and Spanish. With the growth of global networking, English has become a "self-expanding global lingua franca" at the centre of the emerging world language system. (de Swaan, 1991) The predominance of English on the lists has at least two implications for solidarity activities. The first is related to the decline of the original languages of the Americas. One notable feature of many of the e-mail messages produced by Indigenous subscribers is that they include words of greeting or parting written in an Indigenous language, a sign that the language is important to the writer. Language cannot be separated from culture – it is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared, and transmitted from generation to generation – and each language is indissolubly tied up with a unique world-view which "represents the end point of thousands of years of human inventiveness." (Diamond, 1993:84) Many of the original languages of the Americas are in a fragile state. In Canada, for instance, of the 53 First Nations languages still spoken, only three are expected to survive. (Kirkness, 1991) Smith (1980:58) has observed that "the electronic culture rides roughshod over the subtle divisions and groupings" which are the foundation of Indigenous cultures, and that the greatest single homogenizing force is the English language itself. Innovative attempts are being made to preserve Indigenous languages with the new information and communication technologies (Bernard, 1992; Reyes, 1991); however, the tenacity of English on the mailing lists and other Internet communication processes could contribute to the decline of Indigenous languages in the Americas. This observation may give pause for thought to people using the mailing lists for solidarity activities.

A second consequence of the predominance of the English language in the mailing list social space is the need for translation services. On the lists surveyed, some subscribers occasionally translated texts into English for circulation but only a few NGOs provided translation services on a regular basis. The National Commission for Democracy in Mexico has, since the beginning of the Maya uprising in Chiapas, taken on the responsibility of translating into English texts written by the EZLN (Zapatista) leadership for diffusion in North America to supporters and the media. The National Commission for Democracy in Mexico is operated completely by volunteers, and because of their relationship to the EZLN, much of their work will not be supported by traditional funders of NGOs; they rely on donations from Internet users and others to pay operating costs. Another NGO which regularly provides English translation of texts for diffusion on the mailing lists is the California-based SAIIC (South and Meso American Indian Rights Center), which also needs public funds to continue its work. The situation of these two NGOs and others connected to the lists highlights the fact that labour and other resources have been expended to produce the translated texts circulating on the lists, and that strategic financial support is necessary to maintain the social spaces the lists create.

Lurking (and private contacts)

Most subscribers to the mailing lists are lurkers. In the previous chapter, it was noted that approximately 80 percent of subscribers stayed loyal to the lists during the survey period but less than 20 percent actually used the technology to circulate e-mail messages to other subscribers. The obvious conclusion is that roughly 60 percent of subscribers were using the lists for something other than contributing messages. The word "lurkers" has been used by researchers to describe the individuals who do not contribute to computer-mediated public discussions but choose to remain observers. Sachs (1995) has pointed out that researchers have generally assumed this practice diminishes the effectiveness of interaction and rarely asked if there may be benefits to this behaviour.

Sachs' (1995) observation about lurking in connection with the news sites on PeaceNet (an APC network) could also apply to lurking on the mailing lists: the quality of exchange may allow subscribers to benefit simply by following the exchanges of others. They can also form their own opinions by taking a sample of opinions from other subscribers. An anecdotal example is the researcher's experience of learning from the exchange on the *Nativelit-l* list described in an earlier chapter, between several feminists from different backgrounds and cultures. These message-senders were able to take the time to frame their observations and make their arguments persuasively, and in the researcher's opinion, the quality of the exchange would have been difficult to match in a face-to-face public forum. [See appendices: "Sample message: Dialogue a,b,c."] This example suggests that lurking on the mailing lists can function as a means of learning how people are negotiating differences between cultures and world-views.

Both sending messages and reading messages can equally serve a positive communicative function. Jaworski (1993) has observed that although one function of silence is to indicate the lack of any communication and social bondage, this function can also be achieved through speech, as when speech is used or manipulated in such a way that it does not genuinely convey new information or does not aim to create social bondage. In this sense, "viewing silence as a negative concept and speech as a positive one is, to a large degree, culturally biased." (1993:48) Both speech and silence can be used to create communication and rapport or just the opposite: both can be used to cut oneself off from others and to convey no genuine message. Jaworski noted that silence among the western Apache is often used when meeting strangers; through not speaking to a newly met person, feelings of bondage are created. Likewise, where the Anglo-American culture places value on children's verbal skills, Navajo children are more visual in their approach to learning about the surrounding world. (1993:22) In a brief exchange about lurking which took place on one mailing list during the survey period, a participant explained that: "My personal experience has been that most native people do not speak too much, unless they feel they have something important to contribute. Also, our people do not usually engage in 'small talk.' Eg. If everyone can see it is raining, they will not usually talk about the weather." This observation underlines the point that the messages circulated on the mailing lists represent only one part of the communication process.

Another aspect of lurking casts the activity in an entirely different light. Some lurkers may be active behind the scenes, sending private e-mail messages to other subscribers. Numerous messages were circulated during the survey period along the lines of: "Thanks to all who responded to my information request," when in fact, no such responses had been circulated on the lists. These messages referred to private, one-to-one e-mail messages sent to the subscriber who posted the information request. In the researcher's personal experience with mailing lists in general, an information request posted on a list will often bring many more responses by private e-mail than by "public" e-mail circulated to all subscribers. This observation suggests that the amount of private e-mail circulated among subscribers may be far more than the public e-mail circulated on the lists; the mailing lists themselves may be functioning as the central public thread of a complex web of private communications.

Along these lines, another function of the mailing lists is to provide subscribers with an ever-expanding contact list of like-minded individuals or others worthy of note. The quality and range of contacts presented to subscribers can be considerable, and these contacts may prove useful to them for behind-the-scenes solidarity actions and activities.

This study has not addressed the technical barriers that could hamper a subscriber's attempts to send an e-mail message, assuming that if the subscriber were able to send the original "subscribe" message to the mailing list server, she would also be able to send other messages afterwards. However, some subscribers may be lurkers by default, simply because they do not know how to send e-mail or find the process too complicated. One could well imagine this situation occurring in an organization that does not have a budget for Internet training: one staff member familiar with e-mail would send the original subscribe message, and other staff members would know how to read the incoming messages but not have the skills required to respond to a message that interested them. Andrea Jones' (1990) study of NGOs in the UK found that lack of training led to technical difficulties which prevented or inhibited the use of e-mail. This observation points again to the need for strategic financial support for Indigenous organizations and solidarity NGOs.

Fostering dialogue

Dialogue among subscribers was the primary function of the messages circulating on the lists: 64 percent of the messages had a dialogue function in that they either requested a response from subscribers or responded to previous requests. This figure would vary from list to list – some lists were more dialogue-oriented and others were more news-oriented. The research on the *Dairy-L* mailing list came up with a similar figure: 66 percent of messages were questions and responses to those questions. (Varner and Cady, 1993:2230)

The introductory chapter mentioned that many communication theorists have been inspired by the radical potential of interactive media. For instance, in 1930, Bertolt Brecht wrote that:

Radio could be the most wonderful public communication system imaginable, a gigantic system of channels – could be, that is, if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of making the listener not only hear but also speak, not of isolating him, but of connecting him. (Brecht, 1930)

An important point is that for Brecht and other theorists, an interactive media had to have universal access, a media for the masses. A communication process allowing interactivity only among the elite or dominant groups in society has little radical potential, and as discussed in earlier chapters, access to the Internet is far from universal. The Internet is not revolutionary but it does open up new possibilities for dialogue, and the survey results suggested that the mailing list participants are making the most of this opportunity.

Roughly one third of the dialogue messages were requests and two-thirds were responses to requests. (The *Dairy-L* research came up with an identical ratio.) Most of the requests were for information on a wide range of topics. The responses, on the whole, were remarkably thoughtful, detailed, lively and informative. The overall

impression was of a series of parallel running conversations. Sachs' (1995) study of the messages on the PeaceNet computer network was grounded in the position that conversation is central in transforming individual opinion into public opinion. Many of his observations also apply to the messages circulated on the mailing lists: discussions can fly off in several directions at once and be informed by viewpoints that initially seemed unrelated to the topic at hand; discussions can carry on for many months; participants can enter and leave the conversation at will; new aspects of the issue at hand are constantly encountered; participants can publicly challenge and refute arguments; participants can be "experts" who contribute their knowledge to a range of topics, and other participants can respond to these expert opinions in a way that would be difficult to do outside the Internet; and commentary can come from participants close to the source of the issues being discussed. Sachs concluded that the cooperative nature of the exchange is an important element of the opinion-formation process, and the same observation can be made of the mailing lists: users can take advantage of one another's experience and expertise in order to gather information with which they can form opinions.

One technical barrier that could inhibit the exchanges is the e-mail software on subscribers' computers that can make it difficult to follow the "thread" of conversation. A thread is the title or heading of a message and the subsequent responses to the message. The most common e-mail software programs were apparently not designed with mailing lists in mind; it can be difficult even for an experienced computer user to keep track of the various simultaneous parallel conversations.

Slightly more than half the dialogue messages were questions and commentary about current or historical events and issues, including the struggle in Chiapas, treaty and land rights, government policies and programs, activities by solidarity groups, and a range of specific personal interests. Another 30 percent of the messages were related to cultural products and practices, including questions and commentary about books, films and television programs written by or about Indigenous peoples. The remaining messages were concerned with the mailing list process itself or other Internet activities, and upcoming conferences, powwows and other events.

One notable aspect of the dialogue messages was the number that questioned the portrayal of Indigenous peoples in contemporary popular culture, and in particular, that challenged the way images of Indigenous peoples are packaged and sold as consumer products. Both Roth (1992) and Durham (1992) have explained how the commodifying of Indigenous cultures by commercial interests has been damaging to Indigenous peoples, and so this aspect of the discussion on the lists would seem significant. An example was the lively discussion and analysis on one list about the new Disney film *Pocahontas* and its commercial paraphernalia. More than 100 messages were exchanged on this topic. A central theme of this exchange was discussing the actions of an American Indian leader who had been involved in the film's production. During this exchange, participants were able to link across cultural lines to build a common critique of the commercial exploitation of Indigenous peoples. Significantly, attempts were made to use the mailing list technology to write an open letter to parents in the US on behalf of the subscribers who criticized the film, and a boycott of Disney products was discussed. Another notable aspect of the exchanges was the willingness to offer advice based on personal experience. For example, a subscriber's request for advice on how to deal with racist remarks at work elicited a number of responses from other subscribers describing how they had personally handled similar situations. These and many other examples suggest that the dialogue function of the mailing lists could make them very useful as media and communications for solidarity.

There are limits, however, to how "radical" these public conversations can be. As public fora, the mailing lists are open to everyone with Internet access, including the state agencies mandated to monitor "radical" political movements. State authorities have themselves acknowledged that monitoring public exchanges is the easiest way to keep track of criminal activities on the Internet. (Vadon, 1995) In the UK, private security forces have joined GreenNet, an APC affiliate network,

for the express purpose of monitoring the movements of activists working on the anti-roads campaign. (Woolf, 1995) Several subscribers to the mailing lists had Internet addresses which were quite conspicuously connected with surveillance activities. The subscribers to the most "radical" mailing list were clearly aware of this surveillance: during the survey period, an active discussion took place about the

implications of state surveillance of their activities. Private e-mail is also vulnerable to state surveillance. The focus of this study is public, not private, e-mail but it would be remiss not to point out that a battle is raging in the US both on and outside the Internet over whether private e-mail can be kept private. Because the Internet backbone is located in the US, where there is currently no case law protecting the privacy of e-mail, all international e-mail generated anywhere in North America is "wide open to US surveillance." (Bacque, 1994) Because of the US state's involvement with the repression of resistance movements in Latin America, e-mail communications from that region are also vulnerable. (Mattelart and Schmucler, 1985) The origins and history of the struggle to keep the US state out of private Internet conversations have been traced by Sterling (1992) up until the early 1990s. Since that time, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the ACLU and other First Amendment supporters have been fighting the introduction of measures including the "Clipper Chip," described in *Time* magazine as: "the US Government-designed encryption system for encoding and decoding phone calls and E-mail so that they are protected from snooping by everyone but the government itself." (Elmer-Dewitt, 1994) Secure encryption arrangements are available, such as the public key schemes, but even these do not ensure complete privacy of communications. (Katz, 1990) In 1990, the assessment was made that e-mail is not a secure form of communication (Lane, 1990:37), and in the researcher's opinion, developments since that date have not changed this assessment. This situation underlines an important limitation of the mailing lists for solidarity communications.

Disseminating news

Disseminating news among subscribers was the secondary function of the mailing list messages. Thirty-five percent of the messages, and considerably more than half the volume, were news items. Again, this figure varied between the lists. For the survey, news was defined as texts of an informative nature which were presented as fact and did not specifically invite response from readers.

Most of the news messages were produced on behalf of Indigenous or solidarity groups and organizations, including subscribers and others outside the lists. The news produced by this source was mostly "soft" news: press releases, texts of speeches and communiques, conference announcements, appeals for faxes and donations, reports of meetings and delegations, declarations, and similar texts. These kinds of messages were distributed on all the lists surveyed, more on some lists than others. The messages referred to a wide range of events and activities in both North and Latin America, indicating that the mailing lists are a good source of general information on activities and events relating to Indigenous peoples in the Americas.

Conspicuously absent from this source, however, was news journalism. The "hard" news circulating on the lists was written by journalists working for a newspaper or agency that did not have an affiliation with Indigenous groups or organizations; these messages represented the next largest category of news messages. Almost all these messages were circulated on only three of the lists surveyed; the others did not generally carry this kind of material. These three mailing lists function partly as a central source of mainstream and alternative news about Indigenous peoples readily available to people with Internet access. From the sample of about 30 messages in this category were articles from *La Jornada*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Dallas Morning News*, *The New York Times*, *The Irish Times*, *Halifax Daily News*, Reuter, IPS, the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, and *COUNTERPUNCH*, representing six major newspapers, two news agencies, and two alternative publications in four countries. [See appendix: "Sample message: News."] In a sense, one function of these three mailing lists is a clipping service of journalism on Indigenous issues, but the range of issues covered was extremely limited. The one exception among them was the *Chiapas-1* list, which circulated comprehensive news coverage of the Chiapas situation but from a limited number of sources.

The mainstream media coverage of Indigenous issues in the Americas is not only inadequate but also "appalling" in its non-existence. (Roth, 1992:149) The exception is during times of crisis, when the coverage tends to reinforce stereotypes and myths about Indigenous peoples rather than explain the motivations for their actions. (Roth, 1992; Durham, 1992) One reason for this situation is that very few Indigenous journalists are working with mainstream publications, although not for a lack of

trying. In Canada, for instance, the Native News Network of Canada (NNNC) was formed after the "Oka crisis" in 1990 to promote the work of Indigenous freelance journalists but the organization has been largely unable to crack into the mainstream papers. The result of this non-coverage, it is safe to say, is that most Canadians have very little knowledge or understanding of the daily lives of the Indigenous peoples who live in communities outside the major urban centres. Given this general lack of news coverage everywhere in the Americas, the circulation of news journalism on these lists could serve a useful solidarity function, despite the limited range of issues covered, if subscribers wanted to keep up-to-date but were not able to find news articles elsewhere in their part of the world.

However, Indigenous newspapers and journals are available on the newsstands in many areas of the Americas and also by subscription, offering an excellent source of news and analysis on Indigenous issues, and it is remarkable that the mailing lists surveyed do not circulate any of this prodigious output. Indigenous newspapers have a long and strong tradition in North America. In Latin America, where the Indigenous journalism tradition has focused on radio, cassette-tapes and videos (Delgado, 1993), new initiatives are underway to train more print journalists; an example of existing efforts is the Guatemalan bilingual newspaper *El Regional* which could become a national-level publication in 1995. (Castro, 1994) While their purpose has been primarily to serve the Indigenous community, Indigenous newspapers have always had a solidarity function. For instance, in 1876, the year of the Battle of the Little Bighorn in the US, the editor of the Indigenous newspaper the *Cherokee Advocate* explained that if the people of the United States had access to more reliable sources of information, "there would be less danger to us as a result." (Coward, 1994:542) Several publications have excelled in their coverage of crises and their support for resistance movements, notably *Akwesasne Notes*, which resumed publication in 1995 after a three-year hiatus. *Akwesasne Notes* grew out of a Mohawk nation struggle in the 1960s to secure border-crossing rights guaranteed in the Jay Treaty, and it reached a circulation of 20,000 in 1972 when it covered the activities of the American Indian Movement (AIM) who were organizing against racist killings in the small towns of the Dakotas. During the 1973 AIM occupation of Wounded Knee, the circulation of *Akwesasne Notes* shot up to 53,000. (Downing, 1984) In his case study of *Akwesasne Notes*, Downing observed that a "virtual

fusion" existed between the paper and the growing resistance movement and that in particular, the paper's coverage of activities by the BIA (US Bureau of Indian Affairs) put activists in a position of knowing what was in the pipeline, allowing them to begin to organize against it in advance. (1984:107-108) Likewise, the journal *Abya Yala News*, published quarterly in Spanish and English editions by the South and Meso American Indian Rights Centre (SAIIC) is an important Indigenous voice on resistance activities in Latin America. Many Indigenous newspapers are covering ongoing issues and struggles. During the period the mailing lists were surveyed, the researcher also conducted an informal survey of *Windspeaker*, one of the major Indigenous newspapers in Canada, and found that the range of topics covered in the first five pages of any edition of the paper was far more comprehensive than the news journalism circulated on all the mailing lists together. The limited range of news circulating on the mailing lists could give a distorted impression of events, if subscribers relied on the mailing lists as their only source of news about Indigenous peoples. It would seem evident that mailing list subscribers who want to keep fully informed should also subscribe to Indigenous publications.

Linking with solidarity actions outside the Internet

Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham, a long-time activist in the US and internationally, has described a situation which highlights the difference between being interested in Indigenous issues and being committed to working alongside Indigenous peoples in solidarity actions:

In public addresses, no matter what the situation or atrocity we described, we received the same audience responses: standing ovations, and then the questions, "What did Indians eat?" – "How can I find out about my Cherokee grandmother?" – "Where can I learn about Indian rituals and healing herbs?" – "Would you like to see my collection of Indian etchings?" As our situation worsened, America loved us all the more. By 1990, Euroamericans were teaching our "shamanism" in universities. White students were participating in Sun Dances and peyote ceremonies. Every shopping mall in the country had a store which sold Cherokee magic quartz crystals, and every airport had a

boutique selling "Indian" dress and artifacts along with cowboy gear. As Ralph Lauren's television commercial has it, "the spirit of the West is everywhere today." Our lives, and our rights, continue to deteriorate. (Durham, 1992:435)

It would be instructive to know how many mailing list subscribers were using the technology to move beyond a personal interest in Indigenous issues to link up with organized Indigenous-rights solidarity movements outside the Internet, but that information was well outside the scope of the survey. In his critical analysis of the democratic-participant experiments with new communication technologies that took place in the US almost three decades ago, Kenneth Laudon (1977) was careful to point out that the use of any technology will not likely result in drastic increases in participation or political interest, and specifically, that "new technology cannot be expected to build political communities where none existed before." (1977:108) Laudon suggested that one way of evaluating the potential of the new technologies to increase political participation is determining to what extent the communication process offers new structured opportunities for participation. If no opportunities are offered, the combination of more information and less opportunity for political response may only make the participants feel more politically alienated than they already are. (1977:28)

With this point in mind, it is significant that 14 percent of the messages overall were linked with solidarity actions outside the Internet. This figure would vary between lists; some lists were more activist-oriented than others. For the survey, a solidarity link was defined as: expressly encouraging readers to participate in solidarity actions outside the Internet; or including the contact address of an organization active in Indigenous rights outside the Internet; or reporting on these outside solidarity activities. For the survey, solidarity activities did not include cultural events and conferences.

Almost 10 percent of all messages circulating on the mailing lists encouraged readers to participate actively in solidarity with Indigenous rights. In the sample of about 20 messages of this type, more than half suggested joining an organized solidarity group or movement. Other suggestions included sending letters to elected representatives in

government (sample letters were often included) and participating in public demonstrations. The fact that joining organized movements was the main activity suggested indicates a strong link between the mailing lists and organized activism outside the Internet.

The second kind of solidarity link was the messages circulating which included the name and contact address of a group active in Indigenous-rights issues. In the sample of 16 messages of this type, the groups included:

- The South and Meso American Indian Rights Centre (SAIIC), an Oakland-based NGO whose primary goal is "linking Indian peoples of the Americas";
- The American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), which promotes the active participation of American Indians in the sciences;
- The Western Shoshone Historic Preservation Society, which protects the land and treaty rights of the Western Shoshone Indians of Nevada;
- The Colombia Support Network, a US-based NGO organizing against military and paramilitary death squads in Colombia;
- The Waka Nunie Tuki Wuki Coalition, a coalition of Indigenous nations and organizations to protect the Mount Shasta territorial area in California;
- Mexican Exiles for Democracy, an organization lobbying the US Congress to put pressure on the Mexican government to restore democracy in that country, including ending the civil war with the EZLN (Zapatistas);
- The Lubicon Lake Indian Nation, actively organizing for recognition of its land rights and protection of its territories in Canada;
- The National Commission for Democracy in Mexico, a coalition of grassroots organizations organizing for democracy and social justice in Mexico;

- The Confederacion de Nacionalidades Indigenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), the confederation of Indigenous-rights organizations in Ecuador;
- The Innu Nation, coordinating an international campaign to end the low-level military training flights over Innu territories in Labrador, Canada;
- Medicins Sans Frontieres in Brazil, linking with Indigenous-rights groups in a community health project with the Makuxi and Yanomami peoples;
- and the Convencion Nacional de Mujeres, a Mexican women's organization working in solidarity with Indigenous women in Chiapas.

The groups listed above represent only a fraction of those whose contact addresses were circulating on the lists. Their diversity and range suggest that the mailing lists are a good source of contacts for organized solidarity movements.

The final kind of solidarity link was the messages reporting on specific solidarity activities outside the Internet. In the sample of 10 messages of this type, the activities included: demonstrations and other public events, new coalitions forming of solidarity groups, reports of successful actions, fundraising events, general organizing activities, and a new group forming to put shareholder pressure on a corporation to stay out of the territory of an Indigenous nation; this last example is particularly instructive regarding the strategy to target corporations directly. [See appendix: "Sample message: Solidarity links."] The solidarity activities covered a wide geographical area in North and Latin America, suggesting that the mailing lists are a good way to keep informed of these activities.

Survey results summary

The principal function of the mailing lists is to create a social space for the promotion of the world-views of Indigenous peoples. Language barriers on this social space

include the clash of oral and written traditions, and the predominance of English as the language of communication, necessitating translation services for people who speak other languages. Most subscribers to the lists are lurkers.

Fostering dialogue is the primary function of the messages exchanged by subscribers, representing 64 percent of all messages; this figure varied between the lists. These messages formed a series of parallel running conversations. Topics discussed included current or historical events, cultural products and practices, and others.

Disseminating news is the secondary function of the messages. About 45 percent of these messages were produced by an Indigenous or solidarity group or organization; these messages were mostly "soft" news. Forty-two percent of the news messages were produced by journalists with mainstream or alternative newspapers or agencies. The work of journalists with Indigenous newspapers is not circulating on the lists.

Fourteen percent of the messages overall were linked with solidarity actions outside the Internet, either by expressly encouraging readers to participate in solidarity actions outside the Internet, or including the contact address of an organization active in Indigenous rights outside the Internet, or reporting on these outside solidarity activities.

6. Conclusion

In the overview to this study, the mailing lists were situated as responding to a need for new communication and media channels to build bridges between Indigenous peoples and others in the Americas. The second chapter profiled two of the lists surveyed, *Chiapas-l* and *Nativelit-l*, illustrating that the mailing lists can serve a solidarity function; however, the chapters analysing the results of the survey identified inequalities associated with the technology that will limit the usefulness of mailing lists for solidarity communications.

Chapter three addressed the research question concerning the essential features of the technology, concluding that the technology itself contained barriers to communication. Most significant was the barrier to Internet access. Barriers to access were identified as both the technology infrastructure – including no telephone lines into a community – and colonialism and other dominant social relations which have created economically divided societies in the Americas, with the result that millions of people are unable to afford the technology if they should want it.

Needless to say, a massive shift in the balance of power and of the economic structure – which would recognize the Indian and Indigenous title to lands and give oppressed peoples a fairer share of the resources in the Americas – is not expected to occur in the near future. The government policy designed to bring the "information highway" to citizens in the US did not address this fundamental inequality which limits access in the US, and it said nothing about increasing access to people in the Third World countries outside its borders. (US Department of Commerce, 1994) It is notoriously difficult to estimate the number of people who use the Internet (Thompson, 1995) but a reasonable estimate is between two to four million people in the Americas, mostly in the US; however, the total population of the Americas is nearly 700 million. The unmistakable conclusion is that the Internet – and the mailing list process – is essentially an inaccessible communications medium, and it will remain out of the reach of the vast majority of people in the Americas for the foreseeable future.

The problem of unequal access is not simply that it heightens the division between the "info-rich" and the "info-poor." In his review of other information technologies, Kenneth Laudon identified a "deeper" problem related to unequal access: its potential for increasing the gap between the socially active citizens who have access to the technology and the active citizens who do not. The "technology could transform a social aggregate of potential political activism into an acting political coalition, but the political influence of the ordinary member probably will decline." (Laudon, 1977:110) This observation has direct implications for solidarity activities, suggesting that the groups who cannot access the Internet and the mailing list technology could see their influence decline in relation to the "online" solidarity groups. This pattern could also occur within groups: members who know how to use e-mail could become more politically influential than others who do not have Internet skills. On a broader level, it implies that the most "info-rich" members of communities will be the first online, creating new imbalances within and between communities. As well, the people interacting on the mailing lists could be the most privileged community members, and the voices of the most oppressed could be absent from the mailing list discussions. Clearly, a solidarity communications strategy that included mailing lists would also need to include ways to counteract these tendencies. The most evident approach would be to increase indirect access to mailing lists, to find ways to allow those without Internet access to gain some of the benefits of the mailing lists; this point will be discussed shortly.

The same chapter highlighted other barriers to communication that are features of the technology: the "invisible" power of the mailing list listowner or moderator, the centrality of the server computer, and the dominant position of the Internet service provider. Some simple suggestions can be made to improve this situation. First, the listowner could easily be made more visible through regular communications with subscribers, who would then at least be aware that this person exists; on several of the lists surveyed, the listowners did occasionally send messages of this nature to subscribers. Second, to the fullest extent possible, the list should be on a server in a location with both excellent technical support and a commitment that the server will not be vulnerable to political interference. This might involve getting advice from other listowners and shopping around at different colleges and universities in an urban area; questions should be asked about back-up arrangements in the event of a

server crash, and any history of political interference with servers at that location. Third, the choice of Internet service provider should be made thoughtfully. If one must pay for the service, obvious choices are the APC networks or other non-profit service providers that have demonstrated a commitment to Indigenous peoples. There are Indigenous-run commercial service providers in some areas of North America, and these would seem an ideal choice in those areas. A final point about the mailing list technology is that it should always be considered open to modification, to make it meet the needs of its users. Andrew Feenberg has suggested – over-optimistically but nonetheless encouragingly – the potential of having the users of a technology also take responsibility for making it meet their needs: "New criteria of innovation responding to new needs would prevail over capitalist values embodied in inherited technology, leading to fundamental civilizational change." (Feenberg, 1991:60)

Chapter four addressed the second research question, identifying the basic characteristics of the creators and users of the mailing lists. When drafting this chapter, the researcher was impressed with the difficulty of separating the participants from the communication process itself. This difficulty was to some extent a function of the methodology, but it also says something important about the mailing list process in general: the mailing lists cannot be discussed as entities apart from the people who create and use them. One conclusion is that the more widespread diffusion of this new media form – collaborative media – may help break down the myth of "objectivity" surrounding other media forms, such as newspapers, which can still be spoken of and studied as texts apart from authors. A second conclusion is that the mailing list process is inextricably and fundamentally bound up with the people who create it, and by extension with the inequalities that characterize their social relations outside the Internet.

A major limitation of the survey, again a function of the methodology used, was the feeble light it shed on how the dominant social relations outside the Internet were reflected in the mailing list communication process. It would be instructive to know, for instance, how many of the message senders were women. As noted in the introductory chapter, the GVU survey results indicated that only 10 percent of Internet users at large are women. However, the percentage of women participating in the discussion on the lists surveyed appeared to be much higher. The ways in

which women have historically been excluded from the design and development of new communication technologies is well-understood (Curry Jansen, 1989; Frissen, 1992; van Zoonen, 1992) but few research studies have focused on how women do and do not use these technologies in their daily lives (Frissen, 1992:45); it would have been useful to learn something of this process. As well, the survey revealed nothing about the complex interplay among participants related to their gender, class and ethnicity. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey have pointed out that when considering factors such as social and economic positions, Euroamerican women are more similar to their male counterparts than to Indigenous women. (Jaimes and Halsey, 1992:334) How these complexities play themselves out in the mailing list communication process remain unknown.

The same chapter identified a number of significant findings related to the media form and the subscriber base that will not be reviewed here. One issue not directly addressed that begs comment is whether the mailing lists are a "community" or if, as advanced in a recent letter to a newspaper from a computer science professor, the Internet is: "a Balkanized agglomeration of thousands of tiny pocket universes, whose 'citizens' can instantly switch allegiances when things are not to their liking ... reminiscent of the anarchy of a frontier settlement." (Ragde, 1995) The issue of community is related to the observation made that the "self-regulated" mailing list process is fundamentally undemocratic because it allows a minority of message-senders to limit the participation of the majority. One could conclude that the mailing lists surveyed are communities of people with similar interests, that are analogous to communities outside the Internet: all share problems of oligarchy and other dominant social relations. Presumably, some conflicts that will occur on the mailing lists as a result of these tensions could be addressed with dispute-resolution techniques used in groups and communities outside the Internet. However, one could surely find more positive models for mailing list communities than frontier settlements, those symbols of manifest destiny in the United States.

A further point about communities is that the technology discussed in this study – interactive, automatic e-mail – is one of the most popular forms of mailing lists, but mailing lists can also be configured in other ways, to create other kinds of communities. For instance, private, limited, mailing lists can be used for small

groups working on a specific project. One-way mailing lists could prove useful for solidarity groups who want to disseminate information to a wide audience. This study has focused on solidarity communications between Indigenous peoples and others, but mailing lists open only to Indigenous peoples could provide a valuable space to exchange, learn and strategize away from outside interference. All other kinds of mailing lists could prove useful in different ways.

The fifth chapter addressed the question of how the mailing lists function as media and communications for solidarity. One point not highlighted in this chapter is that mailing lists are not inherently good for solidarity communications. In other words, the mailing list technology can be used to support self-determination struggles but it can equally be used to work against them. This issue was raised very briefly in a previous chapter: a media or communications technology can be used to promote either democratic or dominant social relations, depending on who is using it and what they are using it for.

Before drawing conclusions from the findings, it would be helpful to clarify the issue raised by the use of the word "solidarity" in this study. The word is often used in reference to socialism; however, although critical of capitalist social relations and, in particular, the way capitalism commodifies Indigenous cultures for commercial profit, Indigenous scholars have rejected the Marxist analysis of class struggle as the model for their resistance movement. George Tinker, for instance, while not discarding a Marxist analysis entirely, is critical of the hegemony it exercises in much of the Third World because the analysis leaves no room for peoples who consider themselves distinct to find their own revolution or liberation:

Reducing our nationness to classness imposes upon us a particular culture of poverty and especially a culture of labour. It begs the question as to whether indigenous peoples desire production in the modern economic sense in the first place. To put the means of production into the hands of the poor eventually makes the poor exploiters of indigenous peoples and their natural resources... [I]t runs the serious risk of violating the very spiritual values that hold an indigenous cultural group together as a people. (Tinker, 1992:314)

Tinker recalled that the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua was devastating to the Miskito Indians in that country. In the name of socialism, they were "summarily" relocated from their coastal territories, where they had self-sustaining local economies, to high-altitude coffee plantations and were "forced to labour as culturally amorphous workers with no regard to the abject cultural dislocation they had suffered." (1992:316) Ward Churchill is more blunt about the limits of the Marxist model: "Any North American revolution which failed to free indigenous territory from non-Indian domination would simply be a continuation of colonialism in another form." (Churchill, 1992:177)

The chapter gave a very positive review of the solidarity functions of the mailing lists: creating a social space, lurking, fostering dialogue, disseminating news, and linking with solidarity actions outside the Internet. Mailing lists have many features which make them ideal for a range of solidarity activities. However, the major concern emerging from the study is the lack of access to the technology. The conclusion is that the mailing lists will be useful to those who can access it, but to be more effective, mailing lists will need to find links with the non-Internet community and be situated in relation to a whole spectrum of solidarity communications and activities. The remaining discussion will therefore focus on the question: How can the solidarity functions of the lists be extended to people without Internet access? The ideas and suggestions presented below should be considered sketches that could be filled in by further research and analysis.

The two major solidarity functions of the e-mail messages circulating on the lists were fostering dialogue and disseminating news. The dialogue function of the mailing lists, which allows participants to carry on meaningful conversations, can be extended outside the community of mailing list subscribers but it will be a challenge to bring people with no Internet access into the discussion. There were indications during the survey that some subscribers were already making attempts in this direction, by asking questions on behalf of a friend or associate who did not have Internet access. Responses from other subscribers were then presumably printed out and forwarded to the person without access. The next logical step is to continue the dialogue process, forwarding further comments or new questions from the person without access. One could imagine a dialogue of this kind stretching over a long

period of time, but if participants were not in a hurry, they might enjoy the extended process.

Another way to extend the dialogue function was described in a message distributed during the survey period by a subscriber. He takes some of the e-mail messages, prints them out, and leaves them around for friends and relatives to read. In his case, he found that: "This has been very successful as a starting point for some very good discussions about the topics, or about native people generally. Our two youngest sons, who are still living at home, enjoy these discussions and sharing very much." A similar way to extend the benefits of the dialogue function would be for subscribers to simply make a point of discussing with colleagues, friends and family some of what they have learned and observed through the mailing lists.

Disseminating news, the second solidarity function of the mailing lists surveyed, can also be broadened to the larger community with no Internet access. Again, the most obvious way to bring outside news into the lists is by having mailing list subscribers act as mediators, or go-betweens, to the community with no Internet access. If certain subscribers made a commitment to playing this go-between role, community members, and particularly Indigenous groups and NGOs, could have reliable indirect access to the technology, allowing them to regularly post news and information bulletins to the mailing lists. Although the survey for this study was not designed to identify this activity, it appeared it is already taking place. In the chapter discussing message producers, one finding discussed was that 11 percent of the messages overall were produced by people outside the lists working with Indigenous organizations or solidarity groups. Some of these groups and organizations may have no Internet access but have ongoing arrangements with the subscriber or someone else with Internet access to post messages on their behalf.

A promising way to diffuse the news and information circulating on the mailing lists to the wider community may be to encourage media outlets with Internet access to subscribe. The *Chiapas-l* list and the other Chiapas-related Internet sites already appear to have these mainstream media links. [See appendix: "Sample message: News."] In particular, mainstream journalists writing about Indigenous peoples could be encouraged to become subscribers. On one list surveyed, a journalist with a major

mainstream US newspaper was an occasional contributor to the discussions, and it is possible his stories published in the newspaper were more informed as a consequence of his participation. If more print and broadcast journalists were to become regular lurkers on the lists, they would undoubtedly increase their understanding of Indigenous peoples and the self-determination struggle, and this could have a positive effect on the stories they write for the general public. Listowners or other dedicated subscribers could make a point of promoting the mailing lists to journalists. The researcher was impressed when reading the article about the *Dairy-L* mailing list with how much emphasis was placed on promotion outside the Internet: announcements about the list were made at conferences; letters of invitation to join the list were mailed to a wide group of potential subscribers, on an ongoing basis; personal contacts were made by the listowners. (Varner and Cady, 1993:2328) The *Dairy-L* project clearly had resources well in excess of those available to the listowners of the mailing lists surveyed for this study, but the emphasis on promotion is instructive.

An ongoing challenge will be to increase the links between the mailing lists and Indigenous media outlets. The previous chapter discussed the problem related to the lack of news journalism from Indigenous media on the lists. At the time of writing, several Indigenous media outlets have WWW sites, but like most of the alternative news outlets and many of the mainstream news outlets on the Internet, they do not generally make news articles available to Internet users, unless they have been published some time previously and are no longer "news." The basic problem faced by these media outlets is how to allow circulation of their news articles on the Internet for free, without compromising the subscription base of their printed publication. The issue of bringing Indigenous newspapers online is too complex to be discussed here, but any moves in this direction should obviously be made with the full cooperation of the publication involved. Encouraging more Indigenous journalists to become subscribers to the mailing lists will also be a challenge. For various reasons, Indigenous journalists as a group do not have a strong presence on the Internet. For example, the membership of the association of freelance Indigenous journalists, the Native News Network of Canada (NNNC), has not demonstrated a desire to join the Internet community, despite several organized initiatives by the NNNC executive to stimulate interest in the idea. (Personal communication with NNNC, 1995)

Before concluding, some suggestions will be made regarding further research in this field. The most critical issue is access, and in particular, the "indirect" access to the Internet discussed earlier: how to bridge the gap between those with Internet access and those without, to distribute the benefits of the Internet technologies beyond the elite Internet community to the community at large. A second research direction would be to investigate how mailing lists can work with other media forms to support a mass movement for social change, linking the movement for decolonization with other democratic social movements. Mailing lists could be situated within the "small media" spectrum of communications channels – alongside video, fax machines, newsletters and bulletins, or even community radio and television – all of which have their part to play in mobilization for social change. (Downing, 1984) An interesting example of new research in this field is the recent case study on the role of small media in the Iranian revolution which suggested the framework for further investigation:

Small media created a political "public sphere"; they were channels of participation, extended preexisting cultural networks and communicative patterns, and became the vehicles of an oppositional discourse that was able to mobilize a mass movement. They must be seen as technologies or channels of communication, but also as the web of political solidarity and as the carriers of oppositional discourse... [O]nly a rich, historically inflected cultural approach to such communication can transcend a narrow, technologically biased understanding to situate small media in a complex net of economic, political, and cultural relations. (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994:xx)

Finally, it is perhaps considered not "academic" to dramatize the issue studied but a brief overview of current events will underline the genuine need to increase the communication channels between Indigenous peoples and others in the Americas. The most serious and well-known conflict is the EZLN/Maya confrontation with landowners and the Mexican state in Chiapas, but many others are occurring at the time of writing. In Canada, five years after the armed confrontation at the Kahnasetake reserve near Oka, this summer of 1995 has already seen its share of

disputes. On Vancouver Island on the west coast, a blockade was established in April by the Nanoose First Nation. [In Canada, "First Nation" refers to the more than 600 Indian reserves or territories controlled by band councils that have relations with the government of Canada; the "public" roads or railroads traversing First Nation territory are the likely sites of confrontation at times of conflict.] In June, negotiations began to bring down another blockade, on the territory of the Upper Nicola First Nation. My mid-July, at Adams Lake, the blockade held jointly by the Adams Lake, Little Shuswap and Neskonlith First Nations remained in place after 125 days and tensions on both sides were reported to be mounting. The ongoing conflicts across the vast terrain of Canada's interior are too numerous to mention here. On the east coast, Mi'Kmaq warriors are at this moment supporting a protest on the shores of the Miramichi river over a dispute involving treaty rights to fishing. Yesterday, the Canadian national press agency posted a story on its WWW Internet site about an incident in which rifle shots were fired into the home of the leader of the protest. (CP, 1995) The *MicMac News*, the oldest and most distinguished Indigenous newspaper in the country, is unable to tell the Mi'Kmaq side of the story: it folded several years ago after failing to find commercial sources of revenue when the federal government withdrew its core funding.

This study will conclude with an optimistic vision for the future, courtesy of Seneca Nation member John Mohawk, the historian quoted in an earlier chapter in response to the *Wired* vision of progress. In a book published in 1992 – the quincentenary of European contact, marked by Indigenous groups across the Americas under the theme "500 Years of Resistance" – Mohawk contributed an essay titled: "Looking for Columbus: Thoughts on the Past, Present and Future of Humanity," in which he concluded:

We are going to have to ask ourselves what our resources are. Our first resource is human compassion, gained through the clear use of our minds, which will allow us to make the best use of the human family. And another of our best resources emerges when we think clearly about the questions that are not being answered by the society we live in. For the first time in human history, it is possible to talk to the jungle-dwelling Indians of South America in a European language at a North American conference and find out what they think about the world they live in and the world we live in. It is possible for the first time to take

all the knowledge of the whole family of humanity and start plotting a course toward a viable future. It is possible at last to look at the modern period, not as a process of crisis and decline, but as a wonderful opportunity to amalgamate and pull things together, and to make the world our library. It at last is possible, in other words, not only to finally find the real meaning of Columbus, but to bury it. (Mohawk, 1992:443)

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Appendices

Sample message: Dialogue a

From: Joanne
To: NATIVELIT-L <NATIVELIT-L@cornell.edu>
Subject: RE: teaching Erdrich's _Tracks_

Paul wrote:

>Things get really painful when we move into this alcohol
>matter. I have tried to get my students in the American Indian
>Literature course out of what seems their very frequent racist assigning
>of this to genetics and materialist assigning of it to reservation
>conditions, but they do want to insist on it and I have to raise hell
>before they will take seriously my wish to have them look at the
>"witchery" behind it. I don't mean necessarily Silko's literal and
>Laguna term, I mean that the problems go deep, into the notions of land
>and property and America, into spiritual and ceremonial realities, into
>human relationships of hope and goodness.

I've been examining this issue in terms of how people think about reality in terms of their/our relationships to land and "property." Someone in a recent post on this same subject expected that Erdrich should consider Indian women as women and not as only mothers. I find that this is a common response among white feminists (I'm a feminist as well and have always had trouble with the white concept of female-ness/femininity as having an identity outside of interconnected and interdependent community). This kind of response seems to mean that the issue of mothering somehow diminishes the person who mothers. And it seems to come from a lack of understanding that coming from/returning to/being with/connected by collective umbilical to mother is NOT a problem for non-Freudianized Indian people. I also seem to recall that someone wanted to read about Indian people who aren't touched or troubled by social problems, or something like that. This is a really strange idea. Is it related to the "noble savage" syndrome? Or is it part of the wish to embrace a pollyanna-ish notion that Indians are, at heart, untouched by the witchery and writers who bring up the question of how to deal with not feeling quite so pure are to be admonished and isolated? I haven't read Broken Cord, but have read Erdrich's novels and find her to be fully well rounded. I'm not troubled by her focus on the issues of assimilation and the problems found in trying to unravel the tiny thread of existence assigned to Indian people by a powerful and oppressing dominant group. Erdrich makes the thread into a rope with which we may pull ourselves out of the oppressive muck and onto ground more suitable for a decent discussion on where to go next.

Thanks for pointing the way....

Joanne

Sample message: Dialogue b

From: Kathy
To: NATIVELIT-L <NATIVELIT-L@cornell.edu>
Subject: RE: teaching Erdrich's _Tracks_

Joanne wrote:

>I've been examining this issue in terms of how people think about reality
>in terms of their/our relationships to land and "property." Someone in a
>recent post on this same subject expected that Erdrich should consider
>Indian women as women and not as only mothers. I find that this is a
>common response among white feminists (I'm a feminist as well and have
>always had trouble with the white concept of female-ness/femininity as
>having an identity outside of interconnected and interdependent
>community). This kind of response seems to mean that the issue of
>mothering somehow diminishes the person who mothers. And it seems to
>come from a lack of understanding that coming from/returning to/being
>with/connected by collective umbilical to mother is NOT a problem for
>non-Freudianized Indian people.

Joanne,

I have been thinking about your words. I don't see myself as a white feminist who homogenizes women under that category. My reason for arguing for women to be seen as people is that I think any position that supports incarcerating women during pregnancy reduces/defines/confines women to the identity of "producer of children." My concern then becomes who has the rights to that body? The woman? the child? the state who is determining how that woman can treat her body? I don't think mothering diminishes a person; I see mothering as one identity of many identities that a person has. I think incarcerating or sterilizing women reduces the multiple identities of a woman to the importance of one function. I posted my response to Erdrich's intro because i felt that she was irresponsible in supporting a position that reduced women to a biological function. Given Erdrich's fame as a writer, her opinions have power to affect how people think about and respond to an issue. I think we have to remain self-critical lest we reproduce the structures we are trying to break down.

Kathy

Sample message: Dialogue c

From: Joanne
To: NATIVELIT-L <NATIVELIT-L@cornell.edu>
Subject: RE: teaching Erdrich's _Tracks_

Kathy wrote:

>I have been thinking about your words. I don't see myself as a
>white feminist who homogenizes women under that category.

Are you a white feminist? Most white feminists don't see themselves as white feminists. My take on that is that white-ness is not problematized, so, like fish that don't think about the water, whites don't think about being white.

> My reason for
> arguing for women to be seen as people is that I think any position that
> supports incarcerating women during pregnancy reduces/defines/confines
> women to the identity of "producer of children." My concern then becomes
> who has the rights to that body? The woman? the child? the state who is
> determining how that woman can treat her body?

Indian people, generally, think of ourselves as tribal first (like, Potawatomi) and Indian second. Being people is a status like being trees or being coyotes or being squirrels. We're just one part of the peopled earth, to whom we also attribute a people-ness/female-ness. So, who has rights to the body of our mother? Surely not me; I only must attend to her body and take good care of her so she will take care of me. So, mothering is not, to Indians, an identity among many identities, and it is not a function of biology. It is a responsibility and a duty, as is being father, brother, uncle, grandfather, grandmother, sister, auntie, cousin, niece, nephew. My point is that there is a sense of extension in the being mother which doesn't lie only with, or stop with, the body of the person who bears the child. She brings life. It is up to everyone to share the responsibility for the life of the child with her.

> I don't think mothering
> diminishes a person; I see mothering as one identity of many identities
> that a person has.

Yes, persons "mother." Men "mother." Mother is not, however, an identity. Identity implies that "we know her because" she is mother. What we generally know is that she is SOMEONE'S mother.

It's late and this is getting way too esoteric for me....:^)

> I think incarcerating or sterilizing women reduces
> the multiple identities of a woman to the importance of one function. I
> posted my response to Erdrich's intro because i felt that she was
> irresponsible in supporting a position that reduced women to a biological
> function. Given Erdrich's fame as a writer, her opinions have power to
> affect how people think about and respond to an issue. I think we have
> to remain self-critical lest we reproduce the structures we are trying to

> break down.

Sample message: News [message is two pages in length]

From: Richard
To: Chiapas95 <chiapas95@undo.eco.utexas.edu>
Cc: chiapas-1@profmexis.dgsca.unam.mx
Subject: Chase Manhattan Report Follow-up, Apr.24

This posting has been forwarded to you as a service of the Austin Comite de Solidaridad con Chiapas y Mexico.

NOTE BENE: The following article from COUNTERPUNCH follows up on the story of the infamous Chase Manhattan Bank report written by Riordan Roett and distributed to Chase's client by its Emerging Markets Group. Ken Silverstein and Alexander Cockburn obtained a copy of the report and wrote about it, and about Roett's other efforts, in the February 1, 1995 issue of COUNTERPUNCH. This was the report in which Roett made three suggestions: 1. that the Mexican government should "eliminate" the Zapatistas, 2. that it should consider stealing the elections in Jalisco and 3. that just how much pain the "Mexican working class" could be made to bear, to appease foreign investors, was an open question. Roett's Report, along with Silverstein and Cockburn's article, was posted first on Chiapas95, then on chiapas-1, and then it was reposted again and again circulating quickly all over the world, provoking outrage and protests from Mexico City, through the United States to Western Europe. According the following piece, the protests against Chase Manhattan, and the embarrassment it caused, apparently led the Bank to fire Roett. The Chase report, as well as many stories of the protests and actions it provoked, can be found in the archives of Chiapas95 which can be accessed through gopher eco.utexas.edu mailing-lists/Chiapas95, or through the web via <http://lanic.utexas.edu/>

Richard

.....story begins here.....

Ken Silverstein and Alexander Cockburn, "Chase Memo Tumult: Come Blow Our Horn," COUNTERPUNCH, Volume 2, No. 4, February 15, 1995, p.3.

Our Feb. 1 report that Chase bank had called on the Mexican government to "eliminate" the Zapatistas in the name of investor stability caused an uproar in the U.S. and Mexico. For days, COUNTERPUNCH phones rang non-stop, with activists and journalists requesting urgent fax transmittal of our story and the Chase memo which contained the bank's suggestion.

Organizers brandished the memorandum at demonstrations in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, New York, and other cities. The story was covered by everyone from FINAL CALL, which is published by the Nation of Islam, to THE WASHINGTON POST.

On Capitol Hill, Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio) held a press conference to denounce the bank. "Suggesting the killing of innocent people, throwing elections --none of this seems to bother Chase," said Kaptur, who called the memo an "amazing, troubling document." She added that "anyone who honestly believed that Wall Street's hands weren't all over [the Clinton bail-out] should take a good hard look at this memo."

Similar uproar took place in Mexico after PROCESO, a major news weekly, carried a Feb.13 story about COUNTERPUNCH's disclosures. Zapatista officials in the U.S. say that publication of the Chase memo was "a turning point" in that it was the first hard evidence which directly linked Wall Street to Mexico's economic and political crisis.

Chase tried a variety of tactics in seeking to defuse the ensuing PR nightmare. First the bank insisted that the whole thing had resulted from a copy editing error, and that Chase had intended to call for the elimination of the Zapatista "threat," not the Zapatistas. This tactic fell flat. Chase officials then placed sole responsibility for the fiasco on the document's author, Riordan Roett. In a terse official communique, Chase said that the opinions expressed in the memo "represent [Roett's] personal views as a scholar. They were not meant to nor do they represent the views of Chase." As Roett is on Chase's payroll and the memo went out on bank stationary, this explanation also carried little weight.

On February 16, Chase completed its distancing process from the memo. "Dr. Roett," announced Steve Rautenberg, a bank spokesman, "no longer has a relationship with Chase."

(Though his most spectacular blunder, this was not the first time Roett made a fool of himself in his role as omniscient advisor. Last year, he informed financial reporters that Venezuela would probably default on its Brady bonds. This prediction, which proved to be false, caused hysteria among investors when it was carried on the AP-Dow Jones Wire.)

A final note: The Mexico City daily, EL FINANCIERO, reports that the former president of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, has accepted an offer to join the board of directors of Dow Jones & Co., publisher of the WALL STREET JOURNAL. The offer comes at an opportune moment for Salinas, whose U.S.-backed bid to head the World Trade Organization lies in ruins amid the crash of the Mexican economy. Salinas' role on the Dow Jones board will be, in the words of EL FINANCIERO, "to utilize strategic information accumulated during his mandate . . . to benefit the lords of financial speculation."

(The Chase memo is free for subscribers who send in a stamped addressed envelope. Any contributions to offset copying and labor costs would be appreciated.)

.....end of story.....

A subscription to COUNTERPUNCH can be obtained for \$40/yr for an individual, \$25/yr for student/low-income. Write to IPS, 1601 Connecticut Avenue,N.W., Washington D.C., 20009.

Sample message: Solidarity links [message is four pages in length]
[This message was also categorized as "news" for the survey]

From: Gerald
Subject: Lubicon Cree
Mailing List: NATIVE-L(nativel@gnosys.svle.ma.us)

Lubicon Lake Indian Nation
Little Buffalo Lake, AB
Phone: 403-629-3945
Fax: 403-629-3939

Mailing address:
3536 - 106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T6J 1A4
Phone: 403-436-5652
Fax: 403-437-0719

March 30, 1995

Most recently natural gas has become valuable as the "fuel of choice" for the huge U.S. utilities and the Lubicons consequently face yet another assault on their lands, their resources, their rights and their society. Natural gas processing facilities are being proposed all over the Lubicon territory -- including very worrisome "sour gas" plants designed to remove lethal hydrogen sulphide from natural gas so as to make it commercially viable. At best these sour gas plants produce sulphur dioxide emissions which are associated with serious health problems wherever such plants are located. At worst accidental release of hydrogen sulphide by these plants can kill instantly.

On February 23 the Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board -- the regulatory agency considering Unocal's sour gas plant -- announced that they'd decided to approve it. The Provincially-appointed Board of the Provincially-created and funded regulatory agency not surprisingly found that they have "full statutory authority (under Provincial law) to regulate energy related activities on this disputed land, and hold the view that the mineral and land surface leases were properly obtained by Unocal from the (Provincial) Crown".

The clear message to the Lubicons by both levels of Canadian government and their resource exploitation company cronies is you have no rights to your traditional territory and we'll do to you what we please whether you like it or not. Under such circumstances domestic redress has truly been exhausted and it's up to the international community to prevent the final extinction of this small embattled indigenous society.

The School Sisters of St. Francis are shareholders in Unocal of California, the parent company of Unocal Canada. Unocal's Annual General Meeting is scheduled for May 22, 1995, in Houston, Texas. The School Sisters of St. Francis have filed a shareholders resolution on the Unocal sour gas plant built in Lubicon territory which will be discussed at that AGM. People are asked to send letters opposing Unocal's sour gas plant to:

Sister Laurie Michalowski, SSSF
Chair, SSSF Corporate Responsibility Committee
4127 N. Central Park

Chicago, Illinois USA 60618

It is important to let Unocal shareholders know what is at stake and that the international community opposes what their Directors are doing in Lubicon territory.

Attachment #1: School Sisters of St. Francis Resolution

UNOCAL IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES

WHEREAS Unocal Canada Management Limited has constructed a sour gas processing plant in northern Alberta on the contested aboriginal lands of the Lubicon Lake Indian Nation;

AND WHEREAS the Lubicon Lake Indian Nation publicly opposes construction and operation of Unocal Canada's sour gas processing plant for environmental and health reasons and has also charged Unocal Canada with fraudulently misrepresenting the Lubicon position on construction of the plant in order to obtain regulatory agency approval to construct it;

AND WHEREAS both levels of Canadian government have publicly acknowledged that the Lubicon Lake Indian Nation has rights to traditional Lubicon lands although there remains disagreement as to the exact nature and extent of those rights;

AND WHEREAS the dispute over Lubicon land rights has attracted international attention including a decision by the U.N. Human Rights Committee that development activity in the unceded Lubicon territory violates the civil and political rights of the Lubicons and charges by the World Council of Churches that development activities in the unceded Lubicon territory could have genocidal consequences for the Lubicon people;

AND WHEREAS the history of the Lubicon dispute and the support which the Lubicon people enjoy both within Canada and internationally ensures that the Unocal Canada sour gas processing plant will remain a source of continuing controversy for as long as it is located in the unceded Lubicon territory including the possibility of triggering an international consumer boycott of Unocal;

AND WHEREAS the Unocal Canada sour gas processing plant in northern Alberta is part of the larger question facing Unocal of the impact and implications of Unocal activities upon Indigenous societies worldwide;

AND WHEREAS opposition to the construction and operation of Unocal Canada's sour gas processing plant in the unceded Lubicon territory may therefore create continuing negative publicity for Unocal operations and an unstable investment climate jeopardizing returns to Unocal shareholders;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the shareholders of Unocal request the Board of Directors to prepare a full written report to all shareholders (admitting proprietary information) within three months of the 1994 Annual Meeting providing information on Unocal Canada's involvement in the Lubicon territory, the newly constructed sour gas processing plant, Lubicon charges that Unocal Canada fraudulently misrepresented the Lubicon position on construction of the plant in order to obtain regulatory approval of its construction, alternatives to putting this sour gas processing plant into operation, the likely consequences for Unocal if this sour gas processing plant is put into operation in the Lubicon territory and the impact and implications of Unocal activities upon Indigenous societies

worldwide. This report should contain information on the situation provided directly by the Lubicons as well as by the officials of Unocal Canada.

Attachment #2: Transcript of CBC Radio Edmonton A.M. (6:45 A.M.) Wednesday, March 29, 1995

John Grant, Edmonton A.M.: Last month the Klein Government gave the go-ahead for a Unocal sour-gas plant to be built in northern Alberta. The Lubicon Cree didn't want the plant built or at least opened until their land claim is settled. Now they have an unlikely ally. The School Sisters of St. Francis are based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They hold 7,000 shares in the company that built the sour gas plant. Sister Laurie Michelowski is with the Sisters of St. Francis and she's on the line this morning.

Lydia Neufeld, Edmonton A.M.: Good morning, Sister Laurie.

Sister Laurie Michelowski, School Sisters of St. Francis: Good morning, Lydia.

Neufeld: So what is your concern with this sour gas plant here in Alberta?

Michelowski: Well, our concern with the sour gas plant and other issues affecting Indigenous Peoples revolve around human rights issues, sovereignty issues and the environment, health and safety. We're especially concerned with the Unocal plant because of its location near the new (proposed) reserve of the Lubicon Cree as well as the methodology of going about the whole process.

Neufeld: How did you learn about this?

Michelowski: The issue was introduced to us through Sister Toni Harris, President of the Board of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. This is a coalition of over 275 Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish institutional investors. She has done much work on Exxon and the mining issues with Indigenous Peoples.

Neufeld: How unusual is it for a religious order to have this kind of corporate influence, so to speak?

Michelowski: Not unusual at all. The combined portfolio worth of the religious investors in the United States is \$45 billion to begin with. Secondly I think we can look at the issues over the years. Religious investors have been quite influential on the issues of South Africa, EEO and affirmative action, the Series Program. And especially of interest to Canadian citizens, you're probably aware of the Great Whale Project with Hydro Quebec and the religious investors played a major role in the social and environmental concerns of that contract.

Neufeld: Now this position that you've taken, what response have you had from Unocal?

Michelowski: Unocal has been cooperative with us in the fact of dialoguing with us. I was able to visit the site, spend a day with Fritz Perschon and the general plant manager and attorneys. We met with the Lubicon Cree. However, I think they're cooperative to a point. What I'm feeling is that the company may not realize the depth of the matter. There may be an immediate concern with starting up the sour gas plant. Our concern is Unocal looking at the long term results of this action and its relationship with the Lubicons for the years to come.

Neufeld: Now did they initially try to block your action?

Michelowski: They offered a dialogue with us. We did that. As I said I met in Little Buffalo with the company and with the Lubicons. It's a formality that companies can choose to challenge our resolution with the Securities and Exchange Commission. They did that. We won the right at the Security and Exchange Commission to have our resolution introduced on the proxy statement to all the shareholders of Unocal.

Neufeld: Now, when you met with the Lubicons, what kind of response have you had from them?

Michelowski: Very welcoming, very affirmative. The Lubicons have appreciated our efforts. We do not speak on behalf of the Lubicon Cree nor do we speak on behalf of the vast supporters internationally of the Lubicon Cree. We speak with them. And I think they recognize that we are there as their colleague and ally.

Neufeld: How much influence do you think you will have in the end?

Michelowski: We hope quite a bit. As I said, we cited some of these other issues to you. I would hope that Unocal -- as they have indicated to us that it wants to do the right thing -- can re-examine its location. The Lubicon Cree are not anti-development. I think Unocal recognizes that. I think furthermore we would hope that beyond the ruling of the ERCB, beyond looking at bottom-line profits, that Unocal would recognize that perhaps just in changing location this can have long-term positive effects for everyone.

Neufeld: Thank you for speaking with us this morning.

Michelowski: May I add also when you were asking about how we learned about the issue -- I wanted to also recognize that the Los Angeles Rain Forest Action Network has been one of the groups that has worked with us on this issue.

Neufeld: Thank you.

Michelowski: Thank you.

Grant: Sister Laurie Michelowski is with the Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee.

Survey results tables, summary

Subscribers

Number of subscribers per list (data from 15 subscriber listings)

<i>Day</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Highest</i>	<i>Median</i>
1	379	19	1164	329
50	392	29	1258	363

Subscriber loyalty per list over 50 days (data from 8 subscriber listings)

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Highest</i>	<i>Median</i>
Loyal subscribers as % of subscribers	83	64	100	91

Geographic location of subscriber (data from 8 subscriber listings)

	<i>% of Subscribers</i>
North America	91
Latin America	3
Outside Americas	6

Internet service provider of subscriber (data from 8 subscriber listings)

	<i>% of Subscribers</i>
Educational institution	69
Non-profit organization (org)	4

Other

27

Message senders

Number of message senders per list (data from listing of message senders on 13 active lists)

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Highest</i>	<i>Median</i>
Number of message senders	66	8	288	32
Message senders as % of subscribers	16	5	48	11

Activity per list over 10 days (data from survey of activity on 13 active lists)

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Highest</i>	<i>Median</i>
Avg. number of messages sent	36	2	175	12
Avg. volume of messages (kbytes)	170	5	1103	49

Internet service provider of message sender (data from listing of message senders on 13 active lists)

	<i>% of Subscribers</i>
Educational institution	62
Non-profit organization (org)	10
Other	28

Message producers

Message producer (data from representative sample)

	<i>% Messages</i>	<i>% Volume</i>
Subscriber, including organizations	70	40
<i>Outside source:</i>		
<i>Journalist, newspaper or agency</i>	15	28
<i>Writer, Indigenous or solidarity org.</i>	11	26
<i>Other</i>	4	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Type of message produced, by producer (data from representative sample)

	<i>% Messages</i>	<i>% Volume</i>
Dialogue		
<i>Subscriber producer</i>	63	34
<i>Outside producer</i> 1	1	
News		
<i>Subscriber producer</i>	6	5
<i>Outside producer</i> 29	59	
Other		
<i>Subscriber producer</i>	1	1
<i>Outside producer</i> 0	0	
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Type of message produced

	<i>% Messages</i>	<i>% Volume</i>
Dialogue	64	35
News	35	64
Other	1	1

Total

100

100

Dialogue messages: theme and type of interaction (data from representative sample)

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Type of interaction</i>		
	<i>Requests % msg.</i>	<i>Responses % msg.</i>	<i>Total % msg.</i>
Current or historical events	16	35	51
Books, films, TV, music, etc.	10	21	31
Internet, e-mail list process	4	3	7
Upcoming events	3	1	4
Other	1	6	7
<i>Total</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>100</i>

News messages: issues and sources

<i>Issue</i>	<i>News source</i>			
	<i>Indigenous or sol. org. % msg.</i>	<i>Newspaper or agency % msg.</i>	<i>Other % msg.</i>	<i>Total % msg.</i>
Current or historical events	27	42	7	76
Books, films, TV, music, etc.	3	0	3	6
Internet, e-mail list process	6	0	0	6
Upcoming events	8	0	4	12
<i>Total</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>100</i>

Link to solidarity activities (data from representative sample)

	<i>% Messages</i>	<i>% Volume</i>
Link	14	23

No link

86

77

Contacts

Subscribing to a Mailing List

Native-l, *Nativelit-l*, and *Chiapas-l* are currently the three most popular electronic mailing lists for exchanges concerning Indigenous peoples. To subscribe to one of these lists, send an e-mail message to the server at the addresses below, containing only the word "subscribe" followed by the name of the list. For example, to subscribe to *Nativelit-l*, the message would read: subscribe *Nativelit-l*

Native-l: listserv@tamvm1.tamu.edu

Nativelit-l: listproc@cornell.edu

Chiapas-l: majordomo@profmexis.dgsca.unam.mx

A listing of other mailing lists on this topic can be found on the NativeWeb WWW site at the following URL address:

NativeWeb: http://ukanaix.cc.ukans.edu/~marc/native_text.html

Internet Service Providers

In some regions of North America, it is possible to connect with the Internet through an organization run by Indigenous peoples. The best way to obtain the latest information on this situation is to explore the NativeWeb WWW site at the address above.

Another option is the APC (Association for Progressive Communications) networks. Send a note to the office in the US asking about the APC network serving your country or region. Their address is:

Institute for Global Communications
18 De Boom Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
USA

E-mail: support@igc.apc.org

Indigenous Publications

As noted in the conclusion to the study, the best source of news is not the Internet. Most periodicals published by Indigenous-run organizations are available by subscription. The ones listed below are good sources of news and analysis on the self-determination struggle, but many other publications are also available.

Abya Yala News

SAIIC (South and Meso American Indian Rights Centre)
P.O. Box 28703
Oakland, CA 94604
USA

Phone: (510) 834-4263
Fax:(510) 834-4264
E-mail: saic@igc.apc.org

Akwasasne Notes

Mohawk Nation Territory
P.O. Box 196
Rooseveltown, NY 13683-0196
USA

Windspeaker

AMMSA (Aboriginal Multi-Media Society of Alberta)
15001 - 112 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5M 2V6
Canada

Phone: (403) 455-2700
Fax: (403) 455-7639

Susan O'Donnell can be reached at: susanodo@gn.apc.org