Gender and the Politics of Possibilities

Rethinking Globalization

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3

Modemmujers and the New Cultures of Globalization[1]

GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURE

> Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong. (Lyotard quoted in Harvey 1989, 87)

Most discussions on culture and globalization assume very narrow definitions of both. *Culture* is defined by food, music, clothing, and values, or a very narrow mix of what Raymond Williams (1963) called the *aesthetic* elements of culture (i.e., music, art, and literature) and the *anthropologic* elements of culture (i.e., meaning making and daily practices). I focus on the anthropologic definition of culture, as meaning making that sustains daily living.

Similarly, most definitions of *globalization* see it is as a contemporary and modern phenomenon. Some may date it to 1492 and the voyages to the "New World" (e.g., Wallerstein 2004), while others date it to colonization (e.g., Chase-Dunn 1998), or to the 1970s (e.g., Sklair 2002). I, along with Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2004) and others, see globalization as a deep-historical process[2] that includes the ancient migrations of populations across the world, cross-cultural trade, the spread of world religions, and the spread of technologies through cultural contact between various regions of the world. The long-term historical perspective challenges two common assumptions in the globalization debate today: first, that globalization is a product of Western modernity; and second, that globalization is an extrinsic force rather

than a historical process intrinsic to all cultures in varying forms and to varying extents.

These two common assumptions mean that the debate on culture and globalization has been dominated by three views (Nederveen Pieterse 2004): *cultural differentialism*, or lasting difference; *cultural convergence*, or growing sameness; and *cultural hybridization*, or ongoing mixing.

Cultural differentialism was popularized by Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" (1993). Huntington views cultures as emerging from "civilizations" (e.g., Judeo-Christian, Islamic, Chinese) with distinct values. When these civilizations come in contact with each other, they clash because of their fundamental differences. Not only does this view ignore historical reality, in which these cultures were not isolated from each other but rather influenced each other, it also uses dogmatic assumptions about culture to view contemporary geopolitical issues and crises, particularly between the United States and the Middle Eastern countries.

The cultural convergence perspective was formulated around the same time by George Ritzer (1993), who described what he called a "McDonaldization" of society. He argues that the principles of efficiency and sameness that are the hallmarks of fast-food restaurant success are now shaping other realms of society and culture, and are being exported to the rest of the world. Americanization replaces Westernization as the process of cultural diffusion.

The third perspective, hybridization, regards cultural mixing as not only a historical process but also part of the human condition. "The essence of the human condition is a fundamental connectedness with parts of the universe across space and time" (Clark 1997 quoted in Nederveen Pieterse 2004, 25). In this view, cultures have been mixing and producing new hybrid structures, identities, and organizational forms since *Homo sapiens* first spread from Africa to populate the world (see Appadurai 1996). Hybridity is also variously known as *mélange*, *creolization*, *syncretization*, or *glocalization* (e.g., Cox 1997; Robertson 1992; Featherstone 1990).

There is a growing critical literature on hybridity that indicates its unevenness, or the unequal power relations intrinsic to it. In response, Nederveeen Pieterse (2004) has theorized hybridity as a continuum, where one end is *assimilationist hybridity*, based on mimicry and adopting the dominant culture, and the other is the *destabilizing hybridity* that challenges the mainstream (like the hybridity theorized by Gloria Anzaldua, 1990).

While the perspective on cultural hybridity is sensitive to the way gender plays a part in its construction, its focus tends to be more on consumption, particularly of food, music, and dance, such as Japanese salsa, bhangra rap, or klezmer flamenco.

But in these formulations, hybridity is an outcome, a product (Nederveen Pieterse 2004). I define hybridity as a process of collective, intercultural

communication. There is very little understanding of hybridity in daily meaning making, or the more anthropological sense of culture. As more and more political battles are fought via the medium of culture today, it is important that we focus on this form of hybridity, in addition to the hybridity of music, dance, food, and clothing. I argue that the spread of information and communication technologies[3] is enabling women and men to create new cultures of globalization, or new hybrids between cultures and technologies. Thus, the new cultures of globalization are at once "virtual" and "real" and facilitate local, place-based, and transnational, virtual cultural citizenship.

These new cultures of globalization are invented and imagined based on traditions as well as modernities; combine new organizational structures with new forms of communication; circulate transnationally; and illuminate alternative cultural possibilities that blur the distinctions between the aesthetic and everyday senses of culture. What information and communication technologies make visible is what all cultures with a strong oral tradition know, that "the process of exchanging bits of information and creating new constructs out of the old bits goes on all the time—whatever the technology" (Namjoshi 1999, 373). As Suniti Namjoshi (1999) notes:

> (1) Technology does not equal civilization, (2) Passage through time does not equal progress, and (3) Literacy does not equal education. To put it more dramatically: India has a highly civilized, highly illiterate population. (372)

By making it possible for illiterate people to engage in cultural creation, information and communication technologies further the feminist possibilities of globalization. These new cultures of globalization are created to address the inequalities of class, gender, race, and sexuality, that is, as a means of expressing cultural citizenship.

To illuminate these new cultures of globalization, I turn to the analysis of cultural citizenship and then "cyberfeminism," feminist activism on the Internet, as one expression of cultural citizenship; and finally show how it informs the new cultures of globalization, using the examples of Independent Media Centers and the Women's Networking Support Programme.

CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP IN THE CYBERAGE

The concept of *cultural citizenship* has evolved from the efforts of the state and cultural institutions to bring "culture" to the urban masses in the West; to its use by dominant groups in the Global South to shield people from "westoxification" and to gain recognition for their "traditional culture"; to its appropriation by marginal groups to acquire cultural rights (Chaney

2002). The concept, however, reflects a narrow, nineteenth-century view of culture as bound to nation, as homogenous, and as an uncontested category. But as anthropologists have shown us over the past forty years, there is no single culture, even in a nation-state. Culture is a contested terrain as well as an invented one, and it is often a response to marginalization as well as to opportunities provided by globalizations.

So in this context of multiple and fragmented cultures, I define cultural citizenship, not only in terms of politics of difference, recognition, and respect, but as a group's ability to shape common cultural discourses. Borrowing from Williams, Nick Stevenson (2003) defines *common*, not as "same," but as the ability of common people to influence cultural dialogues and institutions.

Cultural citizenship, then, is a contested desire for communication in an information society, which builds new institutions and opportunities for dialogue. Stevenson (2003) calls this an *ethical cosmopolitanism* (as opposed to the cosmopolitanism arising from class privilege, mobility, and hedonism that reinforces class boundaries), which is about living with difference, an art of life rather than of travel and consumption. Therefore, even locally rooted folks can be cosmopolitan in their ethics and be part of imagined communities and virtual communities that are facilitated by the technologies of communication, particularly the Internet.

What I call the "new culture of globalization" has resonance in what Wendy Harcourt (1999) calls the "new culture in cyberspace," where women from across the world meet in cyberspace in new global networks but are still rooted in their local cultures and politics. Arturo Escobar (1999) emphasizes the need to understand the new cyber networks and cultures in relation to what he calls "place based political practice." Technology is important; but it is only a tool, and change depends on power relations in the real world. Hence, he argues, the relationship between cyber culture and political change has to be politically constructed. He calls this political construction the "feminist political ecology of cyberspace." Central to this construct is the ability of the Internet to connect people, rather than to separate them by creating real and imagined boundaries. To the extent that these networks "foster different ways of interacting and relating, of thinking about life, gender, justice, and diversity" (50), they will be critical to the political project of rethinking gender and globalization. It is to these feminist, Internet projects that I now turn.

FEMINISM AND CYBERACTIVISM

By the mid-1990s, the Internet was widely available, and feminists from around the world had already forged solidarities, as I have shown in chap-

ter 2. Hence, there was a corpus of feminist theories and practices that was brought to bear on this new technology, and cyberfeminism was invented. The term *cyberfeminism* was first used by Sadie Plant (1997) and is defined as activism to change the power differences between men and women in the digital discourse (e.g., Hawthorne and Klein 1999). Others, like Harcourt (1999) and Donna Haraway (1997), define cyberfeminism more broadly as the use of technology for addressing gender inequalities in digital discourse, as well as in the material and ideological spaces. Bela Bonita Chatterjee (2002) articulates cyberfeminism as the relationship of the Internet, gender, and sexuality with identity and its relationship to feminism as a political project. All these varied definitions of cyberfeminism highlight connectivity, critique, and creativity as important components of a critical, cyberfeminist politics. As with most issues, however, feminists are divided about cyberfeminist politics. The key feminist arguments for and against the Internet can be divided into three categories: *technological*, *theoretical*, and *strategic*.

The technological arguments highlight the nature of the technology itself as a key to women's liberation. This position is best exemplified by the work of Plant (1997), Sherry Turkle (1995) and Dale Spender (1995). For Plant, cyberspace is essentially female; and, although it was designed by men, it will ultimately undermine male power. This transformation, she argues, does not need feminist intervention or identities. Virtual reality will do it all by its design, a technologically determined position.

Plant (1997) claims that cyberspace is about weaving virtual selves and realities. Turkle (1995) and Spender (1995) similarly argue that cyberspace is woman-friendly, as it is based on communication, consensus, and community: all practices at which women excel. All these theorists believe in "cyberutopia" and are seduced by its possibilities in imagining an alternative, women-centered, postgender world (Chatterjee 2002). These scholars' analysis is supported by cyberfeminist activism such as "women with attitude," or "bad grrls" who use the Internet for utopian purposes as artists, designers, academics, and software designers for gender equity. (See womenwithattitude.tripod.com and www.badgrrls.com.) The emphasis is on virtual identities and individual use in daily lives, not on a collective movement.

But this cyberutopia that many cyberfeminists avow is based on the privilege of wealth, education, and time that most men and women, in the South as well as the North, don't have. So while affluent Western feminists might see themselves as cyborgs as they create and design professional and personal identities on the Net, women who assemble those computers experience cyborg identities as long hours of hard work assembling products most will never use (Luckman 1999). As Sara Kember (2003) notes, cyberfeminism, to be meaningful, needs an ethics, a politics, and a history, rather than "cyber drool."

As opposed to the individualistic "cyber drool" of the previous argument, another technological argument focuses on the collective knowledge that is possible given the technology's abilities. *Connectivity*, or many-many interactions and communications, produces new ways of "commonspace thinking" (Surman 2004), which foregrounds the power of the collective. Sharing power, Surman argues, leads to synergy, creativity and the gift economy on the Internet. Commonspace thinking, however, is confined to the virtual community. Without connection to real communities, one cannot have real social change. Technological arguments tend to foster a politics based on virtual and discursive identity politics coming mostly from white, Northern feminists. It tends to focus on the ability of the Internet to foster myriad new identities that allow freedom for women in cyberspace—that is, its *expressive* use. It is in response to the limitations of virtual, or purely cyber-based, activism that feminists and other activists have articulated strategic arguments.

The strategic argument for cyberfeminism differs from the technological one in its focus on how the Internet can be used for women's empowerment, and in its explicit connection between virtual activism on the Net and place-based activism on the ground. The strategic argument for cyberspace has developed in three different literatures: feminist literature, women and development literature, and technology and minority literature in the United States. I review the arguments in each of these three literatures.

Within feminism, this argument has been made most widely by Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein (1999) and Gillian Youngs (2005, 2006), among others. Their main argument is that while information and communication technologies are a product of transnational capitalism, women and others can use them to challenge that regime. That is, "the master's tools can dismantle (or at least remake) the master's house." As I will show below, this is possible because the technology was developed not only by the masters but also by "geeks."

Youngs (1998) argues that the Internet provides a way for women to develop collective knowledges and practices for social transformation, by providing a safe communicative space in which they can transcend public/private, geographical, and national boundaries. No doubt many feminists will challenge the notion of the Internet as a safe space, given its use for cyber-stalking, pornography, and trafficking, among other threats. Yet the Internet has helped women in developing international connectivity, discursive authority, and cyberidentities (Youngs 2005, 2006), as is the experience of women in international development.

The women in international development and Internet discourse, primarily conducted by UN agencies like the World Health Organization, the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agricul-

ture Organization, and the UN Development Programme (Asiedu 2006), sees women's access to the Internet primarily as a means to eradicate poverty and promote development and, secondarily, as a medium to address issues of human rights. E-development now joins e-commerce and e-governance as the future of our information society (Colle 2004 cited in Asiedu 2006). The focus of this discourse is on the best practices for providing women access to the Internet through *telecenters*, or collective computer facilities. The Internet becomes a means to the end of development, as opposed to its potential to organize cyberpower to determine the kind of development, culture, and politics that people want.

Within this literature, gender integration is seen as important for ensuring women's access to information, training, and business opportunities (Jorge 2000). Hence, specific best practices—such as 50-percent ownership by women, outreach, financial and physical accessibility, relevance, confidence building and training, and participation—are culled and promoted. In the case of Africa, women are being turned into consumers by the various information and communication technology programs funded by donors, the UN agencies, and governments (Robins 2002).

But it is not enough that women have access to the Internet. For if the project of development itself is neocolonial, then what does having access to development mean? Who has the ability to define that (Gajjala and Mamidipudi 1999)? Thus there needs to be a process of dialogue, where women enter as equals and where they are encouraged to be creative and to dream their own utopias. It is in response to such goal-oriented articulations of development that cyberfeminists construct another discourse in which women are engaged in cyberspace not only to alleviate poverty—important as that is—but also as a means of gaining social, cultural, and political power that enables them to define the kind of development they would like for their communities, instead of being forced to follow the neoliberal model of globalization that the West imposes on all countries around the world. So where, when, why, and how women enter cyberspace is crucial to the future of cyberfeminism, for cyberspace can be used productively by people concerned with social change and who do not have the luxuries of wealth, education, and time (Escobar 1999; Harcourt 1999).

The final literature that contributes to the strategic arguments for the use of the Internet for cyberfeminism comes from minority communities in the United States. It draws upon community, race, and class scholarship. The main focus of scholars and policy makers in this literature has been on "the digital divide," or the differential access that privileged white communities have to the Internet, as compared with communities of color. But as cyberfeminists argue, the problem is not the digital divide per se, but how the digital divide is addressed, and for what purpose.

The community-based cyberfeminists are also utopian, but their utopias are collective and are about addressing inequalities. Cyberfeminists working in African American and Latina communities in the United States foreground class and race among women and make these central to using the Internet for social change—as opposed to those cyberfeminist discourses that emanate from white, middle-class, and educated women in the North, primarily the English-speaking North, which are about virtual selves and virtual identities (e.g., Everett 2004; Harcourt 1999; Kvasny 2003; and Wright 2006).

Based on work with black women in the United States, the strategic argument made by scholars is that for poor women, the Internet is a means of "ascension" or liberation, as it provides opportunities for community-based educational and economic projects. Anna Everett (2004) calls this hybrid cyberfeminism "cyberwomanism," where women use the Net for activism. Cyberwomanism, according to Everett, is "making do," a tactic of sharing cyberpower with those who don't have it. For poor, urban, black communities in the United States, cyberpower, the ability to communicate via the Internet, is necessary for democratic politics today (Alkalimat and Williams 2001). An important way for poor, disenfranchised communities to access it is through social capital and community centers that support people with information rooted in the social organization of the community. All forms of capital should be brought to bear on developing social capital that will enable the development of cyberpower.

But in poor communities, access to the Internet has to be provided in conjunction with skills that poor people need for economic and social empowerment (Gordo 2003). This was demonstrated by the project "Plugged In."[4] Based on community demands, Plugged In began programs for children, teens, and adults. The programs engaged the groups in producing knowledge that was turned into products for sale, and also created a community dialogue.

Based on a study of a community telecenter in a poor, black community in Ohio, Lynette Kvasny (2006) found that it is not the digital divide that is the problem as much as digital inequality. She found that if the center does not provide access to other, nondigital services such as education, health care, and employment, access to the Internet is not very meaningful. It just reproduces privilege and the social order. Conditions under which skills are acquired are as important as the context in which they can be invested.

Hence, some feminists are not convinced about the strategic use of the Internet. Marisa Belausteguigoitia Rius (1998) argues that women's voices are still excluded: for example, even in the Zapatista movement, you seldom hear the voices of indigenous women. So the old questions of representation, mediation, and ventriloquism still persist. Hence, she argues that the

master's cybertools have to be dismantled and deconstructed by feminist cyborgs "to analyze and understand highly sophisticated forms of erasing women's voices." Only then can we achieve the dream of women's command of and freedom in cyberspace to use multiple languages and desires (Belausteguigoitia Rius 1998, 30).

In a similar vein, Susan Luckman (1999) argues that "cyberspace cannot escape the social construction of gender because it was constructed by gendered individuals, and because gendered individuals access it, in ways that reinforce the subjugation of women" (36).

The theoretical arguments about information and communication technologies try to temper the skepticism about the strategic use of the Internet. They highlight the kinship between feminist theory and the possibilities of the Internet. N. Katherine Hayles (1995) and Haraway (1997) argue that for women's emancipation, we need knowledge that is based on interactivity, positionality, and connectivity, and the Internet enables such knowing (Deuze 2003).[5] Escobar (1999) argues that women, environmentalists, and Third World social movements might be more in tune with interactivity, positionality, and connectivity for historical and cultural reasons. This might enable them to make the link between "cyberspace and place, between activity and interactivity, presence and tele-presence, existence and tele-existence" (Escobar 1999, 52).

In a slightly different vein, Youngs (2005, 2006) argues that information and communication technologies will allow for the mainstreaming of feminist theories because they have a lot to offer our current socio-technical lives. In particular, she argues that feminism can contribute to the discourse on the ethics of access. Feminists have shown that the liberal notion of equality is partial, and so we need women and other marginal groups to engage in a discussion of equality. Second, feminist theories have shown how the gendered nature of the history of technology and science silenced women and minorities, as well as rendering them invisible in these spaces. Finally, feminist theory has shown the importance of horizontal networks in enabling and empowering women who did not have power to articulate, and become active agents in their own lives, as well as in the lives of their societies. Thus, as the Internet becomes central to contemporary lives, feminist theories become relevant to all.

The technological, strategic, and theoretical dimensions of cyberfeminism are all visible in the work of the Independent (Indy) Media Centers and the Women's Networking Support Programme. These two examples of new cultures of globalization embody collective connectivity that is interactive and relational, and based on commitment to social justice and cultural citizenship. Both these examples are made possible by the new communication technologies, as well as by social networks, political networks, and projects of activists.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTERS

Indy Media,[6] as their website (www.indymedia.org) notes, is

> an international news organization;
> a participatory media production and distribution platform;
> a decentralized social and digital network;
> a people's CNN;
> an activist communications network;
> an experiment in global democracy;
> a social phenomenon;
> an advocacy network;
> a bulletin board;
> an organizing tool;
> a chat room;
> a laboratory for social and technological innovation;
> an incredible experiment in self-governance; and
> a pioneer in the communication landscape. (www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml accessed April 12, 2006)

And, I would add, Indy Media is a new culture of globalization. Born in the throes of the protests against the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999, the Indy Media movement was made possible by the information and communication technologies (computers, the Internet, and open-source software), as well as the need to create media that represented "communication from the people" (Vatikiotis 2004). It is both a medium for people to create news as well as an organizing tool for movement activists. The Internet is not just an efficient means of communication; it is "an invitation to a new imaginary" (Poster 1999 quoted in Atton 2004).

Indy Media is part of a long tradition of alternative or radical media in the United States and elsewhere (Atton 2004; Hyde 2002). Its most immediate inspiration, however, was the use of the Internet by the Zapatistas in 1994, both to communicate to the world and to start a dialogue about the means of achieving radical democracy. Led by Dan Markle and other activists from a host of alternative news agencies, such as Free Speech TV and Protest.Net, activists used a local building, computers, and the Internet to provide an alternative reporting of the protests against the WTO in Seattle.

Reflecting the new global culture that it was to become, the software that enabled them to broadcast came from an Australian activist, Mathew Arinson in Sydney (Couldry 2003). It helped that the WTO meeting was in Seattle, the home of technology-savvy activists who made it possible to stream live reports across the world on the Web. The first Independent Media Center (IMC) in Seattle, through its website, acted as a clearinghouse—of news, photos, and videos recorded by the protestors—for other journalists and activists.

The IMC in Seattle "laid the infrastructure for a multimedia people's news room" (Hyde 2002). By 2000, following the meeting in Seattle, there were 30 IMCs, in cities primarily in the United States and Canada, and now there are over 142 IMCs, in 53 countries, on every continent, though still heavily in the Global North (Garcelon 2006). The spread of IMCs thus reflects global inequalities of location, class, education, and gender, among others. But it is an important phenomenon, with 100,000 hits daily on the global site and about 2 million hits on the network, and 5 million hits during global events (Mamadouh 2004).

My analysis will focus on the IMC phenomenon in general and IMCs in Latin America in particular. Outside North America and Europe, Latin America has the most extensive network of IMCs, a total of 17 at this writing, with most countries having at least one and some having several. Within Latin America, Brazil has the highest Internet growth (Fuentes and Straubhaar 2001).

What makes IMCs different from other alternative media is that they enable *P2P*, or peer-to-peer exchanges, and *M2M*, many-to-many exchanges—as opposed to most communication, which is from few to many. Thus, ordinary people, albeit mostly educated men and women, become newsmakers and blur the distinction between the production and consumption of news. IMCs erase boundaries between producers and consumers of knowledge, and through horizontal communication develop the emancipatory potential of media. In other words, what IMCs and other new media enable is the "realignment" of the relationship between news media, sources, and audiences (Hyde 2002); or, as Sheri Herndon, one of the founders of the Seattle IMC, puts it:

> The art of communication can be magic. I have seen it happen. I think this is one of our huge challenges, whether it is the World Social Forum, whether it is inside a tiny group of people, whether it is on an e-mail list—to let go of your own stuff, of your ego, to see how you can contribute to the greater good. That is a beautiful thing, because a lot of people haven't ever felt listened to. (Interview with Sheri Herndon quoted in Garcelon 2006, 72)

In addition to peer-to-peer exchanges, Internet and open-source technology enable networking, with myriad possibilities. In so doing, as I show below, they represent a new culture of globalization and cultural citizenship.

What enables Indy Media to do this is open-source software. Graham Meikle (2002) argues that the open-source software that IMCs use reflects the philosophy built into the technology of the Internet. He argues that there is a reason that the Internet is decentralized. It was produced by "geeks who wanted to chat with other geeks (105). Hence, it was developed outside official control and is direct and democratic. This message of democratic participation is built into the form of the medium. Technology is

not neutral, but carries with it the intent and the philosophy of its founder. Studies on the history of gender and technology demonstrate this time and time again (e.g., Denis and Ollivier 2003).

The software is open coded so that it can be modified and rewritten by users to meet their needs. The technology also allows innovative ways of archiving and interacting. Though accessibility is limited to those with computers and Internet connections, it enables those with access to interact with over 142 IMCs throughout the world through e-mails and chat channels. The use of open-source publishing, or "copyleft," which does not have individual copyright but uses ideas collectively, is changing the way people have access to information. It allows anyone with access to the Internet to post a news item that is uploaded instantaneously. People become the media. Viewers can not only post articles, but link with editorial, technical, translation, and print teams around the world.

All this relies heavily on volunteer labor and is operated at low cost, as most IMC websites are on servers that are provided either for free or at low cost from cooperative service providers (Coyer 2005a). There is neither an office nor a staff to support, though many local IMCs have a local space and activists who, in addition to maintaining the site, meet regularly. Such volunteer activism allows IMCs to function fairly democratically. There are technical teams and editorial teams that do make decisions; and some news items are hidden, that is, they are not available on the news service but are available in the archives.

Meikle (2002) calls this "unfinished media" that people can use creatively. Herndon (2003) notes that Ferdinand Marcos, the former dictator of the Philippines, used to say that what the government fears is an "expert in communication," and Indy Media is creating thousands of such experts, who are linked to each other across many borders. Herndon sees IMCs as a facilitating space; as an innovative organizational strategy; as a solidarity of diverse networks that are "chaordic" (i.e., constituted by both order and chaos) and that are conscious of being part of a larger network and accountable; as including a variety of ways for people to participate, pool local and expert knowledge, and provide rapid response to fast and flexible events; and as a forum for dialogue, for growing strategically, and for building a movement with multiple and vibrant channels of communication.

At the same time, one should be careful not to read too much into the possibilities of the Internet (Meikle 2002). Radio was a point-to-point communication medium when it started, but it quickly became appropriated by corporate power for broadcasting. And we see corporate interests trying to control the Internet in the United States. How advocates and activists use information and communication technologies and include marginalized peoples will determine their usefulness as a tool for radical democracy (Friedman 2005). Indy Media activists in Australia recommend that we (1)

use the Internet tactically but think strategically about its use; (2) be clear about what we want; (3) do not put too much hope in it; (4) be multimedia in our orientation, as most of the world is not connected; and (5) have faith in people and their imaginations (Meikle 2002).

Power to the People

As the IMC website claims,

> The Independent Media Center is a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth. We work out of a love and inspiration for people who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media's distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity. (www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml accessed August 4, 2008)

Indy Media's focus is on collective connectivity and participation in creating news that is radical and relevant to people. Indy Media incorporates an organizational strategy, that of a network, as well as an emancipatory ideology that embodies interactive and positional knowledge production across boundaries. Networks have become the dominant organizational structure both inside and outside movement and NGO circles (Desai 2005). The transnational movements, particularly the feminist movements, have been at the forefront of using this structure successfully for advocacy, research, and policy formulation, as discussed in chapter 2 (see also Moghadam 2005).

In forming networks, activists are responding to the need to work at multiple levels, which can be accomplished only through collaborations with others. Thus, the individual IMCs, which often are face-face organizations, are linked electronically to form a network. They do not have a centralized structure, although the Seattle IMC, as the original site and the one that hosts the global website, does play an important role in technical support and linking with the other IMCs.[7] But beyond that, it does not seem to have a centralizing role. This horizontal structure is not just a result of technological possibilities but reflects a commitment to participatory democracy that most new social movements share. Thus, the 17 Latin American IMCs are linked to each other as well as to the 142 around the world.

The IMCs' focus on collectivity is unique, as most globalization and technology literature focuses on the new ways in which individuals can become isolated and alienated from social interactions in the process of being part of virtual communities. Most users of computers in the United States are seduced by entertainment and consumption possibilities provided by the new information capitalism (Dean 2002). This was the case with some cyberfeminists discussed above (Kember 2003).

The IMCs' collective enterprise of solidarity calls into question the focus of both scholars and popular media on individual cultural expressions of globalization. Many media studies scholars lament the fact that such virtual communities lead to more and more individual engagement with the media but not with other people. But what is remarkable about all Web-based sites is that the communities they create are more important than the information they convey (Schrage cited in Hyde 2002). The Indy Media movement is different in that all local IMCs are face-face or place-based communities, in addition to being virtual communities, and they reflect local political culture and concerns.

Another aim of IMCs is to articulate radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth. It is an interesting juxtaposition of modern and postmodern understandings of truth as both an objective reality—as reflected in the choice of the word *accuracy*—and a subjective reality—as evident in passionate telling of multiple truths—are highlighted. Indy Media sites do not make claims of objectivity and neutrality. Rather, their websites note that all reporters have their own biases, and so readers should read the stories with a critical eye. These passionate tellings are not just an act of reporting; rather, they are about making the world a better place. In so doing, the tellers are not afraid of working out of love and inspiration, values that are associated with feminine qualities, emotions that are often gendered female. Emotions and passions are central to the new cultures of globalization. For Indy Media, people are the agents of their own lives and histories.

Indy Media is not just a news service; it is a producer of culture as well as a cultural product. People are the communicators who can take charge of media and become producers and makers of news in a literal sense, rather than as targets of news media that have another orientation to truth. This enabling of people to become communicators also mobilizes both definitions of culture, as people give meaning to what is important to them and, in the process, learn a new aesthetic and vocabulary.

Alternative media are often understood in binary ways—as oppositional to the mainstream or as an alternative to the mainstream media—when in fact they are life transforming for the women and men involved in them (Rodriguez 2001). Engaging in producing culture enables people to become creators of their own images, voices, and selves, and transforms them into message producers and storytellers, so that they are not just audiences for other media. Hence, such experiments should rightly be called "citizens' media," to emphasize the cultural transformation. If *citizenship* is defined as active daily engagement in shifting power relations, then we see how citizens' sense of self and access to power shifts in the process of creating news. It may not always lead to social transformation, but it makes people active and engaged, and that has value in itself.

In the almost ten years since its inception, Indy Media has radicalized the way activists communicate. The convergence of activism, the maturity of the Internet, and the domination of corporate globalization galvanized the Indy Media movement (Coyer 2005b). It allows people across vast geographic distances, but with similar political interests, to connect in cyberspace. While Indy Media tries to be as inclusive as possible, there are limits to its strategies.

Limits to People's Power

The main problems faced by the Indy Media movement are limitations with regard to geographic representation, linguistic diversity, and gender balance (e.g., Coyer 2005b; Mamadouh 2004). It is dominated by Northern countries, especially the United States, which has 53 sites; Europe has 40 sites; Australia 11; and Latin America 17. The presence of Indy Media depends not only on access to the Internet and users of the Internet but also on political opportunity structures and political cultures. For example, China, which has a large online population, has no Indy site because of political control; while India, which has an open political culture, has only one site because of infrastructural problems (Mamadouh 2004). Indy Media has tried systematically to address geographical imbalance by transfer of skills and hardware to the South through "caravans,"[8] particularly in South America and Africa. The transfer is not unilateral, as Southern countries transfer content and collective-action skills. But nonetheless, the Indy Media movement reflects, although it tries to address, existing global inequalities.

Linguistic diversity, or lack thereof, is also a problem, in light of the dominance of English. Sixty-eight percent of all websites around the world are in English, with Japanese coming in a distant second at 5 percent. Forty-three percent of the online population uses English, with Chinese a distant second at 11 percent (Mamadouh 2004). The other languages in which Indy Media has interfaces are all European languages with few world speakers; whereas the most commonly spoken languages, such as Chinese, Bengali, and Hindi, have no representation at all. Indy Media is working to provide translation on many sites. Still, the local sites tend to be monolingual, with the exception of the Bolivian and Peruvian sites, which have indigenous Aymara and Quechua languages. The Bolivian site, however, is very incomplete and not always up to date. So while Indy Media is creating a communications commons, for now it is for those who can communicate in European languages.

While there are women in local IMCs, scholars and Indy Media activists complain that it is primarily a male-dominated phenomenon (e.g., Coyer 2005a). It is hard to know what percentage of Indy Media respondents and

consumers are women. There is very little research available on that. It is male dominated because the technology and the initial setup were male dominated. Yet all Indy Media sites are explicitly concerned with gender issues, as I show with the Latin American cases.

The response of the Seattle site to 9/11 revealed another limitation of the movement. Following the attack, the Seattle site carried few "active witnessing" reports and many articles by U.S. or U.S.-based intellectuals like Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, and Edward Said. Influenced by the Chomskyan view of U.S. foreign policy, the site reported mainstream sources and few of its own reports. The Seattle IMC provided more analysis and interpretations than activism or reports. That was not true of sites in Latin America and other places that did reports of their own on the responses to 9/11, as well as on local protests against the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. What one site carries is not the face of Indy Media as a whole. The aim of the movement, like feminist movements, is to move away from a hegemonic position for any one particular site.

Another potential limitation of the Indy Media movement is in the area of participation. Who participates in the Indy Media movement? Is it a "locked circuit" (Downing 2003)? That is, do activists colonize Indy Media and close it off to nonactivist audiences? Finally, the Internet, like other radical practices, is open to both commercial exploitation and government control, as the recent news of Google's and Yahoo's collaboration with the Chinese government documents.[9] So the Indy Media movement is not a panacea, but a medium that has potential for democratic practices and social justice.

The Indy Media movement is multiscalar. Activists and audiences can connect at local-global, local-local, local-regional, or local-national levels, among other such possibilities, thus enabling the practice of democracy at many levels. But the movement also faces challenges, such as hackers; government surveillance; and new software—such as open editing, which will enable anyone to alter another's words. I turn to specific IMCs in Latin America to show how they are addressing some of these limitations.

Latin American IMCs

Indy Media Brazil was the first site in Latin America, developed in 2000 by seven students at the University of São Paulo. It got started after one of the students came back from protesting at the Republican Convention in Philadelphia, where he had encountered the Indy Media movement. The students had to advertise their presence using fliers, as most people did not know about them. Thus, they had to first take the IMC to the street before it could be a Web presence. The São Paulo center later moved from the university to a "squat" building,[10] where participants began to work with poor

youth and single mothers who lived there, teaching them computer skills and involving them in the work of the Indy Media Center (Garcelon 2006). By 2001, the IMC had 21 members, and in 2003 it had 100 members.

The Argentine site emerged a year later in response to the collapse of the Argentine economy in 2001, when the reports of mainstream media were discredited and suspect (Garcelon 2006). The Argentine site focuses on human rights issues and the history of disappearances and torture. Maria Trijana (quoted in Garcelon 2006), an activist at the IMC, notes that Indy Media was "frontline journalism" during those days and continues to be so. Other sites in Chile, Bolivia, and Colombia followed over the next few years.

Most of the Latin American IMC home pages are organized both thematically and by movements, key among them being movements of workers, peasants, women, indigenous people, and Afro-Latin Americans. Gender, race, and sexuality are emphasized as themes on the sites as well as in the central stories, which include stories on abortion (which is still illegal in most Latin American countries), violence against women, indigenous rights, and Afro-Latin rights. The Latin American IMC websites have postings by individuals as well as by movements and NGO activists.

In addition to the feature stories, each of which is embedded with links and audio, video, or photo clips, sites also list local, regional, and global events, along with links to all the 143 IMCs around the world and to other Indy Media projects like radio, satellite TV, video, and archives of postings. It thus links diverse communities in an attempt to build coalitions. All sites are very explicit about their coalition-building consciousness (Keating 2005).

While the sites welcome all kinds of postings, the editorial policy of the Brazilian website serves to illustrate the exceptions. IMC Brazil excludes posts that

- are racist, sexist or have other discriminatory intentions;
- contain personal attacks;
- are any kind of commercial advert;
- promote an election candidate or a political party;
- are against the principals and values of Indy media Brazil. (www.midiaindependente.org/en/blue/static/policy.shtml accessed August 4, 2008)

The Indy Media movement in Latin America has been a huge success in combining old and new technologies and creating a computer "underground railroad." The digital networks operate in tandem with social networks. Most sites are in Spanish, except the Brazilian one, which is in Portuguese, French, Italian, and Spanish. As noted before, the Bolivian and Peruvian sites are also in Aymara and Quechua. Most of these sites have a translation program. It is through combining old and new technologies and

the use of telecenters that the Latin American IMCs have addressed the issues of access and gender imbalance.

For example, in Argentina, where many people do not have access to the Internet and computers, IMCs have developed ways to bring the Internet to poor people by taking computers to them at work and in their neighborhoods (Boido 2003). In one instance, where two young activists were murdered by the military police, the IMC uploaded pictures of the two involved in movement work and showed them in their neighborhood. Long lines formed to see the two activists, and people shed tears and said prayers in front of the computers. This enabled people to see themselves as change agents and makers of history. The IMC in Argentina also enabled people to film their daily experiences in the context of the financial crisis and then put their films up on the website. Besides enabling ordinary people to become active cultural agents, the IMC also engaged them in constructing their own media.

In Brazil, Indy Media uses traditional media such as radio, video, and print to reach the youth in the favelas and on the streets who are not connected to the Web. In particular, Web-based programs are broadcast on Indy Media radio stations, and local-station broadcasts are uploaded on the IMC site (Ortellado 2002).

IMCs in Latin America have also created media centers, or telecenters, that provide computer access and training to poor youth with no access to computers at home. Most young boys, however, use the telecenters for either looking for jobs, playing games, or surfing pornographic sites. The Brazilian government is now planning to build telecenters in fifteen cities in Brazil. But again research shows that they will have to ensure access for women and girls to ensure equality between the genders.

Telecenters, or *telecottages*, were first introduced in Scandinavia in the 1980s as a way to provide Internet access to rural communities. While some were private, others were funded by the state or local governments. The telecenters worked with local social networks to empower the communities rather than individual network users (Qvortrup 1989). The experience of one women's electronic "village hall" in the UK shows that what was most important in the success of the center was the vision of empowering women (Herman 2001). Creating a culture where technology was women friendly, and accessing it was seen as a right of women—and not as a transgressive act—made a huge difference.

Much of the literature on telecenters is about their market potential, about how to make them economically sustainable, and about which kind of telecenter—privately owned, franchise, government supported, or NGO supported—is most viable (e.g., Proenza, Bastidas-Buch, and Montero 2001). Community telecenters, however, should be conceptualized as community infrastructure, like schools and libraries, and not as economic en-

terprises (Simpson, Daws, and Pini 2004). Economic profitability places demands that are not always viable. Telecenters should focus on issues of the community, should be organized by the community, and should be managed by the community. Telecenters that combine the livelihood of the communities with their local expertise tend to be the most successful (Russell 2004). Many IMCs in Latin America are based on such a community model.

But giving every poor woman access to a computer will not change gender inequality (Escobar 1999). For that to happen, we need to change power relations in real life. The Women's Networking Support Programme uses the Internet for such strategic use.

THE WOMEN'S NETWORKING SUPPORT PROGRAMME

The Women's Networking Support Programme (henceforth the Programme) grew out of the Association for Progressive Communicators (APC). The APC was formed in 1990 by seven media networks from Europe, the United States, Latin America, and Australia; it came into being to provide Internet access to NGOs participating in the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. Women active in the APC wanted to form a similar network for women active in the women's movement around environmental and developmental issues. The efforts of these women in the APC resulted in the formation of the Programme in 1993 (APC Women's Networking Support Programme 2000). But in addition to creating a women's network, the APC has also worked to transform its own organizational structure to reflect gender balance and gendered programming. At its 2006 annual meeting, APC members elected, for the first time, a woman to chair the organization. In addition, five out of the eight members of the board, who serve three-year terms, are also women and represent regional and geographic diversity. APC, like many other communications organizations, was male dominated but has worked to address issues of gender inequality, not only by supporting a women's program, but also by transforming its own vision and agenda.

Most of the women who started the Programme had some experience with using the Internet as a tool for activism. They developed a network that included individual women, women's organizations, and women's networks around the world to provide a safe, secure place for networking, mentoring, and support. It is a women-only program, and hence all leadership positions are staffed by women. The Programme's first effort was to provide Internet service to the over 30,000 women who attended the Huairou NGO forum in 1995, held in conjunction with the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, described in chapter 2.

Like Indy Media, the Programme was a response both to needs within the women's movement and to the development of the information and communication technologies. The UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing served as the immediate catalyst for the Programme. Its aim is

- to initiate and implement research activities in the field of gender and information and communication technologies;
- to advance the body of knowledge, understanding, and skills in the field of gender and information and communication technologies by implementing training activities;
- to facilitate access to information resources in the field of gender and information technologies. (www.apcwomen.org/about_wnsp accessed August 4, 2008)

So while Indy Media's focus is on directly enabling people to become news producers and hence cultural creators, the Programme's focus is on research and training. However, as I will show below, the Programme is involved in building new cultures of globalization. The Programme includes women's groups and organizations, as well as individual women from more than twenty countries. I will focus on the Programme's work in Latin America.

Women's communication networks are not a new cultural form in the contemporary women's movements. Feminists have used media networks from the 1960s onward, both as alternatives to mainstream media coverage and as a space to give voice and expression to women (Kidd 2002). Some examples include the news programs Depth News in Asia, Women's Feature Service in New Delhi, and Caribbean Women's Feature. The International Women's Tribune Center started in 1975 in New York City as a clearinghouse of information for and about women from around the world. Isis International began as a communications and information-sharing service in 1974 in Rome. It moved from Rome to Geneva in the 1980s, and ever since the 1990s there have been three Isis offices, in Manila, Philippines; Kampala, Uganda; and Santiago, Chile. It continues to serve as an important feminist communications network.

The feminist media networks and other community media are about cultural empowerment and hence emphasize the process by which they organize the community and the relationship between the media activists and the community (Meadows, Forde, and Foxwell 2002). Hence, media activists engage community members in dialogue, training future media workers and providing local content.

Following the 1995 Huairou conference, the Programme's aim was to provide activists with a means of staying in touch, sharing and exchanging information, training, and developing ideas and proposals for research and advocacy (www.apcwomen.org/node/93, accessed August 4, 2008). The

Programme's structure reflects its agenda. It consists of a Council of Participants that includes all members. A small coordinating team coordinates and manages projects, and raises funds. The Programme is also composed of members active in specific projects at the regional or local level. In addition, the Programme has "working areas" that organize members by areas of interest, such as the Internet and governance. Finally, it has committees for specific tasks such as hiring, evaluation, and fund-raising (www.apcwomen.org/about_wnsp accessed August 4, 2008). The Programme's work is supported by private foundations in the United States and Europe and institutional support from women's organizations.

The Programme is a networked organization that is "multicultural, multidirectional, supportive, affective, sharing, and attentive to the needs of its members." It defines its processes and methods of work as "participatory, consultative, inclusive, egalitarian, flexible and evolving." "Dignity, respect, honor, and security" for each member are part of the Programme's work ethic. As its self-definitions suggest, the Programme takes process seriously. The structure is deliberately flexible, in order to meet the needs of its members and the changing nature of technologies and global contexts. (www.apcwomen.org/about_wnsp accessed August 4, 2008).

The majority of the Programme's members are middle-class European and Third World women and their organizations. Hence, one of the Programme's major efforts is to reach out to poor women, to cross the digital divide using new and old technologies such as radio, posters, and newspapers. Working with the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and with Feminist Radio out of Costa Rica, the Programme provides women access to open airwaves for their own programs and ensures the presence of women's voices online through the Women's International Network.

The Programme's main strategy to change unequal gender relations is through shaping global policy around the use of information and communication technologies and, at the local level, organizing women for social change through the use of the Internet:

> Our approach in gender and information and communication technologies involves an understanding of power relations in society. This recognition includes an awareness of the unequal power relations between women and men, north and south, rich and poor, urban and rural, connected and unconnected—in local communities, in sovereign countries, and globally.
>
> WNSP works to transform these relations of inequality, with the full knowledge that information and communication technologies can be used to either exacerbate or transform unequal power relations. Part of this recognition includes an awareness of the limits of information and communication technologies—that in and of themselves, information and communication technologies cannot create gender equality, or end poverty, but that they can be tools for social action and

positive social change. (www.apcwomen.org/about_wnsp accessed August 4, 2008)

As training is its primary activity, I turn attention to the tool kit *Women in Sync (APC WNSP1, APC WNSP2, and APC WNSP3 2000)*, which the Programme produced. It is a collection of stories and experiences of the women and organizations that have become part of the Programme's network, presented in three parts that comprise lessons learned and challenges faced by women's organizations engaged in using communication technologies as a tool for social change. It also serves as a training manual.

I focus on how the Programme's member organizations have worked with women in Latin America to bring about social change (APC WNSP 3 2000). *Women in Sync* emphasizes the importance of the strong women's movement in Latin America in enabling the success of the Internet strategy and creating new global cultures. Various progressive Internet networks that were involved in the APCs in Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua, and Uruguay took the lead in promoting the creation of a women's organizations network so women could access information and prepare for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Among the chief initiators of the women's network in Latin America was the Agencia Latinoamericana de Información (Latin American Information Agency; ALAI).

The ALAI was formed in 1977 to promote democratic participation of social movements in Latin American society. It was established as a network to facilitate information sharing among social movements in Latin America, and it remains an important source for social-movement information. In addition to alternative media and journalists, there are many grassroots organizations, women's groups, and academics who are part of the network and contribute to it routinely.

Internet resources enabled the ALAI to flourish as it facilitated faster and more effective communication among its members (Burch 1998). For many academic and social-movement organizations, the ALAI was the only way to communicate with others across borders. And because the Internet was primarily introduced through the institutional arena in Latin America, it enabled the development of collective Internet spaces for collective action—as opposed to the individual consumption and chat use that developed in North America and Europe, where it was introduced to the individual consumer. This has further facilitated the use of cyberspace for social transformation in a region with a rich history of women's movements.

In 1989, to support gender equality, the ALAI established the Area Mujeres (the Women's Programme). This has become an important avenue for women's movements and feminists from diverse backgrounds in Latin America to use in sharing important proposals and strategies. The ALAI also

provides training and counseling to establish electronic networks for women's groups. For example, in collaboration with the Programme, it has helped the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American women's movements develop electronic networks. Because the ALAI works with women's, peasants', and indigenous movements and other human rights struggles, it also serves to bring these movements together through its electronic work. For example, the Area Mujeres has begun to work in rural areas with indigenous women and peasants.

The ALAI has also been promoting advocacy in the region for a right to communicate with a gender focus, that is, inclusion of women's voices and concerns (Burch 1998). It was one of the first networks to promote Spanish- and Portuguese-language websites in the predominantly English cyberspace. Today many websites also have indigenous languages such as Quechua and Aymara, as indicated above.

In preparation for the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the Area Mujeres collaborated with the Programme to establish more systematic access to the Internet for women's networks in Latin America. The use of the Internet spread rapidly because of the relative unity of language, the strong women's movements in the region, and its relatively easy availability in Latin America compared to other regions in the South.

The main goals of the electronic women's network were promoting awareness, training women from a gender perspective, facilitating a flow of information, and developing policies, advocacy, and research. The Area Mujeres regards the Internet as a site of struggle. Given poor women's lack of access to computers, one of its most important strategies has been to repackage cyber information into radio and print information and make it available to women who lack access to the Internet.

In Mexico, Laneta (slang for "truth") began as a node of APC providing Internet service to civil society organizations, NGOs, and activists. Laneta began promoting the use of the Internet for the women's movement in 1993, and through its work *Modemmujer* began in Mexico in 1995 as a way of gathering an e-mail list of women attending the conference in Beijing. The preparations for the 1995 Beijing conference helped in regional consolidation.

Laneta linked organizations and networks electronically to the Beijing conference by publishing daily bulletins. Three activists in Beijing sent daily reports to the *Modemmujer* site in Mexico City, which then broadcast them to 400 others that, through fax, local newspapers, and community radio, extended the reach even further. *Modemmujer* also provided a reverse information flow, with women in China learning about women in Mexico, their issues, and their struggles.

Modemmujer now reaches a thousand women's organizations in Mexico. It primarily uses e-mail, as many women's organizations don't have access

to other Web-based services. They also do not flood their members with information, as most women's organizations do not have the capacity, either technical or substantive, to process information overload. So *Modemmujer* synthesizes, and repackages academic and conference material to make it accessible to rural and poor women's organizations. In addition, given the dominance of English on the Internet, an important part of *Modemmujer*'s work is translating materials into Spanish and Portuguese.

On May 28, 1996, the International Day of Action for Women's Health, *Modemmujer* organized a rally and protest against the Mexican state. They held a tribunal in Mexico City in which women recounted their experiences of forced sterilization and malpractice, resulting in maternal and child mortality, as well as other abuses. As a jury of medical and human-rights experts rendered verdicts on these cases, *Modemmujer* communicated them to their Listserv, who in turn relayed them further.

Modemmujer has developed a weeklong training workshop for women's organizations on using the Internet to strategize and network for women's rights, as well as to lobby and advocate on behalf of women. Hence, *Modemmujer* is engaged in articulating a whole new communicative culture, borrowing from *Modemmujer*'s own history of organizing, and from other Latin American countries.

Following the Beijing conference, the Programme collaborated with Area Mujeres in developing telecenters as a means of reaching more women in poor communities in the rural and urban areas. I discuss several of their projects below to convey a sense of the diversity and scope of their reach. They have reached out to indigenous women's groups to enable them to use the Web to weave a "rhizomatic" (Martinez and Turcotte 2003), gender-based fabric of struggle for visibility, as well as against poverty and violence. In Guatemala, the Centro de Communicadoras is a Mayan site where surfers can sign up with women's cooperatives to learn how to make videos or access women's handicrafts produced by women's cooperatives in the rural areas. The sales are handled by women directly, thus facilitating social economies outside the capitalist system.

But working with indigenous communities has not always been easy. For example, in the Andean town of Pastocalle, where most of the small farmers are indigenous or Mestizo, the farmers came in contact with Chasquinet. Chasquinet is an Area Mujeres and Programme-supported Internet network, based in Quito, that provides Internet access to urban and rural poor communities, to give them a voice so that they can influence economic and social policies that shape their daily lives (APC WNSP 3 2000).[11]

The farmers asked Chasquinet for help in dealing with a plague of ants that were attacking their potato crop. They had made several trips to Quito to government agricultural offices but had gotten nowhere. Chasquinet helped them connect, via the Internet, with other farmers, who helped

them with their problem. Following this successful interaction, the local farmers decided to build a telecenter with the help of Chasquinet.

Chasquinet worked with women, as is their strategy, and soon the women wanted to declare their region an ecological reserve to prevent a Dutch hotel from building a resort. They used the Internet to successfully lobby the government. The women also got their children to become involved, and the youth developed Web pages about their reserve. Women also used the Internet for e-commerce for their microcredit enterprises.

It was during this time that Chasquinet found out informally from the girls that the boys were using the telecenter to surf pornographic sites. During discussion of the boys' behavior, the Chasquinet trainer learned that many of the girls had been raped by their male relatives. When the trainer discussed this with the women, she learned that many of the women too had been raped. So the trainers used the Net to talk about sexual abuse, healing, and support-group therapies, which most poor women had never accessed before.

The telecenter became a place for women to come and share their stories and gain support from each other. Many women confronted their abusive spouses. This led to frustration among the men, who complained that women were taking over the telecenter. When a new local leader was chosen he shut down the telecenter, despite protests from the youth and women. The women had, however, learned to support themselves, and now they go to Quito every month to use the computers at Chasquinet. Such experiences reveal the importance of working with men and addressing power inequalities in general in order to continue the work of social transformation.

Chasquinet's experiences with the urban poor have been more positive. In Santa Rosa, a coastal town near Quito, women make a living by picking mussels from the local mangroves. They make about thirty dollars a month. Most of them are illiterate and live in poor communities. Their livelihood was threatened when the local mayor decided to stop the mussel picking and sell the mangrove to shrimp farmers.

Chasquinet learned of this and offered to help. They worked with women to design a campaign in which the local women took part. Chasquinet helped women broadcast their situation and target local and international ecological organizations. They carried out the campaign using radio, as well as by publishing articles in local papers. Greenpeace came to their rescue and began to bombard the local mayor's office with mail. The mayor halted the shrimp farming and the women were able to continue with mussel picking. Emboldened by their success, the women developed a telecenter with the help of Chasquinet and, four years later, are still using the telecenter to access the Internet for their local concerns and for training each other.

In Brazil, the Internet Training Program for Brazilian Women's Network, or Rede Mulher de Educacao, an NGO that facilitates the network of

women's organizations throughout Brazil, develops popular feminist education services. Ten women from around Brazil attended a training session and took the knowledge they had acquired back to many other women in their communities. For them, the Internet is a "place to locate [themselves] in the world through the collective thought that transforms all human relationships and political action" (Martinez and Turcotte 2003, 282).

The Programme has also collaborated with the International Development Research Centre in Canada to develop telecenters in marginalized urban neighborhoods and rural communities in Latin America. Ecuanex, an APC node in Ecuador, as well as Colonodo in Colombia, worked with local organizations to set up telecenters in Ecuadorian Amazonia and in Nueva Loja; each telecenter is a hub connected to five computer-radio centers in indigenous communities. In Colombia APC WNSP worked with Fedevivienda, a social-housing umbrella organization, to set up neighborhood information units that would enable individuals in organizations to learn communication skills for community development.

After these projects were set up, conflicts arose that demonstrated the need for redistribution of social power connected to larger economic, cultural, and political contexts. In Colombia, where there is a history of popular women's movements, women have developed collective strategies for the allocation of resources through community networks. Hence, the neighborhood information units were run by teams that were entirely made up of women, and the training process was shaped by women's specific realities in the neighborhoods.

In Ecuadorian Amazonia, where there isn't a popular women's movement, the leadership of the telecenters was in the hands of women who were related to indigenous community leaders. These women did not develop programs to address the issues of women in the community as a whole (APC WNSP 3 2000). While most of the Programme's work with Area Mujeres in Latin America consists of using the Internet for building solidarities and collective action, the Programme has also tried to tie the telecenters to economic initiatives, without making economic empowerment the sole issue.

While electronic networks in Latin America have led to communicational spaces for women in the region, the fear is that commercialization of the Internet might lead to some of the same kinds of consumerist and entertainment-focused individual use that one sees in Europe and North America. ALAI tries to address this threat by providing collective spaces to diverse social movements for networking and information sharing; and also by mobilizing for awareness of these threats; developing proposals with a gender focus for national and international meetings; and developing structures, mechanisms, and practices for democratic communication.

RETHINKING CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

As noted in the beginning of the chapter, the debates on culture and globalization tend to view both culture and globalization in very narrow terms. Scholars of cultural globalization see culture primarily in terms of consumption of music, dance, clothes, and food, and globalization as a contemporary force, emerging in the West. Based on such an understanding, cultural globalization is understood as cultural homogenization, cultural differentiation, or cultural hybridity. Moreover, cultural hybridity or fusions have emphasized the culture of consumption, especially among the middle and upper classes in the Global North and South, and among the new immigrants.

However, when you look at how ordinary women and men are using the new information and communication technologies, culture as meaning making in daily life becomes evident. You see a new culture of globalization taking shape that involves ordinary men and women in a collective effort of cultural citizenship using the new information and communication technologies.

This new culture of globalization embodies hybridities of virtual and geographic communities; of activists across movements and classes; and of accessing technology and using it for social change and, in the process, developing a common culture based on social justice.

The examples of Indy Media and the Programme represent different dimensions of hybridity. Indy Media has focused on enabling educated men and women to become producers of news and stories. The inequalities of region, class, and education have meant that it is primarily based in the United States and Europe among the educated middle and upper classes. But Indy Media has tried to address this inequality of access by sharing hardware and software.

In Latin America, activists have addressed the digital divide by combining the old media technologies of radio and print with the Internet, and also by developing telecenters in poor communities to provide them access to the new technology. Indy Media has not been as successful, however, in bridging the gender gap.

The Programme, as a women-only network, attempts to bridge the gender gap in the new culture of globalization by training women to access and engage new technologies. Its primary aim is to connect women across communities to organize for gender equality and social justice. As the cases of Chasquinet in Bolivia and Ecuanex in Ecuador show, working for gender equality is a complicated process. As the case of Bolivia demonstrates, not including men can undermine women's access. The case in Amazonian Ecuador shows that including women does not guarantee that all women in

those communities will be represented. So gender access remains a complex issue that cannot merely be dealt with by addressing women alone, but rather has to incorporate men, without undermining women.

While both Indy Media and the Programme arose in the context of movements, Indy Media arose from street protest, while the Programme emerged in the context of the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women. These differing contexts map onto the differing strategies adopted by these networks. Indy Media represents what can be possible with the radical potential of the information and communication technologies, while the Programme shows what is possible within the current context. Both have developed new structures and mechanisms for building both virtual and on-the-ground or place-based communities. Both highlight the importance of pre-existing social networks and social movements in creating a new culture of globalization.

Collective participation, interactivity, and connectivity for cultural citizenship are the elements that are common to both and that define the new culture of globalization. These new cultures have been initiated by educated, middle-class activists from both the North and the South. Hence, an important focus in both Indy Media and the Programme is the politics of relation, or reaching out across boundaries and inequalities to build a common culture. So it is a politics of recognition but also of participation and redistribution of communication resources. Finally, as the Programme notes:

> Technology is culture which like other cultural processes is then subject to negotiation, contestation, and ultimately transformation. In this perspective the issue is not just access to technology but to the creation of knowledge and technology, in definition, making meanings and creating technological culture. (www.apcwomen.org/about_wnsp accessed August 8, 2008)

NOTES

1. The data for this chapter come primarily from the websites of the groups that I discuss, secondary sources, and my own participation in global conferences and gatherings that have focused on gender and information and communication technologies.

2. As Nederveen Pieterse (2004) notes, this historical view is not common among economists and sociologists but is common among historians and anthropologists.

3. Information and communication technologies include phone, fax, Internet, mobile phones, and various Web-based applications such as discussion groups, chat rooms, instant messaging, and Listservs. I use the term *Internet* to refer to all Web-

based applications and as a shorthand for information and communication technologies.

4. "Plugged In" is a collaboration between Stanford University and several poor East Palo Alto communities.

5. Deuze (2003) suggests that the Internet is a useful communicative tool because of its interactivity, hypertextuality, and multimediality.

6. The two terms, *Indy Media* and the *Independent Media Center (IMC)*, are used interchangeably. In general, however, *Indy Media* is used to denote the global movement, while *IMC* is used for a specific, local center.

7. There is some tyranny of the techies, and there have been some government raids—as in Genoa, Italy, in 2003, after the G8 protests, when an IMC site was broken into at night and computers smashed. But they refuse to be concerned with security, and they maintain an open site.

8. "Caravans" are trips made by Indy Media activists from the North to the South to provide computers and other hardware and software.

9. Google and Yahoo! both gave names of their users to the government to be able to operate in China. The Chinese government used these lists to make arrests and curb political activism.

10. "Squat" building refers to a building that has been abandoned and taken over by poor, homeless people.

11. Unless otherwise indicated, all the examples below are from the *Women in Sync*: Toolkit for Electronic Networking (APC WNSP1, APC WNSP2, APC WNSP3 2000).

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