

Cyber Imperialism and the Marginalization of Canada's Indigenous Peoples¹

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Are Canada's indigenous peoples, like the people of Canada, subject to an insidious "cyber imperialism" that threatens to alter and marginalize their cultures and even eradicate them within a generation? The process of marginalization appears inexorable. Perhaps in Canada the situation is more serious than it is the cyber third world, because the net has lulled most Canadians including Aboriginal peoples into seeing it only as a cornucopia of promise. Our governments have committed billions to constructing the superhighway and are only now beginning to be concerned about content. And they have clearly chosen not to leave Aboriginal communities "behind" if the Aboriginal site within Industry Canada's Canada's Digital Collections and Netera's initiatives are any indication. However, the issue is more complex than simply putting up aggressive content relating to the Aboriginal cultures or Canadian content.

It can be argued that a knowledge economy based largely on Canadian and Aboriginal cultural and multicultural traditions and practices is not possible, because the global nature of the internet is such that it precludes this as an option. Several observations drive this conclusion. First the dominant internet language is and will continue to be English, despite the adoption of the internet by strong "second tier" lan-

¹ A first version of this paper can be found on the web site of Heritage Canada.

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guages. English is already so prevalent that the internet serves much like a lubricant accelerating its hold particularly on Aboriginal cultural industries. Second, the key stakeholders in the information economy are corporations, governments, and post secondary institutions all dominated by the power brokers and the middle classes not cultural non government organizations. While marginalized cultures can use the internet to reinforce community, to build protective barriers and to politicize their marginalization, they have for the most part remained on its economic and cultural periphery. Third, the state has shown little sustained interest to date in investing the kind of resources required to sustain a dynamic non-English or non-French Aboriginal cultural presence in all its complexity. Lastly, Aboriginal culture is perceived by Canadians to be best represented through the “cultural relic” lens of archives, libraries and museums. Through these lenses Euro Canadian triumphalism patronizingly praises the residue of native culture while lamenting the passing of its complexities.

David Theo Goldbert argues that in the post modern era colonialism continued to “segregate” and to “marginalize” through various constructs. For example,

In the 1950s and 1960s slum administration replaced colonial administration. Exclusion and exclusivity were internalized within the structures of city planning throughout the expanded (cos) metropolises of the emergent “west.” Fearing contamination from inner city racially defined slums, the white middle class scuttled to the suburbs. ... Local differences notwithstanding, the racial poor were simultaneously rendered peripheral in terms of urban location and marginalized in terms of power (1993: 189).

Can this observation be applied to the “cyber world?” First, some argue that the cyber world is not “colonized” and that Indigenous peoples can have real and meaningful impact. The successful internet based Zapatista revolt would seem to suggest that the cyber world has real power. But closer investigation would suggest that it was a revolt inspired by “liberal” American academics who had the e-resources of their Universities at their disposal. In Canada the “cyber” world hardly seems poised to radicalism. Indeed it continues in its quiet cyber segregation. Industry Canada carefully segregates the Aboriginal sites, as does the National Archives. This movement to “Native Portals” accentuates this separateness. Canada’s museums also tend to segregate native content. It is usually in a separate cyber gallery, and is usually at the beginning of the storyline, rarely scattered throughout the various subject specializations or exhibits. Even where modernity is desired, the subject is dealt with in the Aboriginal section of the exhibition.

Despite the wish of some Indigenous people to do so, it is “virtually” impossible to segregate by “race” on the internet. Rhonda S. Fair’s “Becoming the White Man’s Indian: An Examination of Native American Tribal Web Sites” (2000) argues, based on an examination of the Indian Circle web ring, that there are two web realities depending upon the purpose and focus of the web sites. There are those directed to an external audience which tend to reinforce and perhaps even create “stereotypes,” while those directed to the internal community tend to be more real.

The Aboriginal cyber net tends to reinforce a “class” perspective. The majority of the Aboriginal peoples who access cyber space will tend to be those who are middle class, work for government, the college or university systems or aboriginal governments. The cyber gaze of Aboriginal content tends to be those with the greatest stake in the status quo. That is, the environment in which Canadian Aboriginal peoples seem to want to work is within the context of Canadian law and its current system of justice which promise if not always delivering results. Because the internet allows the Aboriginal middle class to dominate the discourse and the challenge to Euro Canadian authority, it can be argued that they have assumed the role of the “colonial” master. They control the new instrument of defiance — the web sites. But there seems little inclination to use it. Only those Canadian Aboriginal communities on the absolute margin, the Innu or the Lubicon have used their cyber connections to bring their issues to the world stage or to use the WWW as an instrument of resistance.

So the reasons for a more detailed lament become obvious. First is the reality of language. The English language, is both the language of cyber-technology and the language of perceived freedoms — “free markets,” “free expression,” “free elections” and “free information.” It is the language of the West that continues to promise, but has yet to deliver today’s utopia to a “colonized third world.” Joe Lockard, a Ph.D. student at UCLA, in “Resisting Cyber English” puts it bluntly

The colonial pursuit of geopolitical rationalization has historically relied on over-languages to endorse a politics of subordination. Cyber-English, the first world English without a territorial base, has reformulated classic notions of universal imperial benefit. Viewed as a stage in this historiographic continuum, cyber-English is the latest extension of a centuries-long drive towards extinction of small tribal languages and consolidated expansion for a few languages of power. One blunt conclusion arrives quickly: cyber-English has declared global language/class war. Learn it or else. Speak so “we” understand you, or take a hike and be damned (1996).

Those who refute this argument point to “small” dynamic cyber languages like Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, Spanish, French and Finnish as evidence of a non-English dynamic. Yet, these are cultures with a very strong print tradition, and even on the majority of their e-sites the English language remains the alternative choice. The unwritten assumption is that when someone totally resists English they are giving clear evidence of their “technological” backwardness. Yet, it is also argued that by Fred Zellen in “Surf’s up?: NWT’s Indigenous Communities Await a Tidal Wave of electronic Information” that Aboriginal Cultures will “find it easy to identify themselves in the global culture linked by the net,” and that the net will make it easier to “preserve artefacts of their culture” which will only make them stronger (Zellen, 2001). Further reflection on this sentence should cause considerable sadness. Globalization is to be embraced. This will ensure the “preservation” of culture as an “artefact”!

The degree to which Canada’s “imperial” languages dominate Aboriginal perspectives is clear on the Canadian Aboriginal internet sites hosted by Industry Canada. As of March 24, 2001, Canada’s Aboriginal Digital Collections contained thirty five sites. Yet, while most of the listed native sites cite language as a primary concern, all sites are in English or French with at best the native language in a parallel column. Where there are language sites, they “teach” the language or treat the language as an object of “curiosity.” The reasons are transparent: there are too few fluent speakers.

The Six Nations of the Grand River for example estimate their language retention rate at one percent of the population — there are only two hundred twenty-five fluent speakers, with most being over the age of sixty (Anon, 2001). 1996 Statistics Canada indicates that although twenty six percent of Aboriginal Canadians could hold a conversation in their language, only fifteen percent of Aboriginal Canadians or one hundred twenty thousand individuals spoke their native language at home (Government of Canada, 1998). It should also be emphasized that there are few native newspapers that are solely in an indigenous language — and where this is attempted most offer English as a parallel alternative. In Canada it could be argued the imperial language of the internet, English, is reinforcing and accelerating current marginalization rather than introducing it.

And with English and the internet comes politics. The individual sites in the Canadian Digital Aboriginal Collection, amongst the largest on the net, for the most part avoid controversy. These sites are intended to celebrate whether it is business achievement, culture, history or language. The Waskaganish Net Site (Waskaganish aka Rupert’s House is located on James Bay) near is an excellent and typical

example (*idem*).² The main “buttons” are “culture,” “development,” “history,” “myths,” “profile,” “talent” and “tourism.” All of the topics seem to be intended for the outside, particularly tourists, business investors and employers. The site paints the community as modern and connected, with a strong future in heritage tourism — particularly with the development of Charles Fort the first Hudson’s Bay Company establishment. Of equal note is the “history” timeline — which starts with the coming of the first European in 1611. This is not unusual in the various sites included in Canada’s Digital Collections. The “Rat River/Ddhah Zhit Han,” “Peguis First Nation” or the “Welcome to the Big House Kwakwaka’wakw” e-sites³ offer similar treatments of the past — a past which begins with the arrival of Europeans!

Yet Aboriginal sites can be more than “celebratory.” The non federal government sites are dominated by tribal and territorial governments. And this should not be a surprise. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut governments are both elected by majority native populations. These sites are comprehensive offerings of government services, although often through the tourist gaze. However, only the Nunavut sites offers service in the dominant Aboriginal languages.⁴ The Government of the Northwest Territories does not. Tribal government sites tend to be more introductory and political, but always with a strong heritage component. For the most part the native government sites appear to be for those “gazing” in rather than for the community itself. Self-validation is probably the prime reason for the creation of many of these e-sites. In today’s world, if you do not have a presence on the web — you do not exist. The mere fact of having a web page is a statement of existence to an often disinterested world.

The Aboriginal internet is controlled by the “power elite.” To participate a computer, software, expertise and a host server are all required. The internet is frankly expensive and does not permeate most homes in native communities, although this is not true everywhere. In Inuvik, for example, cable access is available to almost every home and this has had considerable impact on how the news is accessed. If a review of North American internet site indicates anything it is that the Canadian Aboriginal sites are less radical, and are mired in the niceties of treaty and land negotiations and the outcome of court cases. Oka⁵, Gustavsen Lake, Burnt Church⁶, which were expected to be hot points, were not when they were checked

² <http://aboriginalcollections.ic.gc.ca/e/listssubject.htm>

³ <http://aboriginalcollections.ic.gc.ca/e/listssubject.htm> for both sites

⁴ <http://www.nunavut.com/home.html> and <http://www.gov.nt.ca>.

⁵ “Oka Crisis” at <http://www.tyendinaga.net/wwwboard/messages/83.html> largely deals with academic retrospectives rather than a continuing battle for human rights.

⁶ “The Burnt Church First Nation” at <http://efn.tao.ca>.

on Google, Excite and Yahoo search engines. Several sites associated with these issues were explicit in the damnation of government action, but they were not sustained nor supported internationally over any length of time. A few had had no postings for several months. The most active protest sites are associated with Leonard Peltier.⁷ Most appear to be maintained by American interests.

The most radical active e-sites in Canada were those of the Innu government of Labrador, and those of the Lubicon Nation. Both seem to employ the rhetoric of marginalization and seem to be related to the internet guerrilla movement. In the 1990's, there has been a strong internet based movement amongst the American and South American indigenous peoples to radicalize the anti-colonialist protests against NAFTA and the imperialism they believe it represents. It saw its greatest success in its support of the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas, Mexico. It became an international cause and was the first movement that won its victories in cyberspace.⁸

The cyber rhetoric of the Zapatistas is evident in that of the Labrador Innu, as is the support of the cyber intellectuals. The Innu site at <http://www.innu.ca> is worth a careful examination. The titles suggest anti colonialist positioning. On the front of the web page there are articles like "Canada's Tibet: The Killing of the Innu" which on further drilling down was written by Colin Samson, Department of Sociology, University of Essex, James Wilson, author of "The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America" and Jonathan Mazower. Another front page article the WEB page is "An Appeal for Justice for the Innu of Labrador." While authorship cannot be determined for some of the articles, they uniformly resist the neo-colonialism that they see around them. The Lubicon pages, many hosted on a server at the University of Victoria Department of Fine Art, are poorly designed but the messages are equally sophisticated and uncompromising.⁹ These sites would all argue that Canada's history is an artificial construct which marginalizes Aboriginal peoples. Joyce A. Green's "Towards a DÄtente with History: Confronting Canada's Colonial Legacy" first published in the International Journal of Canadian Studies which makes this case is placed on one of the key Lubicon sites (Green, 2001).

The voice of anti colonialism is often that of academics like Joyce Green and Colin Samson. The Cana-

⁷ "The International Office of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee" at <http://www.freepeltier.org/story.htm#top> viewed March, 24, 2001.

⁸ "Zapatistas in Cyberspace A Guide to Analysis and Resources" at <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html> viewed March, 24, 2001.

⁹ "Lubicon Supporters Home Page" at <http://www.finearts.uvic.ca/~vipirg/SISIS/Lubicon/main.html> viewed March, 24, 2001.

dian Aboriginal press, which functions for the most part in English, tends to the middle road, with only a modest dose of anti colonial rhetoric. *Windspeaker*, first published in 1983 for the Aboriginal people of northern Alberta, is the most widely read of the Aboriginal newspapers. By 1993 it had positioned itself to become Canada's leading Aboriginal news providers (despite the 1990 elimination of federal funding which left it the only Western Aboriginal voice in Canada). Since *Windspeaker's* transformation, its owner, the Aboriginal Multi Media Society has launched *Sweetgrass* to serve Alberta, *Sage* to serve Saskatchewan and *Raven's Eye* to serve British Columbia. It should be noted that AMMSA also owns and operates CFWE-FM radio, which broadcasts to fifty four Alberta Aboriginal communities.

The AMMA newspapers are traditional with a strongly independent yet liberal community focus.¹⁰ The editorial policy, which would not be out of place in the *Globe and Mail*, is uniformly critical of the federal government in its treaty negotiations, its fishery policies as well as its own Chief Matthew Coon Come for his statements on alcoholism amongst native leaders. There were also extremely worthwhile articles on the Residential Schools litigations. That being said, its front page lead story on April 1 related to the Aboriginal Juno awards.

While the digital versions of newspapers are the most significant "portal" to Aboriginal cyberspace in Canada, there are Native portals like Turtle Island Native Network in Canada and Nativeweb, in the United States from which both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal peoples can gain alternative perspectives.¹¹ Their links emphasize the demoralization of the Aboriginal communities throughout the world in the post colonial context. It is clear that Turtle Island and Nativeweb, which are more in tune with the cyber world are more international than national in their focus, and see Aboriginal issues in a global context. The links to American tribal issues are numerous. What is equally interesting is that Turtle Island does not have a ready link to the AMMA products.¹² Commercial and political interests still supersede those of the new Aboriginal international alliances encouraged by the opportunities of cyberspace. Linkages to the United Nations aboriginal issues exist, but do not dominate.

The aboriginal chat rooms offer an important location for determining the impact of the e-world on post colonial issues. The most numerous sites in Canada relate to land claims, to self government, to cultural appropriation and to racism and to genealogy, with the most popular topic being genealogy. The most

¹⁰ <http://www.ammsa.com/ammsahistory.html#anchor9942088> for a brief history of AMMA.

¹¹ "Nativeweb: Resources for Indigenous Cultures around the World" at <http://www.nativeweb.org> viewed March, 24, 2001.

¹² "Turtle Island Native Network" at http://www.turleisland.org/front/_front.htm viewed March, 24, 2001.

poignant chat rooms were those on the Aboriginal Youth Network which posted several key questions for individuals to join in. The topic of “racism” in the school system, particularly in the teaching of history and native subjects had the largest number of contributors.¹³ The chat rooms tend to be anonymous — but there is a vigorous policing action in these rooms, since it is difficult to discern who is who, by questioning those who don't seem to use the correct “sub culture” English rhetoric. Race not culture is a determinant of who can participate. Ellen Baird, doctoral student at South Dakota State University, argues that in those chat rooms she explored Aboriginal participants had concluded that

American Indians in general resist assimilation and take offence at someone who is trying to pretend to be Indian, and are vigilant about protecting Indian identity on the web. ... Ironically, it is the Indian participants who sound more mainstream than non-Indians in this observed chat room (1998).

In Canada there is as yet no literature analyzing native chat rooms. However, a quick examination of the Native-L archives or any of the other chat rooms suggests that in Canada there is less militancy than on the American counterparts. Canadian sites tend to focus on issues regarding land claims and on group identity. Little on the “chat rooms” indicate an interest in history although there is a real commitment to culture and the arts. Genealogy remains a consistently strong interest particularly on the Métis sites.¹⁴ Métis chat is very much concerned with the issues of “identity.”

These chat rooms, particularly in Canada, evidence the tensions between those who would preserve existing ownership of identities, and those who feel they should be able to join a newly discovered racial connection to culture. The emotion of the chat rooms is real and indicates how important the net might become in the creation of new identities.

Say I lived in B.C., had done my genealogy complete, over 1 500 names, of which, 8 of the 127 of my ancestors going back 7 generations can be documented as being of native American ancestry, I had my DNA test done, stating both my genotypes are of North American origins, but I came from the east coast, wanted to join your Métis group, would I qualify? NO! ... According to the BC chapter of the MNC, we cannot meet your membership requirements, nor can we meet those of any other MNC affiliate, yet, it was our ancestors who created

¹³ Aboriginal Youth Network http://ayn-o.ayn.ca/discussion/board_mainpage.htm viewed March, 24, 2001.

¹⁴ http://www.turtleisland.org/front/_front.htm for the link to Metis chat.

the first Métis child in Canada! It is our Native American grandmother who was the very first Métis mother in Canada, it is our grandmothers who must be crying in shame to see what her children must endure just to be allowed to come home. Shame! (Wiskipkpaqtism, 2001)

The degree to which these chat rooms are causing the formation of new identities, or placing “political” pressures to allow new identities to be recognized is as yet unclear. However, experience elsewhere indicates that one of the impacts of the web can be the creation of new virtual communities. The impact of the web in the Métis fight for a national “inclusive” identity, rather than an exclusive one controlled by Red River descendants will be worth watching. It might yet be that the 1982 Constitution recognized the Métis, but the web will make their nation a reality.

Aboriginal governments' e-sites are probably doing the most to project and protect culture. At Ouje-Bougoumou, a Cree United Nations award winning community, science and computer camps were started in 1997 with considerable success.¹⁵ These “camp kids” developed their own web pages which reflected an incredible sense of local and international community.¹⁶ The sense of pride and ownership of these pages and the heritage they exhibited was palpable.

The museum, archives and library community which are largely controlled by Euro-Canadians have been key to the creation of Canada's understanding of Aboriginal culture. The new cyber or virtual museums that are springing up continue the perpetuation of Euro Canadian views. The situation is of course more complex than the previous statement suggests. Moira McLoughlin for example observes that museums are “borderlands: spaces of coexistence, negotiation, and transformation which do not assume given centres of power” (McLoughlin, 1993). Jane M. Jacobs' work on Aboriginal tourist sites in Australia on the other hand argues that in this “borderland” both communities' understanding of any particular heritage site is forever transformed (Townsend-Gault, 1998). The “myth” of negotiation, or the “myth” of appropriation are all being re-negotiated at the same time. A new understanding then does begin to emerge. As the dialogue continues a consensus may be articulated in which both histories and both pasts no longer exist.

¹⁵ 1997 Science/Computer Camp Ouje Bougoumou at <http://www.ouje.ca/youth/Camp/camp.htm> viewed March, 24, 2001.

¹⁶ See Lance Cooper's web page at <http://www.ouje.ca/youth/Camp/Lance/lance.htm> for example viewed March, 24, 2001.

But for the majority of Canadians whether Aboriginal or Euro-Canadian, often the museum appears to dictate, not to negotiate, the modern discourse which determines stereotypes. The new virtual museums tend to reinforce the past. That this “museum gaze” is further perpetuated through the internet can be seen through an examination of Canada’s senior museums: the Glenbow, the National Museum of Civilization, the National Museum of Art, the National Museum of Science and Technology, the National Museum of Nature, the Provincial Museum of Alberta, the British Columbia Provincial Museum, the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, and the Virtual Museum of Canada.

Most Aboriginal sites indicate the value that native people give to environment and nature and particularly their lives in it. What is interesting is that the National Museum of Nature makes no reference to that inextricable connection.¹⁷ As far as Nature is concerned Aboriginal peoples do not exist. The Canadian Museum of Science and Technology is equally deficient. Any review of technologies tends to ignore Aboriginal interests other than the occasional tip-of-the-hat to the science of archaeology. The technologies of flint napping, of buffalo jumps, of fishing do not make it on the net version of the museum, although canoes do. From June 21, 2000 – Oct. 21, 2002 Technology is hosting an exhibit presented by “Canoe.ca.” The key “hook” “What do M. Atwood, P.E. Trudeau, P. Johnson and Grey Owl have in common?” The answer is not that except for Pauline Johnson, who is of mixed European Mohawk ancestry, all were Euro-Canadians. No “they were all avid canoeists.”

The exhibit “explores the history of the commercial canoe in Canada, and how the success of this enterprise has helped make the canoe a universally recognized symbol of Canada.” The implication is that the National Museum of Science and Technology is for “modern” progressive people, not Aboriginal peoples.¹⁸ This contrasts with the Royal British Columbia Museum whose technology site includes a research report by Shelley E. Reid, “The Beauty of Technology” on Aboriginal fishing techniques. The Virtual Museum of Canada’s exhibit on science and technology “Athena’s Heirs” also marginalizes Native wisdom by including it at the beginning of the exhibition in a linear fashion — rather finding relationships throughout the discourse. Here native peoples are again seen, albeit unintentionally, as “anti modern.”¹⁹

¹⁷ National Museum of Nature at http://nature.ca/nature_e.cfm viewed March, 24, 2001.

¹⁸ National Museum of Science and Technology at <http://www.science-tech.nmstc.ca/english/whatson/index.cfm> refers to the exhibit. If one drills down in canoe.ca one can find a paper by John Jennings, “The Canoe — The Boat That Built A Nation” at <http://www.canoemuseum.net/old/resource.htm> which does explain its native antecedents although it is little more than a worshipful paragraph.

¹⁹ “Athena’s Heirs,” Virtual Museum of Canada exhibit at <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Heirs/index.html>.

The National Gallery equally reinforces the stereotypes presented by the National Museum of Science and Technology. Its major digital retrospective show has been on Inuit carving. When prowling the site's vignettes, insights into other Canadian Aboriginal artists can be gleaned, but with difficulty.²⁰ Future shows, all curated by Marie Routledge, on the works of Marion Tuu'luq and on Pudlo Pudlat, both northern artists, appear to reinforce rather than break stereotypes and deal with native artists as a "separate" category rather than as individuals in a post-modern construct.

In history museums Aboriginal peoples fare better, but the fact is that there they are also seen as "historic" rather than as "contemporary" peoples. The view of the museums diverges significantly from "history" on Aboriginally authored e-sites. It is much more political. The Manitoba Museum has little more than an advertising presence on the web, and not much can be discerned other than native communities fall under the "ethnology" rather than under "history." The National Museum of Civilization does not include Aboriginal peoples under "history," rather First Nations are given their own sections in the virtual museum. They are before "history." The approach appears there to be linear, and for the most part interprets native people through the "tourist" or Euro Canadian gaze. Native people are seen in their "pre-historical" context as peoples of the past with little current presence. The virtual native cowboy exhibit is the exception. It deals with Native cowboy culture in all of its dimensions and provides real life to an already spell binding subject.

The awarding winning "Haida" site is a "best practices" Aboriginal site. It is one of the only ones found to be arranged in a non-linear fashion with multiple entries with the past and the present fully integrated.²¹ Like most museum virtual sites however it is difficult to find out who is responsible for the site contents without considerable drilling. It would seem that museum sites on the web are generally treated as movie productions — with a long credit list — but with no real authority. The Glenbow has surprisingly little Aboriginal presence on its web. The Provincial Museum of Alberta, which along with the Royal British Columbia probably have the best e-sites. If one had not seen the outstanding Syncrude Gallery at the Provincial Museum of Alberta, the impression would be left that that museum was only interested in reinforcing old stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as yesterday's peoples.

²⁰ National Gallery of Canada, "Carving an Identity: Inuit Sculpture from the Permanent Collection," November, 26, 1999 – November, 26, 2000, Inuit Galleries at <http://national.gallery.ca/english/exhibitions/carving/carving.html>.

²¹ <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Haida>.

Libraries and archives are increasingly beginning to develop web presences. However, libraries and archives are themselves a Euro-Canadian construct that in some cases have insidiously replaced and in others supplemented the “elders” as a source of information. Often at the forefront of the digital revolution, libraries in particular should be expected to make considerable and culturally sensitive contributions. But for the most part they do not.

The National Library digital site includes a few Aboriginal Canadians like Poundmaker, Peter Pitseolak, and Louis Riel (indexed as a pioneer!)²², but not Crowfoot, Red Crow or Big Bear. It mentions Pauline Johnson as a Métis, which she did not identify herself as, and Victoria Belcourt Callihoo as an historian, when she may have felt herself better represented as an Elder. One presumes that the National Library has taken the decision to include Aboriginal peoples throughout as part of the Canadian fabric rather than to categorize them separately. But the Library could have shown a little more sensitivity than categorizing Riel as a Pioneer!

The Toronto Public Library offers no special access to information to the largest group of urban natives in Canada. Its search engine, however, does link the user to Aboriginal community associations and agencies, identifying their street, e mail and web addresses. Industry Canada also provides a useful Aboriginal portal to government services. Mount Royal College does have a special bibliography of native materials, which anyone would do well to use as a beginning point. The Universities of Alberta and British Columbia both have excellent native bibliographies, although in some cases the data bases listed are restricted to users of their systems. Also they are not the easiest to find. Aboriginal communities wanting to gain an instant access will much prefer going to the *Windspeaker* or if they are of more radical persuasion preferring a decidedly American perspective, Turtle Island Native Network.²³

While Canadian archives are critical to the resolution of many Aboriginal issues, and to the finding of lost identities, they do not for the most part take special efforts to collect materials created by Aboriginal peoples. They have however made considerable progress in attempting to break through the Euro-Canadian gaze. The National Archives of Canada's “Pride and Dignity” is an exhibition of over sixty photos designed to break down some of the common stereotypes surrounding Aboriginal society. The cyber

²² National Library of Canada at <http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/bioindex/eendeav.htm#Pioneers> for the Classification of Riel.

²³ http://www.turtleisland.org/front/_front.htm.

exhibit on Treaty 8 is also a model of careful discourse.²⁴ The Métis Scrip material is authored and appropriate.²⁵ The National Archives' "Aboriginal Peoples: An Overview" offers no authorship and is little more than sophomoric pabulum. The site aimed at both the Aboriginal and non Aboriginal researchers warns users of the complexities of research relating to Aboriginal issues. It might well be construed by some as condescending, although it is surely not intended to be so.

The various documents contained at the site are in effect archival publications of selected materials, rather than complete sets of documents from which Aboriginal peoples can come to their own conclusions. Until complete sets of documents created by and maintained by Aboriginal peoples are available at Aboriginal archives and on the net, there will continue to be filters that are imposed by the dominant institutions and the cultures they represent.

The cyber colonialism of the Aboriginal people of Canada continues to be at once insidious and subtle. Manuel Castells in *The Power of Identity* clearly articulates the changes that

are continuing to happen globally. Canada is not immune. He argues that "ethnicity does not provide the basis for communal heavens in the network society, because it is based on primary bonds that lose significance, when cut from their historical context, as a basis for reconstruction of meaning in a world of flows and networks, of recombination of images, and reassignment of meaning. Ethnic materials are integrated into cultural communities that are more powerful, and more broadly defined than ethnicity, such as religion or nationalism, as statements of cultural autonomy in a world of symbols. Or else, ethnicity becomes the foundation for defensive trenches, then territorialized in local communities ... defending their turf (1997).

Within Canadian Aboriginal cyberspace, that statement has some resonance. For some, individual Canadian tribal cyber identities are being increasingly submerged not in their own "national" context, but rather in continental and increasingly in international "Aboriginal peoples" identities. That is, for example, the identity of the Cree peoples is not a unified or clear one in Aboriginal cyber space. The strongest Aboriginal identity is a continental one, developed by a reaction to American national issues and to the homogenization of the "tourism" and "museum" gaze. There is a beginning identification e.g. the Innu

²⁴ National Archives of Canada, "Aboriginal Peoples" at http://www.archives.ca/08/0804_e.html.

²⁵ National Archives of Canada, "Aboriginal Peoples and Archives" at http://www.archives.ca/02/0201200110_e.html viewed March, 24, 2001.

and Lubicon e-sites, with international issues of a post-colonial world, but these are few and show but few signs of acceptance across the Canadian Aboriginal e-scene. The majority of Canadian Aboriginal e-sites seek validation as modern peoples through demonstrating their use of the new medium. And they further seek validation as “modern” economic players by emphasizing their “forward-thinking” community plans, their role in cultural tourism and in providing “state of the art” schooling. Most equally emphasize a commitment to language and heritage — but the very cyber world they call on to protect their heritage is the world that is eroding that heritage. In the few active native classrooms, the real issue is often the preservation of barriers precluding “outsiders” from appropriating their issues, culture or language.

The web in itself is not eroding Aboriginal culture and reshaping Aboriginal self identities as much as reinforcing those tendencies that exist. There is no evidence right now to determine which of the literally millions of internet sites are most meaningful to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Are they the most frequent visitors to, for example, the Zapatista sites gaining the necessary cyber insurgency skills to stop the apparently inevitable erosion of their culture by the forces of Euro Canadian imperialism? Or are they the frequent users of country music or gospel music sites? Which chat rooms are most popular? Which Canadian museum sites resonant? Who are the visitors to individual tribal-e sites? Just a few more Euro-Canadian researchers? Why are the visitor numbers so low — less than two hundred hits over several years per site in most cases?²⁶ We don't know. There are suggestions by those like Michael Margolis and David Resnick in *Politics as Usual* (2000), that the cyber world will not offer as many immediate changes as Manuel Castells postulates. However, what does emerge is that as the “first” world becomes increasingly connected, those who do not have access to its cyber resources will be increasingly marginalized and become victims of yet another revolution.

²⁶ “Native Web” at <http://www.nativeweb.org/resources.php?name=Cree&type=1&nation=151> Note for example most Cree sites have less than 200 hits.

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