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Collective Construction of Identity in the Internet: Ethical Dimension and Intercultural Perspective

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Introduction

From the second half of the 20th century, after World War II, human civilization evolved with a new social, cultural and technological dynamics based on complex relations between different factors that changed substantially the frontiers established by modernity. This changes generated new representations, social practices and cultural links. Within this environment, information and communication technology gained a very important role.

The Internet, as technological and communication tool, is the most important symbol of these quick changes in the information age. It is a crucial part of the social environment of our lives and has caused enormous changes in our working practices, learning, living, and how we relate to others. The Internet forms a new atmosphere that is characteristic of the information age: Networks, connections, peer to peer communication, complexity and more velocity of the information flows (Castells 2001, 15-17).

There are several elements that explain the deep importance of the Internet in all fields of human activity; for instance, the use of public technologies, its decentralized nature and the anarchistic culture that was present from the beginning. The Internet is

overall a new way of communicating between equals. Through the Internet we identify the rise of a new global and social space. Within this space, millions of human beings from different social, cultural, political and economical contexts are brought together. It is a new kind of social exchange that affects, both directly and indirectly, a great part of the world population and is generating new ways of sociability and – what is fundamental in this contribution – new identity patterns.

In this context, there are communities that share practices, values and alternative vision of the world, totally opposite to the short, restricted and commercial vision of the *network society*. This vision is converting the Internet into a territory of an evident social complexity. Understanding the implications of organization patterns, exchanging information systems, values and beliefs, discourses, collective construction of identity and ethical and cultural dimension may contribute to gaining insight about conflicts and preoccupations at the beginning of the 21st century, a century with a social environment characterized by complexity.

Into this social and complex universe one interesting dimension arises, namely identity construction. In the context of the network society, identity is a result of a reflexive process of construction by the social actors and no longer limited by religious belief, race, nation, social class or place of residence.

Individuals stand in front of a large range of options and make conscious decisions about who they are and what they pretend to be. This process of identity construction has a social background and should be understood in the context of a key concept: *collective action pattern* (Contreras 2003, 26-27). New social movements create by using the Internet real laboratories of culture and generate alternative cultural codes. They also generate symbolic challenges to power.

This contribution aims at examining the process of collective construction of identity within the Internet, with special attention to the ethical dimension and intercultural perspective.

In the context of this chapter it is important to underline that the different theories related to social movements, collective action and collective identity are notions that arise mainly from Western epistemological and hermeneutic traditions.

Social Movements Theory

Academic research about social movements as a special sociological topic is a relatively new field. Before the 70s, social movements had been studied as part of the collective behavior phenomenon (Buechler 2000, 3), which is a fundamental concept of sociology. Three basic theories dominated the initial phase of investigation about social movements in the context of collective behavior: symbolic-interactionist, structural-functionalist and relative deprivation (Ayers 2001, 6).

The symbolic-interactionist theory argues that an individual defines his world symbolically and, in doing so, chooses a course of action according to these symbolic definitions. Within this process, interchanges of new attitudes and interpretations which are essential for the social action are produced (Buechler 2000, 21). The structural-functionalist theory affirms that, first of all, an existing structural condition provokes a collective behavior and makes it endure. After that, a social or structural tension generates a different collective behavior and, consequently, produces changes

in society (Buechler 2000, 25). The relative deprivation theory is based on the idea that reactions of a group of people in certain circumstances will depend on subjective comparisons (Walker/Smith 2002, 1).

In the 70s, a new theory for social movements investigations called *resource mobilization* appeared and became popular mainly in the USA. Its main thesis is that a group will be more strongly motivated in participating in a collective action if it has access to such resources as time, money, people, leadership and opportunities of recognition within the organization (Canel 2004).

Later, in the 80s, a theory of new social movements was developed in Europe as an answer to the resources mobilization paradigm. This theory is concerned with studies of culture and ideology as the basis for movement activity, which doesn't just reflect a certain social, economical, ethical, etc., status (Larana/Johnston/Gusfield 1994, 7).

Within the theory of new social movements, a concept of collective identity was developed to explain how and why individuals get connected to a social movement through a shared system of beliefs.

New Social Movements Theory

In order to explain properly the theory about new social movements it is very important to give a brief review of the postmodern context in which the topic is developed.

After World War II, postmodern debates were frequent in the intellectual, cultural, politic and social scene; for example, Philosophy, Art, Literature, Sociology, and Architecture. Occasionally, these postmodern perspectives produced new social and politic theories. One such case being the theory of new social movements.

However, there is actually no unified postmodern theory, or even a set of linked positions, that are clearly defined, rather a variety of coexisting theories with a diversity of postmodern positions. To clarify some essential aspects of the postmodern concept, it is fundamental to establish the differences between the modern and postmodern discourses (Featherstone 1988).

One relevant aspect is the distinction between modernity and postmodernity. The Modern Age is the historic period later to Middle Ages and its main characteristics are innovation, dynamism, the victory of reason as the principal element of the knowledge and society development. Other topics are the search for truth, the systematization of knowledge, the scientific, technological and industrial development, and in an advanced phase, the attempt to create political and social systems more democratic and equalitarian.

On the other hand, some theoreticians of postmodernity (Baudrillard, Lyotard, Harvey, Jameson, Vattimo) interpret the substantial changes and transformations as derived from technologies of information and communication, leading to globalization and new cultural and social models. They are producing postmodern social formations in an ongoing process that is conceived as an upper stage of capitalism.

This transition simultaneously produces an increase in cultural fragmentation, some changes in experience about space and time, and new models of experience, subjectivity and culture. Such circumstances provide the socio-economical and

cultural bases of the postmodern theory (Best/Kellner 1991, 1-4).

Three great revolutionary changes characterize the Modern and Postmodern age, namely:

- The Industrial Revolution as a result of an accumulative process of technological changes, allowing the transition of traditional rural societies into industrial societies producing deep problems of social equity.
- The Scientific-Technological Revolution, characterized by an intensive and accelerated increase in industrial production, whereby this tendency is more secure and experienced. However, this had repercussions on new social, political and cultural paradigms, democracy, equality and human rights becoming fundamental concepts in modern discourses (Lucas 2000, 15-27).
- The Informational Revolution as a process that is producing post-industrial social elements (also called postmodern elements or postmodern condition). This transition period from the industrial society into the information society (Lucas 2000), also referred to as the knowledge society or net society (Castells 1996), is characterized by some essential concepts such as world system, reflexivity and construction of symbolic codes (Tejerina 2004). In this context, the power and the strategic value of information are essential. The primordial aspects of this transition are the decrease of material production and the increase of information and cultural symbols (Melucci 1989, 45). In this third stage, postmodern tendencies are inserted.

Therefore, modern and postmodern societies cohabit: diverse cultural and social tendencies coexist and are interconnected into the same country or region according to more or less emphasis on the processes related with the power of information. The new social movements are characterized by a fluid and open organization, multi facet and heterogeneous participation with major attention focused on social rather than economical transformations. With regard to this point, Melucci (1996), following Habermas's concept of the colonization of the life-world (Habermas 2001), describes contemporary societies as highly differentiated systems that continue to make more investments in the creation of individual spaces of action. These are societies which promote individualization, self realization and autonomous construction of personal and collective identities but at the same time exert a strong control over the most private and intimate aspects of everyday life. In such a context, new social movements fight against state intrusion as well as the intrusion of economic forces into social life, defending the identity of individuals and their freedom to determine their private life against system manipulation. They defend, above all, their personal autonomy (Melucci 1985, 796).

Buechler (2000) makes a detailed analysis of some relevant topics concerning the new social movements:

- Contemporary collective action forms are generated in a socio historical specific context; in this sense, the new social movements respond to the peculiar characteristics of postmodern society.

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- The main motivations of new society movements aren't fundamentally derived from the structure of classes, but from other aspects, such as gender, sexual orientation, age, occupation or citizenship. Consequently, the social base of these movements is more complex and diffused.
 - A process of politicizing everyday life is notorious, that is why this tendency is converted into the principal motor of social and political action, basing itself above all, on the level of values, autonomy and democratization rather than on power, control or economic profit.
 - The new social movements do not usually have rigid or hierarchical structures, but rather represent cultural laboratories of open experiences which appear and disappear continuously. Indeed, the new social movements are organized, with major or minor emphasis, in relation to the specific affairs and struggles, and then disappear in the form of politicized subcultures coherent to the visions and values of the movement, to reappear in the next specific struggle in the form of organized actions and so on.
 - One very important aspect is the collective identity, characterized by the fluency and multiplicity of identities in the postmodern stage. Within such a context, the persons' ability to involve in a collective action is related to the qualities of the movements according to the definition of collective identity. It is deduced therefore that the social construction of collective identity constitutes an essential process of contemporary social activism.

From a cultural point of view, there is a continuous exploration of new identities, meanings, signs and symbols, whereas conventional methods are rejected. The new movements are primarily involved in aspects that affect the cultural production system (values, identity), as this is the area of major conflict in a society based on information. In their everyday confrontation with the system, which controls resources such as production, distribution and interchange, social movements are presented as the creators of social codes alternative to the dominant ones (Melucci 1989, 28-29).

Moreover, concepts like *global/local*, *complexity*, *fluency* and *network* are more and more frequently used to represent the new movements metaphorically in contemporary societies (Bauman, 2000).

There is no doubt that one notable characteristic of the new social movements is their *global/local* character, and the fact that they unite specific interests of localized areas and have big objectives which imply wide geographic zones and different cultures and societies. In the last years, the appearance of movements which are not strictly localized in one place, but are situated and developed in various places simultaneously, is more and more frequently testified. Thereby, the concept of *glocalization*, which designates the fact that the global is inseparable from the local, acquires a major role, as Castells (1996, 1997, 1998, 2001) has demonstrated through the analysis of multiple interconnections between the local and the global, and the mutual influence of the local on the global and *vice versa*.

Another essential attribute of postmodern society is *complexity*. It implies a dynamic society that is very far from equilibrium, where the processes are complex and

non linear and where the idea of centrality dilutes into a combination of contingent processes. These processes form part of the complexity, but are situated in different decentralized localizations (Chesters 2003). In this regard, Melucci (1989, 45), in his analysis of the new social movements, considers that those are a consequence of the transformation of industrial society into a complex information society. The fundamental features that Melucci analyzes in this transition are the decrease of material production and the increase of the production of information and cultural signs.

Another key characteristic of postmodern society is *fluency* and *liquidity*. The new social movements appear, disappear and reappear as waves, have turbulences, penetrate into multiple places both through great spaces and through tiny interstices. These movements are composed of a set of elements which combine persons, groups, technologies, and access to resources of information which connotes them as a characteristic near to viscosity. The new social movements act at different speed, their origin is imprecise, their punctual and definitive objective is impossible to detect, as they are in constant motion which is the very reason for their existence (Bauman 2000).

Also a key concept related to the new social movements is that of *networks*. It is evident that the new social movements consist of them. They are not rigid and static, but dynamic, defined by the very relation they are formed of, rather than by the elements they are built of, generating relatively stable and endurable relations. Parts of these networks are represented by persons, groups, technological equipments, instruments, information, and different types of resources. Taking this into account, these networks become a central element of the new social movements.

In such a context, the concept of *community networks*, becomes very important, as it corresponds to the new forms of association and collective action of the digital interconnected era. This is a generic term which defines different forms and practices that, through the use of the Internet, create the economical, political, social and cultural web of contemporary societies (Íñiguez 2003).

Collective Action and Collective Identity

Within the most relevant of Melucci's contributions to the study of the new social movements, the theoretical articulation of the concept of collective action should be emphasized. Melucci suggests an approach in which collective action is the result of purposes, resources and limits; an orientated and defined grouping of intentions constructed by means of social relations developed within a complex system. This system requires a certain equilibrium which can be obtained through a series of opportunities, obligations and alternatives. This system activates and strengthens itself as a form of giving sense and meaning to the singularity of *being together*, i.e., it constitutes the *We* for a common cause (Íñiguez 2003).

The principal features that can be identified in the processes of collective action are:

- Conflict, defined as the opposition between actors who compete for resources they both value

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- Solidarity, understood as the capacity of an actor to share a collective identity, i.e. to recognize himself and be recognized as part of the same social unit
 - Rupture of the limits of the system or the limits within which a system can vary without modifying its own structure

With these elements, Melucci defines »analytically« the new social movements as forms of collective action (a) based on solidarity, (b) compromised in a conflict, and (c) whose actions pretend the rupture of the system limits in which the action takes place (Melucci 1985, 794-816).

Within this analytical definition, the crucial element which explains why a collective actor appears is the one of *collective identity*.

The concept of *collective identity* allows the explanation of the mechanisms which motivate people to participate in groups of social movements. Collective identity is a process of social and psychological nature, which links individuals to a group through a series of interactions whose essential aspect is the social movement activity. Collective identity generates strong connections between the individuals and the group, so that the individuals involved have many common interests (Ayers 2001, 2).

Now, if the new social movements confront the system essentially for symbolic and cultural reasons, the very term of *social movement* proves inadequate. Instead, Melucci (1989) proposes the term *areas of movement*, as the processes which configure a collective identity take place in these areas. The areas mentioned are formed by *networks*, which are built by many dispersed groups, but are connected through the social interchanges, interlaced in everyday life and spreading their action in alternative models of cultural laboratories, essentially experimental and open (Rubio 2004).

It is in these areas or networks where the collective identity is formed, and where links necessary for the action appear, through the inversions that an individual makes to experiment and practice new cultural models, new forms of relation which provide alternative perspectives to world comprehension. This implies a novelty in the forms of organization of contemporary movements, their *auto-referential* character, i.e., the fact that they don't have an exclusively instrumental aim which has to do with the accomplishing of the objectives, but rather represent an aim by themselves. Given that the collective action is based on the cultural codes, the »form« of the movement is the message itself, a symbolic challenge to the dominant codes (Rubio 2004).

Therefore, the principal characteristics of these experimental models of collective action and identity are:

- a basic joint of shared definitions, i.e. common values and interests;
- a joint of markers of the borders which distinguish one social group or movement from the rest of society;
- a meditated process of conscious decisions, expressed at a level of cohesion which a group gets as a result of its experiences, values and shared opportunities
- between the members of the movement, permanent negotiations are realized, as well as the interactions between the private and public sphere;
- being part of various groups is permitted;

- the activity takes just a part of time and is rather brief;
- a condition for participation is the personal pledge and affective solidarity (Meluci 1994, 146).

Thereby, the collective identity as a process can also be understood as the network of active relations between the actors who interact, communicate, influence each other reciprocally, negotiate and decide. The structures of organization, the communicative channels and the technologies of communication, form substantial and inseparable parts of such a network of relations (Rubio 2004).

In such a context, there exists a series of resultant studies concerning a link between collective identity and the Internet. As a result, a crucial and each time more evident aspect emerges: The Internet has become a fundamental medium for the formation and action of the new social movements (Mele 1999, Myers 1994).

Collective Action and Identity in the Internet

Internet irruption as a new environment for social relation and interaction is primarily the basis for the emergence of new collective actors, social movements, repertoires of collective actions, and the generation of collective identities which build original scenery whose possible conditions can be found in what we know as *network society*. These dynamics convert the Internet into a very important laboratory of cultural, social and political experimentation which outlines and overtakes a part of what may soon become the prevailing model. In this emergence of new social actors in which some social movements are being transformed, the functioning of network and the intensive use of Internet is one of the most striking characteristics. Many of those are auto denominated as networks, or even constitute movements networks.

Castells (2001a) has studied this phenomenon with special attention and emphasizes the following characteristics:

- The major part of social and political movements of all the tendencies existing uses Internet as a privileged form of action, organization and communication.
- Nowadays, there is a crisis of traditionally structured organizations, such as parties or associations of directly political orientation, because of the appearance and development of more and more social actors from specific coalitions which concern concrete objectives. In general, there can be seen a big gap from the organized social movements to the network ones, which base themselves on the coalitions that have to do with values and projects. Internet is the organizing structure and the instrument of communication which permits the flexibility and the temporality of mobilization, but at the same time maintains a character of coordination and an approach capacity of this mobilization.
- The social movements of our society are each time more developed according to the cultural codes and values. There are still traditional reintegrating movements, but the most important ones – environmental, ecological, women, human rights – are the movements of values, i.e. the ones that depend overall on the capacity of

communication and the capacity of obtaining support and stimuli in this call for values, principles and ideas. In this context, Internet is essential as the instant transmission of ideas worldwide permits coalition and future development concerning the values.

- The power functions each time more in global networks, but people live, construct their values, their trenches of resistance and opposition in local societies. The problem here is how a local level can control the global one. Concerning this, Internet permits the articulation of the local alternative projects by means of global protests which finally land in some place, for instance, in Seattle, Washington, Prague, etc., but that are formed, organized and developed with the help of the Internet, i.e. global connection, local movements and local experiences. Internet is the global-local connection and represents a new form of mobilization in our society.

Thus, nowadays Internet is the organizing structure, the medium, the instrument of communication, the sufficient technology which provides new developments and sceneries for the collective action (Scott/Street 2000). In a changing world, as the one we live in, which is globalizing itself more and more each time, Internet is becoming a medium that permits spatial and temporal mobilization redefinition, maintaining at the same time the collective component of affirmation, coordination and focalization, which characterize the action of the social movements (Routledge 2000). This way, the dynamics implied in the contemporary collective action is presented in the same terms in which the Internet functions: the local/global articulation is the fundamental characteristic (O'Brien 2000).

Subsequently, a vital aspect which should be emphasized is that the communicative web, represented by Internet, creates a social web and favors new alternatives of resources and actions for the social movements. The communicative fluxes facilitated by Internet form new organizing dynamics and assist the appearance of social networks, with peculiar attributes of collective action and identity, which provide singularity to their reintegrations and let other movements and causes.

Finally, before studying different cases that illustrate the ethical dimension and intercultural perspective of collective construction of identity in Internet, is necessary to highlight that the concept of collective identity is not associated only with Internet, neither with the postmodern environment.

From an historic perspective, the related aspects with the formation of individual and collective identity are linked with the development of Modernity. The arising of the Modern Age allowed a new understanding of the social space as a social construction, relative and arbitrary, fully human and not as a product of nature. In this sense, the conformation of identities in traditional societies was based on the existing conditions, while the in modern societies are based on the obtained conditions and therefore, in the possibility of election that has as an ethical fundament, freedom of human being. In such social context, the individuals have changed its perspective from a world where identities were fixed, eternal and immutable to a universe where identities are the result of constant election, relative and mutable in time (Buechler 2000, 187-188).

In this perspective, is possible to affirm that the concept of collective identity is

simultaneously modern and postmodern. Therefore, such concept shares common attributes in both social formations. However, in the postmodern context, the collective construction of identity is more notable and related topics as identity, difference, alterity, multiculturalism, interculturality, politics of recognition, net society and relations between global and local, constitute essential analytic concepts in the postmodern discourse.

Ethical Dimension and Intercultural Perspective: Case Studies

To illustrate the aspects explained in the previous sections and to meditate about the ethical dimension and intercultural perspective, the following examples have been chosen:

- Another World is Possible Movement
- Another World is Possible Movement in Guadalajara (May, 2004)
- The Zapatista Movement
- The Protests in New York (August-September, 2004)
- Identity and Daily Life: The Young Expression

Another World is Possible Movement

A case that perfectly illustrates the collective construction of identity in Internet, its essential characteristics and ethical and intercultural context generated, is represented by the conjunction of social movements which emerge throughout the world and are interconnected, articulated and identified with the generic name of *Another World is Possible*. It expresses an area of new social movements of great interest and is formed by network groups of heterogeneous types, i.e. an amalgam of persons, groups, collectives and extraordinary differentiated organizations. Globalization, localization, complexity, liquidity and network structure are distinctive aspects of this movement (Íñiguez 2003).

The composition of the movement is heterogeneous and contains a variety of aspects from the resistance of ethical and intercultural character to the groups of struggle against specific companies and enterprises; going through the fights against the policies of economical and political submission which are promoted by huge world institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Group of the 8, etc.; getting involved in some groups of protest against the debts of the countries called the Third world ones, among other things. The activities of the movement develop simultaneously in countries all around the world, and frequently convoke activists from all the nationalities, producing at the same time hundreds of actions in different places. They are mostly characterized by the use of new information technologies as principal resources of the interactions, information distribution, communication between different groups of people. The movement extends and penetrates in all the imaginable spaces of the social systems and communities.

Finally, the movement shows with particular spotlessness the formation and evolution of dynamic networks which, generated in multiplicity of relations and interactions between people, groups, collectives, organizations, instruments, equipments, etc., create and sustain a sense of identity that, in the limit, is what provides it with force and efficiency. Some examples in Internet are:

- Independent Media Center: <http://www.indymedia.org/or/index.shtml>
- Nodo 50: Contrainformación en Red: <http://www.nodo50.org/>
- Rebelión: <http://www.rebelion.org/>
- Alianza Social Continental: <http://www.asc-hsa.org/castellano/site/home.php>

Another World is Possible Movement in Guadalajara (May, 2004)

Seattle, Prague, Barcelona have been sceneries for the struggle of the Another World is Possible Movement. One of the last acts and spaces of protest was seen during the *III Summit of Latin America and the Caribe-European Union* which took place in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, on May, 28 and 29, 2004. The days of action have consisted of a series of forums and workshops where people look for alternatives to neoliberal policies, as well as organizing cultural activities and street celebrations. The participating groups were extremely diverse, from peasants, students, trade unions and teachers, to civil associations, anarchists groups, sexual rights groups, etc. and even political parties. Later, the police stopped many participants. Today, the problem and the struggle of network groups continues. Next, some examples in Internet about this topic (local) and its relation with Another World is Possible Movement (global):

About Guadalajara Mobilization:

- ◆ *Centro de Medios Independientes* (México):
<http://mexico.indymedia.org/index.pl?section=guadalajara>
- ◆ *Centro de Medios Independientes* (Guadalajara):
<http://guadalajara.mediosindependientes.org/>
- ◆ *Nodo 50: Contrainformación en Red:*
- ◆ <http://www.nodo50.org/pchiapas/mexico/noticia.htm#guadalajara>
- ◆ *Alianza Social Continental:*
<http://www.asc-hsa.org/castellano/site/noticias.php>

The Zapatista Movement

The Zapatista Movement emerged in 1994, in Mexico, to represent the struggles of indigenous peoples under the motto: *¡Ya Basta!* Through the Web, the movement rapidly got great significance at the world level and very soon lots of groups united to the struggle. The antecedents of the Internet use by the social movements are found by Castells in the zapatista revolutionary movement in Chiapas, Mexico. The zapatista movement became the first informational guerrilla movement in 1994 when it was able to use Internet perfectly and to obtain resonance in the world means of communication (Castells 1997, p. 63-83). *¡Ya Basta!* and *Todos somos Marcos* are

symbols of a collective identity with international and intercultural influence. Some examples in Internet are:

- ◆ *EZLN ¡Ya Basta!* (México): <http://www.ezln.org/>
- ◆ *Associazione Ya Basta* (Italia): <http://www.yabasta.it/>
- ◆ *Gruppe b.a.s.t.a* (Alemania) <http://www.gruppe-basta.de/>
- ◆ *Le Collectif ¡Ya Basta!* (Paris, Francia) : <http://www.zapata.com/site/yabasta.php3>

The Protests in New York (August 29-September 2, 2004)

The Convention of Republican National Committee (United States) in New York (August 29-September 2, 2004) originated many protests. The protest acts illustrate very good the network culture and its scope.

The participants use the most advanced technology for their protests: Instant messages to an infinite number of cellular phones and computers, Internet sites with video, audio and discussion groups, and the use of this technology to inform to media from any corner of this city or the world. During months, the Independent Media Center of New York has prepared itself for this Republican Convention, and some weeks ago managed to obtain various confidential lists with the names and hotels of delegates, apart from their cellular numbers and e-mails. The dates and time, the location and the topic of secret parties and meetings of the party's elite, were divulged in Internet sites, for the activists to be able to »welcome« the delegates. Coalitions like RNC Not Welcome and A31 have fulfilled dozens of actions against enterprises, parties and meetings, even within the convention, in specific hours and with the help required, obligating the police to be in the state of a constant alert and mobilizing itself constantly in different points of the city (Cason/Brooks 2004). Some examples in Internet are:

- ◆ *New York City Independent Media Center*: <http://nyc.indymedia.org/>
- ◆ *RNC not Welcome in New York*: <http://www.rncnotwelcome.org/>
- ◆ *Counter Convention*: <http://www.counterconvention.org/>
- ◆ *The New York City People's Law Collective*: <http://nycplc.mahost.org/updates3.htm>

Identity and Daily Life by Internet: the Young Expression

The young generation also generates an important contribution to collective identity, built up of common elements and the desire of communicate to other young people about topics of identity and daily life. In this context, a very particular phenomena of nowadays is the growth of personal web sites and blogs. Two students of my courses as examples:

- ◆ *Ninive García Luna*
Personal Web Site: <http://www.gratisweb.com/arena2004/ninive.html>
Blog: <http://niniveidentidades.blogspot.com/>
- ◆ *Gabriela Vaca Pliego*
Blog: <http://www.koalasdefelpa.blogspot.com/>

On the basis of what has been said so far, it is possible now to address a basic question:

Which are the main ethical principles that guide these new social movements based on the Internet? Due to the social importance of digital communication networks new ethical theories arise such as hacker ethic (Levy 1984; Himanen 2001; Sterling 2001), ethics of cyberspace (Lessig 1999; Capurro 1999; Hamelink 2000), information ethics (Capurro 2003), and ethics of free culture (Lessig 2004). The main ethical values that support the core of these theories are: Free and universal access to information, free exchange of knowledge, culture and technologies; intellectual freedom and freedom of expression; human rights; free access to Internet; respect of the private sphere and confidential data; conquest of public spaces to make collective actions.

Although the Internet is very important in the construction of new models of collective identity and collective action due to economic, politic, social, cultural, technological differences, these models of communication are not the same in different parts of the world. Unfortunately not everybody have access to information technologies, computers and Internet (“digital divide”). However, models based on social networks and a common base of communication can be useful for the creation of alternative projects that link the gap between the collective construction of identity in Internet and other more traditional models. This common ground can be discovered in works of Habermas related to “Theory of Communicative Action” (Habermas 1984) and the “Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” (Habermas 1989), by taking into account his critics and followers (Crossley/Roberts 2004)

Conclusion

A main aspect to highlight concerns the ethical and intercultural implications of the new social movements based on the digital network. These represent intentional and collective efforts to transform the established social order and to create new forms of intercultural relations in a planetary scale. From an ethical and intercultural perspective, these models of collective identity and collective action make possible to create alternative social projects with important cultural, social, economic and political repercussions. Their motto should be: *Another World is Possible*, i.e., we can construct jointly a more equal and friendly world. But independently of its success or failure, these new models of organization give in principle the opportunity to everybody to make their own history, to create mechanisms of civil resistance, and to build a more meaningful everyday life based on the principle of solidarity. These movements represent vital spaces that can promote deep democratization and restore a meaningful public sphere.

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