

Cybernations: Identity, Self-determination, Democracy and the “Internet Effect” in the Emerging Information Order

KURT MILLS

Gil Scott-Heron says: “The revolution will not be televised.” The global reach of CNN makes that claim doubtful. Regardless, however, the revolution *will* be digitised, faxed, e-mailed, uploaded, and generally will be available electronically to a large portion of humanity. It may not be the immediate, real-time revolution we expect from CNN à la Tiananmen Square or Boris Yeltsin standing up to Soviet tanks, but it will be real time nonetheless. What revolution am I talking about? It is the revolution taking place with the digitisation of identity, the wedding of selfhood and the electronic age, the redefinition, or, conversely, the reification, of communal affiliation via cyberspace, and the use of cyberspace to further self-determination and democratic reform.

The ways we experience reality, encounter ourselves and others, participate in daily activities, and, of course, act politically, are in the process of being dramatically redefined and remade. The “virtual” is overtaking the “real”. Virtual cash evades the control of governments and can even bring economies to their knees.¹ Ideas also evade the grasp of governmental censors, whether they be about human rights or racial hatred. Territorial boundaries are rendered meaningless as bits and bytes, electrons, data, faxes, and images speed along fibre optic cable, up and down satellite links, and through the matrix of cyberspace.

It seems obvious that something is happening to the way we communicate, organise ourselves, and identify ourselves. But what? Are identities undergoing fundamental change? Are they being deterritorialised? The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, the Internet is making non-territorially based identities more viable or “virtually” more real. On the other, the same bundle of technologies is reifying old-fashioned ethnic/national/communal territorially based identifications. A contradiction? Of course, but in the Age of Ambiguity² that should not bother us, for we can recognise the local and the global forces simultaneously tearing us apart and binding us together, and handle this seeming cognitive dissonance with aplomb.

1. Walter B. Wriston, *The Twilight of Sovereignty: How the Information Revolution is Transforming Our World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992).

2. Kurt Mills, *Human Rights in the Emerging Global Order: A New Sovereignty?* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 53.

In the following pages, I look at these contradictions that seem to arise in this era of globalisation. I attempt to get a grasp on how the advent of instantaneous global communications may be affecting the milieu in which we construct our identities and how we act on those identities. In particular, I provide a few examples where different types of identities, those firmly planted in old-fashioned, specified terra firma, as well as those with a more transnational character, are attempting to use the Internet to further their identity construction or self-determination projects. These include the Kurds, Tibet, the Zapatistas, the Vatican, and the self-styled *Diocèse sans frontières* of "Partenia". The examples were chosen because they illustrate some of the various ways different kinds of communities are using the Internet to strengthen their communal identities and to pursue self-determination, as well as some of the contradictions inherent in using this fast-growing set of technologies. What can we conclude? Yes, the Internet is changing in the ways we interact and view ourselves and each other. Yet, it is far too soon to declare the end of nationalism and parochial identity. The former Yugoslavia demonstrates the extreme localisation that occurs in this age of globalisation. And the plight of the Kurds, the demands of the Québécois, and the radicalism of a small part of Islam all highlight the centrality of identity in today's hyperlinked world. Indeed, global telecommunications will facilitate the reification of these identities. Further, the global distribution of resources and differences in levels of access to telecommunications technology restrict the ability of many to use cyberspace to reify alternative identities and challenge traditional state authority. Although there is significant potential in the ability of people to use these resources to facilitate change, there are also limits to how much these technologies can, by themselves, effect change, and limits to the possibilities of revolution, whether televised or not.

Identity and Community in the Information Age

How can cyberspace facilitate identity construction projects and self-determination movements? How should we conceptualise identity and community in the Information Age? Are our current understandings of these concepts useful in understanding the changes we are witnessing today? Benedict Anderson's characterisation of community as "deep, horizontal comradeship"³—a connection, a fraternity, an idea that bonds people together—is useful here. The argument is that such bonds can be created in the ether of bits and bytes, as well as in other types of interaction. That is, the interactions that occur in cyberspace can, in some instances, contribute to that comradeship. As Anderson points out, members of communities never have the opportunity to meet most of the other members. These communities are thus "imagined communities": "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the power of their communion".⁴ Given that all communities are imagined, constructed in the minds of the members, it is thus not surprising that such communities could appear or be strengthened in cyberspace.

3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Why is this? Cyberspace replicates, at least in part, the conditions under which certain types of interactions, which are necessary for communities to arise and be sustained, take place. Ray Oldenburg argues that there are three main “places” people inhabit—places to live, places of work, and places of conviviality. The last, so-called “third place”, refers to the Agora of ancient Greece, the place where people engage in casual conversation that includes not only idle chatter, but also the vital discussion of public issues that affect everybody. These third places, which provide “psychological comfort and support”, are receding, and nowhere more than in the US as communities have started to come apart at the seams as a result of mall culture, among other factors.⁵ Malls have replaced cafés, Chilis(tm) has replaced Cheers(tm), a mass market gathering place substitutes for the corner bar “where everybody knows your name”. Of course, such developments occur far beyond the United States, as mass market globalisation undermines or replaces traditional “Agoras” worldwide. Online communities provide space for these third places, “places of conviviality”, virtual Agoras where people can participate in public discussions and engage in many of the other interactions that are necessary for psychological well-being. As I will argue below, it may be that the potential for cyberspace to provide “virtual” Agoras for “real” communities will prove to be one of its most enduring legacies by supporting the connected, yet contradictory, processes of the reification and the realignment of communal affiliation and identity.

However, a cautionary note must be sounded here. While the creation of virtual Agoras may help facilitate the creation of “imagined communities”, not all elements of Anderson’s framework may be available online. Some of the most powerful unifying symbols are physical ones. Anderson talks, for example, about tombs of Unknown Soldiers. Although “void ... of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings”.⁶ Such monuments help to underscore the sacrifices that people made for their nation and the preciousness of national identity arising out of that sacrifice. Visiting a tomb of the Unknown Soldiers is supposed to provide a visceral reification of our nationalism. Other physical manifestations have the same effect. Flags, of course, are shorthand for national identity. All Americans recognise the Washington Monument as a symbol of the United States (as well as the power of the United States emanating from the halls of Congress and the White House, in visual range of the monolith). Museums, through the inclusion or exclusion of certain artefacts (and facts) also help to solidify national identity. Other physical, cultural artefacts become logos, symbols of the nation. Angkor Wat (reconstructed by the French) was featured prominently in successive, if diametrically opposed, Cambodian regimes.⁷ Can one imagine Egypt without the pyramids of Giza? The current government, society, generation, and, indeed, civilisation of Egypt, played no role whatsoever in their construction. Yet they are used by Egyptians to denote seven millennia of continuous culture and civilisation (even though the pagan religious rituals they represent would be anathema to the current identity of Egypt as an Islamic state). Such imposing

5. Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* [online] (1993), available: < <http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/1.html> > .

6. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

presences, at least to a certain extent, require physical presence and contact. We all learn about the pyramids in our history classes, but actually being in the presence of such completely out of human scale structures is a different matter entirely and allows one to feel the weight of history behind the pyramids. Or, being told about the eternal flame that commemorates a great national figure or event is one thing. Actually being there and feeling the history (or at least of version of history) is another. Can any of this be recreated in cyberspace? One can upload pictures and stories and histories that might contribute to a feeling of connectedness and nationhood. But, until full immersive virtual reality technologies are implemented, these tokens will pale in comparison to actually seeing the real thing, feeling the presence. However, this might not be the most important point. Images and sounds and stories can serve as reminders of experiences. Some of the groups I talk about in the following pages have some sort of physical referent. In these instances, the "nation" has a specific territory associated with it, and the physical manifestations of the nation can be at least suggested, if not fully reproduced, in cyberspace. Just as most members of a nation do not know each other, so do many members of a nation not have the opportunity to visit and experience the awe and majesty of national symbols. But we all learn about them in school or through family or church. Seeing or hearing visual or aural cues can still be powerful. *Le Marseillaise* heard through computer speakers can still pack a visceral punch, even if it is not sung together with 10,000 other Frenchman at a football match or on Bastille Day (this phenomenon is what Anderson calls unisonance—"the echoed physical realization of the imagined community"⁸).

Further, other, perhaps more spiritual, signs may also be used to signify connection. Of course, it is not that simple. Anderson points out that one of the great unifiers of global religious imagined communities was (and to a certain extent still is) the pilgrimage. During the apex of Western Christendom, what brought together all of the pilgrims to Rome was the common experience of the pilgrimage. It seems unlikely that a pilgrimage to Mecca could be recreated in cyberspace (nor would such a virtual pilgrimage be likely to be recognised as fulfilling that pillar of Islam). Yet online discussions of the meaning of the experience of the hajj could serve as a unifying force, given that it is such an important part of Islam. This unifying activity could, at the same time, reify (and thus realign) that part (religion) of one's identity.

The process of realigning identity is what David Elkins refers to as "unbundling". "Bundling" involves taking a bunch of identities together. Territoriality provides a framework for understanding ourselves, and our relationships to others, both within our territorially defined state and outside. There are common elements such as history, tradition, culture, religion, language, ethnicity, etc. which *may* be present within the bundle called the state, and citizens of these imagined communities take most or all of these together as key aspects of identity. When one goes beyond the territorial state for vital aspects of one's identity, that identity becomes at least partially separated or unbundled from the state. Elkins observes that such unbundling may result in new forms of bundling as identities become realigned and change in import.⁹ These unbundled

8. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

9. David J. Elkins, "Globalization, Telecommunication, and Virtual Ethnic Communities", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1997), p. 142.

identities lead to the creation of the postmodern "self" which is a "'decentered' self—a historically constituted identity that is continuously being reconstructed. The postmodern self is an assemblage of its environment, a *multiple self* that changes in response to different social situations."¹⁰ Ronald Deibert argues that, instead of nationalism, we should think in terms of "nichelism", "a polytheistic universe of multiple and overlapping fragmented communities above and below the sovereign nation-state"¹¹ made possible by the vast offerings of transnational identities and "'niche' communities" in cyberspace.

Perhaps the "cybernation"—a non-territorially bound imagined community—will be the next (postmodern) step in evolution beyond Anderson's territorially based imagined communities. Anderson argues that nations are imagined political communities which are "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"¹² and that the idea of the nation came about as a result of particular historical circumstances, particularly the development of print capitalism (that is, a transformation in information technology). They are "*limited* because even the largest of them ... has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations".¹³ They are "*sovereign* because the concept was borne in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm ... nations dream of being free ... the gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state".¹⁴ Cybernations are made possible by another transformation in information technology—globalised telecommunications, and in particular the Internet. Cybernations are obviously limited, in that they do not, in Anderson's words, imagine themselves "coterminous with mankind". Yet the limits are not the territorial limits of the modern nation, which frequently has a direct connection to the land and may have aspirations, if not already achieved, to being a nation-state. Rather, it is limited by those who choose, across territorial boundaries, to be identified as a part of this virtual entity. Yet, cybernations are not sovereign, at least in the traditional sense. They do not have undisputed authority within the boundaries of the community, and do not have equality on the international scene. In fact, they may play a key role in undermining the traditional notion of sovereignty as the ideas binding the members of the cybernation together may come into conflict with the authority of the modern state. If we think of sovereignty in terms of authority, then we might have to start thinking in terms of multiple and overlapping sovereignties and centres of authority, rather than being able to point to a single sovereign centre—the state.¹⁵ Although some may argue that such cybernations may be completely new identities, the most powerful may come from current, non-territorially based identities.

Before turning to this argument, however, one other point is in order. The arrival of mass communication—books, newspapers, radio, and television—helped form the basis of nationhood for many groups. Common information and common education, and the common perspectives which grew out of these

10. Ronald J. Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 181.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 198.

12. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

14. *Ibid.*

15. See Mills, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 51–53.

processes created a foundation for community and nationhood, and helped the members of a nation “imagine” themselves to be so. As will be argued below, the same may be said for cyberspace. However, a contradictory trend may be occurring at the same time. Andrew Shapiro argues that new communications technologies have led to what he terms a “control revolution”. Because individuals can bypass the gatekeepers of information—states, the traditional media—control of information, resources, and experience is passing from large institutions to individuals. This will help disenfranchised groups get their word out and organise. But, it will also allow individuals to increasingly cut themselves off from information they may not want to hear. It is increasingly possible to tell your computer to deliver to you only what news you want to hear—you can very narrowly define the topics you read about or the sources from which you get your information. This personalisation and “hyper-individualism” could have the potential of directly undermining the shared information, perspectives, and understandings that under gird a feeling of nationhood. Thus, while global communications technology may expand our horizons far beyond the borders of our state, it may also have the opposite effect—contract our boundaries of experience and sympathy to smaller and smaller groups and much more narrow perspectives.¹⁶

Realignment, Reification and Self-determination

The Catholic Church and Islam on the Internet: Logical States, Disintermediation, Neomedievalism?

The communications revolution is undermining state authority by helping to “relocate” authority, making new loci of allegiance and authority possible.¹⁷ For example, Thierry Breton, in his novel *The Pentecost Project*, provides a fictional account of what he calls a “logical state”, which he describes as “an assemblage of individuals who already share the same interests and aspirations, who subscribe to the same values and are acting toward a common purpose, wherever they might be found on the planet”.¹⁸ It is “a supranational community that bears some resemblance to those nations that have been dispersed by historical forces but which have preserved their national identity”.¹⁹ In the book, Breton describes a fictional plan by the Vatican to use communications technology in order to link up all Catholics around the world and be able to address them directly all at once. In this way, the authority of Rome could more easily be exercised, and citizens might shift more of their allegiance from the territorial state in which they live to the non-territorially bound Catholic logical state. Although this has not happened²⁰—yet—one could imagine any number of possible candidates for logical states—other groups or authority structures

16. Andrew L. Shapiro, *The Control Revolution: How the Internet is Putting Individuals in Charge and Changing the World* (New York: Public Affairs: 1999), pp. 116–120.

17. I have previously made the following argument elsewhere. See Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

18. Thierry Breton, *The Pentecost Project*, Mark Howson (trans.) (New York: Henry Holt, 1987), p. 58.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

20. However, the Vatican does have its own World Wide Web site (< <http://www.vatican.va> >). There you can get Apostolic Exhortations, Apostolic Letters, and Encyclicals, as well as news from the Vatican Information Service. And certainly the Pope’s highly publicised globe-trotting, with its attendant media coverage, has helped him get across a single, global message.

within religions, such as varying sects of Islam; various transnational ethnic groups, such as the Kurds; or, possibly, even transnational corporations attempting to gain greater allegiance from their far-flung employees. Any attempts to relocate authority in this way could have an extremely destabilising impact on states as the traditional holders of power and authority, and these territorially bound units would find it difficult to stop this process. The control of territory, which has been an important aspect of sovereignty, may diminish in importance: "as the information revolution makes the assertion of territorial control more difficult in certain ways and less relevant in others, the nature and significance of sovereignty are bound to change".²¹ This also raises questions about the relevance, in at least some instances, of territorial, state-based identity.

In fact, the Internet shrinks time and space such that borders "virtually" disappear and appear significantly less relevant to the construction of identities and communities and allegiances. Although it is certainly possible to overstate the degree to which the development of instantaneous global²² communication relegates borders to the dust heap of history—certainly access to concrete, life-sustaining resources can still be determined by which side of a fence you are on—the myths²³ which support the territorial (nation-)state now coexist with, and in some instances are being partially replaced by, other transnational, global myths.

The Vatican Web site²⁴ is an instance of a transnational community using these new capabilities to strengthen an already existing global identity with both territorial and non-territorial elements. The Vatican is, on the one hand, a territorial state (albeit one with a rather small population) that carries out traditional diplomatic activities, and the Vatican Web site provides news of those activities. On the other hand, the Vatican is also the centre of one of the largest global identities which transcends territorial boundaries as well as virtually all other boundaries and identities. It is, in Breton's words, a logical state. Its Web site might represent an attempt by the central authority of that "state" to shore up its authority by making available its positions and edicts and "laws" to the citizens of this state. To the extent that the Vatican can more easily spread its messages to believers it might also more easily be able to exert its authority over its far-flung flock, subverting the authority of states where its edicts come into conflict with those of states, while shoring up one part of one billion people's identity matrix²⁵ (Stalin may have asked how many divisions

21. Wriston, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

22. Of course, there are still many countries, most notably in Africa, which have no Internet access, or where such access is restricted to the expensive hotels that foreign businessmen inhabit.

23. As Mayall and Simpson note, "[n]ations need myths to live by". Gellner describes the nation as a "myth": "Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny are a myth. . . ." Thus, the argument here is that the Internet can facilitate the mythmaking of different communities which can call into question or undermine the myths—including particular perspectives on history, ethnicity, language, and the like—which under gird the modern state. James Mayall and Mark Simpson, "Ethnicity is not Enough: Reflections on Protracted Secessionism in the Third World", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol. XXXIII (January–April 1992), p. 10; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 48–49.

24. < <http://www.vatican.va> > .

25. The Vatican's new computer network will also allow the Pope perhaps to have greater control over the Church hierarchy as it will provide for the ability for bishops and others in the hierarchy to download instructions directly from the Vatican. Daniel J. Wakin, "Vatican Makes Internet Connections" [online], *Washington Post* (18 August 1998), available: < <http://www.washingtonpost.com> > .

the Pope has, but at some point the more relevant question may be what's his URL?²⁶).²⁷

Yet, perhaps the term logical "state" does not correspond to the dynamics described above. Certainly the Catholic Church (with the Vatican as its capitol and the Pope as its head of "state") is not a state in traditional international law terms. While it has a population—those who self-identify themselves as Catholic—it does not have a well-defined territory, although one might question the extent to which territoriality matters in the emerging information order. The requirements of government and independence get to the point of how this challenges the traditional state. The Vatican, while not an internationally recognised government for the one billion Catholics around the world, still serves as such, or at least as a competing government, to the extent its declarations may override the declarations of states in the hearts and minds of at least a portion of the population of this "state". Regarding independence, while the Pope is beyond the bounds of state control, the members are not. Further, when we look at other functions and characteristics of states in the modern world, such as providing services to their citizens, such as defence, having a monopoly on the legitimate use of force (and actually having force to exert), and facilitating the organisation of economic activity (although one might argue that the state is becoming significantly less important in this arena), it falls short. The term "cybernation" might more accurately describe the situation. While there can be states which are not nations, there are also nations which are not states, and the Catholic Church, insofar as it does provide a coherent identity to a transnational population, possibly challenging state identity and authority, would certainly qualify as such a "cybernation". As such, it harkens back to the medieval world, where the Church made claims to universalism and coexisted in a decentralised milieu with a variety of political actors, all vying for and sharing political authority over individuals. This "neomedieval" analogy may be taken even further, for it was the Church that, through its dominance of the written word and by virtue of having a superior communication system, was able to maintain its dominance and contain heresies. And the Church was an enthusiastic supporter of the printing press when it arrived on the medieval scene. However, the printing press also helped to undermine the Church by allowing pre-existing and new heresies to be distributed more widely and thus served to support the Protestant Reformation.²⁸

printing had a revolutionary effect on the extent to which one particular heresy could spread widely and rapidly with devastating consequences for the Church's containment strategies. In other words, the properties of the printing environment favored the interests of the Protestant Reformation to the disadvantage of the Papal hierarchy.²⁹

26. Uniform Resource Locator—an address on the Internet.

27. The head "Webmaster" of this emerging "virtual papacy", Bishop Claudio Maria Celli, head of the Vatican's Internet Office, sounds a cautionary note for believers: "The road to God needs participation in a community. The Internet offers elements, but it doesn't substitute this road." However, while one may question the authenticity of online religious experience—one can even have confession and absolution online (not an officially sanctioned Vatican activity)—one cannot deny the potential for shifting authority structures and centres that the Internet provides. Wakin, *op. cit.*

28. Deibert, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–59, 69–70.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

In the same way, while cyberspace may open up opportunities for the Church to assert its authority globally, it may also provide the space for "heresies" to be spread much more easily and affect perceptions of what it means to be, say, Catholic, or to hold some other communal identity. As Edward Said argues, "nations themselves are narratives".³⁰ That is, the way people perceive the nations and communities they are members of is significantly defined by the narratives about the community that come to dominate. As long as the Vatican has a monopoly on how Catholic identity is constructed it can be sure that its perspectives and paradigms will predominate among the faithful. But once it loses the ability to control the message completely, as with the advent of the printing press, it loses the sole ability to define what it means to be Catholic. The recent and widespread use of silencing against proponents of liberation theology in Latin America and against those who differ with the Vatican on such issues as homosexuality demonstrates just how important the ability to make sure that everybody is "on message" and to stifle dissent is perceived to be. The very nature of the Internet, like the printing press before it, allows new, perhaps previously submerged, narratives about the nation or community to emerge. As these heresies—and as submerged perspectives about religion or nationalism or whatever which may challenge settled doctrine or previously accepted assumptions, they may be considered every bit as heretical as medieval heresies—come to light and have a greater chance of making their way into popular discourses, they may alter the perceptions or self-perceptions of the community and what it means to be a member.

Take, for example, Partenia,³¹ which represents a "Virtual Diocese". In fact, it is "virtual" in two ways. First, it "exists" in cyberspace. Second, it represents a nowhere land, a diocese with no parishioners (in the traditional sense anyway), where, for centuries, dissident clergy within the Catholic Church have been banished. Partenia as a territorial entity "exists" in the middle of the Sahara desert. The current bishop of Partenia is Jacques Gaillot, who had been the bishop of Evreux in France until he ran afoul of the Vatican authorities. After being banished (metaphorically) to the middle of nowhere, Gaillot set up a Web site ("physically" based in France) from which to communicate with the parishioners³² in his newly imagined "Diocèse sans Frontières" of Partenia, which he describes as "a place of freedom where we can meet one another and speak to each other as if we were on the market place",³³ a virtual Agora where believers who may not necessarily fully accept The Truth as told by the Vatican can explore alternative Truths and variations on the transnational Catholic identity. After his "transfer" to Partenia, Gaillot lived with 150 homeless people (that is, those without a fixed territorial residence/referent) in France and communed with cyber parishioners, using the Internet as a means of resistance and as a way to promote a more open global identity than the one proposed/imposed by the Vatican. In other words, as the Vatican attempts to reify a pre-existing transnational identity in an authoritarian manner, Partenia attempts to provide an alternative vision or interpretation of that identity, a "heresy".

30. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. xiii. On the nation as narration, see also Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (New York, Routledge, 1990).

31. < <http://www.partenia.org> > .

32. Partenia had 92,000 visitors in 1997. < <http://www.partenia.org/eng/actu.htm> > .

33. < http://www.partenia.org/eng/1_9601e.htm > .

What about another transnational global identity numbering about one billion people—Islam? The Internet can, of course, provide outlets for the spread and understanding of Islam globally. It provides access not only to the Koran, but also analysis of the Koran and other sources of Shari'a Law, and much other cultural information. The Internet may be facilitating the reification of Islam, but it is doing it in a way that may be termed more democratic. In the same way that Partenia represents an alternative to Papal orthodoxy, so is the Islamic presence on the Internet presenting non-authoritative discussion and analysis by "self-authorizing authors".³⁴ That is, while there is a lot of discussion about Islam, it may not be mediated by religious authorities. And, in fact, the Internet is allowing people in some of the strictest Islamic states, such as Saudi Arabia, to get online and discuss issues, such as atheism, with others outside of Saudi Arabia, this in a country where one can be condemned to death for apostasy: "Religion, a temper-raising subject in this region, has found a natural home in cool cyberspace. Internet's anonymity is giving many unprecedented courage to speak their minds without facing any consequences."³⁵

This is seen as particularly threatening in an area of the world which is characterised by a close relationship between religion and the state, and where many governments are highly authoritarian. For example, "Iraq is not on the Internet, but Iraqis are, and one of the things they do is to represent and extend Iraq into an international 'cyberspace' populated by self-authorizing authors independently of Iraq's formal authorities."³⁶ That is, Iraqis are able to present a different vision of Iraq, the articulation of which outside of cyberspace would get any Iraqi thrown in jail. Likewise in Saudi Arabia³⁷ and Bahrain,³⁸ where dissidents can speak against the government via the Internet. Authorities perceive a potential threat to traditional values through the Internet (with access to such things as pornography), whereas some dissidents are advocating an even *stricter* Islamic state via cyberspace. The government of Saudi Arabia wants to control access to the Internet, but like the doomed attempts to create a Virtual Wall of China (see below), the very nature of the Internet makes this a lost cause.

The virtualisation of Islam has allowed new voices to be heard and older voices to be heard more widely. The Internet has enabled "a migration of existing messages" from traditional fora such as universities or coffee houses, "chang[ing] the balance of who and what is published".³⁹ Further, Jon Anderson argues that a particular facet of Islam appears on the Internet. It is not the authoritative pronouncements of the ulema or the "popular" Islam of the non-literate masses, but "a more middle-brow Islam associated with a more middling population: its versions range from fundamentalist to liberal".⁴⁰ The Internet is thus providing new outlets for new interpretations and "re-intellectualizations of Islam", open-

34. Jon W. Anderson, "Is the Internet Islam's 'Third Wave' or the 'End of Civilization'?: Globalizing Politics and Religion in the Muslim World" [online], prepared for delivery at the conference on Virtual Diplomacy sponsored by the United States Institute of Peace (1-2 April 1997), available: < <http://www.usip.org/oc/confpapers/polrelander.html> > .

35. Faiza S. Ambah, "Dissidents Tap the 'Net' to Nettle Arab Sheikdom", *The Christian Science Monitor* [online] (24 August 1995), available: < <http://www.csmonitor.com> > .

36. Anderson, "Is the Internet Islam's 'Third Wave' or the 'End of Civilization'?", *op. cit.*

37. < <http://saudhouse.com> > .

38. < <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/bahrain/> > .

39. Anderson, "Is the Internet Islam's 'Third Wave' or the 'End of Civilization'?", *op. cit.*

40. *Ibid.*

ing the door for greater contestation across the religious spectrum. For those Islamic or Islamic-oriented states with a particular take on Islam (Sunni/Shi'a, moderate/conservative, secular/religious) this must be rather disconcerting because it allows discussion and debate beyond the bounds imposed or sought by state/religious authorities. This is an example of what David Rothkopf calls "disintermediation". That is, the various organisations, institutions, and authorities, whether they be secular or religious, governmental or non-governmental, through which ideas and information and power have traditionally flowed, are being bypassed: "Disintermediation brings the people back into public discourse in new and powerful ways. Elites, the clubs that depended on access and proximity to ensure their power, are now threatened by 'the demolition of distance' that we have called dislocation. The consequence is disaggregation."⁴¹ That is, identity and authority and power are unbundled from their traditional centres and repackaged in new ways: "The center gives way to centers of power, each linked to virtual communities."⁴²

And it is the multiplicity and overlapping nature of these centres of power and authority that give rise to the view that perhaps the world is entering a period best described as "neomedievalism", where, as in medieval Europe, one finds an international polity where the lines of allegiance and authority are not clearly drawn, and further, where our models of the world, which are generally based on territoriality, shift dramatically. As Stephen Kobrin argues:

Medieval concepts of perspective and viewpoint were not compatible with territoriality as a mode of political organization. Medieval maps reflected scriptural dogma rather than useful images. The wider world was seen through a screen of symbolism: the idea of external space was only very weakly grasped in terms of mysterious cosmology comprised of heavenly hosts and other figures of myth and imagination.

Cyberspace is not physical, geometric or geographic. The construction of markets [or identities] as electronic networks renders space once again relational and symbolic, or metaphysical. External reality seen through the World Wide Web may be closer to medieval Christian representations of the world than to a modern atlas.⁴³

The Vatican Web site, and, ironically, Partenia, as well as the Web sites, USENET discussion groups, and e-mail discussion lists of a multitude of other identities, ideas, and ideologies, thus serve as the postmodern underpinnings of an increasingly de-centred world, providing complex and seemingly contradictory symbolic maps of the world which are non-territorially based and seem to challenge our traditional understandings of the world.

41. David J. Rothkopf, "Cyberpolitik: The Changing Nature of Power in the Information Age", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 51 (Spring 1998), p. 354.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Stephen J. Kobrin, "Back to the Future: Neomedievalism and the Postmodern Digital World Economy", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 51 (Spring 1998), pp. 366, 369. On neomedievalism as "therapeutic redescription" of international relations theory, see Deibert, pp. 214–216. For an international relations analysis of the medieval world, see Benno Teschke, "Geopolitical Relations in the European Middle Ages: History and Theory", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 51 (Spring 1998), pp. 325–358.

Tibet: Placelessness → Place

The process of reifying identities may include pushing for a different political space for the group, that is, self-determination. The Internet can function as a tool for self-determination in two ways. First, because it can provide access to a wide variety of information across borders to members of the group, it can foster a continuing sense of identity. This is particularly important for dispersed groups such as the Kurds or Tibetans. Second, it can provide a new way to act in the global political realm to lobby on many different fronts for its self-determination claims. Such “cyberdiplomacy” can be important for both territorially dispersed and territorially compact groups.

The Tibet Online Resource Gathering⁴⁴ has both cultural and political goals, including

providing information on the plight of Tibet and serving as a virtual community space for the movement. This movement is dedicated to bringing about substantive negotiations without preconditions between the Chinese and Tibetan Governments, so that they can find a solution which will bring an end to the suffering of the Tibetan people, in accordance with the people’s right to self-determination.⁴⁵

It provides general historical and cultural information about Tibet, and links to about 250 support groups worldwide. These and other links, as well as several e-mail lists comprise the Barkhor Community Space which might be likened to the virtual Agora alluded to above: “The Barkhor is a meeting place for supporters of Tibet and discussion of Tibet issues. This virtual Barkhor is dedicated to returning the right of free speech and gathering to the actual Barkhor, the traditional city center of Lhasa, capitol of Tibet.”⁴⁶ It thus provides a space for the transnational maintenance of Tibetan identity and culture, as well as focusing on the political goal of returning Tibetan rule to Tibet. It provides information on human rights in Tibet, and the International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet⁴⁷ publishes a vast array of legal material relevant to self-determination for Tibet.

The political project is embodied in the official Web site of the Tibetan Government in Exile.⁴⁸ Given the political climate in Tibet, Tibet itself cannot be used as a base from which to launch its self-determination movement. However, the Dali Lama has had significant access to international leaders, and an Internet presence can facilitate getting the word out about his activities and also provide information about how to help the self-determination movement. The Web site provides legal and political information with respect to the status of Tibet, as well as up-to-date news and cultural information. The current physical capital of the Tibetan government in exile is in Dharamsala, India. The Web site is maintained by the Office of Tibet, the Dali Lama’s official representatives in London. This demonstrates the essential irrelevance of territoriality or physical presence for the distribution of information.

44. < <http://www.tibet.org/> > .

45. *Ibid.*

46. < <http://www.tibet.org/Barkhor/> > .

47. < <http://www.tibetictl.org/index.html> > .

48. < <http://www.tibet.com/> > .

Through the Internet, both individuals and officials are attempting to maintain cultural contact and support a self-determination movement. It is using what Knoke calls "placelessness" to support a sense of place. Knoke defines "the Placeless Society as the awakening omnipresence that will allow everything—people, goods, resources, knowledge—to be available anywhere, often instantaneously, with little regard for distance or place".⁴⁹ He argues that: "Everywhere, people, money, goods, and knowledge flow so effortlessly from point to point that place becomes an irrelevant concept. The world is becoming placeless."⁵⁰ Certainly the Internet is contributing to this placelessness. However, paradoxically, it is also contributing to place. For, certainly it is not only the goal of the online Tibetan presence to foster transnational cultural communion, although that is certainly a significant aspect. That cultural communion of the Tibetan imagined community is made possible by, and would, indeed, be nonsensical without, a place—Tibet, physically set at the "rooftop of the world" between China and India. Further, the ultimate goal is to fully regain a place, that is, achieve self-determination for Tibet. This is hardly a "placeless" political project, but it is pursued, partly, by the placelessness of cyberspace which, in some ways, represents the antithesis of what Tibetans and others are striving for.

Kurdistan: Cybernation?

The Kurds, much more than Tibetans, represent a truly transnational identity. They do not have their own country.⁵¹ Thus the Kurds who live in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria in the region are not refugees⁵² but rather the inhabitants of a transnational territory that was carved up into separate states during decolonisation. The Kurds have experienced significant repression in all of the countries in which they live and have several active self-determination movements which have engaged in a variety of violent and non-violent activities. A number of Kurdish-related Web sites have appeared recently, among them the Kurdish Information Network,⁵³ Kurdistan Web,⁵⁴ Kurdish Worldwide Resources,⁵⁵ Washington Kurdish Institute,⁵⁶ and the American Kurdistan Information Network.⁵⁷ They all have political as well as cultural aspects. The American Kurdistan Information Network

hopes to function as a bridge over which friendships and knowledge are exchanged to the benefit of both peoples. Its aim is to increase awareness about the Kurds. ... AKIN hopes to become a valuable resource center for policy makers, scholars, and students of the region. At the same

49. William Knoke, *Bold New World: The Essential Road Map of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), pp. 20–21.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

51. However, the Kurds do have de facto independence in Northern Iraq as a result of the intervention to protect the Kurdish population after the Gulf War.

52. Although the Iraqi Kurds who fled to Iran and the border of Turkey after the Gulf War were refugees.

53. < <http://www.xs4all.nl/~tank/kurdish/htdocs/index.html> > .

54. < <http://www.Humanrights.de/~kurdweb/> > .

55. < <http://www.kurdish.com/> > .

56. < <http://www.clark.net/kurd/> > .

57. < <http://www.kurdistan.org/> > .

time, it seeks to promote understanding between the Kurds and the Americans. In Kurdistan, AKIN wants the killings to stop, peace to prevail, and the will of the people to be respected and accepted.⁵⁸

The Kurds have the beginnings of a de facto state in Northern Iraq. At the same time, even if it were to become a recognised state (a highly unlikely occurrence in the foreseeable future), it would not encompass anywhere near the entire Kurdish community. However, various dispersed groups of Kurds have attempted to facilitate the maintenance of the “logical state” or “cybernation” known as Kurdistan through, among other things, the Internet, providing common points of contact and sources of instantaneous cultural and political information to its members around the world.

Chiapas: The Internet Effect

The examples above have, for the most part, been operating on the fringes of popular consciousness. One instance that has had a direct, public international effect is the case of the Chiapas rebellion in Mexico. This is a case of the poorest of the poor rising up to demand respect and self-determination. At the same time, they have been aided by some of the most high-tech developments. Descriptions of the rebel leader Subcommandante Marcos using a satellite linkup to distribute Zapatista propaganda from the depths of the Mexican jungle have fired the public imagination. While these reports may have been a bit overblown, it is nonetheless the case that the Zapatista cause has been facilitated partly by the global telecommunications revolution. The Chiapas rebellion is a perfect illustration of the uses of the Internet to help indigenous autonomy movements to circumvent the restrictions imposed by the state as they press their case. While reaffirming the primacy of place, the Zapatistas also took their case to the increasingly “placeless” global realm and in the meantime began to “think locally and act globally”.

While news agencies reported that Subcommandante Marcos co-ordinated the rebellion and distributed Zapatista propaganda globally while hunched over a laptop computer with a modem and cellular phone,⁵⁹ Harry Cleaver describes a different reality. Disparities in economics are reproduced in access to telecommunications technologies. Thus, those who might be the most likely to want to use the Internet for their self-determination struggles may have the least direct access:

Despite all of the media hype which came with the discovery of the role of cyberspace in circulating Zapatista words and ideas, Subcommandante Marcos is not sitting in some jungle camp uploading EZLN communiques via mobile telephone modem directly to the Internet. Zapatista messages have to be hand-carried through the lines of military encirclement and uploaded by others to the networks of solidarity. Similar problems of access exist within those networks. Many who might be sympathetic to the Zapatistas, e.g., various rural and urban communities of Native

58. < <http://www.kurdistan.org/aboutakin.html> > .

59. “Marcos on the Internet”, *The Christian Science Monitor* [online] (27 February 1995), available: < <http://www.csmonitor.com> > .

Americans, Mexicanos and Chicanos in the U.S. and Canada, have few means to plug into the Net. There, too, access for most people must be mediated by groups of humanitarian or political activists who download EZLN Communiqués and upload expressions of solidarity from off-line organizing.⁶⁰

Yet EZLN communiqués and other information *did* escape the Mexican government's attempts to isolate Chiapas, and *were* uploaded to Web sites, USENET discussion groups, bulletin boards, and e-mail lists.⁶¹ One of these sites is ¡Ya Basta!,⁶² which, while not an official publication of the Zapatistas, was set up with their approval "to provide reliable information on the Zapatista uprising and serve as a mouthpiece for the Zapatistas in cyberspace".⁶³ The site's Webmaster states that: "The crisis in Chiapas will not be solved in Cyberspace; yet, the Internet can be a powerful tool for activism and information dissemination. ..." ⁶⁴ It provides communiqués from the Zapatistas and other notices. Other Chiapas-related Web sites include: Chiapas Alert Network,⁶⁵ Acción Zapatista,⁶⁶ ZAPNET (Zapatista Net of Autonomy and Liberation),⁶⁷ and Zapatistas in Cyberspace.⁶⁸ Chiapas95⁶⁹ is an e-mail list that distributes information regarding the struggle in Chiapas as well as in Mexico generally. Chiapas-l⁷⁰ has become an important interactive forum for discussion of events in Chiapas. The network of Chiapas-related sites, including those in Italy,⁷¹ The Netherlands,⁷² France,⁷³ and Japan⁷⁴ has allowed the Zapatista to bypass governmental censors, in the same way that the precursors to the Internet were designed to survive nuclear

60. Harry Cleaver, "The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle" [online] (November 1995), available: < <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/cleaver/zaps.html> > .

61. The Zapatistas were not the originators of these activities: "the EZLN has played no direct role in the proliferation of the use of the Internet. Rather, these efforts were initiated by others to weave a network of support for the Zapatista movement." Harry Cleaver, "The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 51 (Spring 1998), p. 628. Yet the Zapatistas were quick to embrace the Internet: "There's no evidence that the Zapatistas were thinking in terms of the Internet from the beginning. But they caught on quickly, as feedback from friends and allies made clear to them the importance of this unexpected vehicle for rapid communication and mobilization." Harry Cleaver, quoted in "A Rebel Movement's Life on the Web" [online], *Wired News* (6 March 1998), available: < <http://www.wired.com/news/news/politics/story/10769.html> > .

62. < <http://www.ezln.org/> > .

63. < <http://www.ezln.org/about.html> > .

64. *Ibid.*

65. < <http://www.stewards.net/chiapas/10.htm> > . This site includes, among other things, an automated letter writing campaign which, at the click of a button, allows you to send a message to the heads of the NAFTA governments regarding the situation in Chiapas.

66. < <http://www.utexas.edu/students/nave/> > .

67. < <http://www.actlab.utexas.edu/~zapatistas/index.html> > .

68. < <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html> > . This may be the most comprehensive guide to Zapatista online resources > .

69. < <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/chiapas95.html> > .

70. gopher://profmexis.sar.net:70/11/foros/chiapas-l > .

71. < <http://www.ecn.org/la.strada/>; < <http://www.ipsnet.it/chiapas/> >; < <http://www.ecn.org/ezln-it/> >; < <http://vivaldi.nexus.it/commerce/tmcrew/chiapas/chiapas.htm> > .

72. < <http://www.dds.nl/~noticias/prensa/zapata/> > .

73. < <http://www.anet.fr/~aris/zapata.html> > .

74. < <http://clinamen.ff.tku.ac.jp/EZLN/INDEX.html> > .

war (at least according to legend⁷⁵): "When the Mexican state sought to block the flow of information about the uprising in Chiapas it was outflanked every bit as effectively as any Soviet strike might have been. It could keep Televisa from reporting the facts, but it couldn't prevent thousands of independent computer operators from passing them on to all who wanted to know."⁷⁶

This has allowed activists worldwide to share information, organise, and pressure their governments and others to respond to the situation. Arguments and counter-arguments appear instantaneously in full public view for all who care to watch or participate in the discussions. All of this helped to fuel the global solidarity with the people in Chiapas and also may have helped pressure the government to negotiate with the Zapatistas and call off a manhunt for Marcos.⁷⁷ The experience with the Zapatistas may be the first instance of the "Internet Effect". Commentators have pointed to the so-called "CNN Effect" where CNN and the global media more generally are assumed to have a role in deciding which humanitarian crises are responded to by governments and which are ignored by their choice of which stories to highlight.⁷⁸ Today, however, the spread of easy access to the Internet may be undermining, at least partly, the monopoly that global media producers have in choosing which stories and what information is beamed and uploaded around the world. Activists can now become their own producers, spreading information and organising concerted efforts to pressure governments to take action in certain situations, bypassing CNN decision makers.

Yugoslavia: Bypassing the Censors

The Chiapas rebellion was not only a self-determination movement, but was also, in one sense, a democracy movement as disenfranchised people tried to get a say in decision making and opening up the political process. Another democracy movement which used the Internet to great effect is the one in Yugoslavia. The authoritarian government of President Slobodan Milosevic tried to keep control over the dissemination of news in the country, with decreasing success. In 1996, Milosevic banned the Belgrade radio station B-92. B-92 responded by taking its news broadcasts to the Internet. It sent them over the Internet in Real Audio format, bypassing the ban on radio broadcasting. It also used the Internet to mobilise international support. Although B-92 returned to the air a few days later (as a result of international pressure made possible by the transmission of information over the Internet⁷⁹), it continued to use the Internet, most innovatively to circumvent a ban on ground transmitters. It sends its broadcasts over the Internet where they are picked up by the BBC and beamed by satellite back to Serbia, bypassing the censors. The broadcasts are then picked up by 35 local

75. For an account of the early days of the precursors to the Internet, see Stewart Brand, "Founding Father", *Wired*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (March 2001), pp. 144–153.

76. Cleaver, "The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle", *op. cit.*

77. *Ibid.*; "Marcos on the Internet", *op. cit.*

78. See Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), *From Massacres to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy, and Humanitarian Crises* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1996).

79. Shapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

radio stations and rebroadcast.⁸⁰ B-92,⁸¹ and its associated Opennet⁸² Web site (both of which are hosted by XS4ALL⁸³ in The Netherlands) which, in addition to the audio feeds, also provide much other text information on events in Serbia, have become, according to one observer, “the core of a multifaceted and vibrant cultural and political opposition network whose lifeline is the Internet”.⁸⁴ Or, as one Yugoslav put it, “It’s like a new level of public sphere”⁸⁵—a new virtual Agora, where the participants in the “Internet Revolution”⁸⁶ can communicate, reaffirm their goals, and plot the overthrow of an authoritarian regime. It was a significant example of the process of disintermediation referred to above—the pro-democracy forces were able to bypass the gatekeepers in Serbia, the censors who had previously tried to prevent pro-democracy information from spreading.⁸⁷ That it took four years after the start of this new kind of revolt to oust Milosevic from power underscores the fact that these new technologies are not panaceas, magic bullets to right all of the wrongs in the world. Yet it is undeniable that the Internet did play an important role in the democratising process in Yugoslavia.

The Ambiguous Future for Virtual Community

Do the few examples discussed above actually represent a new form of agitating for self-determination or preserving the culture of dispersed communities, or are they just more instances of cyberhype? Kani Xulam, from AKIN, while arguing “the Internet is a great tool to preserve the name and heritage of the Kurds for this generation and for posterity ...” also recognizes that much of its target audience is not computer literate and thus their “reach is limited”.⁸⁸ Certainly many other oppressed and dispersed peoples would be in similar circumstances. These “Fourth World”⁸⁹ nations come mainly from the Third World where access to many of these technologies is still severely limited, and thus the benefits of the Internet will be lost on many except, perhaps, those members who have made it to the First World and have been able to gain access to computers and modems.

It is obvious that the potential for developing links and sharing information can be empowering and can give a voice to those who, for too long, have

80. Chris Hedges, “Serbian Response to Tyranny: Take the Movement to the Web” [online], *The New York Times* (8 December 1996), available: < <http://www.nytimes.com> > ; Bruno Giussani, “Born from ‘96 Opposition, Serbian Internet Effort Thrives” [online], *The New York Times* (8 September 1998), available: < <http://www.nytimes.com> > .

81. < <http://b92eng.opennet.org/> > .

82. < <http://www.opennet.org/> > .

83. < <http://www.xs4all.nl/> > .

84. Giussani, *op. cit.*

85. Quoted in *ibid.*

86. David Bennahum, “The Internet Revolution”, *Wired* [online], Vol. 5 (April 1997), available: < http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.04/ff_belgrad_pr.html > .

87. Shapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

88. Kani Xulam, private e-mail message to the author, 25 March 1996.

89. “Fourth World” nations are “Nations forcefully incorporated into states which maintain a distinct political culture but are internationally unrecognized.” Richard Griggs, “The Meaning of ‘Nation’ and ‘State’ in the Fourth World”, Occasional Paper 18, Center for World Indigenous Studies [online] (1992), available: World Wide Web Path: < <http://www.halcyon.com/FWDP/fourthw.html> > .

been voiceless. However, it seems likely that current global inequities will be reproduced in cyberspace. The vast majority of the estimated more than 400 million people who are online are in North America and Europe, while those in Africa and Latin America, especially, have little or no access, because of the simple lack of computers and bandwidth, as well as, in some cases, governmental telecommunications policy.⁹⁰ Self-determination movements in developed parts of the world will find the Internet an inexpensive way to get out their message, while the vast majority of those who would like to take advantage of these technologies cannot. Yet, where access can be gained, the Internet can be used to leverage meagre resources to much greater effect than in pre-Internet days. Further, as was the case with Chiapas, as well as the move to disinvest from Burma and thus put pressure on the military regime,⁹¹ the locus of much of the actual organising and information dissemination was in the developed world where there is relatively easy access to the requisite technologies.

In addition, while the democratic possibilities of the Internet are significant, they may be overrated by some. One problem, that of access, has already been mentioned. In addition, however, while the information revolution has led us to the current Information Age, the Information Standard⁹² has not completely eclipsed other forms of power. That is, while information matters, so do cold hard (if now virtual) cash and the ability to project military might. Thus, while the students at Tiananmen Square were able to undertake their revolution by fax, it was crushed by old-fashioned state police power. Further, there is in attempt (although probably futile) to create what might be described as a Virtual Wall of China, as well as attempts to restrict Internet access in other countries, particularly in East Asia.⁹³ While the government has embraced the Internet as a communications tool, it has not, at the same time, embraced the democratic, anarchical vision that many of its boosters share. Rather, it wants to control the type of information which might be accessed by its citizens. That is, a territorial entity is trying to control something that is inherently non-territorial. That this

90. As of November 2000, one Internet analysis firm gave the following estimates of the global distribution of the approximately 407.1 million people online: Canada and United States—167.12 million, Europe—113.14 million, Asia/Pacific—104.88 million, Latin America—16.45 million, Africa—3.11 million, Middle East—2.4 million. These figures should be considered only rough estimates, but the disparities they illustrate are striking. While more than half of the population in Canada and the United States has access to the Internet, less than half of 1% of the population of Africa does. Source: Nua, < http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how_many_online/index.html > .

91. In the case of Burma, one significant front in the democratic struggle against the authoritarian Burmese government was in localities in the United States where, for example, a law was passed in Massachusetts preventing the state from contracting with corporations that did business in Burma. Another successful campaign pressured Pepsi to withdraw from Burma. The organising potential of the Internet made these efforts possible. See Tiffany Danitz and Warren P. Strobel, "Networking Dissent: Cyber-activists Use the Internet to Promote Democracy in Burma" [online] (8 November 1999), available: < http://www.usip.org/oc/vd/vdr/vburma/vburma_intro.html > .

92. See Wriston, *op. cit.*

93. Sheila Teft, "China Attempts to Have its Net and Censor it Too", *The Christian Science Monitor* [online] (5 August 1996), available: < <http://www.csmonitor.com/> > ; Arslan Malik, "The Internet and CNN Won't (Soon) Free China", *The Christian Science Monitor* [online] (15 August 1997), available: < <http://www.csmonitor.com/> > ; Michael Laris, "Internet Police on the Prowl in China" [online], *Washington Post* (24 October 1998), p. 12, available: < <http://www.washingtonpost.com> > ; Joshua Gordon, "East Asian Censors Want to Net the Internet", *The Christian Science Monitor* [online] (12 November 1996), available: < <http://www.csmonitor.com> > .

is probably doomed to failure only serves to further underline the ambiguous nature of the possibilities of cyberspace.⁹⁴

Indeed, the role of the Internet Effect in Chiapas demonstrates rather forcefully the inability of states to tame digital communication. It may be in this type of situation where the potential of the Internet for undermining state authority, and enhancing self-determination movements, will be most dramatically illustrated. And the process of “unbundling” identity from the state and repackaging it will accelerate as more of the world logs on, thus undermining, in some instances, the authority claims of states.

94. Yet, at least for the present time, China, along with other authoritarian governments, has been able to use a mixture of reactive (such as censorship and controlling access) and proactive (such as propaganda and channelling the development of online activity toward specific, state-supported goals) strategies, as well as long-standing control over communications technology, to control the use of, and access to, the Internet by its citizens. Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, “The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian Regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution” [online] (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001), available: < <http://www.ceip.org/files/pdf/21KalathilBoas.pdf> > .

Copyright of Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations is the property of Carfax Publishing Company and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.