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ARTICLE

Warriors and Weavers: The Poetics and Politics of Indigenous Appropriations of New Media Technologies in Latin America

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There has been much academic debate about the relationship of indigenous communities to new media technologies, specifically with respect to the way that the former might appropriate the latter and the terms in which they might do so, with a significant number of critics arguing that the concepts and lexicon of the traditional practice of weaving, sometimes recast as 'netweaving', may offer the most appropriate trope. However, such arguments typically remain at the level of theory, providing little or no evidence of the way in which real indigenous communities speak of how they appropriate new technologies. This article explores the poetics and underlying politics of indigenous appropriations of new media technologies, with reference to aesthetics where relevant, by contrasting the online presence of two highly prominent, prize-winning projects of indigenous internet appropriation: the web portal Índios Online, run by a group of different indigenous communities in north-eastern Brazil, and the homonymous website of the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca of the Nasa community in south-western Colombia. While they have both been studied extensively in their national contexts, very little attention has been paid to the poetics and aesthetics of the different projects, and no previous study has taken a sustained comparative approach. I present evidence to demonstrate that while the latter do, to some extent, engage tropes of weaving in their appropriation of these technologies, the former tend to prefer hunter and/or warrior tropes. I argue that the greater or lesser involvement of indigenous women in the appropriation of new media technologies does not seem to be a major factor determining such a choice, despite the typically gynocentric practice of weaving and hence the feminisation of related discourse, and, in contrast, the more masculinist repertoire of hunter and warrior tropes. Instead, I find that the different geographical locations, traditional activities, artisanal production and, most importantly, the immediate political situation and processes of the different communities do impact significantly on this choice.

(Net)weaving Is for Oppositional Cyborgs

There has been much academic debate about the relationship of indigenous communities to new media technologies, specifically with respect to the way that the former might appropriate the latter and the terms in which they might do so, with a significant number of critics arguing that the concepts and lexicon of the traditional practice of weaving, sometimes recast as 'netweaving', may offer the most appropriate trope. While my intention in this article is to explore specific web-based materials produced by different indigenous communities in Brazil and Colombia to determine the poetics of their appropriation of new media technologies first hand, I want to start by briefly exploring the back-story of cyborg theory, cyberfeminism and (net)weaving to reveal how it underpins the dominant Western academic association of indigenous people and new technologies with cyborgs and (net)weaving. It is my contention that there is too much deference to the work of Donna Haraway in the subsequent association of indigenous people and cyborgs, their appropriation of new technologies and (net) weaving, and that it is therefore useful to start with an understanding of how such a situation has arisen.

Early cyborg- and cyberfeminist theoretical writing, from the mid-1980s onwards, evidences a keen desire to overhaul the 'despised metaphors of both organic and technological vision' (Haraway, 'The Actors Are Cyborg' 21) with their masculinist bias and metonymic fragmentation, their binary structures and rational, hierarchical taxonomies, and to develop new folksonomic affinities and loose rhizomatic metaphorical associations that might insinuate alternative ways of seeing the world and relating to one another. The technology, practice and related lexicon of weaving – recast subsequently by some prominent critics as 'netweaving'[1] – has been central to this undertaking to conceptualise contemporary technoculture from a different, more gynocentric, perspective. As Sadie Plant discusses at length in *Zeros and Ones* (1998), artisanal weaving has always been a woman-centred practice, with strong ties to what it means to be a woman in pre-industrial societies,[2] and, in the view of a highly influential, though controversial, thinker such as Sigmund Freud, it has been considered just about the only contribution women have made to the development of technology. Plant, however, goes on to 'unveil' the significant impact that weaving technologies have had on the development of cybernetics – the concept of the computer is based on the punch-cards of the Jacquard loom – as well as to flag up the important role that women such as Ada Lovelace have played in the history of both the development of cybernetics and the industrialisation of weaving. Weaving as gendered theory and practice, therefore, has close ties to contemporary technoculture: it is 'digital', not just in so far as artisanal weaving is made 'by hand' (Gabriel and Wagmister, epigraph), but because the industrial loom's use of zero as a place-holder is the origin of the binary coding that lies behind all contemporary digital technologies.

[1] Tony Stevenson and Arturo Escobar have specifically used the term 'netweaving' to refer to alternative forms of social relations that might be enabled by new technologies. In Escobar's work, he tends to use 'netweaving' when considering cyberfeminist issues ('Gender'), and prefers the term 'meshworking' when discussing social movements more generally ('Other Worlds'). For further use of the term 'netweaving' in a cyberfeminist context, see Inayatullah and Milojevic, and, for a detailed study linking cyberfeminism and (net)weaving, see Du Preez.

Similar cyberfeminist appropriations of this terminology can be found in languages such as Spanish and Portuguese. See, for example, the long-standing Spanish online journal *Mujeres en Red* [Women in the Net] and reflections about women's networking online by its founder, Montserrat Boix; the much more recent Facebook page of the Colombian Colectivo De Mujeres 'Tejiendo Red' [Collective of Women 'Weaving Webs'], and the website of Brazilian group Mulheres em Rede [Women in the Net], whose strapline reads 'Tecendo teias de solidaridade e conhecimento' ['Weaving fabrics of solidarity and knowledge'].

[2] Nb. Not all artisanal weaving is considered women's work in traditional societies. Nonetheless, there is a marked predominance of the association of artisanal weaving with women.

In terms of its relationship to more traditional, masculinist conceptualisations of the way we work and relate to one another, (net)weaving does not stand in direct opposition to networking, since weaving is always, already networking (Plant, epigraph) and networking, at least for Haraway (epigraph), is still considered a 'feminist practice' despite its other applications. However, (net)weaving constitutes a subtly different, more radical approach that values 'play' over 'work'; the non-hierarchical, participatory construction of communities of practice over the more utilitarian business model of 'networking', and that foregrounds 'specific positioning, multiple mediation, partial perspective' (Haraway, 'Actors' 21). This is an approach most suited to the 'oppositional cyborgs' in whom Haraway vests much hope for the future in 'A Cyborg Manifesto'.[3]

But who are Haraway's 'oppositional cyborgs'? Cyborgs are those beings that span in any number of ways, both literal and metaphorical, the traditional boundary markers of human and machine. Although Haraway recognises the utopianism of her line of argument, her 'oppositional cyborgs' are those that, despite being the product of powerful interests, find a way to critique and challenge that paradigm of control through a 'cyborg consciousness'. The people who Haraway seems to be alluding to through the manifesto are, for example, female *maquiladora* [assembly plant] workers – she mentions, in particular, the textile industry (171) – who are able to organise and challenge their working conditions. And she is quite specific that such work within 'the homework economy' – a term she borrows from Richard Gordon – is 'being redefined as both literally female and feminized', even if the workers are not always female themselves ('Cyborg Manifesto' 166). But Haraway also notes that this is not just a gendered transformation of the way in which we work: it is simultaneously a racialised one. She goes on to argue that '"women of colour" might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities' (174).

In 'New Sciences: Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Repressed', an essay written in response to Haraway's original manifesto, Chela Sandoval critiques Haraway for borrowing too heavily from US third world feminism and blurring its specificities such that the statement 'we are cyborgs' ('Cyborg Manifesto' 150) can read, rather unhelpfully, as 'we are women of colour'. She also challenges Haraway for failing to recognise the extent to which she draws on indigenous American motifs and metaphors in her elaboration of cyborg feminism, and the extent to which she posits 'cyborg consciousness' as a novelty:

> It is no accident that Haraway defines, names and weaves the skills necessary to cyborgology through the techniques and terminologies of U.S. third world cultural forms, from Native American concepts of 'trickster' and 'coyote' [...], to 'mestizaje,' or the category 'women of color,' until the body of the feminist cyborg becomes clearly articulated with the material and psychic positioning of U.S. third world feminism. (Sandoval 252)

Sandoval argues that the indigenous (and other subaltern, immigrant) peoples of the Americas are, in fact, the original 'oppositional cyborgs': 'The colonized peoples of the Americas have already developed the cyborg skills required for survival under techno-human conditions as a requisite for survival under domination' (248).

[3] 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' began appearing in different print versions from 1984. I have used the 1991 version from *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*; a version that responds to some of the criticisms made of its earlier iterations.

Digital Indigeneity: Appropriating Technology and Negotiating Identity

If, as Sandoval argues, indigenous people in the Americas are 'oppositional cyborgs', adapting to the imposition of new technologies and 'indigenising' them to further their own aims, it should come as no surprise whatsoever that indigenous communities across the hemisphere have taken to using new digital technologies as they have manifested themselves over the last several decades, and that, in so doing, they have employed the same approach in their dealings with these technologies as they have with previous generations of new technologies. Academic books might cast their nets as wide as possible to capture audiences by selling themselves on the novelty value of the conjunction of references to indigeneity and new media in the same title: for example, Neil Blair Christensen's *Inuit in Cyberspace* (2003), Kyra Landzelius's edited collection *Native on the Net* (2006), Valerie Alia's *The New Media Nation* (2010) and the whole host of books, articles and websites dedicated to charting the use of the internet made on behalf of, and later by, the Zapatistas of south-eastern Mexico since the mid-1990s. However, the authors and editors of these works, particularly those published by well-informed anthropologists and other academics rather than excitable advocates for the revolutionary power of new media, are very aware that, notwithstanding the effects of inequalities of access (the 'digital divide'), the use of new media by indigenous communities is only as worthy of attention as any other topic of anthropological interest that has not yet been exhaustively studied. The use of new technologies is not automatically viewed with suspicion by indigenous communities (though many are understandably cautious) and their employment does not automatically undermine any sense of a claim to indigeneity.[4] Although, for some 're-emergent' communities it may mean that, in the context of self-representation through new media, indigeneity needs to be performed in a far more stereotypical, strategically essentialist way in order to be 'recognised' by mainstream society as 'indigenous', for those more secure in their claim to indigeneity, as the author of *Inuit in Cyberspace* notes, 'The amount of technology in the daily lives of Inuit make [*sic*] them no less fully fledged Inuit than before, unless they themselves feel so' (Christensen 21). Furthermore, if the discourse surrounding 'indigeneity' per se is a contemporary, translocal phenomenon (dating back in its English-language usage in international organisations only as far as 2000 (Niezen, cited in Castree 151)), it is, I would add, also 'born digital': the discourse of indigeneity, the related issue of indigenous re-emergence and the rise of digital communication technologies are concurrent and related phenomena. Viewed from this perspective, 'indigeneity' per se is digital. Nonetheless, I use the term 'digital indigeneity' in this article to specifically describe the relationship of indigenous people to digital media, how they appropriate new technologies and what they say about the way this relates to their sense of identity as indigenous people.

The real question, then, is not whether indigenous communities use new technologies or whether they can ever be compatible with 'indigeneity'. It is about how indigenous communities appropriate new technologies and the terms they use to describe their relationship to them. As Landzelius argues in the introduction to *Native on the Net*, researchers need to consider 'how these [digital] technologies are being "indigenized": that is, how are they being creatively integrated and indexed into practices and beliefs rooted in a local cultural logic?' (2). Given the fact that artisanal weaving is not only gendered but also a prominent cypher for indigenous identity(ies), threaded through with information concerning the beliefs and

[4] Indigeneity has been much debated in recent years. Rather than rely on any combination of factors to do with claims to be 'first-come' in a particular place, bloodlines, language, inherent marginalisation or non-mainstream/alternative practices and beliefs, scholars typically now opt to follow the 1989 International Labour Organisation Convention No. 169 which makes 'self-identification the central identifying principle' (Alia xx).

practices of the different communities to which the weavers belong, it makes sense that the scholars who first approached this topic might have hypothesised that indigenous people would adopt weaving as their poetics, aesthetics and underlying politics of 'digital indigeneity', and, that, as they did this, those same scholars would perhaps get swept up in the discourse of cyborg theory and cyberfeminism.

In their prescient theoretical essay advocating an exploration of the relationship between indigenous/non-Western cultures and digital technologies, Teshome Gabriel and Fabian Wagmister suggest that applying the concepts and the lexicon of weaving to new technologies may 'lend traditional, non-Western cultures a way of integrating digital technology into their own lives and value systems' (333), by identifying continuities between old and new technologies, and allowing them to 'maybe even reinvigorate, traditional practices', with the overarching objective of 'actually mutat[ing] the medium itself and hav[ing] it respond to the aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual characteristics of the community' (334). However, they can offer no proof that indigenous communities do conceive of their relationship to new technologies in terms of weaving. In other research concerning Latin American indigenous communities' relationship to new technologies, there is also a strong tendency to want to define indigenous internet users as 'cyborgs' who specifically 'weave' or form part of a more generalised 'weaving' of alternative online politics and identities. Sarah Grussing Abdel-Moneim's article, 'O Ciborgue Zapatista: Tecendo a poética virtual de resistência no Chiapas cibernético' [The Zapatista Cyborg: Weaving the Virtual Poetics of Resistance in Cyber-Chiapas] (2002),[5] and Eliete da Silva Pereira's book *Ciborgues indígen@s.br: A presença nativa no ciberespaço* [Indigenous Cyborgs.br: The Native Presence in Cyberspace] (2012), both draw on Haraway's references to weaving in 'A Cyborg Manifesto' to develop the theoretical basis for their interpretation of indigenous actors online.[6] However, notwithstanding the consonance between indigenous activism and 'netweaving' or 'meshworking' as an alternative form of social organising – as seen, for example, in the work of Arturo Escobar – neither provides any evidence for indigenous self-definitions of their online presence that would explicitly back up their reliance on the weaving model. It is self-definitions and descriptions that most concern me in the remainder of this study.

This article proposes to break new ground by exploring in detail the poetics and underlying politics of indigenous appropriations of new media technologies, with reference to aesthetics where relevant, and how this relates to their sense of identity as indigenous people. It does this by contrasting the online presence of two highly prominent, prize-winning projects of indigenous internet appropriation: the web portal Índios Online, plus related projects and cultural products, run by a group of different indigenous communities in north-eastern Brazil, and the homonymous website of the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (ACIN) of the Nasa community in south-western Colombia. I present evidence to demonstrate that while the latter do, to some extent, engage tropes weaving in their appropriation of these technologies, the former tend to prefer hunter and/or warrior tropes. I argue that the greater or lesser involvement of indigenous women in the appropriation of new media technologies does not seem to be a major factor determining such a choice, despite the typically gynocentric practice of weaving and hence the feminisation of related discourse, and, in contrast, the more masculinist repertoire of hunter and warrior tropes. Instead, I find that the different geographical locations, traditional activities, artisanal production and, most

[5] Nb. All translations in this article are my own, unless otherwise stated.

[6] Lisa Nakamura, the prominent scholar of the intersection of race and digital technologies in US culture also makes passing, derivative reference to the relationship between indigenous peoples, 'complex forms of indigenous weaving' and digital technologies (14).

importantly, the immediate political situation and processes of the different communities do impact significantly on this choice.

The two projects analysed in detail here have been selected for their success within the communities from which they stem and their prominence in terms of national and even international critical acclaim (prizes won, journalistic and academic articles and books published). They are also largely synchronous projects, both running from the early 2000s to the present date, and, as noted above, they are almost diametrically opposed in terms of the tropes of appropriation used. While they have both been studied extensively in their national contexts, very little attention has been paid to the poetics and aesthetics of the different projects, and no previous study has taken a sustained comparative approach.

My approach is based on multimodal analysis of the websites themselves and their 'spheres' of links (Schneider and Foot) including closely related materials (e-books and videos, for example) produced by the groups and accessible via their webpages which reflect on the nature of their engagement with new technologies. This analysis proceeds on the basis of 'snapshots' of the websites in question, as the materials published online and the different permutations of website design over the period of nearly fifteen years means that there is too much material to analyse it all in detail. This approach is supplemented by interviews, conducted largely by electronic means, with key participants,[7] and more traditional desk-based research to contextualise the indigenous communities and political processes involved, as well as the national contexts with respect to policies of digital inclusion. With respect to multimodality, these websites and related digital materials are examined with an eye for aesthetics – their use of colour, motifs, logos and other design features – as well as their inclusion of photographs, videos and other media, where these aspects are seen to be significant. However, my overriding interest is with poetics; that is, with analysis of the written or verbal discourse used by both groups, as this is where I have determined the most significant political differences in approach to be located.

Digital Warriors: Índios Online

Evidence of a sustained project by a group of different indigenous communities to discursively 'indigenise' new technologies, as well as to reconsider themselves, as a result of their use of new technologies, specifically as 'digital indigenes', is to be found in the work of a collective of '(re-)emergent' or, better, 'existing and resisting' (Zoettl 17), indigenous peoples in North-East Brazil (the original groups were the Kariri-Xocó and Xucuru-Kariri of Alagoas state; the Kiriri, Pataxó-Hãhãhãe, Tumbalalá and Tupinambá of Bahia state; and the Pankararu of Pernambuco state) who work together under the aegis of a local NGO (Thydêwá),[8] and with sponsorship from the Brazilian Ministério da Cultura (Ministry of Culture) and other sources.

Although offline projects between these indigenous groups and the NGO in question date back to 2001, the Índios Online [Online Indians] web portal was set up in 2004 as an ethnojournalism project to encourage indigenous communities to report on abusive incidents, as well as document their cultural practices and provide material to challenge mainstream preconceptions about indigenous people.[9] Subsequent related projects have included an online educational network, @rco Digital [Digital Bow] (2006–2007), and resultant book, available in hardcopy and online (N. Kariri-Xocó, *et al.* 2007); the Celulares Indígenas [Indigenous Mobile

[7] I have conducted discrete interviews, as well as sustained ongoing conversations via a variety of communication channels, with key participants in these websites, as noted in the Works Cited list. In particular, I would like to thank Sebastián Gerlic, Vilma Almendra and Manuel Rozental for their help with my research and for their friendship. I would also like to thank Stephanie Dennison for her enduring support of this research project.

[8] Also sometimes Thydewas, in order, web-based materials.

[9] The first posts still searchable on the current site date from July 2005.

Phones] (2009) programme, which put mobile phones and their cameras at the disposal of the indigenous communities to record rights violations or other significant events and then share the resultant *celumetragens* [mobile phone 'shorts'] online; Esperança da Terra [Hope of the Earth] (2009–), an online forum for the exchange of knowledge regarding the environment and cultural diversity; Oca Digital [Digital Round House] (2012–), a digital arts project; and Pelas Mulheres Indígenas [By Indigenous Women] (2015–), a project that seeks to raise consciousness of women's rights, as well as encourage greater participation by indigenous women in on- and offline fora. A short, self-reflexive documentary film called *Indígenas digitais* [Digital Indigenes] (2010), directed by the NGO director Sebastián Gerlic, has also been promoted via the website. The film provides a neat summary of many of these projects and explicitly encourages those interviewed to reflect on what being a 'digital indigene' might mean for them. My discussion here of 'Índios Online' thus spans the website of that name and the various related projects of those who identify as 'índios online', with the focus being the discourse surrounding the appropriation of new media technologies by those involved.

The Índios Online website itself went from strength to strength in the period up to 2011, spreading far beyond its initial base in the North-East both in terms of audience and production team. It has been entirely indigenous-led since 2009 and is currently run by Patrícia Pankararu from Pernambuco, Nhenety Kariri-Xocó from Alagoas, Fábio Titiah and Yonana Pataxó Hãhãhãe from Bahia, as well as Alex Makuxi from Roraima. To date (July 2017), over one thousand indigenous people from nearly forty different indigenous groups have registered on the site, around half of whom have contributed materials, and it has had nearly 8 million page views, mostly from Brazil and the United States (Gerlic). The site has garnered considerable attention in Brazilian media and academia and has won a string of prizes, both national and international.[10] According to Gerlic, once Facebook began to gain serious traction from 2011 onwards, traffic on the site diminished notably, with community members creating individual profiles for themselves on the social media site instead.[11] The website, nonetheless, continues to be active to this day, with regular additions of news items, as well as evidencing gradual evolution in terms of its design. The look is now much more slick and both less busy with information and less rustic in design than it was originally, using a slightly less 'earthy' palette, and with fewer indigenous symbols in terms of headdresses as headers, but it does retain important signifiers of indigeneity such as the 'hand-drawn' *arroba* (@) logo which has been in use since 2009, and the borders based on Kariri-Xocó designs which were already present on the very first iteration of the site (see **Figures 1–5**). The site started life on the Content Management System b2evolution and moved to the related CMS WordPress in 2007, but is now designed in such a way as to make this dependence on pre-established formats all but invisible from the user interface.[12]

[10] Prizes won include the Brazilian Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos Humanos [Office for Human Rights] prize in 2007 and the Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos [Funding Authority for Studies and Projects] Prize for 'tecnologia social' ['social uses of technology'] in 2014, and they were semi-finalists in the W.K. Kellogg Foundation/Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean prize for Social Innovation in 2008. The group has received substantial attention in Brazilian(ist) academic circles with respect to issues of digital inclusion, cyberactivism and indigenous cultural authenticity, as well as coverage in online blogs and other news outlets, alongside many other projects for digital inclusion of Brazilian indigenous communities. Brazilian indigenous cyberactivism has been so notable that it has even merited attention from international newspapers and broadcasters such as the BBC (see Fellet). In Brazil, the Índios Online group continues to attract attention from researchers, despite the drop-off in on-site traffic.

[11] The site still encourages indigenous users to register as members of its online indigenous community rather than setting up and providing links to social media groups related to the project. Fledgling attempts were made to set up Facebook and Twitter presences in the early 2010s but they have not been maintained.

[12] The Índios Online group have also had two different URLs in their lifespan org.br and now.net, since the first domain name was 'stolen'. This is not an uncommon issue with popular websites.

Figure 1: The Índios Online homepage over time, 2004.

Figure 2: The Índios Online homepage over time, 2 March 2009.

Before going on to look at the group's preferred tropes for the appropriation of new media technologies, I want to briefly examine the context in which this group took to the internet. This context has two main components: firstly, the 're-emergence' of indigenous groups across the world, and in Brazil in particular, and the importance of new media technologies for the most recent 'waves' of this; and secondly, the political project of 'digital inclusion' in Brazil.

'Re-emergent' indigeneities and digital technologies

Much research has already been conducted into the 're-emergence' of indigenous identities, both in Brazil and elsewhere in the world, over the last forty years or so and with growing vigour as a translocal movement since the beginning of the new millennium, facilitated by NGOs

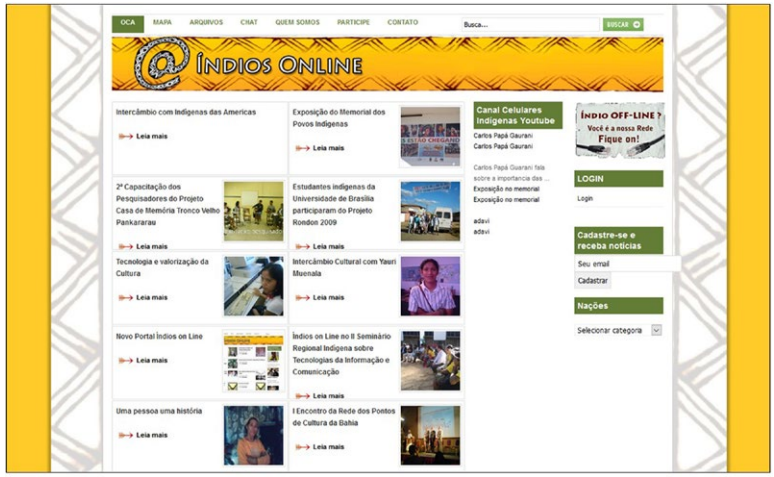

Figure 3: The Índios Online homepage over time, 12 August 2009.

Figure 4: The Índios Online homepage over time, 10 December 2015.

and international, popular and academic, pan-indigenous discourse (Warren 157–63).[13] In the case of the indigenous communities involved in the Índios Online project, by the 1870s the Brazilian government had declared the formal extinction of all indigenous, as well as African-origin, peoples in the Brazilian North-East: this region – the coastal fringe and the arid hinterland, the Sertão – was the locus of the most intensive colonisation efforts in Brazil and is generally considered the crucible of *mestiçagem* [miscegenation] between blacks, whites (Portuguese and Dutch) and indigenous groups (French 17–42). It was only during the last

[13] In the Brazilian case see also Oliveira, French and Zoettl.

Figure 5: The Índios Online homepage over time, 5 July 2017.

century – 1940s onwards, and most notably since the late 1970s, with a 'third wave' of re-emergence since 2002 – as various laws were passed in Brazil making it possible and desirable to reassert a community's indigenous or African-origin, *quilombola* [maroon] identity in order to gain land and other social rights, that self-identifying indigenous groups have re-emerged in this region (Arruti).[14] While a few of the groups involved in Índios Online re-emerged in the 1940s (the Pankararu, the Kariri-Xocó and the Xucuru-Kariri), the others are of more recent re-emergence (for example, the Tupinambá and the Tumbalalá re-emerged post-2002). While the older groups may no longer think of themselves in terms of re-emergence, factors affecting all groups include small numbers of people per community – 1,200–8,500 people each in 2014 according to the Brazilian Sistema de Informação da Atenção à Saúde Indígena [Health Information System for Indigenous Peoples] (*Povos Indígenas*) – a concertina-like process of the splintering of groups to form new ethnicities and the combination of others to form hybrid ethnicities, always with a focus on the assertion of 'ethnicity', plus dispersion of these groups across a large geographical area where they are also in close contact with mainstream society, and therefore an ongoing 'battle' for space, both conceptual and real.

The recent wave of re-emergent indigenous identities is closely related to the use of new ICTs, in so far as digital communications technologies have been essential to form and spread the translocal indigenist discourse that, since the 1970s, has encouraged and supported re-emergence, despite the dangers of indigenous homogenisation that such translocal discourse brings (Salazar 16; Forte, 'Smoke Ceremonies'). On a more practical level, the engagement with new technologies helps re-emergent groups to consolidate their claims to indigeneity by allowing them to communicate more widely and more effectively/directly. Furthermore, the tools can help avoid traditions dying out by allowing for their preservation and/or their creative reinvention in new digital formats. All of these elements and more are what the participants in the film *Indígenas digitais* take being 'digitally indigenous' to mean. One interviewee in the film, Jaborandy Tupinambá, says:

[14] The 1988 Constitution strengthened indigenous rights, particularly with respect to the possibility of reclaiming ancestral lands. Furthermore, the Brazilian government's ratification of the International Labour Organisation Convention No. 169 in 2002 also opened up significant further opportunities, thus provoking what Arruti identifies as a 'third cycle' of ethnic re-emergence.

> Indígenas digitais é aquele índio que se apropria da ferramenta e faz o uso dela para ajudar a sua comunidade. Para estar aproximando da sua comunidade, dar voz a sua comunidade.
>
> [Digital indigenous people are those who appropriate this tool and use it to help their community. To be closer to their community, to give a voice to their community.][15]

He goes on to suggest that there are important roles for 'digital indigenes' as teachers and that all members of the community need to embrace the new technologies to empower themselves and preserve and promote their cultures. The film side-steps any need to discuss the issue of the digital divide and shows indigenous people confidently seizing on new technologies and using them to achieve pragmatic and political objectives of their own. It also shows indigenous people as aware of new media's power to allow them to represent themselves to a whole variety of audiences at local, national and global levels.

However, there is rather more to being 'digitally indigenous' than such statements reveal. In terms of self-representation, given that new technologies do not fit comfortably with mainstream conceptions of indigeneity that see indigenous people as 'primitive', 'traditional' and 'non-urban', for example, it is very much a question of getting the performance of one's 'indigeneity' right in order to be seen as 'properly' indigenous, yet of simultaneously striving to avoid the stereotyping and 'commodification of indigenous identities' that Salazar identifies as the result of 'the expansion of digital capitalism' (Salazar 17). And this is even more of a tightrope walk for recently re-emergent groups whose claims to indigeneity are especially precarious in the eyes of mainstream society, despite the fact that digital communications are so integral to the construction and dissemination of such identities. The result is a strategically essentialist form of self-representation seen most obviously in the determination to be pictured wearing traditional dress/body-paint whenever the 'índios online' are photographed or filmed using a computer (see, for example, the images in the e-book *@rco digital*). This is not a weakness or a failing; it is, as noted, a strategy to advance their agenda.[16]

Digital inclusion in Brazil

Moving on to the second key feature of the context in which the Índios Online group has emerged, regardless of whether we are discussing large and persistent or small and re-emergent indigenous groups in Brazil, any of these groups start using digital communications technologies in part because they choose to do so and seek ways to make it happen, and in part because they are encouraged to do so, not just by NGOs, as mentioned above, but also by the Brazilian government. Since the beginning of the millennium, the latter has pursued policies aimed at engineering 'inclusão digital' [digital inclusion] in an attempt to find ways to embrace a far-flung and heterogeneous populace as constituent parts of one nation, and equally, as a way of ensuring its place within the global knowledge economy as it sought to ensure that a greater proportion of its workforce were part of that economy and thus combat information dependency on behalf of 'emerging nations' (Clarke 205). The policies of 'inclusão digital' were a key plank of the Lula administration (2003–11) and included endorsing FLOSS [Free, Libre and Open-Source Software] as government policy, and the production of cheap PCs together with associated tax breaks, thus making personal computing and

[15] Although the film now circulates online with English subtitles, the translations used here were provided to me by Tansy Larsen, Lara Warburton and Amber Rose McCartney, all students on the University of Leeds MA Applied Translation Studies (2010–11).

[16] See Conklin (2007) for a highly perceptive study of the visual performance of indigenous identity in contemporary Brazil.

internet connection available to increasing numbers of Brazilian citizens. They also included outreach programmes under the aegis of the Programa Cultura Viva – Cultura, Educação e Cidadania [Living Culture Programme – Culture, Education and Citizenship] to set up *telecentros/pontos de cultura* [telecentres/cultural centres] which placed free, often reconditioned, computer terminals with free internet access in rural locations where people were unlikely to have the means to access such technology on an individual basis (Clarke). These policies have continued during Rousseff's administration (2011–16) and beyond, with the creation in 2011 of a Secretaria de Inclusão Digital [Department for Digital Inclusion] within the Minstério das Comunicações [Communications Ministry], one branch of which is the (pre-existing) Governo Eletrônico – Serviço de Atendimento ao Cidadão [Electronic Government – Citizen Relations Service], or GESAC, whose job it is to 'oferece[r] gratuitamente conexão à internet em banda larga – por via terrestre e satélite – a telecentros, escolas, unidades de saúde, aldeias indígenas, postos de fronteira e quilombos' ['offer free internet broadband connection – via terrestrial or satellite means – to telecentres, schools, healthcare centres, indigenous villages, border posts and former maroon settlements'] (GESAC).

The Índios Online web portal and related digital projects have been a direct beneficiary of these policies, and their early success has arguably had some influence over the roll-out of the policies themselves. The web portal owes its creation to the work of the NGO Thydêwá which, in 2004, with initial financial support from the company Bompreço do Nordeste SA and the governmental Programa Fazcultura, furnished each of the original seven indigenous communities with a computer terminal with internet access and a digital camera, and gave training in their use. After attracting good publicity for the project, it became a formal Ponto de Cultura in 2005 (Thydêwa), barely a year after it was set up, and continues to be supported by GESAC to this day.

While the Brazilian government's policies have undoubtedly helped facilitate access to the internet for many indigenous communities across the country, the policies are, of course, dependent on the smooth running of the process that delivers infrastructure to the various communities and trains locals in its use, and, moreover, they do not automatically ensure indigenous participation 'on their own terms'. According to Clarke, although the policies of the Brazilian government aimed at improving 'inclusão digital' have been partly successful in democratising access, 'this remain[s] a philosophy of consumption, and not one of adaptation, appropriation or production of technology' (13). That is to say, indigenous people generally end up becoming consumers rather than producers of information spread by digital means, and they also lay themselves open to consumption, to commodification by others. It is in this context that the work of the Índios Online group is particularly interesting, since they have been quite determined to produce their own digital information – not just a static, outward-facing website, but a 'members-only' *bate-papo* [chatroom] facility, too – and to adapt and appropriate the internet use to suit their own worldview.

Índios Online and the appropriation of new media technologies

Across these different web-based projects and resultant digital cultural products – the Índios Online website itself, but also, especially, the @rco digital online educational network facilitated by a members-only blog and the *@rco digital* book that brings together the most important materials from the blog, and the documentary film, *Indígenas digitais* – as well as in interviews given to other researchers, members of the Índios Online group have expressed a consistent desire to view their appropriation of new technologies in terms of a set of hunter- and warrior-themed metaphors.[17]

[17] As many of these projects were conducted in fora that were only open to indigenous participants and members of the Thydêwá team, in my analysis I draw heavily on what was subsequently made publicly available in book

The Índios Online website design exudes a warrior aesthetics in its design. In terms of aesthetics, the 'grafismos' [line-drawn designs, particularly for body-painting used in ceremonies or pyrography on objects such as ceremonial pipes or spears] present in the website's design virtually throughout its history make direct reference to the indigenous communities of the North East, specifically to the Kariri-Xocó. As is well known, indigenous art, particularly body painting, is not simply decorative, but symbolic of social status and/or function within the community, with different patterns carrying different meanings. According to Nhenety Kariri-Xocó (personal interview), the zigzags and criss-cross patterns present in the borders and the aroba of the logo indicate 'objetivo' [direction or goal] and are thus abstract forms of arrows; the intercalated triangles indicate 'resisténcia' [resistance], and the spiral shape of the aroba itself relates to time: taken together they form an aesthetics of sustained and focused resistance. These different elements of the website's visual design can be seen, therefore, to correspond to the hunter-warrior discourse present in so many of the posts on the site – a brief search reveals the term 'caça' [hunt] and 'caçador' to appear in around 1,600 posts (38% of the total number of posts currently searchable on the site), the terms 'guerreiro', and less frequently 'guerreira', to appear in about 400 different posts (9%), and the expressions 'arco e flecha' [bow and arrow] and/or 'arqueiro' [archer] in roughly 150 posts (3%). Furthermore, in many posts there is an explicit link made between these terms and the use of new media technologies.

The appropriation of the internet in terms of this hunter-warrior discourse develops from 2006 onwards, apparent in various posts concerning the development of the @rco Digital project. It is largely the vision of Nhenety Kariri-Xocó, in his double role as core team member of Índios Online and of the @rco Digital network, supported and amplified by other core Índios Online/Thydêwá team members. See, for instance, Thydewas's post on 30 September 2006 entitled 'Índios On-Line se unem em Tupinambá' ['Índios On-Line meet in Tupinambá territory'] which reports on the third Encontro dos Índios Online where the @rco Digital network was launched; Nhenety's posts on 23 December 2006 entitled 'O site é a grande maloca' ['The website is like a big round-house'], and on 8 April 2007 entitled 'Visão de Nhenety sobre computador' ['Nhenety's vision of computers'], both of which fed directly into the @rco digital book and which received a significant number of approving comments from community members; Sebastián Gerlic's 'Convite aos e-índios' ['Invitation to 'E-Indians''] of 3 June 2007, addressed to 'Caros Índios On-Line, Arqueiros, E-Índios' ['Dear "Índios On-Line", Archers, E-Indians'] and proposing the creation of the *@rco digital* book; and Rodrigo Diego Makuxi's post on 29 September 2010 entitled 'Rede Índios Online', which is the result of an email questionnaire exploring the value of the Índios Online network for its participants.

Nhenety's vision is perhaps best captured in the distilled version that appeared in the *@rco digital* book. Here he explains that:

> O arco e flecha é um instrumento de defesa, de caça... Hoje em dia, um computador com acesso à Internet também pode ser utilizado pelos índios como um instrumento de defesa e de caça.
>
> [Bows and arrows are tools for self-defence, for hunting... Nowadays, a computer with internet access can also be used by Indians as a tool for self-defence and for hunting.] (N. Kariri-Xocó, *et al.* 6)

Another of the book's authors, Alex Pankararu, repeats these concepts of the computer plus internet connection as a digital tool for hunting (information) and self-defence (political

or documentary film format. Nonetheless, I have had some access to what has been recorded by the Internet Archive Wayback Machine of the original @rco digital blog, kindly facilitated by Sebastián Gerlic.

lobbying, publicity for rights abuses) while also emphasising the need to overcome any sense that indigenous peoples are unsuited to this kind of activity:

> Há muito tempo, índios e tecnologia não se conciliavam.
> Era impossível, imaginar ver índios navegando na rede mundial.
>
> [A long time ago, Indians and technology didn't go together.
> It was impossible to imagine seeing Indians surfing [lit. navigating] the Worldwide Web.] (N. Kariri-Xocó, *et al.* 32)

He lays the blame for this preconception on the non-indigenous population, though there is also a sense that the text is written to make the case for adopting new technologies to the indigenous communities themselves. He asserts:

> O projeto ÍNDIOS ON-LINE não é de se espantar,
> E o índio não deixa de ser índio
> Só porque se conectou, mas ao contrário,
> Isso só nos ajudou e nos levou à realidade mundial.
>
> [The ÍNDIOS ON-LINE project is nothing to be afraid of,
> And Indians don't cease being Indians
> Just because they got connected, but quite the opposite,
> That just helped us and put us in touch with global reality.] (N. Kariri-Xocó, *et al.* 33)

One other frequent participant in the Índios Online group, Jaborandy Tupinambá, also took up the hunter-warrior trope in a contemporaneous interview, arguing that the internet for indigenous people was the equivalent of 'um arco e flecha que você manda por uma linha e vai buscar as coisas longe e trás o beneficio para a nossa comunidade' ['a bow and arrow that you shoot down a line and that goes off in search of distant things that will be for the benefit of our community'], but he also led things in a slightly different direction, defining the group members as 'guerreiros online' ['online warriors'] (qtd in Pereira, 'Ciborgues indígen@as.br' 141). Jaborandy is far from the being the only participant to speak in these terms: for example, on 11 June 2007 a very brief post on the Índios Online website by Poliana Dutra Souza was entitled 'Estou feliz por ser guerreira indiosonline' ['I'm happy to be an 'indiosonline' warrior']; in 2008, there was a related photography and video-making initiative in the Pankararu community that was known as the Guerreiros On-line Pankararu [Pankararu On-line Warriors] (see **Figure 2**); and on 29 September 2010 Junior Pankararu made reference to 'nossos guerreiros on line' ['our "on line" warriors'] in his contribution to a post on the Índios Online site. These repeated references to 'digital bows and arrows', 'digital hunting' and to 'online warriors' work together to form a confident and combative poetics that is arguably the predominant mode in which indigenous groups across Latin America have appropriated new media technologies.

Digital Weavers? The Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (ACIN)

I want to move on now to focus on a prominent indigenous organisation that, unlike the Índios Online group, has employed a poetics of weaving in reference to its communication strategy which, while embracing both old and new communication technologies, is particularly well known for its innovative use of the latter. And perhaps even more obviously, it has employed an aesthetics of weaving in its appropriation of new media technologies. The organisation

in question is the Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca [Association of Indigenous Assemblies of Northern Cauca, ACIN] founded in 1994, a local organisation that feeds into the larger and more established Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca [Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca, CRIC] which dates from 1971, and on up to the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia [National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia]. The ACIN predominantly represents the interests of the Nasa community, also formerly known as the Páez, who live in the north of Cauca province, in south-western Colombia.

The ACIN has had a web presence since a page in its name was first set up in 2002 by the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT), as a by-product of a project to set up *telecentros* for and with three different communities in the South-West, including one in the ACIN's headquarters in Santander de Quilichao. This website was a page within the CIAT's own website and was initially set up and maintained by CIAT staff with input from ACIN for texts and images. From 2003, the organisation had a website of its own that was hosted on the server of the NGO Fundación Colombia Multicolor, an organisation focused on enabling socially marginalised communities to access and use new communication tools, and maintained in part by the foundation and in part by ACIN members. And from 2004 onwards the organisation has had its own website, built using Dreamweaver software, hosted independently on their own server and maintained exclusively by ACIN members (see **Figures 6–10** for the development of the site since 2004).

Figure 6: The ACIN webpage since 2004, 28 August 2004.

Figure 7: The ACIN webpage since 2004, 28 July 2005.

The full title of the site in its current iteration reads Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca: Çxhab Wala Kiwe/Territorio del Gran Pueblo (the subtitle in Nasa Yuwe and in Spanish reads, 'land of the great people'), and despite ups and downs, it is still active at the time of writing, in a recently redesigned format on WordPress.[18] The older version of the site active until early February 2017 indicates that it had over 15 million hits, and since the early 2010s the site has also had links to the organisation's presence on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, indicating its willingness to modify its communication strategies to keep up with the times. As with the Índios Online website, the ACIN's website has become slicker and more sophisticated in design over time. Although the new format might be found to be a bit more 'light', a bit more focused on news and denunciation than on critical reflection around the organisation's purpose, it is nonetheless clear that it still places significant importance on representing the functionality of a coordinated and determined organisation, and as a result it remains quite text heavy and busy in its concern to ensure visibility for all its functions.

[18] For a very detailed account of the vicissitudes of the ACIN website up until 2009 see Almendra *et al.*, *Tierra y silicio*, esp. chapter 5. Like the Índios Online site, the ACIN site has also changed from .net to .org over time because the ownership of the former domain name expired and was snapped up by others before ACIN members could rectify the situation (129). For an account that synthesises the process up to 2016, see Almendra, *Entre la emancipación y la captura*.

Figure 8: The ACIN webpage since 2004, 2 March 2011.

Figure 9: The ACIN webpage since 2004, 25 March 2015.

The ACIN's communication strategy amounts to much more than just a website, and includes their own media (such as oral storytelling around the hearth or weaving)[19] as well as appropriated media – they have three community radio stations, a video production team and various forms of printed communication (Murillo 158). What brings it all together is a unified purpose expressed in the various different 'planes de vida' [lit. 'life plans'] of the communities that make up the association. These plans are particularly focused on sustainability and autonomy from the Colombian state's version of development, sustainable or otherwise.

[19] Vicente Otero argues: 'Nuestra conceptualización de comunicación es mucho más amplia, encierra idioma materno, costumbres, las mingas comunitarias, los tejidos que hacen las mujeres en sus manifestaciones culturales, el fogón' ['Our concept of communication is much broader; it includes the mother tongue, customs, communal work, the weavings that women make in their cultural gatherings, the hearth'] (quoted in Herrera Huérfano and Ramos Rodríguez 55).

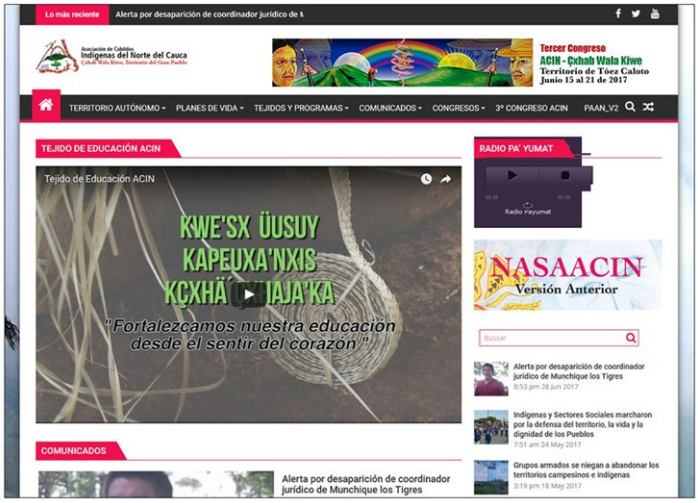

Figure 10: The ACIN webpage since 2004, 5 July 2017.

The municipality of Toribío's plan, the Proyecto Nasa (1980–), is the most long-standing and prominent of these plans (cf. Wilches-Chaux; Gow 171–87). It is this clarity of purpose, together with an innovative and integrated communications strategy that puts new technologies in dialogue with old ones and at the service of the indigenous communities themselves, that has earnt the group several prominent prizes over time. The municipality of Toribío was awarded a national prize for having the best 'development plan' in 1998, and the National Peace Prize was awarded to the ACIN for the Proyecto Nasa in 2000.[20] The ACIN also won the United Nations Development Programme's Equator Prize for their approach to sustainable development in 2004. Specifically for their communications strategy, the Association won a prize for best community media programme in Colombia in 2007 and the Spanish Casa de las Américas' Bartolomé de las Casas prize in 2008 (Wilches-Chaux 155–6; Rozental and Almendra).[21]

Before going on to examine the poetics, and aesthetics, of the ACIN's appropriation of new media, I want to contextualise in a bit more detail the history and political project of the Nasa community, as well as the intersection of this with the Colombian government's approach to digital inclusion.

The Nasa and the Indigenous Movement in Colombia

The province of Cauca is famed as being the birthplace of the contemporary indigenous movement in Colombia in the early 1970s – a movement that is now widely recognised beyond the borders of Colombia for its success in asserting indigenous autonomy (Troyan 1). The Nasa of northern Cauca are the most numerous indigenous group in Colombia – 186,000 people, according to the Colombian Ministerio de Cultura's 2005 census data ('Nasa (Paez)') – and are at the heart of the development of this indigenous movement. The movement does not just centre on Cauca because the Nasa are the most numerous group, nor because Cauca has one of the highest densities of indigenous population in the country.

[20] A second National Peace Prize was awarded to the Guardia Indígena [Indigenous Guard] in Northern Cauca in 2004.

[21] The Association and its communication strategy, particularly with reference to the digital aspects thereof, have elicited a huge amount of interest within Colombian academia, predominantly in the field of media and communications studies, development studies and education. ACIN members who participated in the setting up and maintenance of the website, in particular Vilma Almendra, have contributed considerably to facilitating and furthering this interest through their own academic writing and collaboration on wider research projects.

According to Troyan, the crucial combination of factors also includes the fact that the Nasa are famous in Colombian history for having been most resistant to Spanish colonial rule and for the ferocity of their warriors – figures such as La Gaitana –, and they had managed to retain some communal lands, organising structures and language (Nasa Yuwe), so there was a strong sense of tradition that could be harnessed by emergent organisations to promote a sense of ethnic identity (7–10). When this was coupled with an antiquated and weakening regional land-owning elite, the indigenous movement could take hold by introducing a discourse that reinvented groups of people who, while not necessarily denied or denying indigeneity, previously identified more readily as belonging to a particular locality, as being part of a bigger, stronger Nasa ethnicity (Gow, esp. chapter 5). Furthermore, Troyan argues that the Colombian state in part encouraged this development at the time, finding an ethnicity-based form of social organisation, of citizenship, 'safer' and easier to manage than a class- or ideology-based one (chapter 6).

What is important to note here is that this process of the reassertion of indigeneity – and, importantly, indigenous *autonomy* – might be relatively recent but it is massive in terms of numbers of people involved, consistent in its development over time and, arguably, highly successful – it is a 'social movement'. It predates by two decades the Colombian Constitution of 1991 that finally recognised indigenous rights, defining the nation as pluricultural, and indeed it was undoubtedly instrumental in bringing about such constitutional change. Throughout its history, the indigenous movement as it pertains to the Nasa has also moved through different stages. The movement first facilitated the Nasa's reassertion of their ethnic identity and re-establishment of themselves both materially and politically, through the reclamation of land and the setting up of organisations such as the CRIC and the ACIN, for example. Over time they have refined their political position: ferocious warrior figures such as La Gaitana and other freedom fighters who resorted to armed insurgency to tackle the state are not forgotten but they are confined to the past, and the resistant identities of the Nasa today are specifically conceived of as peaceful, as a way of asserting autonomy from a range of violent guerrilla, paramilitary and drug-trafficking groups, as well as from the government, all of whom may seek to co-opt them (Troyan 155–6).

Moreover, the concept of Nasa ethnicity is really quite plural and flexible. Although purportedly representing the Nasa, the ACIN counts significant numbers of members (c. 40%) that are Misak/Guambiana/o, *mestiza/o* [mixed race] and Afro-descendant (Paz Martínez, 'Políticas' 147). The organisation has also moved, over time, to articulate a solid, decolonial political project which recognises that its strength lies in its ability to align with other struggles around the world and to see the bigger picture (of neoliberal politics or climate change, for instance) (see, for example, the alliance with Basque groups evident in **Figure 6**). As some ACIN members have argued with respect to their current political position:

> La identidad étnica mantiene su centralidad, pero adicionalmente se buscan alianzas con otros grupos y organizaciones con los que se comparten luchas y resistencias frente al nuevo orden global y sus formas de la explotación económica, social y política.
>
> [Ethnic identity remains central, but additionally we seek to ally ourselves with other groups and organisations who fight similar battles and resist the new global order and its forms of economic, social and political exploitation.] (Almendra *et al.*, 'Resistir' 124).

The ACIN is thus very much open to collaboration with, and participation from, non-indigenous activists and sympathisers, and its work is organised around issues such as health,

education, agriculture, sustainability, and autonomy from mainstream society and its politics/economics, rather than specifically Nasa culture or identity.

In terms of the relationship to new media, given the conditions underpinning the contemporary Nasa community's existence outlined above, in particular the size of the community and the success of the indigenous movement both in terms of reassertion of indigenous identity and of assertion of political autonomy, engagement with new ICTs has not provoked the same kinds of existential concerns about performance of indigenous identity as it has done for the Brazilian communities studied. While there were some community members who voiced initial reluctance to go online lest it turn out to be another, more insidious, means of stealing (and subsequently commercialising) community knowledge (Paz Martínez, 'Políticas' 166), the organisation as a whole quickly realised the affordances of new media to achieve their objectives, particularly with regard to the networking mentioned above. Over the last fifteen years, it has built up an extensive international network of contacts only made possible through new ICTs, with some of their news items, for instance, being translated into other European languages by a team of international supporters (Almendra *et al.*, 'Resistir' 125).

Digital inclusion in Colombia

The Colombian government has pursued a vigorous programme of digital inclusion since the late 1990s, led by the Ministerio de Comunicaciones [Ministry of Communications] which, on the back of these efforts, changed its name in 2009 to the Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones [Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies]. Its work has been most visible in its various programmes to install *telecentros* in rural and disadvantaged communities across the country. Nonetheless, as with the Brazilian approach to digital inclusion, its policy has been criticised for relying too heavily on supplying hardware and infrastructure and not thinking through the training needed to make use of the equipment nor the way in which communities might use it. Furthermore, in this top-down arrangement, the reasons why a digital inclusion policy was seen as advantageous centred around the uses of ICTs for governance (and governability in a nation-state in which material infrastructure does not afford easy communication by more traditional means, and where the state has been significantly challenged in its ability to hold the nation together) and productivity (drawing more citizens into the information economy and thus lessening the gap with more developed nations). The third strand of the government's explicit policy from the late 1990s that focused on 'communities' really smacks of being a targeted intervention to achieve the other stated goals, rather than deriving from any real desire to empower communities themselves.[22]

However, the first ACIN *telecentro*, set up in 2000, and subsequently its website, demonstrate a rather different trajectory, depending instead on an international research centre (CIAT) together with the Universidad Autónoma de Occidente and a Colombian NGO focusing on ICTs for social inclusion (Colnodo), who were working on an internationally funded project focused on local agriculture and sustainability which sought to empower local communities to research and disseminate relevant information in this field. That is to say, it was about content and purpose rather than just infrastructure. Moreover, it is also dependent on the initiative of key members of the organisation to negotiate being a recipient of the *telecentro* through the InforCauca project, and to then perceive the need for having a website for the organisation for themselves (Paz Martínez, 'Políticas' 193–5). The initiative of CIAT was very

[22] For a detailed study of the Colombian government's policies at the time of the creation of the ACIN webpage, see Paz Martínez, 'Políticas', chapter 5. For more recent overviews of its approach to digital inclusion see Escobar Sarria, Paz Martínez and Ospina Saavedra, chapters 3 and 4, and Thompson *et al.*, chapter 7.

different to that of the Colombian government, proposing instead to 'plantear alternativas a los flujos comunes de información que van de arriba hacia abajo' ['propose alternatives to the normal channels of information that flow from top to bottom'] and enable communities to not just access information but to participate in the 'generación y distribución de información y conocimiento' ['generation and distribution of information and knowledge'] (93). As a result of this more community-centred approach, the ACIN's appropriation of new ICTs has been more dynamic and productive than many other experiments in setting up telecentres, and it has contributed to a subsequent shift in the Colombian government's approach (Escobar Sarria, Paz Martínez and Ospina Saavedra 43).

ACIN and the appropriation of new media technologies

The ACIN's website makes significant visual and textual references to weaving and to woven artefacts as a way of referencing indigenous culture and politics. In terms of its aesthetics, present on the website since the very beginning, the organisation's triangular logo comprises a hand-drawing of a *bastón de mando* [the staff of order, the maximum symbol of indigenous authority] and a *chumbe* [a woven belt, also used to carry objects including small children and bearing symbols that can contain important messages for the wearer] that delimit a drawing of mountains, a rainbow, a lake, a *the wala* [spiritual leader] and a *tulpa* [hearth], together with another *chumbe* that unfurls across the header (see **Figure 6**). By 2008, when the site was fully independent and was really finding its feet in terms of the innovative ways in which it could represent the organisation's politics and support its communication strategy during the Minga Nacional de la Resistencia Indígena y Popular, the hand-drawn logo disappeared, leaving only a more digitally drawn *chumbe*-like banner to reference indigeneity (see **Figure 8**). That stage lasted several years. However, with changes in the team of people in charge of the website and its design, since mid-2013 there has been a variant version of the logo with its *chumbe*, as well as other artistic elements referencing indigenous tradition and beliefs, having returned to form a standard feature in the different iterations of the website (see **Figure 9**). Most recently, the logo has, in fact, reverted back to the original design in the relaunched version of the site and is complemented by another drawing also showing the same symbols of indigeneity (see **Figure 10**).

The organisation has also, over time, shifted its way of organising and consequently its poetics to use a weaving metaphor throughout. In 2005, the various projects, programmes and initiatives of the organisation were renamed 'tejidos' [weavings]: these areas for coordinated action across the different communities that make up the ACIN – on health, education, communication and so on – had previously been conceived of as 'consejerías' [councils] made up of teams of 'consejeros' [councillors]. At this point, in response to community demands to move away from a 'techno-operational' approach that fed too easily into the hands of those in power towards a 'politico-organisational' approach (Dorado *et al.*, qtd in Murillo 169, and Almendra, *Entre la emancipación y la captura* 185), they became known as 'tejidos' made up of teams of 'tejedores' [weavers] (compare **Figures 5** and **6** to appreciate the introduction of the 'tejidos' and the weaving discourse more generally).[23] One of the most dynamic of

[23] From 2012 onwards there has been increasing pressure from ACIN leadership to shift away from the weaving terminology back to one of 'Sistemas Propios' ['Own Systems'] that corresponds more seamlessly with the terminology used by mainstream society: 'no es posible seguir nombrando nuestra forma de organización como Tejidos de Vida porque ni siquiera sabemos tejer y [...] es mejor hablar de sistemas, porque es un concepto que nos facilita y nos acerca al diálogo con el gobierno' ['it's not possible to carry on calling our form of organisation Life Weavings because we don't even know how to weave and [...] it's better to talk about systems, because it's a concept which helps us and brings us closer to dialogue with the government'] (Almendra, *Entre la emancipación y la captura* 191).

these, and one that was undoubtedly at the heart of the proposal to change the names of the programmes, was the Tejido de Comunicación y Relaciones Externas para la Verdad y la Vida [Communication and External Relations Weaving for Truth and Life].

In their description of the Tejido de Comunicación, the 'tejedores' extend the weaving metaphor as they describe the way their 'communication weaving' is designed to work:

> Fundamentalmente entendemos el Tejido como un paso adelante en un proceso en curso, que se propone facilitar la activación y la acción permanente de una red de comunicación, compuesta por NUDOS (o nodos), HILOS y HUECOS.
>
> [Basically we understand the Weaving as a step forwards in an ongoing process which proposes to facilitate the creation and continuing work of a communications net[work], composed of KNOTS (or nodes), THREADS and GAPS.] ('Tejido Comunicación')

Here the 'nudos/nodos' are the people, while the communicators, the 'hilos' are:

> los mecanismos y estrategias que enlazan a los diferentes nudos de manera que 'tocar un nudo haga vibrar a toda la red' (medios tradicionales como visitas, asambleas, mingas, etc. y medios apropiados como los electrónicos, la radio, los impresos, los video-foros, etc.)
>
> [the mechanisms and strategies that link the different knots so that 'touching one knot makes the whole net vibrate' (traditional media such as visits, assemblies, cooperative work, etc. and appropriated media such as ICTs, radio, printed documents, video-forums, etc.)]

and the 'huecos' are the topics that need to be addressed, which can also be conceptualised as the gaps in the (social) fabric that need to be lessened by the more efficient work of the 'knots/nodes' and the 'threads'.

This use of a poetics of weaving as a way of referencing the ACIN's sense of indigenous identity and of describing their political project sits well with the imbrication of weaving and indigenous 'oralitegraphic' forms of writing, in particular the *chumbe* for the Nasa (Rocha Vivas 57–65). It does not exactly suggest a clear-cut appropriation of new ICTs through a discourse of weaving because ICTs are never an end in themselves nor divorced from other media: The 'Communication Weaving' team do not refer to themselves as specifically 'digital' weavers, for example, nor discuss how ICTs in particular need to be appropriated through a discourse of weaving. However, the creative use of new ICTs by the organisation to serve their particular political agenda is so very prominent that the choice of weaving motifs and metaphors, spliced with digital networking references (for instance, the twinning of knots and nodes), can be seen to respond to some degree to a determination to indigenise the internet through these tropes. Thus, even if aesthetically it generally offers a strategically essentialist repertoire of Andean indigeneity, suggesting a willingness at that level to play the role of 'los tejedores permitidos, cómodos, ingenuos' ['the permissible, comfortable, ingenuous weavers'] (Almendra, *Entre la emancipación y la captura*, 126), in its most radical phase (2008–2013), it has offered a poetics that is deliberately indigestible for mainstream society, and that therefore contrives to go beyond any strategically essentialist approach.

Poetics and Politics

The two case studies explored above offer quite a stark contrast in terms of their poetics of appropriation of new media technologies. To a large extent, the different lifeways and wider cultural contexts of the different communities would seem to adequately account for this difference in approach. Indigenous people across Brazil are typically associated with 'bows and arrows' in the mainstream imagination, whereas Andean communities are well known for their textiles, and there is clearly a strategically essentialist approach in operation as indigenous communities themselves engage with these stereotypical discourses.[24] However, this is not just pandering to stereotypes – it is most certainly the case that the weaving of clothing and objects such as bags is a much more significant practice in the highland Nasa communities of south-western Colombia than it is among the lowland Brazilian indigenous groups of the North-West that make up the majority of the Índios Online network,[25] and that therefore such a trope more immediately springs to mind for one community than it does for the other.[26]

Furthermore, there is an even wider cultural context to factor in here. A warrior poetics of 'guerreiros' fighting and defending this or that cause, or just being cool, is common parlance in Brazilian Portuguese. Footballers are heralded as 'guerreiros' for their various exploits and online gamers may refer to themselves as such. There are well-intentioned social projects such as Guerreiros sem Armas that runs fee-paying courses to channel the energies of middle-class youth into voluntary work in marginalised communities, or the Guerreiras Project that seeks to empower disadvantaged young girls by encouraging participation in football, and even a high-end jewellers for men and women with branches in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro that calls itself simply Guerreiro. All Brazilians can, seemingly, claim a 'warrior' identity for themselves. However, in their deployment of a warrior poetics, in conjunction with explicit discussion of bows and arrows as the tools of the warrior, the participants in Índios Online are arguably doing a bit more than simply 'going with the flow' in terms of the way they choose to express their feisty sense of self: Given the significant increase in the use of this terminology by indigenous Brazilians over time, they can be seen to be seeking to forge a link in the collective imagination between indigeneity and 'warrior'-like characteristics, thus claiming warrior poetics for themselves.

In contrast, in Colombia the poetics of weaving also circulates much more widely, not only in indigenous 'oraliterature', but also with particular relation to attempts to create a strong 'social fabric' and to alternative social organising. See, for instance, an advertisement circulated for the 'Trueque para la Paz: Encuentro para la Reconciliación' [Exchange for Peace: Encounter for Reconciliation] event organised by the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de Género, Mujer y Sociedad of the Universidad del Valle in Cali and the Secretaría de Paz y Cultura Ciudadana of the Cali Mayor's Office on 25 April 2017 where the proposal was that the participants should 'construir […] un gran telar' ['create a big fabric'] made out of scraps

[24] Arguably, it is in the aesthetics of indigenous websites where the greatest strategic essentialism is in evidence, particularly where a 'rustic', 'authentic' register employing hand-drawn designs and motifs relating to ancient artefacts, traditional crafts including weaving of course, rituals and beliefs, as well as pastoral symbols (landscapes, natural motifs such as water, leaves and seeds) is used. While this register is often present on these websites, there is also a significant tendency to use it as no more than a backdrop, to succinctly signify indigeneity to external audiences, with attention being more explicitly directed towards symbols of power and resistance (flags, warrior heroes of the past, *bastones de mando* and, sometimes, bows and arrows) and which respond more closely to the actual political positioning of the communities and to their internal debates. In terms of poetics, I find less strategic essentialism and more evidence of serious political positioning, hence the privileged attention it is awarded in this article.

[25] See, for example, Abraham Quiguanás Cuetia's 'Los tejidos propios: simbología y pensamiento del pueblo nasa'.

[26] Note that this does not mean that weaving understood broadly is completely absent in lowland Brazil – there is basketry; knotting techniques are used to make bags, hammocks and fishing nets; and there is some weaving of cloth to make blankets, for instance – nor that members of the ACIN would never talk in bellicose terms (although it is the case that they never refer to bows and arrows).

of material as a community building exercise for women in Cauca province as the FARC were starting to be reintegrated into civil society following the 2016 Peace Accords. Consider also the network of Nasa and other indigenous and Afro-descendant women weavers from the north-west of Cauca known as EnRedArte con Identidad who work together to not only make and sell their traditional textiles (notably via an online shop, hence the name of the collective and its poetics of digital weaving), thus conserving traditional knowledge, but simultaneously seek to create a stronger and more peaceful social fabric as well as help strengthen women's agency in their communities by providing a source of income (cf. Huete Machado; 'Las mujeres indígenas'). The use of weaving poetics by the ACIN fits perfectly within this context of the expression of alternative social organisation.

One might surmise from the above that gender also has something to do with the choice of poetics. While weaving is not exclusively an activity for Nasa women, it is predominantly so, and is closely bound up with the process of becoming a woman in their culture (Quiguanás Cuetia). There was arguably, also, significant participation of women within the Tejido de Comunicación from the very beginning of the project to develop the website (Paz Martínez, personal interview), which might have inclined the organisation towards a more woman-centred poetics and aesthetics. In the case of the Índios Online group, while Brazilian warrior discourse has typically been quite masculinist in nature, and hunting and fishing with bows and arrows are activities traditionally carried out by indigenous men, there was also greater engagement of male participants in the early development of the web portal, despite efforts to ensure inclusivity, and the authors of the hunter-warrior poetics cited earlier are all men bar one. As one female participant who has accompanied the Índios Online project throughout, Potyra Tê Tupinambá, told me in interview, 'com Índios Online [...] os homens eram mais voltados a essa coisa de colocar "guerreiros", realmente' ['with Índios Online [...] it was really the men who were more interested in talking in terms of being "warriors"'] and of conceiving internet use in terms of bows and arrows, whereas the women who were involved in the early stages of the project tended to have 'uma voz mais tímida, mais contida' ['a more timid, more restrained voice'] and were less inclined to talk of themselves in terms of being 'guerreiras'. Certainly, in other evidence of the participation of women in the early years of the Índios Online website, the discourse tends to be somewhat less combative: see, for example, the contributions to *@rco digital* written by Yakuy Tupinambá and Yonana Pataxó-Hãhãhãe (N. Kariri Xocó, *et al.* 20 and 29–30, respectively). Yakuy does talk of the computer as 'uma ferramenta' ['a tool'] and she has also used her access to the information afforded by the internet to propel her to study a law degree so that she is better able to 'lutar' [fight] for her community's rights, but, in rather less bellicose mode, she also describes the computer as 'uma janela para o mundo' ['a window on the world'] that helps her community to 'ter um rosto, e fazer ouvir nossa voz' ['be seen and make our voice heard'], and it is this latter mode that is dominant in her writing at this stage.[27]

Nonetheless, there is plenty of contrasting evidence from more recent projects by those involved in Índios Online to encourage greater participation of women in projects both on- and offline, and greater agency in society overall, that the women involved are now just as likely to conceive of themselves as 'guerreiras' as their menfolk (P.T. Tupinambá), and they do not automatically opt for gentler, possibly more textile-based, metaphors in their self-representations either on- or offline, not even in women-only fora such as the Pelas Mulheres Indígenas website (see **Figure 11**). And in the case of the ACIN website, the weaving poetics used to articulate the organisation's 'projects' came about in community discussions involving a cross-section of community members, both men and women (see, for instance, the interview with Mauricio Dorado, the first coordinator of the Tejido de Comunicación, qtd in Murillo 169) and they have been sustained since that point in 2005 by the whole

[27] For an overview of the development of indigenous feminisms in the 1990s and 2000s, see Hernández Castillo (2010).

Figure 11: Pelas Mulheres Indígenas website, 7 July 2017.

community. Thus, it does not seem reasonable to draw the conclusion that the level of input from indigenous women in the development of these websites, and the association of certain activities with a particular gender, makes a significant difference in terms of the poetics used, though it may have made some.

Instead, I want to argue that what is more important than questions of gender here is the precise political context in which these projects have come about. In the case of Índios Online, and particularly for those groups that have emerged since the early 1990s to reassert indigenous identities, the often bloody battles to reclaim indigenous land ('as retomadas') and the fight for their rights in other respects, provides the most obvious political context for their adoption of a hunter-warrior poetics. In the terms of Manuel Castells, writing in *The Power of Identity* (1997), this is a clear case of 'resistance identity' which constructs 'communes' or 'communities' through 'forms of collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression, usually on the basis of identities that were, apparently, clearly defined by history, geography, or biology' (Castells 9). Their lives and the precondition for their willingness to use the internet are a struggle for cultural survival as they seek to draw attention to their situation and draw down resources. And while cross-community networking/weaving is clearly a key part of what the group does through its members-only chatroom facility, and international networking/weaving is also present to some degree,[28] it is this specific 'go-get-it' relationship with mainstream society and with government that significantly contributes to their choice of hunter-warrior poetics.

In the case of the Nasa of the ACIN, as they have reconstructed their indigenous identity during the last half-century of civil war in Colombia, they have specifically moved to position themselves as non-violent, and, despite frequent recall of their people's tradition of 'resistance' to Spanish colonisation, this is quite purposefully now framed as peaceful resistance.[29] It would therefore be anathema to those constructing the communications strategy for this community to have recourse to a warrior poetics. Moreover, this 'resistance identity' has, in

[28] Indeed, international netweaving links the Índios Online to the ACIN and there has been significant exchange over the years between both groups.

[29] The hugely complex Colombian Civil War dates from the mid-1960s to the signing of the Havana Peace Accords in late 2016, although many would argue that the war is far from over today.

the view of certain critics and members of the ACIN itself, moved on to become an example of what Castells terms 'project identity', where 'the building of identity is a project of a different life, perhaps on the basis of an oppressed identity, but expanding toward the transformation of society' (Castells 10), and it is here that the openness of the ACIN to collaboration with not just other ethnicities but also other projects and causes equally aimed at challenging hegemonic power structures and achieving autonomy is key. As Almendra *et al.* point out, this difference in identity politics can be neatly encapsulated in:

> el paso del mandato de 'la toma de tierras,' como consigna y bandera política, al de 'la liberación de la Madre Tierra,' como uno de los principios articuladores de la lucha que hoy libra el movimiento
>
> [the shift from the command to 'reclaim land,' as political rallying call and banner, to that of 'the liberation of Mother Earth' as one of the main principles of the struggle in which the movement is engaged today] (Almendra *et al.*, 'Resistir para salvar la vida': 122).[30]

Here we can see that the ACIN is open to collaboration with other environmentalist groups located far beyond their immediate location, as it seeks to preserve natural resources for the humanity at large. The group, then, really do function as a node in a much wider, digitally enabled network/weaving, and this has had an impact on their choice of metaphors to express their appropriation of new ICTs. In addition, there is evidently a desire to offer a counterpoint to the terminology of mainstream neoliberal 'network society' through a resistant poetics of weaving that cannot – they hope – be easily assimilated or co-opted by 'the system'.

It is the case, of course, that the different poetics that I have been discussing here do not always appear in absolute mutual exclusivity, thus suggesting some slippage between identities formed purely around the concept of 'resistance' and those described as 'project identities' by Castells. Indeed, critics of Castells's theory of different forms of identity as they relate to social movements, such as Christian Fuchs, argue that all social movements contain both 'proactive and reactive' (104) elements. I have chosen to retain Castells's terms here, however; in part because they have been taken up by members of the ACIN in order to consider their own identity as a social movement, and in part because I do determine differing amounts of 'proactive and reactive' elements in the two cases studied and that this relates to the kind of poetics that they select.

To whit, there are some examples of warrior discourse on the ACIN website, although they are relatively rare and generally refer to news from other indigenous groups elsewhere in Latin America. Nonetheless, 'la lucha' [struggle] is the lynchpin of the movement, even if people do not subsequently define themselves as 'guerreras/os', or do so as 'Guerreros y guerreras de la resistencia pacífica' ['Male and female warriors of peaceful resistence'], to quote the title of a post on the website from 22 October 2010.

In the case of the Índios Online group, perhaps the best, and most creative, example of where these two modes of indigenising discourse combine is actually in the @rco Digital project itself. The resultant book has as its subtitle 'Uma rede para aprender a pescar' ['A Net for Learning to Fish'] (see **Figure 12**), thus combining the 'hunter-gatherer' discourse of the fishing net which is used for obtaining food with a 'weaving' discourse born of the fact that the same fishing net is of course a form of textile (and there is even a further echo of that other webbed textile much associated with indigenous lifeways in Brazil – the hammock).

Furthermore, on the back cover of the book, Nhenety Kariri-Xocó asks provocatively, 'Você sabe quem inventou a Rede?' ['Do you know who invented the net/web?'], thus contriving to

[30] This does not mean that reclaiming land is never undertaken by members of the organisation these days, simply that the discourse around these issues has shifted to align with a change in politics.

Figure 12: The front and back cover of the book *@rco digital* (2007).

frame his reference to 'the net' in such a way as to challenge the endless colonialist rhetoric surrounding the invention of networked digital technologies and the consequent occupation of cyberspace framed as 'homesteading on the electronic frontier' (cf. Rheingold). What this mainstream colonialist rhetoric achieves is, according to Ziauddin Sardar, a rerun of the Conquest without the inconvenience of there being anyone in the way, and it thus allows the white, Western internet-user the fantasy of being both cyber-conquistador and digital native.[31] Instead, in Nhenety Kariri-Xocó's formulation indigenous people become first-come in cyberspace. Taken together then, these two examples indicate that the limited range of weaving poetics used by the Índios Online group works to support the more dominant hunter-warrior discourse: they are still part of the 'go-get-it' and combative political repertoire.

Conclusion

This study of the Índios Online and ACIN websites and broader projects relating to the appropriation of new media technologies has taken me so long to write that it really covers the rise and fall of the indigenous community website in Latin America. Since 2011, the point at which I first started following these projects, social media platforms and messaging services such as Facebook and Twitter, WhatsApp and Messenger have boomed in the region ('Social Media in Latin America'; Hale). Although the mobile phones that indigenous community members are using are unlikely to be the latest models of iPhone, individuals do have these most common apps on their phones and through them they have far greater flexibility to move in and out of groups, as well as create and develop individual profiles for themselves. Thus the 'telecentre' model of internet access and community-based appropriation of new media technologies has been decentred. Further research will need to be undertaken to explore the poetics and politics of Latin American indigenous self-representation and political action through these new channels.

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[31] For more on the discourse of digital natives and new tribes, see Barlow and Prensky. Poster explicitly argues that this effects the 'retribalisation of humankind' (following Maffesoli's theorisation of *Le Temps des tribus* [1988]) in a way that suits the fantasies of mainstream society.

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