"We are not extinct": The revival of Carib and Taino identities, the internet, and the transformation of offline indigenes into online 'N-digenes'

Maximilian C. Forte
Adelaide University (Australia)
mcforte@centrelink.org

"One of the things I like best about the Internet is that millions of people whose ideas were ignored in the mainstream media can now be heard. However, one of the things I really hate about the Internet is that millions of people whose ideas were ignored in the mainstream media can now be heard".


This paper stems from an ongoing project that involves addressing two ‘gaps’ in the relevant research literature. The first such ‘gap’ pertains to what is still relatively minor anthropological interest in the social and cultural implications of the Internet, and the concomitant lack of sufficient ethnographic research in this area. In the overall social science literature about the Internet, the ways in which indigenous peoples have engaged this medium has suffered from even further neglect, apart from such examples as the brief (yet nonetheless significant) empirical reports contained in a special issue of Cultural Survival Quarterly (1998). I have only surmised some possible reasons for this generalized lack of anthropological interest derived from informal exchanges with a variety of scholars. One of the main concerns appears to be that the Internet is itself still new and socially marginal, a tool of the few, or merely a toy in the hands of a tiny elite, when considered in terms of global social distribution. From this perspective, the Internet pertains to a relatively small number of middle-class youths (the ‘Net Generation’ or N-gen), professionals, and other privileged groups in ‘developed’ countries or in the ‘developed’ pockets of ‘underdeveloped’ countries. Indeed, data presented in the NUA Internet Surveys show that only 8.46% of the world’s population is online, that is, 513.41 million people as of August 2001 (NUA 2001b). The perception that users in the United States and Europe, and ‘core’ areas of the ‘periphery’, constitute the dominant presence on the Internet is also ostensibly supported in various attempts to map cyberspace using geographic metaphors (see Dodge 2001; Forte 2001b). The figures for Trinidad and Tobago, a focal point in my study, seemingly confirm this core-periphery division. As of December 2000 only 42,800 Trinidadians had Internet access, or 3.64% of the national population (NUA 2001a). The International Telecommunications Union reports that in Trinidad, for every 1,000 members of the national population, there were 5.96 hosts, 77.25 Internet users, and only 54.2 PCs (ITU 2001; also IBRD 2001). In addition to the ITU and World Bank, other agencies report that radio, television, and newspapers, in that order, are
the dominant means for disseminating news and images in Trinidad (UNDP 2001). Yet, the Internet population is constantly growing, and the social and cultural impact of the Internet is not limited only to the online realm. Indeed, as Steve Cisler (1998) argued: “The Internet may not be for everyone or for every group, but even those without it will be affected by it, or by the lack of access to it in some form”.

What is most significant for our present concerns is that there has been indigenous engagement with the Internet almost from the start. The Website of the Oneida Indian Nation in the State of New York was, reputedly, the first site to be launched by any indigenous body anywhere, coming online in 1994 even before the Website for the White House, at a time when there were perhaps only 5,000 Internet sites in total (Polly 1998). On the other hand, that a U.S. indigenous site should be the first is also a telling indication of the kind of center-periphery dynamic that appears in various key points of this paper and in my research on the contemporary development of Caribbean indigeneity in general. We must recognize, nonetheless, that there is now a significant mass of Websites built and maintained by indigenous bodies, or for indigenous groups as a result of forms of ‘cyberbrokerage’ (see Delgado P. & Becker 1998; Polly 1998), by indigenous peoples, or about indigenous peoples especially in the form of informational ‘clearinghouses’ (Cisler 1998).

The second research ‘gap’ at the heart of this study stems from the fact that in much if not most of the social science literature on the cultural development of the post-Conquest Caribbean there seems to be a consensus that the indigenous has been absent or severely diminished (Forte 2001a:1-5). The dominant themes in the social science literature are that indigenous peoples in the Caribbean became virtually extinct (in biological terms), that they have had limited cultural impact on the post-Conquest Caribbean, or that they were absent from the repertory set down by colonial experience (thus overlooking the extent to which ‘Carib’ and ‘Taíno’ became canonized as symbols of resistance and/or commemorated as the ancient bedrock of the nation in the historical narratives of Caribbean cultural nationalists [cf. Dávila 1999; Forte 2001a:80-138, 280-299]). Also neglected is the current resurgence of Amerindian identities and traditions and the wider recognition that these are receiving. This neglect is all the more remarkable when we consider such developments as the current region-wide revival of Caribbean Amerindian identities and organizations, as evidenced by Trinidad’s Santa Rosa Carib Community (SRCC), state support and recognition for bodies such as the SRCC, the holding of three international indigenous gatherings in Arima, Trinidad, itself; and, at the regional level, as exemplified by the formation of the Caribbean Organization of Indigenous Peoples, the growth of ‘Caribism’ in Dominica, the international networking of Belizean Garifuna, and the emergence of an array of new Taíno organizations comprised by Puerto Ricans in the U.S. (see Haslip-Viera 1999). Moreover, there is already considerable evidence to suggest that the growth and development of Amerindian identity and traditions in one territory is significantly aided and shaped by Amerindian cultural revitalization efforts in other territories. Major media for this regionalized phenomenon have been those of conferences organized by activist academics, non-governmental organizations, North American indigenous bodies (see Palacio 1992, 1989), and international organizations such as the Organization of American States; regional arts festivals, such as CARIFESTA, that have gathered indigenous representatives from across the region especially since the Columbian Quincentenary in 1992; personal ties and relations between individuals in different countries (Forte 1998-1999a); and, of greatest interest for our present purposes, increasingly the Internet. As I will discuss in this paper, Caribbean indigenous engagement with the Internet must be analytically situated within this context of regionalized and globalized modes of representing and organizing indigeneity.

It is therefore significant that in endeavoring to redress the second research gap we should thus also be led to remedying the first research gap listed above. This paper represents the convergence of three areas of investigative concern: (1) the widened impact of the Internet in building networks of common interests and promoting certain self-representations; (2) the globalization of indigeneity, whereby discourses, practices, and motifs symbolic of an increasingly generic mode of representing indigenous
people and indigenous struggles are taking hold in the international arena; and, (3) the revival of Amerindian identities in the Island and diaspora communities of the Caribbean—all of which are developing concurrently. In broad terms, the main questions at the center of this study revolve around the motivations, constraints, enabling factors and outcomes involved in transforming offline indigenes into what I call online N-digenes. At the same time as I investigate the electronic dimension of the contemporary construction of Caribbean Amerindian identities, I examine the networks of interests and infrastructure constituting the new Webschaften that inhabit particular electronic landscapes, or (if we continue with this revamping of our terms) iScapes. In this paper I will address the question of what online cultural practice offers to revivalist groups that offline practice does not provide, even when the former is propelled by the latter. In addressing this question, I focus on the dominant, unifying theme of most Caribbean Amerindian Websites: “We are not extinct”.

I argue that the electronic assertion of ‘survival’, by self-described ‘revivalist’ and ‘restorationist’ groups, occurs precisely because the offline realm places many more constraints on the dissemination of these assertions. As Cisler (1998) observed: “One of the strongest reasons for having a presence on the Internet is to provide information from a viewpoint that may not have found a voice in the mainstream media”. I thus argue that in helping to promote the visibility of peoples long believed to have been extinct, or ignored for being minorities, the Internet also helps to embody groups facing difficulties in gaining acceptance as “indigenous”, whilst facilitating mutual recognition and validation between these groups thus lending further authority and authenticity to the individual groups in their own offline contexts. In other words, and as depicted in Figure 1, I examine the processes by which the ‘veracity’ of Caribbean Amerindian indigeneity is sought and then attained by electronic means of promotion, forming a loop of processes that I call the V.E.R.A.city loop, that is, online visibility helping to virtually embody groups who might not otherwise be noticed or distinguished, who, given this virtualized visibility and embodiment subsequently gain recognition from prospective allies and brokers. In some cases, depending upon the reputation of one’s ally, the fact of being recognized itself adds authenticity to a particular, previously under-recognized group’s claim to be ‘real Tainos’ or ‘real Caribs’.

**Figure 1: The ‘V.E.R.A.city’ Loop of Electronic ‘Revival’**

The ethnographic focus of this study consists of reorganized groups such as the Santa Rosa Carib Community (SRCC) in Arima, Trinidad,[1] and new revivalist Taino groups based in the U.S.[2] In the case of the SRCC, the bulk of my research was conducted ‘on the ground’. In the case of Taino groups, much of this research resulted from my online participation and observation. It is a combination of these two modes that underlies this research. My overall concern, offline, has been to document and analyze why and how groups such as the SRCC are motivated to locate themselves within international indigenous networks and the ways...
in which these have served to reshape their self-representations. In terms of my online methodology, the following were the primary ethnographic avenues by which I conducted the research and gained the experience and observations at the base of this project. (1) I acted as a direct contributor and ‘co-constructor’ (see Forte 1998-1999b) in the preparation of Websites on behalf of my informants (SRCC 1998-2001; Los Niños del Mundo 1999-2001a), which emerged from collaborative writing exercises between my informants and myself as part of my fieldwork. (2) I created other sites that featured my field research and that I also used for posting pre-prints of my work; part of this effort was to create a research resource for other scholars, whilst also acting as a means of interacting with interested researchers (see Forte 1998-2001a, 1998-2001b, 1998-2001c). (3) Emerging from the previous two efforts, I founded the Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink (CAC 1999-2001) which gathers Websites by or about Caribbean Amerindians under one virtual roof, whilst also publishing articles, essays, personal testimonies of contemporary Tainos, and a newsletter, and brings together scholars and activists through a mailing list, a listserv, and provides for further feedback via a message board. In addition to the correspondence and feedback generated by this resource, the site itself is also equipped with site usage monitors that gather statistics on user traffic while also furnishing information on linked sites plus search terms and phrases used to navigate within the CAC, thus furnishing me with a ‘user model’. As a result, these various means generated the corpus of data underpinning the online dimension of my ethnography. (4) I have also been active in the field of Internet content organization as an editor in the Open Directory Project (dmoz.org), a human-operated directory of Websites that provides the core database of Websites for numerous Internet search engines and directories such as Google, Hotbot, Netscape and others. What this allowed me to do was to raise the online profile of all available Web pages by or about Caribbean Amerindians, expanding the database from the original four pages listed in December 2000, to 198 pages by August 2001.

Finally, we require an ethnographic overview of the offline-online nexus in the representation of Caribbean Amerindians. This has resulted in a telling pattern of distinctions between groups in the Caribbean and its diaspora. There are at least three different offline-online situations, which can be summarized as follows. (1) Those groups established as territorially-based entities, formalized by law, with their own residential communities and their own official political structures, such as the Amerindian tribes in Guyana and the Caribs of Dominica. These are the groups that are least represented on the Internet. This is most likely due to the socio-economic situations of the given populations which result in their restricted access to information technology, and possibly also due to their not perceiving the Internet as a valuable or crucial component of their political and cultural practice ‘on the ground’, which may itself be the result of restricted access to, and thus knowledge of, the opportunities afforded by global Internet communication. In those cases where they are represented, it is the result of cyberbrokerage or the independent efforts of others, often not members of the given populations and often situated abroad. In the case of Guyana, the Amerindian Peoples Association has a Website (APA 2001) which was produced and is maintained as a result of an initiative between the Government of Guyana and the United Nations Development Program—and this is a site with a strong political and economic focus that is not centred on the “we are not extinct” since this is not a predominant perception of the state of Guyana’s Amerindians. In the case of Dominica’s Carib Territory, there are at least three key ways in which the Caribs are represented online. Delphis Ltd. (2001a) is a Dominican Web design firm that maintains Dominica’s sole Internet portal, called “A Virtual Dominica” (Delphis 2001b). Delphis also hosts pages on the Dominica Caribs, most notably pertaining to the Gli-Gli Carib Canoe Project of 1997 (Hubka 1997) which involved a much publicized journey from Dominica to the Orinoco, re-linking Carib communities along the way (see Forte 1998-1999a). The Dominica Caribs are also featured on a Website produced by a Dominican émigré in Canada (Riviere 2001). A German NGO, Kalinago e.V., describing itself as consisting of “19 interested parties who are committed to the preservation of the culture and traditional knowledge of the last remaining indigenous people of the Caribbean, the Caribs, or, as they call themselves, the Kalinago”, also
maintains the other major Website representing Dominica’s Caribs (Kalinago e.V. 2001a). (2) Another category consists of those groups that have been recently reorganized, such as the SRCC, which, though it lacks a separate land base or an autonomous political structure, the SRCC has built upon previous communal bases and has achieved some measure of state recognition and support. The SRCC has embarked upon an effort to obtain a greater degree of recognition at the national level by reviving and promoting ‘Carib traditions’ for a wider national audience and by seeking greater exposure and validation by allying itself with indigenous bodies abroad, including U.S.-based Tainos. SRCC members lack any independent access to information technology or the Internet. As I mentioned above, the SRCC attained an online presence as part of my own collaborative cyberbrokerage. Subsequently, the SRCC has also achieved online visibility via an independent Trinidadian cultural tourism site, *Amerindian Trail* (Marchock 2001), and as a ‘chapter’ represented abroad by the United Confederation of Taino People based in New York (see UCTP 2001). (3) The final category consists of the many Taino groups based amongst Puerto Ricans in the U.S., whose presence dominates the Internet where Caribbean Amerindian Websites are concerned. Most of these groups were formed in the 1990s and lack either an independent, collective hold on resources and are still very much engaged in the struggle for recognition, not just as organizations but as Tainos, given the predominant perceptions that the Tainos are extinct in Puerto Rico (cf. Dávila 1999). These are the groups that I have characterized as ‘new revivalist’ above. The dominant feature of these groups is their access to information technology and their active networking on the Internet, a fact that distinguishes them from the previous two categories. In addition, in the majority of cases, these groups have their own Webmasters and thus design and maintain their own Websites, or have an exclusive and direct say in what is posted on their behalf. In all cases, what one sees is individuals and organizations engaged in relatively unfettered self-representation, demonstrating often advanced Internet design and networking skills (e.g. Baramaya 2001; Biaraku 2001; Ciboney 2001; Coqui 2001; JTTN 2001; Maisiti 2001; Presencia Taina 2001a, 2001b; TALK 2000; TTAT 2001; UCTP 2001; Vargas-Stehney 2001).

This paper is organized analytically along two axes, the local–regional–global axis and the offline–online axis. In the remainder of this paper I will examine processes of globalizing indigeneity insofar as these shed light on the offline motivations and designs for online cultural practice. I will also outline some of the outcomes of online representational practice, and conclude with comments on structure-agency issues and the digital divide.

The Globalization of Indigeneity

‘Indigeneity’ is a problematic term that I use repeatedly in this work in an admittedly slippery fashion, as a matter of both design and necessity. The term seems to have only randomly and sporadically surfaced in the literature mostly within the last ten years and there is as yet no consensus on how best to define the term. I use it as an open term, meant to be distinguished from ‘indigenous-ness’ which can connote a static ‘state of being’, or ‘indigenism’ which has specific Latin American connotations of elitist romanticism and state incorporation projects known as *indigenismo* (see Díaz-Polanco 1982, Field 1994), which contrasts with *indianidad* (or ‘Indianity’) as ‘indigenism from below’ (see Berdichewsky 1989:25-26; Varese 1982), or what some call “radical indigenismo” (Bollinger & Lund 1992:20). In broader terms however, the value of the term ‘indigeneity’ lies in its generalizing denotation of the theory and practice of, by or for ‘the indigenous’, that is, as a bundle of discourses and practices for representing ‘the indigenous’. ‘Indigeneity’ can be also be used to refer to some notion of being ‘locally rooted’ in a particular territory, of being either ‘first here’ as expressed in the ‘first nations’ idea (an idea of precedence) or the ‘true local’ as expressed in the ‘sons of the soil’ idea (an idea of residence).

What we must recognize is that ‘indigeneity’ and ‘locality’ make no logical sense without at least
implicit reference to a prior notion of ‘the global’. Indeed, if we see the history of ‘globalization’ as including the emergence of the modern world-system in the 16th century, the colonial expansion of Europe into other territories was itself responsible for marking some persons as ‘indigenes’ in the first place. In the contemporary period, the active construction and representation of indigeneity implicitly relates, reads, responds, and reacts to processes of globalization (see Robertson 1992:46). Moreover, as Friedman (1994:199) frames it, we can witness the extent to which the “heightened representability of the fourth world peoples” is a “global process in social terms”. Giddens (1990:5, 64) and Robertson (1992:130) both argue that globalization, beyond observable relations of interdependence, involves local and personal contexts of social experience being transformed through what Giddens highlights as social action at a distance, which is complemented by Robertson’s thesis that contemporary concerns with tradition and indigeneity largely rest on “globally diffused ideas”. In addition, Kottak and Colson argue that what Meyer Fortes called “the field of social relations”, meaning the “range of social relations, in time and space”, is a range that is now international (1994:396). The Internet itself plays a central role in enabling the global diffusion of ideas of indigeneity whilst stretching the communicative dimension of social relations across time and space.

While thus far we have analyzed indigeneity as emerging out of, and responding to, globalization, I would also argue that we can speak of the globalization of indigeneity itself. Whether indigeneity has been globalized or simply internationalized is a problematic question. Friedman (1999:1) argues that since the mid-1970s “there has been a massive increase in the activities of indigenous minorities in the world” and “their struggles have become global news and they have entered numerous global organizations so that they have become an international presence” (emphasis added). Yet, he argues that this “does not mean that they have been globalized” (Friedman 1999:1). Given Friedman’s own reliance on the term “global” when describing this phenomenon, the distinction he then raises between that and “international” seems unclear. At other times, Friedman has argued, “Fourth World movements have become a global phenomenon, institutionalized via United Nations organs such as the World Council of Indigenous Peoples” (Friedman n.d., also Friedman 1994:199). The main question would then seem to be: How internationalized does something have to become before it can be seen to be globalized? I would interject here that when we factor cyberspace into our considerations the question no longer seems relevant, as indigeneity, projected through the Internet, is itself global, however unevenly spread.

The question of ‘globalized indigeneity’, to the extent that one can meaningfully speak of this, represents an important paradox of indigeneity: seemingly free floating whilst emphasizing local rootedness. I suggest that the globalized spread of motifs, practices, products, ideologies, cosmologies, organizations, media and support networks of indigeneity, especially on the Internet, have led to the construction of indigeneity as a macro phenomenon, lifted from the confines of any one location, and seemingly applicable to any other location. At this level, we are then speaking of an indigenous macro-community that is trans-local and constitutes a virtual meta-indigeneity. Indeed we might speak of a ‘virtual’ indigeneity as in the sense of “being both related to and increasingly ‘disconnected’ from its formal referent” (Geschiere & Meyer 1998:606), that ‘formal referent’ previously seen as confined to distinct physical localities. We may thus be able to speak of interchangeable ‘local platforms’ and adaptable globalized meanings, motifs, and so forth, ultimately leading to a situation where the network is the indigene.[5] In this regard, it is important to underscore the extent to which the symbols and discourses of indigenous groups in one part of the world can and do impact the symbols and discourses of indigenous groups in another part of the world, especially on the Internet. On the other hand, this transmission and transference is not one that is multilateral in the case of Caribbean indigeneity, where North American Indian labels, motifs, and representations influence contemporary articulations of Caribbean indigeneity rather than vice versa.

James Clifford speaks of the globalization of indigeneity using a “diaspora” metaphor. Noting the
second part of the paradox above (local rootedness) he observes that, “tribal or ‘Fourth World’ assertions of sovereignty and ‘first nationhood’ do not feature histories of travel and settlement, though these may be part of the indigenous historical experience. They stress continuity of habitation, aboriginality, and often a ‘natural’ connection to the land” (Clifford 1994:308). Noting the first part of the paradox (transnationalism, extra locality), he states:

the kinds of transnational alliances currently being forged by Fourth World peoples contain diasporic elements. United by similar claims to ‘firstness’ on the land and by common histories of decimation and marginality, these alliances often deploy diasporic visions of return to an original place—a land commonly articulated in visions of nature, divinity, mother earth, and the ancestors. [Clifford 1994:309]

Thus, “in claiming both autochthony and a specific, transregional worldliness, new tribal forms bypass an opposition between rootedness and displacement” (Clifford 1994:309). As I have been arguing here, ‘Internet indigeneity’ transcends this dichotomy between rootedness and transnationalism.

There is a further paradox to be considered along the lines of structure and agency. Groups such as the SRCC, when viewed primarily in a local context, appear to demonstrate considerable agency in pursuing and affirming their international connections with other indigenous bodies. Yet, Caribbean Amerindian organizations are still largely peripheral to the globalization of indigeneity and continue to act as takers of metropolitan trends rather than makers of new global trends. For these organizations, the North American Indian-led international ‘resurgence’ of indigenous politics and motifs acts as both an inspiration, a fund of materials that can be drawn upon, and the standard by which one’s group is to be measured. Indeed, it seems that internationally broadcast news from the United States, Canada and Brazil relating to Native Americans, First Nations and Amazonian tribes may well have acted as a catalyst and as a paradigm for others to follow (see Conklin 1997:712-713). I would argue that the U.S., Canada, and Brazil are most likely the symbolic core of internationalized paradigms of indigeneity, providing perhaps a disproportionate amount of the motifs of indigeneity, the emblematic struggles, and the trademark representations of ‘indigenous issues’. As we shall see, this has direct implication for online representations of Caribbean indigeneity.

In the final analysis, the processes discussed in this paper show ‘the local’ to be ‘multi-sited’ within itself, that is, composed of a series of global currents, in contrast with Marcus’ notion of multiple sites as bounded geographic entities that exist ontologically apart from one another (see Marcus 1995, 1986). This paper also outlines actors, processes and practices that demonstrate the “production of locality” (Appadurai 1996:178) as an inherent feature of the cultural globalization process. In this case the local is produced, in part, with globalized resources. Another way of seeing this is as a dialectic between global ‘flux’ and the quest for an orientational ‘fix’, or, as the tension between global flows and attempts at closure, to reaffirm boundaries and identities (Geschiere & Meyer 1998:602-603). Even in the case where North American Indian representations shape the articulation of Caribbean indigeneity on the Internet, we see an appropriation of symbols and motifs pertaining to the former under the heading of the latter.

**Offline Indigenes: Globalizing Caribbean Amerindians**

Within the confines of this paper, I can present only a brief introduction to the Santa Rosa
Carib Community (SRCC) in the Borough of Arima, Trinidad. The SRCC is a formal organization that was incorporated as a limited liability company in 1976, in order to apply for a state land grant. SRCC documents emphasize that the group’s immediate needs are: (1) “recognition by society and government as a legitimate cultural sector”; (2) “research to clarify their cultural traditions and the issue of their lands”; and, (3) “support from appropriate institutions in their perceived need areas”. Since the 1970s, what was previously a group of inter-married families who were locally known as “Caribs” and who worked in preparing Arima’s annual Santa Rosa Festival, came under the leadership of individuals such as Bharath who progressively steered the group in the direction of greater formalization, bureaucratization, politicization and “cultural revival”.

Gaining greater visibility has been a key issue for SRCC leaders in their quest to affirm their value in terms of having “contributed to the national cultural foundation” and to gain recognition of this value. Historically, a number of factors have impeded their acquiring a higher public profile within Trinidad. One of these stems from their being fixed in Arima, as a local group, instead of leading or forming part of a national movement of re-identification with Amerindian ancestry. Secondly, the group itself is very small, with the core of the SRCC consisting of roughly only 30 people. Thirdly, SRCC members do not stand out as physically distinctive when compared with other Trinidadians. This is critical in a society such as Trinidad to the extent that racialized notions of ethnicity have long been dominant. In other words, the long-held conviction is that ‘extinction’ can occur via miscegenation (see Forte 2001a:123-127, 304-308), and thus the only “real Caribs” are the “pure Caribs” who also happen to be “dead Caribs”. As Yelvington (1995:142) observed, while some degree of choice of ethnic identification is possible in Trinidad, there are serious sanctions for “pretending to be what you are not”, or for being seen as engaged in pretense. Indeed, the SRCC’s visible association with an array of international indigenous groups who frequently exercise a presence on the ground in Trinidad, helps to offset these potential sanctions against individuals who locally might otherwise be seen as primarily ‘not pure’ or ‘not real Amerindians’. While the survival of Amerindians may not be the dominant narrative in Trinidad, what is more commonly or easily accepted is the notion that the society as a whole has inherited some “Amerindian cultural heritage” (Forte 2001a:280-299). Thus SRCC leaders and spokespersons work on two fronts: (1) gaining recognition as “true Amerindians” from other peoples and organizations whose indigenous identity is not questioned locally; and, (2) in promoting themselves as the keepers of traditions that mark that “Amerindian cultural heritage” that has putatively shaped the wider “national culture” where this is seen to exist.

With respect to promoting “Carib traditions”, amongst the goals of the SRCC, “maintenance” and “revival” are the two most important objectives, in the words of its key brokers. The main “retained traditions” to be maintained come under the headings of food (cassava processing), house building, handicrafts and the Santa Rosa Festival, and “traditional” or “bush” medicine to some extent. Traditions to be revived include: the Carib language and weaving using a variety of local palms that are still not used in their current weaving.

The project of articulating, enacting and displaying the “Amerindian cultural heritage” can also become fused with seeking recognition and identity-validating associations with indigenous groups abroad. “Revival”, as SRCC leaders use the term, can blend in with their concept of “retreival” which entails instituting traditions learned from historical and ethnographic texts, or reacquiring from elsewhere in the Caribbean and South America those traditions in place in contemporary indigenous communities. The process of reacquisition entails what they call “cultural interchange” between themselves and these other communities. SRCC brokers define cultural retrieval as the process of rediscovering, re-learning and practicing “the ancient ways”, including language, religious practices, and traditional costume. Cultural
interchange involves the process of acquiring indigenous traditions (that they have ‘lost’, as Bharath says) from other Amerindian communities that are seen as still practicing them, and this involves considerable networking on the international front.

By associating themselves with “resurgent” and “established” indigenous groups elsewhere in the Caribbean and the Americas, and in drawing on their symbolic resources, this has helped SRCC members to enhance their own identity and legitimacy as “indigenous” at the local level (cf. Mato 2000:352). SRCC leaders thus actively engage a regional Caribbean and international network of indigenous organizations and communities, and this interaction heightens their value and legitimacy locally. Owing to the SRCC’s international connections, their resulting status is heightened locally especially in an outward-oriented society such as Trinidad’s that values foreign appreciation, global exposure, and international connections as prestigious forms of validation. Thus the dissemination within Trinidad of metropolitan (i.e., European and North American) and wider international valorizations of the indigenous further bolsters the value of indigeneity at the national level. That a range of international organizations, such as the Organization of American States, the U.N.’s World Intellectual Property Organization, UNESCO, and indigenous organizations such as Canada’s Assembly of First Nations, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, have all worked with the SRCC in some capacity at some time, only serves to heighten the profile of the group within the national politics of cultural value, and, the cultural politics of national value. It is difficult to overstate the depth and range of powerful affirmations of the importance of indigenous peoples as promoted in various international media over the decades, added to the growing visual association between celebrities, prominent world leaders and Amerindian images as presented in international news reports that are usually recycled in Trinidian media or presented directly via cable television, the Internet, and in locally televised news. Thus the benefits of being visibly associated with “First Nations” in Canada, for example, aids them in obtaining greater local visibility, credibility and recognition as indigenous. This feedback from global to local is the offline equivalent of the V.E.R.A.city loop that I identified in Figure1.

International exchange relationships thus become a central part of the local “recovery” of Amerindian traditions. Moreover, they are a source of validation. As one of the SRCC brokers wrote, in telling terms: “While the members of the SRCC are striving for recognition by the nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, they are accepted by all true Amerindians from the Mohawk council of tribal people of Canada and the United States, to the Carib Community of Dominica” (Almarales 1994:34, emphasis added). Almarales further emphasized: “They [SRCC members] are recognized as true Amerindian descendants outside Trinidad and Tobago” (1994:55).[7] In other words, how their identification as indigenous is developed and defined is, in part, in and through this internationalized network. The recent adoption by the SRCC of the “First Nations” designation is a trademark of this internationally networked sense of indigeneity. The concept of cultural interchange also implies, within reasonable limits, a network where local platforms are more or less interchangeable. The principle at work seems to be that what is “indigenous” over there can be “indigenous” here and maybe “indigenous” everywhere. As a result, the customs, costumes, and ceremonial practices of North American Indians have been adapted to some extent, added to personal links and visits to Seminole communities in the U.S., and contacts with Canadian First Nations. The development of the Smoke Ceremony in the SRCC reflects the manner in which they have become plugged into the offline world of internationalized indigeneity (see Porte 1998-1999b, 1998; Los Niños del Mundo 1999-2001b).

Apart from understanding what the Internet is and how it works, “going online” posed no problems to SRCC leaders who in fact welcomed the opportunity. As a “hi-tech” instrument that pertains to an elite, the Internet can and does acquire a certain level of social prestige in Trinidad, at least as far as my
informants seemed to indicate. In the case of Cristo Adonis, shaman of the SRCC and lead vocalist in an SRCC-affiliated band, *Los Niños del Mundo*, having such visibility on the Internet even inspired some to comment, perhaps enviously, that having a Website must mean that one is a “big man”—especially when we consider the skewed distribution of Internet access in Trinidad as I pointed out earlier. The fact that other Caribbean Amerindian groups already had Websites produced a certain “demonstration effect” as well, and the facility of having Websites designed and launched on their behalf only added to the value of undertaking an online presence. In having an online presence, the SRCC would thus achieve greater visibility (see TTWD 2001), at the local level (with many Trinidadian Internet users apparently keen to survey the range and types of Websites representing Trinidad), and especially among privileged members of the middle and upper classes with Internet access and with the resources that render them prime candidates as prospective patrons in the eyes of SRCC brokers. For their part, SRCC members do not, as a group or as individuals, even own a computer, and some cannot afford to have telephone connections. On the other hand, not even this helped to insulate them from the Internet, as some SRCC members received “email mail downloads” from the Internet, in the form of printed packages of Web-based materials mailed to them from friends in the U.S. As I mentioned, I acted as the SRCC’s ‘cyberbroker’. I doubt that had I not involved myself in this manner that the SRCC would not have gained an online presence, and, indeed, one SRCC-affiliated broker has since launched a Website for a new group to have emerged from the SRCC (Stollmeyer 2000). The Websites that I helped to produce (SRCC 1998-2001; Los Niños del Mundo 1999-2001a) required research in advance, on my part, sitting down and discussing what should be shown and how, what should be said or not, and what the scope and goals of the sites should be. As such, the Websites represent collaborative writing exercises, emerging from meetings, conversations, and interviews.

The desire for greater visibility and recognition produces a parallel between the offline practice of the SRCC and the online practice of U.S.-based Taino groups. Much of my research with such groups occurred online: participation in listservs, e-mail interviews, and content analysis of Websites. The methodological problem that is posed here lies in the dangers inherent to reading backwards from online to offline motivations and organization. What I can do, with some margin of ‘safety’, is to outline here who the key actors are, the main stated intents of individuals, the idiom they use in self-representation, and the stated purposes of the organizations that they have formed. Before proceeding further, we should bear in mind that my online focus on Taino groups is not meant to imply that their existence or cultural practice as Taino groups only occurs online. From their own Websites one can see photographs of their participation in various festivals, Pow Wows, dances, prayer meetings, family gatherings, and arts and crafts exhibitions. Of course, these are snapshots of particular moments, capturing the fleeting scenes of a day’s activity. Yet, suddenly, they achieve permanence on the Internet, restructured in ways that Webmasters manage and edit, often with the implicit attempt of graphically inserting those shown, into dominant and symbolically powerful streams of globalized representations of indigeneity.

There are at least five categories of online forms of Taino representation and site ownership. The first category consists of personal homepages, such as Valery ‘Nanturey’ Vargas-Stehney’s (2001) *Bohio Bajacu: Taino Indian Website*, an almost ‘classical’ personal page of the kind that was once prevalent in the early years of the Internet. On that site Vargas-Stehney states, in language that is representative of that found on most Taino sites: “My name is Nanaturey, short for Inaruri Guá Yuke Turey, (Valiant Woman from the White Earth’s Sky)….I am India Taina Boricua, Taino Indian Woman from the Island of Boriken, from the Tribes of Canobanas and Bayamon. I have always known about my Taino roots. My family is strong with the traditions of my Ancestors”. Another such site belongs to Bobby Gonzalez (2001), designed primarily as a resume type of site designed to announce himself as a “Native American Taino” lecturer, storyteller, poet,
active in the Native American cultural scene. The second category of Taino Websites consists of "family" sites, often just personal homepages writ larger. One example of this is Baramaya (2001), describing itself as a group of families, gathered to restore a village and chiefdom recorded in the colonial chronicles of Puerto Rico, with members claiming origins in that part of Puerto Rico. Another example is Maisiti (2001), which also describes itself as a community of Taino families dedicated to cultivating Taino family life. Loosely fitting within this second category is Coqui’s Village (Coqui 2001) an online virtual ‘village’ of Taino organizations’ Websites and Taino businesses, including groups such as Maisiti.

Taino arts and crafts Websites form the third category. One prominent example is Presencia Taina (2001a, 2001b), showcasing what it promotes as Taino arts, crafts, and dance. One branch of Presencia Taina states in terms of its purposes and activities offline:

Our Taino projects serve the Caribbean indigenous community as well as other indigenous communities. To date, we have brought our programs to many places: elementary schools and universities, public and private institutions, parks and recreational facilities and public and private self help organizations. We service the old along with the young. The majority of our constituents come from low-income neighborhoods and communities that receive very little contact with the artistic cultural educational circles. We introduce these elements that have otherwise separated from each other to become whole once again. The response from these participants has been overwhelming, with an increased demand for our services. [Presencia Taina 2001b]

Another site is that of Biaraku (2001), describing itself as a “Taino Cultural Interest Group” and featuring a range of artistic creations such as sculptures, paintings and a wide array of poetry with Taino themes. In the case of Biaraku, as with Coqui’s Village above, it is unclear how many people are behind the online representation, or who they are specifically.

The fourth category of sites consists of those that can be loosely called “informational”, meaning that they do not neatly fit into any of the previous categories and represent an attempt to simply provide what the site owners see as educational information. One example in this category is Taino Ancestry Legacy Keepers, Inc. (TALK 2000) which states that it is “a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1998”, whose mission is, “to maintain Taino legacies by educating, informing and fostering a positive image to the general public on Taino ancestry, history, culture, historical sites and sacred ceremonial grounds by means of public forums, training sessions and conferences as well as publications and electronic means”, and it thus operates a “Taino Education Center” online. TALK also states that it is part of “Tanama Taino Yukayeke”[8], what it calls, “a tribal unit which is dedicated to the spiritual needs of our communities”, and to, “the preservation and promotion of awareness of the Taino culture and the honoring of our ancestors”. Biaraku, above, would also fit into this category.

The fifth category, and by far the most visibly dominant of Taino Websites, comprises all those bodies that describe themselves as tribes, nations, confederations, or governments. The Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation (JTTN) is perhaps the most prominent online, in terms of traffic to its Website, links to its pages from a wide array of institutions, the number of pages that it maintains and its active online networking. The JTTN (2001) Website announces the body as a “Government”, and states that this, “tribal web site is a humble tribute to our honored Taino ancestor Cacique Orocobix (Principal Chief, Remembrance of the First Mountain) of the tribe of Jatibonicu and its Taino people. We of the Jatibonicu tribe are known as
the ‘Great People of the Sacred High Waters’”. Again, it is difficult to ascertain the size of the group or where it is principally based (the JTTN says that is based in New Jersey and Puerto Rico). Indeed, when asked in an interview about the number of members, the head of the JTTN, Cacique (Chief) Pedro Guanikeyu Torres answered: “We maybe number 300, 3,000 or 30,000. At this point I can only say that we are an ethnic indigenous people that number in the thousands and that we are still growing as people are still returning back into the Taino family circle” (Vázquez 2001). Primarily, the JTTN seems motivated to gain recognition of Taino survival as such, and formal recognition of itself as a representative body—as Torres explained: “We seek to obtain the full Federal and State recognition and mutual respect between our common Governments in Puerto Rico and in the United States” (see Vázquez 2001). The JTTN testifies to having received the recognition of the State of New Jersey, as well as producing certificates conferred by the U.S. Census Bureau indicating, apparently, forms of indirect or implicit recognition (JTTN 2001). Pedro Torres adds that the JTTN is “seeking sovereignty as a Taino tribal nation within our Boriken (Puerto Rico) territorial homeland”.

Based in The Bronx, New York, the Taino Turabo Aymaco Tribe of Boriken (TTAT 200) describes itself as a “Taino Native American Indian Tribe” and states that it is “the modern-day revival of the ancient Taino Native American Indian Tribe of the regions of Turabo Aymaco”. The spokesperson for the Turabo Aymaco Tribe, José ‘TureyCu’ Lopez, states on the Website that the motivation behind its members coming together is “for the sole purpose of genealogical research, maintaining and upholding Taino ancestral ways, and to educate each other about Taino history”. There is no indication of the number of members and little about the history of the group.

The Ciboney Tribe, based in Florida, has an unstated membership size that consists mostly of middle and upper class ‘white’ Cubans. The group states on its site (Ciboney 2001) that its mission is “promoting [the] art and cultural heritage of the indigenous people of Cuba”. A previous version of the Website, which was still available in early 2000, featured photos of members and outlines of how they were organized according to certain clans, e.g., “the Lobster clan”, but graphically less ‘tribal’ pages have replaced these previous representations, with a move towards greater anonymity. None of the Puerto Rican Taino groups online has any overt relationship with the Florida-based Ciboney group.

The United Confederation of Taino People (see UCTP 2001), based in New York, was formed in 1993 as an attempt to unite the disparate and often competing Taino groups, and is headed by Roberto ‘Mucaro’ Borrero (see Borrero 1999). On its site, the UCTP does not indicate its membership size, but does list several chapters across the Caribbean region and Hawaii. The UCTP, backed up by a letter from SRCC President Bharath that has been reproduced online, also represents Trinidad’s SRCC abroad. The UCTP has also become active in on a number of fronts: anti-globalization protests; in an online and offline campaign to obtain the revocation of the 1493 Papal Bull Inter Caetera; and, in various ceremonies held in New York to commemorate the annual United Nations International Day for the World’s Indigenous People held on 09 August. The UCTP also publishes The Voice of the Taino People.

In a manner that parallels the Trinidad SRCC’s quest for greater public association with indigenous groups in Dominica, Guyana, Canada and the U.S., Taino groups have also been active in the internationalizing aspect of the revival of Caribbean indigeneity. In their offline practice, Taino groups have attempted to insert themselves within wider currents of internationally recognized currents of indigeneity. As Dávila (1999:25) explains, Taino groups and associations “have tended to conceptualize themselves not so much in nationalist as in diasporic terms”, which calls to mind Clifford’s (1994) argument of the quasi-diasporic nature of internationalized indigenous organization. In addition, Dávila found that most of the Taino revivalists were either born or raised in the U.S., with most residing there,
and it was in the U.S. that “most of the Tainos recouped their indigenous identity...in some cases directly instilled by experiences in the United States” (1999:19). The Native American movement played a key role, in ways that parallel the Canadian First Nations presence in the Caribbean. Many of today’s U.S.-based Tainos had experiences such as working on Native American publications, serving as translators to Central and South American indigenous delegations to the United Nations, participating in Native American Pow-Wows and other activities (Dávila 1999:19). Taíno organizations have also received the backing of Canada’s Assembly of First Nations in seeking to have decrees promulgated by the Spanish Crown to protect the indigenes of Hispaniola accepted as valid treaties by the United Nations (see Barreiro & Laraque 1998).

**Online N-digenes: Electronically Generated ‘Revival’**

As I have been arguing thus far, there is an important and dynamic relationship between the offline and the online dimensions of cultural practice. I suggest that online practices of self-representation are a vital facet of offline politics, shaped by them and shaping them in their turn. While we might then agree with the statement that, “every set of facts in virtual reality...is shadowed by a second, complicating set: the ‘real-life’ facts” (Kling 1996:439), this formulation remains incomplete. While realities are being constructed and disseminated on the Internet that have not yet taken root on the ground—i.e., a sovereign Taíno government—it is important to recognize the possibility of the ‘real-life facts on the ground’ being reshaped and informed by electronically-generated realities.

It is certainly the case that Internet practice is of value to those that have undertaken it—indeed, as their engagement with the Internet is not a ‘given’ that we can take for granted, the fact that it occurs must indicate that it is viewed by activists and brokers as a valuable and potentially efficacious medium compared with previously more restricted modes of self-representation. Many of the groups and individuals in question try to achieve online what is substantially more difficult to achieve offline, that is, wider dissemination and greater recognition of the contemporary presence of Caribbean indigenes. It is also possible that what is asserted online is a hypercorrection for that which is underrepresented offline. The process may entail the construction of a virtual indigene resulting in an equivalent to that which Alcida Ramos called the “hyperreal Indian” (1994:161), an ‘Indian’ that is over constructed and reified. The Internet is a medium that enables heavy presentation—for example, many of the Taíno sites are heavy in terms of beautification and elaborate appearance: large and vibrant graphics heavy with depictions of ‘traditional wear’ and various forms of plumage; petroglyphic symbols; ‘mood music’ (chants, songs, nature sounds), and, sky and starlight backgrounds in some cases. As has been widely observed in other areas of Internet culture, “individuals are disembodied and, in theory, unbound by the body’s constraints” (Doheny-Farina 1996:65), and can also ‘multiply’ themselves as a result, beyond scrutiny. In this vein, Doheny-Farina argues, “the World Wide Web...is primarily a graphics delivery system, a presentation medium masked as an interactive network. Deliberative rhetoric is defeated every time by image” (1996:79).

“We are not extinct” is, as I flagged at the outset, the leitmotif of most Taino Websites. A number of these sites (JTTN 2001; TALK 2000; Vázquez 2001) report or reproduce published DNA studies conducted by Juan Carlos Martínez Cruzado at the University of Puerto Rico (see DRLAS 2000) that suggest the genetic continuity of Taínos in Puerto Rico. Other sites (i.e., TTAT 2001) reproduce articles in the Puerto Rican press on this issue (i.e., Ramirez 2001a, 2001b). Numerous Taíno Websites also argue the case for Taíno cultural survival, suggesting that Amerindian
communities survived in remote mountain regions of Puerto Rico and Cuba, mixed into the rural peasant populations known as *jibaros* and *guajiros* respectively, or they speak of the survival of Amerindian customs (the making of cassava bread, for example), or about Amerindian stories told by grandmothers, while others simply emphasize their self-knowledge as Taino as being the result of spiritual revelations.

Thus, Vargas-Stehney (2001) declares “We The Taino Are Still here”. The Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation declares: “We the Taino people of Borikén are still here” (JTTN 2001). Likewise, Biaraku (2001) argues:

> In spite of the myth of “extinction”, we, the descendants of the Taino people, have managed to survive despite all odds. Although most of us are of mixed origins, many of us retain the knowledge of our indigenous identity as a family legacy, others are striving to reclaim it, and others are still unaware of their Taino heritage. A heritage that encompasses more than place names and derived vocabulary, but a distinct a way of life that has meaning for us in the present time.

Similarly, TALK (2000) stresses that though, “many of the Taino people died due to genocide, battles, illnesses and mass suicide to the point of extinction, as many have claimed”, they now have to claim this, "as untrue...Though the Taino culture has, to a great degree, been lost through assimilation, some folks ‘around the world’ still call themselves Taino, and have carried on some Taino customs and traditions including ceremonies”. The Turabo Aymaco Tribe emphasizes that it is, “the modern-day revival of the ancient Taino Native American Indian Tribe of the regions of Turabo Aymaco”, representing, “those Taino Native Americans who died, and fled their homelands during the massacre that came with the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas in 1492. Our tribe also represents those survivors and their descendants of the massacre” (TTAT 2001; cf. Torres 1996a). José ‘TureyCu’ Lopez, representing the Turabo Aymaco tribe, writes:

> I have been blessed with the high honor of restoring and breathing rebirth into the ancient Native American Taino Tribe of Aymaco, Borinken (Puerto Rico). Many will still declare that the Native American Taino Tribes of the Caribbean are extinct, but I, many scholars and others who know the real facts, know that this is a falsehood, perpetrated by those who do not want to see our Native American people once again thrive. Also I feel in my heart that if a person has the love of their ancestors in their heart and treasure their ways, then nothing is ever truly extinct. [Lopez 2001]

Pedro Torres of the Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation also writes:

> We as a Taino people must start writing to anyone who is presently authoring articles of misinformation about the extinction of our Taino people and to correct those who are promoting this kind of misinformation about our Nation. It is the responsibility of a people to justly defend their Taino national sovereignty. In this way putting to rest once and for all, the false rumors that we as a people are extinct. [Torres 1996b]

These perspectives on “Taino survival” are also being echoed and amplified across other Websites, as in the case of Richard Vázquez’s (2001) article in About.com, a fairly reputable and popular Web-based information resource. Vázquez tells readers in bold print, “the Caribbean Taino Indians have been considered extinct for
hundreds of years, yet they have always been with us”, and then adds:

History books and encyclopedias still refer to the Taino/Arawak people as the first tribe to be decimated by colonialism. It would be more appropriate to say that this was the first tribe to be ‘told’ they were extinct....Because the government does not recognize them or because they haven’t maintained a very public presence, we assume that their stories ended in our grade school textbooks saying they were conquered. While their governments and temples fell, the people remained and continued to influence our culture—and ancestry. [Vázquez 2001]

Torres, head of the JTTN (2001), is keen to take advantage of the kind of exposure offered in these instances, as a means of directly reaffirming and disseminating his own theses of Taino survival (as in Vázquez 2001), with little or no critical opposition registered.

Beyond assertions of survival, continuity, or reawakening, there is also a pronounced tendency among Taino Websites to immediately structure self-representation along the lines established in the dominant discourses of established North American Indian bodies. This graphically demonstrates the processes whereby newly established Taino groups read and sift through various globalized ideas, images and symbolic resources in order to define their indigeneity as ‘first nations’, which is itself a North American trope of indigeneity as Beckett (1996) argued. While the Internet allows Taino groups to project what they see as distinctly Taino and Caribbean aspects of Caribbean culture, especially in terms of iconography and material culture, and while the Internet may even help to strengthen the association between certain items and icons with ‘Taino identity’, in a manner that renders them emblematic of ‘authentic’ Taino identity, some see the Internet as inducing pressures to “merge, interact, and standardize” (Zellen 1998). Indeed, apart from their actual residence in the U.S., there are two interrelated forces accounting for the tendency of Taino groups to structure their online representations in terms evocative of politicized forms of North American indigeneity: (1) the fact that North American modes of representing indigeneity have achieved a certain prestige, respectability, and worldwide exposure, hence the presumed obvious benefits for more marginal groups to be associated with this paradoxical subaltern mainstream; (2) the need to make ‘Taino identity’ communicable and intelligible to a wider online public that may well be unfamiliar with Caribbean Amerindian histories and cultures.

Consciousness of the need for recognition by, and association with, North American indigenous bodies is represented in different ways by online Taino activists. This can range from something as simple as the otherwise counterintuitive listing of all Federally recognized Native American Indian tribes with contact details (TTAT 2001), to more explicit formulations of the need for Taino association with such bodies. For example, in an interview with the JTTN’s Pedro Torres, Vázquez (2001) asked: “How have you been received by the officially recognized tribes in the United States?” In response, Torres stated:

They have received us as brothers with open arms. We have signed some peace treaties and look forward to establishing formal diplomatic ties with other Federally recognized tribal nations. There is one thing that binds all Native American Indian people and that is our common indigenous blood that binds us all into a common struggle for the survival of our people. We are of many tribal nations yet we are but ONE American Indian Nation. [Vázquez 2001]

In order to insert themselves within more globalized and specifically North American patterns for representing indigeneity, and to gain direct and indirect recognition and legitimacy in the process, a number of Taino Internet specialists have been active in garnering online forms of recognition for Taino groups. One method, best exemplified by the active online networking of the JTTN’s Torres, is for Taino
groups to be incorporated in listings of Native American Websites. In a letter to United Native America (UNA 2000), addressed to Mike Graham, Torres states with reference to a petition for a U.S. national Native American holiday:

I believe that your petition does not cover the Taino Native American Indian people of the United States territory of Puerto Rico. We are the original people who greeted Christopher Columbus on October 12, 1492. Your petition covers the United States, Alaska and Hawaii and does not include the United States territory of Puerto Rico. Please add the US Territory of Puerto Rico to your petition as we who are Taino are also Native Americas.

Mike Graham answered, seemingly without reservations: “As founder of United Native America I fully agree with your request to add the Taino Indian Nation of Puerto Rico to the holiday petition. We have sent a letter to the online petition support team to make this change”. The outcomes of such online networking can be seen in various examples. A page of “Hopi Links” lists the JTTN in its Native American Resources page (see Hopi 2001), as well as the UCTP. Rocha (2001) lists the JTTN amongst its “Indian Nations” list. Elsewhere, the JTTN is also included in a listing of “USA Tribal Governments” (see NSCIA 2001). The JTTN is listed along with the UCTP on a Website under the title of “Native American Timeline” (Watson 2001).

In addition to asserting Taino survival and seeking recognition among Native American bodies, some Taino organizations also structure their online self-representations in terms of ‘sovereign tribe’, ‘nation’, and ‘government’, utilizing officialist discourse, and seeking to thereby achieve symbolic status as ‘Indian nations’ on par with Federally recognized bodies in the U.S., despite the lack of a land base, residential centers, or a significant mass of ‘citizens’. One example of this type of representation can be found in Barbados, with an organization called the Pan-Tribal Confederacy of Amerindian Tribal Nations, headed by Damon Gerard Corrie, who claims descent from Guyanese Arawak royalty (Corrie 2001). In an addition to language evocative of North American Indian confederacies and nations, we can also witness the appropriation of older anthropological notions of ‘tribe’ and ‘race’. In an e-mail interview, I asked Corrie what he meant by “tribal nation”, which he explained as follows: “A tribe is a group of families under a recognized chief and usually claiming a common ancestor. A nation is a people or race having a common descent, language, history, or political institutions. A tribal nation combines both” (Corrie 2000). Similarly, Torres (1996a) argued that, “the concept of nation comes from a people with the same common culture, race and beliefs”.

That there is a network of interlinked, mutually referring, Taino Websites utilizing a variety of shared symbols and building on the fact of each other's online presence, some might dispute whether they form an online 'community', a 'virtual' equivalent of the 'tribal nation' that is spoken of by Torres and Corrie above. The literature on electronic communities[9] is largely beyond the scope of this paper, apart from flagging certain key theoretical and methodological points. The first point requires that we move beyond rigid, idealized expectations of 'community' in terms of affective unity and social totality that seems to pervade much of the non-anthropological literature on electronic communities. For example, Kling (1996:426) observes that some analysts argue, "not every collection of people who happen to talk (or write) to each other form the sense of trust, mutual interest, and sustained commitments that automatically deserve to be labeled as communities" (emphasis added). Kling himself argues, "although highways connect places, they don’t always connect people in ways that build community" (1996:449). Others prefer to label online groupings as embodying special interests that can, at most, be labeled "lifestyle enclaves" that provide only a "sense of community" (Doheny-Farina 1996:50).[10] Others argue, still in critical terms, that computer networks can indeed foster 'community', via the fragmentation of knowledge that underlies the formation of specialized communities (Gregorian 1996:602). There is also research interest in the question
of electronic time-space compression that permits at least a simulacrum of offline interpersonal relations that some see as a critical part of ‘community’, with discussions organized along the lines of face-to-face (FTP) versus computer-mediated communication (CMC), “virtual reality” (VR) versus “real life” (RL). Some will argue that accessibility and velocity can compensate for the challenges posed to proximity and immediacy by the great distances involved in global communication. As some observe, the acceleration of communication entails increased synchronization (cf. Gleick 1999, and Rheingold 1993 on “Real Time Tribes”), while some argue that a shared electronic ‘place’ can substitute for a shared physical space (Adamic & Adar 2001).

I would argue that we need not let rigid definitions of ‘tribal nation’ and idealistic evaluations of the ‘true community’ impair our analysis of actual means and processes by which online Taino bodies form a collectivity, or a Webschaften. In the case of Taino networks on the Internet, we can delineate patterns of association and commonality in at least seven respects: (1) common interests (affirming Taino survival, seeking recognition as Tainos, association with Native American tribes); (2) related content (essays on Taino history and culture, information on archaeological sites, language resources; sometimes sites will appropriate content from other sites); (3) shared perspectives (exemplified by a shared idiom for expressing Taino indigeneity); (4) shared symbols (petroglyphic icons, zemis,[11] animal figures seen as sacred symbols in Taino cosmology); (5) boundaries (formed by sites cross-referencing each other for users, the granting of awards, and other typical examples being hyperlinks and ‘Webrings’); (6) mutual advantage (the legitimacy of each site bolstered by the fact that other such sites exist as well, thus rendering any one Taino site less of a ‘one-click wonder’); and, (7) regular exchange (electronic newsletters, e-mail petitions, mailing lists, listservs, newsgroups, message boards, chat rooms, and individual e-mail messages).

Stemming from these observations, I suggest that in doing an ethnography of such an online community one can document the growth and extent of the network by keeping track of these elements of the infrastructure and interaction. Over time, one should be able to develop a fairly clear idea of a particular constituency, its predominant interests, and its geographic concentration(s). In addition, one might be able to at least impressionistically gauge the intensity of the interactions, and the value the network holds for its members (see Porte 2001c).

Of course, there is no gainsaying that Taino organizations have become almost notorious in some circles for their intense rivalry and frequent bickering. Some of the Taino Websites (e.g. Vargas-Stehney 2001; TTAT 2001; JTTN 2001) explicitly refer to these intra-Taino conflicts, and in some cases we can also witness online forms of schism exemplified by the existence of two separate groups and sites under the title of Presencia Taina (2001a, 2001b). On the other hand, one could well argue that this competition demonstrates solidarity at a higher order by indirectly confirming that the building of the Taino presence possesses considerable value to those involved, in other words, that being seen as Taino is something worth fighting for.

**Outcomes: Representability and Credibility**

The question we face at this stage is whether or not the heightened visibility of Tainos and Caribs online translates into the kind of heightened representability in the sense that Friedman (above) suggests. I argue that heightened representability can be gauged in three different ways: (1) by the number and type of other agents and institutions that take indigenous representation on board as if it were their own project; and/or, (2) the active presence of agents and institutions that openly support, validate and
extend the content and purposes of particular indigenous representations; and/or, (3) the wider circulation of particular representations, within a context of increased recognition and respect for particular representations.

There are various examples of how Taino and Carib organizations and sites have been endorsed and validated in a manner that has heightened their visibility. The Encyclopaedia Britannica online has an entry for “Taino” that states: “Although Taino culture was largely wiped out, groups of Taino survived colonization...In 1998 the United Confederation of Taino People was created as an umbrella organization for the affirmation and restoration of Taino culture, language, and religion”. Given that encyclopaedias are often the first (and perhaps last) research resource used by young students and general members of the public, it is significant to find such validation of the UCTP. In addition, I recall that the first time I learned of the Jatibonicu Taino Tribal Nation was via the Website of the Discovery Channel which had an impressive array of pages devoted to an archaeological expedition centred on Taino history, but with added links to the JTTN as an apparently legitimate and valuable source of information from “Today’s Tainos”.

In the case of the Santa Rosa Carib Community of Trinidad, their online presence has led, very quickly, to greater online appreciation and interest, with some offline translations. Given the SRCC’s interest in achieving greater recognition and material rewards for their role in maintaining and promoting what they see as key indigenous traditions and rituals, it is important that a number of tourist oriented Websites have appeared in the last two years that feature the SRCC. The Trinidad Tourist Board, in conjunction with Trinidad’s national airline, British West Indian Airways, advertises the Santa Rosa Festival in Arima as a celebration of the town’s “first peoples” (BWIA 2000). A tour package offering “six days of birding in Trinidad and Tobago” features “visits to Amerindian communities” in its itinerary (Earthfoot 2001). Other tourist sites, also feature Arima and its Carib Community as an attraction in various tour packages (MEP 2001, EHI 2001, Permenter & Bigley 2001). AmerindianTrail.com (Marchock 2001) is an eco-tourist and cultural-tourist site that is almost exclusively devoted to showcasing the SRCC.

In addition to tourist interest, there has also been greater interest expressed by a number of academic researchers in the U.S., Canada, and U.K., with at least three graduate students undertaking, or planning to undertake, fieldwork with the SRCC for degrees in anthropology. University students working on research papers, added to numerous students at the secondary school level in the U.S. have also sought further information about the SRCC after encountering Websites on the SRCC. One freelance photographer, Marisol Villanueva, who learned of the SRCC via the Internet, visited Arima and produced a series of photographs to be displayed as part of a special exhibition at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York to be held in 2002. Individuals working on cookbooks, calendars, books on crafts, and school texts have also contacted the SRCC via e-mail after visiting their Websites in order to seek their inputs.

Trinidadian media outlets that also have an online presence, such as The Trinidad Guardian and The Daily Express, have posted archives of their articles on the SRCC on the Internet, further adding to their wider visibility. The National Library of Trinidad, which had an online presence even before it had begun actual physical construction, features various articles on the SRCC as well (see NALIS 2001). In addition, the entry for Trinidad and Tobago in the Encyclopaedia Britannica online begins with mention of today’s Caribs of Arima.

The two sites representing the SRCC (SRCC 1998-2001; Los Niños del Mundo 1999-2001a) have received several thousand visitors, several dozen e-mail messages, and several commercial propositions oriented toward events and services produced or offered by the SRCC and its members. Moreover, they have also acted as a beacon for various expressions of local and national pride among the Arimian and wider Trinidadian diaspora overseas. Indeed, numerous Trinidad sites operated by such individuals routinely feature links to
the SRCC. These are added to Trinidad-based sites with content on Trinidad’s Amerindians produced by local journalists such as Kim Johnson (2000), Pan Trinbago (2000) which is the country’s steelband organization, or by private individuals interested in presenting Trinidad’s history online (Bermúdez Negrón 2000-2001). I have surveyed the range of messages received by e-mail or posted on the SRCC sites. While as much as half of all the messages are genealogy-related, with numerous individuals either asserting their Carib ancestry (“my paternal grandmother belonged to the Carib tribe”) or wishing to research it further (“I am engaged in genealogical research of my mother’s family”), another large proportion of visitors consists of Arimians residing abroad, and the dominant thrust in the majority of messages is that of local and national pride in the Amerindians. Indeed, the number of such visitors claiming a Carib ancestry and/or expressing pride in the Carib heritage easily outnumbers the membership of the SRCC, pointing to the wider spread of this phenomenon. The following are some examples of these expressions: (1) “It is about time that the Caribs are recognized for their contribution to the island”. (2) “Hi, I am a Trinidadian, also a Carib descendent living in Oakland, California, U.S.A. I was surfing through the different sites and stumbled upon yours. Seeing the artifacts brought back a lot of memories”. (3) “Born and grew there in Calvary, Arima: Keep doing what you doing in enlightening people of the Carib people history in Trinidad”. (4) “I’ve been away from home for over 12 years now. I grew up in Sangre Grande, Toco, and Tunapuna. I am very, very proud to see that after all these years Trinidad, as a nation is coming to form and that the people who gave us the names of those homes we know so well are still there and that another generation will know that there is a Carib nation.”. (5) “This site not only took me back to my youth but also made me a bit homesick. I grew up with the Santa Rosa festival, it is part of who I am. Arima and the Carib Community are not mutually exclusive. You cannot separate one from the other. I am from a family of Parranderos and so proud to call Trinidad and in particular Arima…home!” (6) “My grandmother’s grandmother was Carib and I have cousins in Arima who are married to pure Carib Indians. We do have to keep our culture alive and there’s no better way to doing it than thru [sic] this medium. Although I now reside in the U.S. I know I can always browse home and my American friends/children can visit and experience what a diverse environment I was raised in”. (7) “I am a Trinidadian and lived in Arima. I attended Arima Girls RC School. I always attended the Santa Rosa Festival. Now that I am living in USA (Westchester), I miss the parang and the whole spirit of the festival. I am quite happy to see that the Caribs, natives of the island, is [sic] making headway i.e. in making other people see what they have to offer. (8) “May the ancestors guide and protect all the descendants of the indigenous peoples in Trinidad & Tobago”. Indeed, other studies in the U.S. have found that the number of people identifying with an indigenous heritage increased once Internet systems such as e-mail and Usenet newsgroups were put in place:

People claiming Indian heritage began populating the newsgroups and mailing lists. Many people used the Internet to raise questions concerning their personal and collective identities and to share their histories. Before the Internet, these histories were only accessible through restricted classified systems at university or public libraries. In other words, the information came home and in exchange, people started to share their own oral histories regarding their indigenous experiences. [Delgado-P. & Becker 1998]

Conclusions: Indigenous iScape

Here’s the Internet, a world controlled by no one, like a vast television station without
Questions of structure and agency come back to the fore when we try to delineate that electronic landscape, or *iScape*, within which indigeneity is constructed and expressed. Like Gleick above, Doheny-Farina argues, “the net levels hierarchies” given that it has become “so complex and decentralized that no power structure can control it” (1996:75, 76). Similarly, Kling (1996:447) argues that in contrast with the pre-Internet epoch when publishing houses, editors, and librarians acted as gatekeepers and curators, today instead, “almost any Internet account holder can set up shop as a publisher and bypass the institutional apparatus of publishers and librarians to reach a large potential readership”, thus enabling authors, such as Taino Webmasters for example, to reach potentially large audiences. Indeed, at one point I discovered that the Website of the JTTN alone, in operation since 1996, had received more than 500,000 unique visits. Whilst the agency of online brokers and Webmasters seems to be indisputably considerable, there are still constraints and restrictions that, fundamentally and ultimately, quietly work to determine who gets a say and who gets to hear what is being said.

The structural aspect of this *iScape* can be analyzed in basic technological terms, communication infrastructure, access, and the uneven distribution of the knowledge necessary to produce an online presence. These considerations allude to what has come to be popularly known as the “digital divide”. Oguibe (1996) argues that the Internet indeed represents a new frontier, as in a new dividing line between rich and poor, thus erecting yet another Manichean border even as “cyberist discourse” claims to have destroyed all frontiers. In addition to the fact that there is unequal global access to, and thus use of, the Internet, on the Internet itself certain agencies and institutions are able to exercise a more prominent presence than others, either due to custom or due to commerce. This observation is not based solely on recognizing the fact that corporations have the means to hire a substantial staff of Web technicians who can spend every day in marketing corporate websites, ensuring top rankings in search engine results, and paying to be promoted to the top of the list of various directories, as well as developing various software tricks that ensure maximum spread and the highest visibility on the Internet. Prestige garnered in the “real world” also works to ensure that certain sites are relied upon for “reliable” information more than others, such as encyclopaedias, recognized media outlets with considerable offline reputations, and so forth.

Moreover, there is a center-periphery tension within the online representation of indigeneity (cf. Delgado-P. & Becker 1998). The fact remains that there is far more information on the Internet about Caribbean Amerindians than there is by them. In addition, amongst the indigenous population of the Americas as a whole, there is differential representation on the Internet. If one looks at the dmoz.org directory listing for “Indigenous Peoples”, one immediately notices that there are as many as 2,000 Websites listed for indigenous peoples in North America, yet, South America, which has an Indigenous population that may be as much as several times larger than that of North America, has only about 18 Websites listed. The Caribbean is somewhat anomalous here, with almost 200 Websites listed. The anomaly of the Caribbean can thus be summed up: a smaller indigenous population than either North or South America, yet a higher per capita proportion of indigenous-related Internet sites. How could this be so? On the one hand, the Caribbean contains a number of middle-income countries, such as Trinidad and Barbados, with Trinidad experiencing two economic booms over the last thirty years and with a population that, by Caribbean standards, is relatively better off economically. The Caribbean has a large diaspora population resident in nearby North America; on the other hand, the fact remains that a larger proportion of Caribbean Amerindian Websites have been produced by Caribbean people resident in North America, such as Taino individuals based in New York. The Caribs of St. Vincent, most of whom live in conditions of serious poverty, do not have a
single site on the Internet, and were it not for their Garifuna comrades from Belize and residing in places such as New York, there might have been no mention of them at all on the Internet. Guyana, with one of the largest indigenous populations of the wider Caribbean, and as much as 500 times larger than Trinidad’s Caribs, has only a single Website belonging to any of its Amerindian peoples (Forte 2001b).

Recent economic developments are not very promising where the future of online individual agency is concerned. Some have referred to the supposed “dot.communism” of the Internet, where so much has been available gratis: free e-mail, free Web development tools, free Website hosting, and even free Internet access. However, this “free” culture, funded as it was on the hope of advertising revenues, is in a steep decline. As someone with intimate involvement in monitoring and cataloguing Taino Websites, I have witnessed the disappearance of several which were hosted for free. In broader terms, as more privileged non-indigenous persons in the core gain ascendency on the Internet, indigenous persons in the periphery risk being reduced to informants without agency (Delgado-P. & Becker 1998).

The challenge then is not so much that of the Internet threatening to ‘wipe out’ indigenous cultures, as much as it is one that does not permit access and thus voice for those indigenous cultures that cannot afford information technology and that have no training in how to use it. My aim in this paper has thus been to describe and analyze the means and processes by which Caribbean indigenes have been transformed into N-digenes, the limitations of these processes, as well as what are undeniably numerous successes. My expectation is that Internet will soon become (if it is not already the case) the frontline in the assertion of the survival and/or revival of Caribbean Amerindian identities.

About the Author
The author recently completed his PhD in Anthropology at Adelaide University (Australia), with a dissertation titled, “Re-Engineering Indigeneity: Cultural Brokerage, the Political Economy of Tradition, and the Santa Rosa Carib Community of Arima, Trinidad and Tobago”. He has presented several papers on this subject at international colloquia and has published related articles in Cultural Survival Quarterly as well as on the Internet in Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies and Kacike: The Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology. He is the founding editor of Kacike (http://www.kacike.org) as well as the Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink (http://www.centrelink.org), an Internet platform for Caribbean Amerindian communities and related educational resources managed by an international editorial board.

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This paper is a longer and substantially different version of one that is to appear in print in late 2002 under a different title, as part of a collection edited by Dr. Kyra Marie Landzelius titled, *Going Native on the Net: Indigenous Cyber Activism*, and to be published by Routledge. While this paper is twice as long as the print version, and thus contains materials and issues not covered by the shorter version, I am nonetheless thankful to the volume editor and Routledge for their assurance that no conflicts obtain.

[1] I also conducted ethnographic research in the Carib Reserve of Dominica during September 1998, with respect to relations between Dominica Caribs and the SRCC in Trinidad.

[2] By this distinction I mean that “reorganized” groups consist of those building on previous communal formations, yet reformulating, reinterpreting and reinventing those formations for contemporary purposes. By “new revivalist” I mean those groups that have been recently created, such as the many Taino groups formed in New York in the 1990s amongst members of the Puerto Rican diaspora who were not previously organized along the lines of indigenous identification. This distinction is not meant to obscure the fact that both such groups proclaim themselves to be engaged in ‘cultural revitalization’.

[3] For further information about the ODP, which bills itself as “the Republic of the Web” see: [http://dmoz.org/about.html](http://dmoz.org/about.html). For more information about my editorial role, see ODP (2001).

[4] Of course, answers to this question may turn out to be substantially more complicated. In the case of the Dominica Caribs, thanks to the efforts of various NGOs, representative bodies have in fact achieved some limited access to information technology, yet, the evidence suggests that this is being under utilized nevertheless. A German NGO remarked: “We continue to be dissatisfied with the level of contact with the Caribs. Despite all the advanced technological developments that aid communication this has remained a sticking point. Letter, fax, and e-mail exchange are often one-sided and can be drawn out over months. Despite new technology we continue to rely as before on personal contact” (Kalinago e.V. 2001b).

[5] Here I am adapting the Sun Microsystems’ motto—the Network is the Computer—and refers to a vision of computers as basically empty shells, or mere terminals, connected to a network that is the centralized and global source of ‘localized’ computing.

[6] Statistical breakdowns of Trinidad and Tobago’s multiethnic population show 39.5% as ‘African’, 40.3% as ‘East Indian’, 18.4% as ‘mixed’, 0.6% as ‘European’, and 1% as ‘other’ (USDoS 1998).

[7] Expressions of international support for the SRCC can come from as far away as Australia—an entry in the guest book of the Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink at (CAC 2001) read as follows: “I am of Dhauwurd
Wurrung heritage from country in south west Victoria, Australia. We here at home give our support to you our cousins across nyamat, to achieve your rightful places in today's society and to hang onto your culture. We all are still creating the Dreaming”.

[8] Yukayeke is commonly translated as “village” by these groups.

[9] There is a growing body of literature focused on the concept of communities ‘online’, albeit a focus that is bifurcated along the lines of: (1) electronic networks for communities ‘on the ground’, and, (2) ‘virtual’ communities that are formed entirely on the Internet. The first promised to bolster ‘geophysically’ situated demographic bodies, while some argue that the second substitutes for them altogether (cf. Jones 1995; Kling 1996:426; Lea 1992).

[10] Doheny-Farina explains: “lifestyle enclaves are segmental because they describe only parts of their members’ private lives—usually their behaviors of leisure and consumption—and celebrate the ‘narcissism of similarity’ through the common lifestyles of their members” (1996:50).

[11] Usually carved from wood or stone and not much bigger than can be held in a hand, these are seen as containing spirits and are often associated with shamans and chiefs, sometimes depicting skeletal yet fertile representations of shamans.