Paul Stubbs (1998) 'Conflict and Co-Operation in the Virtual Community: eMail and the Wars of the Yugoslav Succession'

***Sociological Research Online,* vol. 3, no. 3, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/3/3/7.html>**

To cite articles published in *Sociological Research Online,* please reference the above information and include paragraph numbers if necessary

Received: 4/6/98 Accepted: 28/9/98 Published: 30/9/98

Abstract

This article focuses on the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) during the wars of the Yugoslav succession, through three case studies of particular eMail networks, discussion groups and bulletin boards: *zamir; APC/Yugo/Antiwar;* and the *Soc/Culture/Croatia* and *Soc/Culture/Yugoslavia* newsgroups. The text addresses the relationship between 'real' and 'virtual' communities and looks, in particular, at the role of eMail as a tool for social, political and cultural change. Despite the rhetoric of CMC as an inherently liberating and democratising medium, the suggestion is that power relations remain crucial in understanding all of the case studies. eMail may be most effective when part of a local discourse and practice of social change. The article concludes with a consideration of the link between different kinds of trust, or social capital, within the eMail world.

Keywords: *Activism; Conflict; Co-Operation; Email; Post-Yugoslav Countries*

Introduction

1.1 The Gulf War of 1991 may have been the first 'war by computer' as CNN viewers, spared the horrors of real carnage, were able to marvel at the pinpoint accuracy of sophisticated computerised weaponry. The wars of the Yugoslav succession from 1991 are, perhaps, the first 'wars with computers' in which reactions to a real war were multiplied immensely by the possibilities of new communications technology, computer-mediated communication (CMC), or popularly, cyberspace. A definition of cyberspace, from a sociological perspective, is 'a realm of computer-based communication processes that is completely decoupled from the need to meet physically' (Schmidtke, 1998: p. 81). This paper is an initial attempt to theorise and reflect upon the role of such 'virtual communities', through case studies of different electronic mail (eMail) groups and networks, in a time of conflict. The suggestion is that many of the concepts used to understand spatially defined communities are also applicable to globally dispersed eMail communities. Speaking sociologically, then, there is a need to amend some of the core concepts around conflict and co-operation, but not to jettison them, in order to understand the eMail phenomenon during the wars.

1.2 This article seeks to look, in general terms, at the similarities and differences between 'virtual' and 'real' communities, at the importance of power relations on-line, and at the possibility that eMail is a 'new public sphere'. It examines some core theoretical constructs from the extant literature, and looks at specific examples from the region of post-Yugoslav countries. Three case studies in the eMail war are addressed in detail: the *zamir* network; the *APC/Yugo/Antiwar* discussion group; and the *Soc/Culture/Croatia* and *Soc/Culture/Yugoslavia* discussion groups. These case studies seek to illuminate issues of conflict and co-operation and also wider social issues in the use of eMail during a war.

1.3 The case studies are followed by a return to theoretical considerations and, in particular, an analysis of the significance of the material presented for understanding the role of 'social capital' in the making of communities, both virtual and real. To read the essay does not require of the reader any in-depth computer knowledge - all terms and the specifics of the technology are explained insofar as they are important to the argument and insofar as I understand them. However, it does require some understanding of the nature and dynamics of the wars, since to digress in order to contextualise fully some of the examples used would take far too much space (for useful introductions cf. Thompson, 1992; Magas, 1993; Silber and Little, 1995).

1.4 The article reflects my active involvement in a range of civil, cultural, and political initiatives in Croatia and Bosnia- Herzegovina, all of which, directly or indirectly, are reproduced in cyberspace discussions. By October 1994, being based in the School of Social Work at the University of Zagreb which had very few computer resources, I had purchased a new lap top computer and a modem. This, combined with sharing a Zagreb flat with one of the key proponents of eMail in Croatia, allowed me to link up with the *zamir* network, of which I remain a member. From then on, my concern with how to use eMail politically, grew apace, as did my interventions in various discussion groups, some of which are noted below.

1.5 Notwithstanding Clifford's recent suggestion that 'monitoring' eMail discussion groups can be a form of anthropological 'fieldwork' (Clifford, 1997; pp. 57 - 58), the article makes no claims to be research-based in the sense of systematically gathering information for the case studies. My computer remains full of texts posted on *zamir* and on *APC/Yugo/Antiwar* and, remembering certain key dates, themes, issues, and postings, I simply looked through my archives to pick them out. Some texts were missing, others retained the capacity to 'surprise' and disrupt my expectations, but many were, more or less, as I had remembered them. I resubscribed to *Soc/Culture/Croatia* and *Soc/Culture/Yugoslavia* for a brief period in May 1998, and chose to examine texts relating to one particular theme which dominated at that time. In a sense, then, the article is less sociological research than an intervention in the field of cultural politics, reflecting my wider concern with the nature and dynamics of 'social praxis', or the attempt 'to produce reflexive, and useful knowledge, linked to, and indeed breaking down somewhat, the distinction between 'theory' and 'practice' (Stubbs, 1996: p. 32).

1.6 As appropriate for a text about electronic communication for 'publication' in an electronic journal, there are many hypertext links to eMail addresses and Web sites incorporated in this on-line version. However, as many authors have noted, hypertext does not lend itself to the forms of citation which are most often utilised in print published academic discourse. The links in the text may be to documents which have changed locations or be irretrievable currently, and to eMail addresses which have also changed or whose users have ceased to be traceable. As Jones has suggested, the 'ever-shifting dynamics of the medium' may, indeed, make it one that is 'out of control' (Jones, 1997: p. 28), or seemingly so, in the longer term. However, the text is written so as to be entirely comprehensible without the links and addresses although, at the time of revising this text for publication, in early September 1998, all the links were, in fact, accurate and operational. I have also used plain ASCII text which means that some words in the languages of the post-Yugoslav countries which contain characters specific to these languages have been altered to their closest plain text equivalents.

Conceptualising the Virtual Community

2.1 The rapid growth of computer- mediated communication has produced an increasingly significant body of print published work seeking to explore the social implications of the new technology. Three core sociological concepts, long debated and contested in line with different theoretical and political approaches - those of 'community', 'power', and 'the public sphere' - are discussed extensively in this literature and all are pertinent to the topic of the role of eMail in the wars of the Yugoslav succession. In this section, I explore each of these concepts in turn.

Community

2.2 Whether eMail and Internet users form a 'community' has been the principal preoccupation of most sociological on-line theorists. Rheingold's seminal approach to the question contains within it a number of assumptions which merit further exploration:

> Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on ... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace. (Rheingold, 1993: p. 5).

2.3 In this quote, Rheingold seems to be suggesting that some CMC interactors constitute a community and others do not - hence virtual communities rather than the singular term 'virtual community'. The popularisation of the phrase 'virtual community' by his book is, in fact, part of the problem as Watson has recently argued:

2.4 The distinction between 'virtual' community and 'real' community is unwarranted. The term 'virtual' means something akin to 'unreal'. ... My experience has been that people in the offline world tend to see online communities as virtual, but the participants in the online communities see them as quite real. (Watson, 1997: p. 129).

2.5 The debate takes on a new significance in the context of wider discussions about globalisation processes which appear to compress both time and space, themselves, at least in part, social constructs. EMail and Internet are examples of this par excellence so that it is tempting to see their use as the harbinger of a new transnational community not fixed spatially. It is certainly true that a computer, a modem and a telephone line are requirements to participate in eMail communication and, therefore, to be capable of linking with tens of millions of others all over the world. Moreover, none of these, in the age of lab tops, PCMCIA cards (functioning as portable modems), and mobile phones, are fixed spatially.

2.6 However, the relationship between new technologies and space is not as simple as it first appears. Without a *server* or *host* (the terms convey their technological and literal meanings), through which one's messages are sent and others received, and to which one must join and register in some way, there is no consistent access to the web of relationships which is eMail and the Internet. Interestingly, most people are linked to a server or host in the same geographical space, locally or at the very least, nationally, which they themselves occupy. The main reason for this is simple and concerns the low cost of local telephone calls as against the prohibitive costs of international calls as well as ease of registration, and so on. Many eMail addresses, indeed, specify not only the name of the host server but, also, the country in which it is located, with a globally recognised nomenclature for this: hu is Hungary, ba Bosnia, si Slovenia, hr Croatia, and so on. In the *zamir* network discussed below, servers were indicated by their cities (zg is Zagreb, sa Sarajevo, bg Belgrade, tz Tuzla, pr Pristina, and so on) as, perhaps, a counter to this nation state fixedness. Indeed, the 'ztn' in the address, lest we should have any doubts about the intentions of its founders, stands for *zamir transnational network*. However, even in these cases, the spatial fixedness of the server, and by extension usually, the user, is assured within this nomenclature.

2.7 Similarly, questions of time remain highly complex in terms of eMail discussions. Although there is an increasing interest in on-line conferencing, or chat lines, in which the discussion happens live, as it were, most eMail conferences and discussion groups remain diachronic forms of communication rather than synchronic, in contrast to 'real' conferences. Once an eMail user signs up for a conference, then she or he is able to read all the messages sent to it by other subscribers, and any messages she or he writes, unless the user specifies otherwise, also reach all subscribers. Of course, not only are there differences in global time zones but the time it takes for your message to reach others depends on a number of factors: how often you and they make a netcall (dialling your server to receive new messages), and how fast the transfer between servers is. This means that whilst you may think you are the first to reply to someone, when you complete your netcall, you find that several others have beaten you to it and the thread you wished to pursue has been lost.

2.8 In short, there are certain specifics of CMC which mean that space and time are not, completely, transcended. This does not, of course, rule out the possibility that eMail users can be constituted as a community. Indeed, it may be far more useful to reframe the question about whether particular eMail groups are or are not a community, and discuss, instead, the complex identities which users present online and offline, and the ways in which eMail participation satisfies some of their needs for sociability, some of the time. All three of the case studies, in part at least, gather together persons who share an interest in a particular topic, being discussion groups which act as virtual meeting places for those concerned, in some way, with the fate of former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the nature of the interactions within them are very different.

Power

2.9 Questions of power relations refer to who has access to the new information technology and how interactions on-line relate to power off-line. In terms of access, it remains true that most, although not all, servers are commercially-oriented, for profit organisations, charging membership fees and, often, also an on-line charge over and above the cost of the telephone connection. Compared to the 'set up' costs, of a computer, modem, and telephone line, this is unlikely to be a major prohibitive factor limiting access. Nevertheless, the growth of non-profit servers which subsidise users through the grants they receive (*zamir* in post-Yugoslav countries and *zpok* in Hungary are examples of these), does indicate an increasing awareness of the social limits to the technology.

2.10 The virtual community is far from open and accessible to all. The growth of internet cafes is a commercial exploitation of the wish of increasing numbers of people to have eMail and internet access, or at least to 'try it out', and there is also a growth of free public providers: in Central and Eastern Europe these are usually funded by the Open Society Foundation, and increasingly in some Western European cities they are funded by the local city administration to promote 'cyberdemocracy' (Tsagarousianou et al, 1998).

Nevertheless, it remains true that most users of eMail and internet are relatively young, relatively well educated, read or speak some English, and are overwhelmingly male. Reviewing a wide range of studies of internet use, Manuel Castells has suggested:

> CMC starts as the medium of communication for the most educated and affluent segment of the population of the most educated and affluent countries, and more often than not in the largest and most sophisticated metropolitan areas. (Castells, 1996: p. 360).

2.11 His phrasing is important, denying total closure, and anticipating a relative democratisation of access as the medium expands, but suggesting that these early elites continue to hold power and tend to frame the future direction of CMC as it becomes more widely available. His image of a 'revolution of concentric waves' (Castells, 1996: p. 360) unable to reach large segments of the population in the West and the vast majority of people in poor countries, is a salutary one. It should also not be forgotten that the first wave of CMC use was military-industrial and not leisure based, much less designed to be socially useful, and its role in restructuring industrial enterprises and the ways in which work can be imagined, are legion (Breslow, 1997). Castells argues that the history of CMC has been about the competing visions of 'the military/science establishment' and 'the personal computing counterculture' (Castells, 1996: p. 355), with these two different sets of users continuing to diverge sharply. In addition, whilst the global social effects of CMC may well be 'the reinforcement of the culturally dominant social networks' and 'the social cohesion of the cosmopolitan elite' (Castells, 1996: pp. 363 - 364), this does not preclude the possibility of localised uses of the medium which are far more progressive.

2.12 The idealistic suggestion that eMail interactions, because of their relative anonymity and the 'paucity of electronic cues' (Schmitz, 1997: p. 85), provide more of a level playing field in terms of power relations, compared to face-to-face interactions, has been rigorously critiqued on a variety of grounds. There are even suggestions that technological innovation demands new sets of 'capabilities' and may widen the gap between the CMC 'haves' and 'have nots' (Buffoni, 1997: pp. 114 - 5). Certainly, eMail use demands relatively high levels of linguistic, textual and word processing competencies, even though its standards of typographical exactitude are, certainly, less than those of much print published communication. In the absence of face-to-face cues for stereotyping, participants in some eMail discussion groups may, indeed, overcompensate in their disapproval of misspellings, clumsy formatting, or messages which go wrong in some way because the user has not (yet) grasped the fine detail of the software programme. Educational capital converted into what might be termed 'computer cultural capital' is, therefore, no less exclusionary than other forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Above all, in the context of eMail use across linguistic communities, the use of the English language as the dominant form, also sets real limits to participation on a 'level playing field'.

2.13 Studies show that, even when significant numbers of women do join mixed gender discussion groups, their participation remains much lower. In part at least, this can be explained by the complex inter-relationship between online and offline identities or, rather, the projection of the former into the latter:

> In other words, as the female users wrote themselves into this virtual community, they did so in an imagined social space very much defined by their experiences in a patriarchal culture. As a result their discourse patterns were 'gendered', meaning ... that the female users were less participatory than their male counterparts, and often silent. (Dietrich, 1997: p. 181)

2.14 Indeed, just as in parts of the offline world, this has led to a growth of all-women discussion groups and a range of other strategies to promote women's participation and empowerment online, some of which are noted in the first case study, below, of the *zamir* network. The complexities of power, inequality and resistance in the new, relatively autonomous 'socioscapes' (Appadurai, 1990, quoted in Eade, 1997: p. 7) of contemporary global culture, including CMC, lead directly into questions of the transformations of political interventions, of civil society, and the public sphere.

A New Public Sphere?

2.15 The role of eMail as a political tool also touches on complex relationships between online and offline life. Indeed, just as one might feel oneself to be a member of a community but never go to a public meeting, the 'activists' of the eMail world - those who use the technology extensively, or primarily, to act politically - are a small group, even less representative of the general population along all of the axes noted above. Despite vast efforts by some Western European and North American cities to 'democratise' their political processes through computer connectivity, the unsurprising fact that it is the 'politicos' - those

already politically active in other ways; and the 'teckies' - those primarily interested in the technological advances which participation allows for; who come to dominate political cyberspace (Francissen and Brants, 1998: p. 30), must make those who argue for the essentially liberating impact of new technologies at least pause for thought. Indeed, the rise of the 'politico-teckie', a fusion of the two phenomena, may be an important side effect of the political use of eMail, adding yet another layer of exclusionary 'capabilities'.

2.16 Many authors have explored whether the activist use of cyberspace involves, in Habermas' terms (Habermas, 1994), a new 'public sphere', replacing the coffee houses and salons of the eighteenth century and the streets and barricades of the nineteenth, as the privileged locations of civil society (Breslow, 1997: p. 241). This privatisation of public participation, as it were, as one usually uses a computer alone, even if not in the 'privacy of one's own home', makes the use of eMail politically different from many other forms of political action, suggesting that cyberspace may be conceived as both public and private space (Fernback, 1997: p. 39).

2.17 An extension of this debate concerns the globalisation of civil society as supranational agencies and, above all, the large International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) tend to transform local social movements into technicised bureaucracies (Demirovic, 1996). One part of this transformation involves an emphasis on new computer technology and global networking via eMail as necessary for even the smallest local grassroots organisation. There is a complex relationship between different levels of activism and, indeed, the possibility of merging the coffee house, street meeting and eMail in a new conglomeration of activism. Again, this is a key theme to be explored later in this article.

eMail and War

2.18 Several features of 'wars in general', and the wars of the Yugoslav succession in particular, are important in terms of the theoretical considerations outlined above. All wars, of course, involve a kind of 'saturation effect' in Geerz's terms (cf. Geerz, 1988), in which all aspects of previously taken-for-granted everyday life become contested, complex and politicised (cf. Cale Feldman et al, 1993). When the wars occur in a region with high levels of computer and other literacy and a sophisticated communications infrastructure, it is very likely that communications use will heighten and change (cf. Kolar-Panov, 1997).

2.19 In the wars of the Yugoslav succession, however, we are studying the use of a new communications form since, outside of a few specialist milieus, eMail use was largely unheard of in 1991 but by 1995 had reached massive proportions. In a sense, eMail and war developed alongside each other so that there was both 'no war without eMail' and 'no (normalised) eMail use outside of war' in post-Yugoslav countries. Clearly, war is a prime example of a 'politically charged situation' (Clifford, 1988: p. 10) in which previously taken-for-granted notions of community, of power, and of what is public and what is private, are shattered.

2.20 The notion that modern wars, far from being purely local, domestic, or internal conflicts, as they are sometimes made to appear, are almost always 'intermestic' (Pugh, 1998) insofar as they are always structured in the context of global social relations, is an important one. The involvement of a wide range of international agencies, of activists and volunteers and, indeed, of various Diaspora communities, are key features of the wars of the Yugoslav succession. Indeed, in their different ways, the three case studies are testimony to this and represent different aspects of the global amplification and restructuring of the conflicts, and their assimilation into various kinds of transnational discourse.

Zamir Net: eMail for Peace

3.1 The *zamir* network (the term *za mir* is Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian *for peace*), established in 1992, was an explicit attempt to use eMail in peace building and conflict resolution. Its origins, in fact, derived from workshops with anti-war groups in Zagreb and Belgrade who, because of the war, were no longer able to have any telephone, fax, or letter contact with each other, except via third countries. By setting up servers in both cities, and connecting them to a server in Germany, the need for a third country remained, but the process of communication exchange was made much faster. Later, servers were added in Sarajevo, Ljubljana, Pristina, Tuzla, and Pakrac. A wide range of anti-war groups, particularly associated with the Anti-war Campaign in Croatia (ark@zamir.net), based in Zagreb, and the Centre for Anti-War Action in Serbia, based in Belgrade, but also women's groups, ecology groups, humanitarian agencies, and countless individuals, used *zamir* during the war years and, indeed, it still exists today although, for reasons discussed below, it is not quite the force it once was.

3.2 The network received funding from a number of Western donors, mainly from strands of the European peace movement, and from George Soros' Open Society Fund, which was never of a level to allow for the latest technology to be used but which did allow for a cheap service, for most of the time and in most of the sites, actually free at the point of use, which was comparatively efficient compared to any other system locally available. Perhaps more importantly, *zamir* became the most visible part of an experimental social movement, articulating a kind of 'globalisation from below' (Deacon et al, 1994; Turmir, 1998), seeking grassroots civil solutions to a conflict in which, patently, top down political solutions were thin on the ground and likely to prove disappointing. I would argue that, at its best moments, it was a kind of experimental participatory democracy, in which Western peace activists, most notably Wam Kat (Kat, 1993; wam@mir.org), Erich Bachmann (Bachmann, 1994; e.bachmann@bionic.zer.de), and Kathryn Turnipseed, formed relationships with local activists such as Ognjen Tus (ognjen@zamir-zg.ztn.apc.org) which were very different from the exploitative ones often found in such encounters.

3.3 As Turmir rightly points out, a key *zamir* constituency was the network of women's groups throughout the post-Yugoslav countries so that, in fact, women accounted for far more of *zamir's* subscribers than was normal with eMail nets. Through the training and networking of groups such as the 'Electronic Witches', these groups came to use the technology extensively, although in ways which often differed from men's usage, with more interpersonal networking than formal conference participation, again not unlike 'real' political communities. Even so, a *zamir* conference /ZAMIR/WOMEN/, perhaps reflecting the fact that women's groups had maintained an all-Yugoslav dialogue, in contrast to many other, Republic-based, initiatives, throughout the 1980s (Jalusic, 1994), was often the site of important debates, and, unusually for *zamir*, was dominated by the languages of the region and not by English.

3.4 In assessing the impact of zamir, it has to be said that it never really achieved its goal of being a genuine transnational movement producing and reflecting civic dialogue across post-Yugoslav countries and beyond. In some ways, this should not be surprising since, as already noted, and as Srdjan Dvornik (sdvornik@zamir.net), a leading *zamir* activist expressed it to me, 'these groups had stopped talking to each other in the 1980s, it would take more than *zamir* to get them talking to each other now' (Dvornik, 1994). The voices of *zamir* were, far more, the non-nationalist voices of 'the other Croatia', particularly from Zagreb-based groups, than they were a reflection of a wider movement. Nevertheless, the Belgrade scene, centred on the Centre for Anti-War Action and Women in Black, was a significant presence in many of the conferences.

3.5 One of the side effects of the economic crisis and sanctions in Serbia was that, ironically, *zamir* was one of the few avenues available through which messages could be sent to friends around the world, so that *zamir-bg* had a much larger number of users who were not committed to its broader social goals and used it, simply, as a vehicle to maintain their social networks. The use of *zamir* in Bosnia, particularly in the height of the war, faced the obstacle of the fact that, even if your laptop did not need electricity, which was often cut, then your modem almost certainly did and, of course, you needed a telephone line to last long enough to make a netcall. This made access to eMail extraordinarily difficult. The modems donated from the West, as was the case with much humanitarian aid, were old and slow and, therefore, required more time to download messages than would have been the case with state-of-the-art technology.

3.6 It can still be argued that the continuance of an alternative cultural space which *zamir* had represented was crucial in orchestrating global coverage of the protests in Belgrade in late 1996 and early 1997 although, apart from excellent on-the-spot reporting from peace activist Dorie Wilsnack with the Balkan Peace Team (cf. BPT_BG, 1997), it was not *zamir-bg,* already virtually finished, but the new wave of 'real audio' and internet representations of Radio B92 and others, which dominated the oppositional discourse (Turmir, 1998).

3.7 Postings on *zamir* from Tuzla in Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the occasion of the massacre of young people in the centre of town on what, in the previous system, would have been the Day of Youth, in May 1995, perhaps showed the network at its best. Three young people linked to *zamir*, Damir Kapidzic, Emir Prcic, and Adnan Demirovic, posted a number of simple messages portraying the horror or war, listing the names and ages of those who died, and translating appeals by the Mayor of Tuzla, Selim Beslagic. The day after the massacre, Beslagic wrote to the UN security council thus:

> Today in the early morning at 8.30 the new missiles again hit the town centre. The insane intention is obvious: the killing of innocent people continues. This morning's grenade hit the place near by last night's massacre point. The citizens of Tuzla have nothing to say to you. Because you are quietly watching the killing of innocent people, and you do have the means to stop it. Your behaviour is nothing else but collaboration in this crime against

humanness. ... Between you and the killers of our children here will be no difference. Because even in the international legal justice the collaboration in the crime is the crime itself too. (posted by D. KAPIDZIC to /ZAMIR/FORUM, /APC/YUGO/ANTIWAR, and other eMail conferences, 26 May 1995).

3.8 EMails from Belgrade, Zagreb and elsewhere followed and expressed the collective grief and anger of a community, in which the virtual became real, at the attack on young people in the city that was the symbol of anti-nationalism. A year later, in memoriam, Croatian peace activist Goran Bozicevic (miramida_pk@zamir-zg.ztn.apc.org) wrote this:

> Tuzla's Youth a year after.
> I'm an atheist. (Am I?)
> I'm a phycisist.
> There exist laws of preservation on energy, preservation on momentum and so on.
>
> Where are seventy one lives now? If they are not in our actions, could we live with our shame?
>
> WHAT I DID FOR THEM TODAY? YESTERDAY?
> WHAT AM I GOING TO DO TOMORROW?
> THE DAY AFTER?
>
> We got their lives as heritage.
> Don't we feel their power?
> I do. (GORAN.BOZICEVIC posting to /APC/YUGO/ANTIWAR, 25 May 1996).

3.9 This internal 'witnessing' (the term is used by Large, 1997: p. 144 in a different context), is one of the strengths of the virtual community of *zamir*. At times such as the Tuzla massacre it conveys the horror to a reluctant wider public and news media. During the Croatian military and police actions in early May 1995 which recaptured Western Slavonia from 'rebel' Serbs, the more strategic value of *zamir* was demonstrated. One part of the Croatian anti-war movement was heavily involved in Volunteer Project Pakrac, working in a divided town in Western Slavonia, which had already used eMail in pioneering ways, in work with schools, for example. After the volunteers had been evacuated, some returned and, via eMail, posted important news of the general state of affairs and, in particular, on human rights and other abuses which were occurring. The quality of this reporting, and its speed, was far superior to anything produced by expensive, official, monitors, such as those from the European Union and may even have had real effects in curbing abuses in certain locations (Stubbs, 1997a: p. 43).

3.10 The local role of an eMail network like *zamir*, as opposed to its wider impact, is a relatively understudied phenomenon. One aspect of *zamir* which is not widely discussed is the existence of closed discussion groups on specific topics, which are termed internal conferences, read by and written to by a smaller number of agreed people and organisations. Examples of these which I have had access to, for various reasons, are discussion and decision-making fora for ARK, for the Pakrac project, and for the Centre for Peace Studies. They allow for real democracy between meetings, and for safe discussion of complex or taboo themes, as well as being a useful vehicle for the expression of a process of consensual decision-making.

3.11 In addition, using *zamir* was one part of the repertoire of the alternative or oppositional *scene* in Zagreb, linking explicitly with specific real events, such as petitions, actions, demonstrations, or happenings, and often being covered by, or prefiguring coverage in, the alternative journal *Arkzin* (arkzin@arkzin.com; http://www.arkzin.com). The November 1997 issue of *Arkzin*, for example, gives extensive coverage to an eMail campaign which began on the /ZAMIR/WOMEN/ conference against sexist advertising to promote a concert by *Zabrenjeno Pusenje* (No Smoking), a band which normally would be given favourable coverage in the journal. The whole scene then was, in effect, greater than the sum of its parts, through an explicit multiplication of what Mark Dery (http://www.factory.org/nettime/archive-1996/0119.html, and http://www.factory.org/nettime/archive-1996/0214.html), quoted by Turmir (1998), terms 'culture jamming' or 'guerrilla semiotics, directed against ... the manufacture of consent through the manipulation of symbols'. In this way, the globalised nature of *zamir's* intervention is less acutely experienced than its specific, 'other Croatian' meaning. It became, amongst its core users, a kind of cultural code, whose meanings, and indeed sense of humour, could not easily be read from 'outside', although its original stated purpose was precisely the ability to explain these inside events to a wider public.

3.12 Of course, as I shall discuss in the concluding section, this production of localised meanings has both positive, solidaristic, effects, and more negative consequences, at least in terms of attracting

wider interest and impact. In-jokes and hidden codes are, often, key definers of specific oppositional movements, but these same characteristics can exclude others. This is precisely why actions linking eMail use with wider social change are so important. Examples would include 'Electronic Witches'' training of diverse women's groups in all post-Yugoslav countries, and the pilot Peace Studies programme run by the Centre for Peace Studies, which attracted almost forty students from much wider than the normal Zagreb *scene*, who studied, as one stream, a course on 'Technology and Communication', led by Ognjen Tus, which linked explicitly the politics of eMail and the possibility of progressive use of technology.

3.13 *zamir* has also been important in supporting independent media in Croatia, particularly the satirical political weekly *Feral Tribune* which has faced various financial and other controls from the state. It is certainly true that eMail is much less easy to censor than other forms of communication, although it is also, of course, not a particularly secure medium for message transmission (one's eMails can be intercepted and read far more easily than one's telephone conversations, for example). *zamir* has faced little public opprobrium although, in an interesting piece of attempted sabotage, an encoded Serbian nationalist song, itself over 10 MB long, was placed on the network and almost brought down the server. In general terms, levels of trust and co-operation were high, marked by sufficient, and sufficiently positive, human feelings in Rheingold's terms, to be seen as a community (Rheingold, 1993: p. 5). In exactly the same terms described by Schmitz to describe The Public Electronic Network's treatment of homelessness (Schmitz, 1997), *zamir* exhibited 'a shared commitment to supply information and act in concert' (Schmitz, 1997: p. 90). Moreover, I am aware of many occasions when private censorious eMails were sent but there was no public comment in a conference or where 'persons might critically respond with a public comment about a previous entry but privately send a conciliatory message' (Schmitz, 1997: p. 90).

3.14 As with all politicised social movements, *zamir* has been marked by very different personalities with different perceptions of what is politically possible or achievable, and how an eMail system can contribute to this. Debates in 1995 between Srdjan Dvornik and Wam Kat, for example, seem to me now like an echo of broader debates on modern versus post- modern political options, with Dvornik emphasising formal realistic options, and Wam Kat attracted by more surrealistic possibilities or a kind of digital anarchism. The burgeoning of new commercial options in all of the post-Yugoslav countries, and the relative technological inferiority of the *zamir* system, also led to its demise in much of the region. Today, *zamir* still works most effectively in Croatia, with the Zagreb and newly established Rijeka servers offering internet connectivity, continuing to have a core of loyal users, and also attracting a new generation of activists eager to learn more about how the network works. However, new debates about the relationship between commercial sustainability and its broader social goals are beginning to surface.

Apc/Yugo/Anti-War: 'Pseudo- Democracy' in the East-West 'Contact Zone'?

4.1 As already stated, *zamir* became a member of the *Association for Progressive Communications*, a global organisation linking groups in many different countries who combine eMail use with the pursuit of peace, social justice, women's issues and, by far the largest group of members, ecology. There are a number of conferences which members can subscribe to, usually mixing discussion with information and reposting of relevant news items. The conference /APC/YUGO/ANTIWAR/, as its name suggests, is the principal vehicle for APC members to discuss actions against the wars in post-Yugoslav countries. Whilst, occasionally, messages are posted from outside the /APC/ family - this can be done when someone reads a message copied to more than one conference and replies to them all - it is mostly a forum in which peace activists from Western Europe and, to an extent, the United States, exchange messages with those in the region of the conflict.

4.2 As such, it is a prime example of what anthropologist James Clifford, quoting Mary Louise Pratt (Clifford, 1997: p. 192; Pratt, 1992), terms a 'contact zone' or 'the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations'. The term is particularly apposite because, in Pratt and Clifford's usage, formally equal relationships actually cover situations of 'radical inequality' and 'asymmetrical relations of power' (Clifford, 1997: p. 192). Moreover, these power relationships are never simply 'subject-object' or 'oppressor-victim' hierarchies, but are highly complex and mediated, related to 'real world' dynamics, but taking on their own specific cyberspace forms.

4.3 One example is the postings on /APC/YUGO/ANTIWAR/ during the Croatian Army actions in Western Slavonia, described above, and, more particularly, the days in early May 1995 when, for the first time in the wars, Zagreb was shelled by 'cluster bombs' which killed and injured many civilians. Partly as a

result of the obviously shocking newsreel pictures shown around the world, many outsiders assumed that things were much worse in Zagreb than they actually were, and sought to repost information which was in fact obtainable elsewhere, thus making the conference rather tedious to read. A Zagreb ecological and anti-war activist, Zoran Ostric (zoran.ostric@zamir-zg.ztn.apc.org), treated the conference to his thoughts on all aspects of the war, the shelling of the city, the decor of the restaurant he sheltered in, and his mother's cooking (Ostric, 1995). Whilst actually praising Ostric, a German peace activist went on to suggest that YUGO/ANTIWAR was a 'total failure' (Hardten, 1995a), stating that 'we are very disappointed about the level of critical discussion we find here in this board' (ibid.), and in a subsequent posting, even questioning whether Zagreb had really been shelled (Hardten, 1995b).

4.4 Others, such as the co-ordinator of the HR Net Debra Guzman (debra@oln.comlink.apc.org), criticised these comments and expressed solidarity and support for activists in Zagreb. Far more instructive is a posting by Wam Kat, which could have been written with the notion of 'contact zones' in mind:

> Aggression never has been a good start to get people helping you, since in this case, you need something from us, although we also need something from you, solidarity, hope, and help, but that on the side line. Of course you can say: we are helping you with money, so help us with information. It would be a fair deal, would it. ... YUGO:ANTIWAR a TOTAL FAILURE it is nice to read, maybe you are right, but what is a TOTAL SUCCESS, remember it NEVER HAVE BEEN DONE BEFORE. Let's just give it a try, don't put your expectations too high. You, me, we, all of us, are responsible if it works or not. Let's be happy that we run this conference for such a long time without having major flame wars in it going on, something what can't be said about the regular INTERNET conferences on the same topic. (Kat, 1995).

4.5 'Flame wars' are arguments in cyberspace which escalate out of control. Wam Kat here is clearly hinting at the complexities of the relationships between local activists and Western European erstwhile 'supporters'. There have been many points of tension in this relationship. The earliest were concerns by some from Slovenia and Croatia that the European peace movements played down repeated warnings about instability in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s, in part at least, because of their extensive connections with oppositionalists in Belgrade many of whom, by this time, were articulating nationalist ideas. Later, there was a clear disagreement about whether the use of military force, by the UN and subsequently NATO, was justifiable and/or useful. In addition, there were always many civic positions, not least from different post-Yugoslav countries, so that it was unclear which should be supported.

4.6 However, these structuring debates are rarely explicitly discussed in the conference. Currently, most postings to the conference concern the situation in Kosova, reflecting the increased tension and renewed use of force by Milosevic in this predominantly Albanian, former autonomous, province. These are mostly news briefs from Kosova Albanian sources or repostings of news reports, so that there is little real debate or analysis about alternative civic solutions. In addition, a Croat living in the United States, where he is appealing against his asylum application being refused, Ivo Skoric (iskoric@igc.apc.org; http://www.peacenet.org/balkans/ivo.htm), tends to fill the conference with his essays, some quite pertinent, others simply self-indulgent, on a wide range of issues, from corruption within the Croatian political elite, through support for independent media, to a long-running story about a parking fine he received in the US! The fact that anyone can post a text to an eMail conference, regardless of its content, is often seen as a progressive feature, given the narrowness of content which mainstream media carry. However, as Zoran Ostric's postings during the shelling of Zagreb, Ivo Skoric's postings and, indeed, the daily diary of Wam Kat which appeared on numerous conferences over a three year period, illustrate, the failure of particular users to ration their contributions, or to seek the advice of a good editor before pressing the 'send' button, is a rather lamentable side effect of the 'no censorship' position.

4.7 Unlike *zamir* which was, at least embryonically, a participatory democracy in the making, /APC/YUGO/ANTIWAR/ is far more of a 'pseudo-democracy'. The real civic dialogue is occurring elsewhere, in a large number of 'alternative Parliaments', 'citizen's assemblies', 'grassroots conferences', and so on, which are sometimes advertised in the conference, but rarely reported on in a manner conducive to genuine feedback. There are a number of other eMail conferences and, more recently, Internet web pages, where those looking for information on civic opposition to the wars can go (for example http:www.igc.apc.org/balkans). However, the wasted potential of /APC/YUGO/ANTIWAR/, perhaps reflecting the wider problems of dialogue between civic groups regarding the wars, is a sad conclusion.

Soc/Culture Newsgroups: 'Noise' from the Diaspora

5.1 Diasporic communities can be defined as groups separated physically from their 'homeland' but maintaining some kinds of intellectual, cultural, even spiritual, sense of belonging to it. In this sense, it is

clear that new modes of global communication can facilitate a more active engagement of Diaspora in events 'back home', as 'separate places become effectively a single community' (Clifford, 1997: p. 246). Benedict Anderson, who noted the phenomenon of 'long-distance nationalism' in his seminal 'Imagined Communities' (Anderson, 1983), suggested in a later essay that transnational Diaspora were enabled to 'play identity politics by participating ... in the conflicts of ... (their) imagined Heimat - now only fax time away' (Anderson, 1992: p. 13). Whilst it is difficult to envisage the fax machine having this effect, other media such as satellite tv, videos (cf. Kolar-Panov, 1997), and eMail, are certainly important in this context.

5.2 The role of various Diaspora in the wars of the Yugoslav succession is not well covered by political accounts of the break-up, despite the existence of large 'Croat' and 'Serb' populations in the United States, Australia, Canada, and elsewhere. Certainly, the connection between new national movements *within* Croatia, and aspects of the Diaspora which had been courted explicitly from the mid-1980s onwards, including massive funding for Franjo Tudjman's party *HDZ* and, later, the return of Canadian pizza millionaire Gojko Susak as Minister of Defence in the independent Croatia, should not be understated. Even so this is not, as popularly argued in some anti-nationalist circles, a simple reconnection of primitive, frozen, nationalism with a new national movement (cf. Kaldor, 1996), but is a much more complex process of identity formation incorporating both 'old' and 'new' elements, and resonating differently in different places, with different age groups, levels of education, and so on (Kolar-Panov, 1997; Skrbis, 1995). To quote Clifford again, 'whatever their ideologies of purity, Diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist' (Clifford, 1997: p. 251).

5.3 Looking closely at the interventions of Diaspora in two eMail discussion groups, /SOC/CULTURE/CROATIA and /SOC/CULTURE/YUGOSLAVIA/, could lead one to reject Clifford's strictures, however. The /SOC/CULTURE/ newsgroups, on Usenet, are very popular conferences containing, as their name suggests, items of cultural, political, and social significance regarding a particular country. Whilst, many postings are from a hard core of in- country or out-of-country respondents, there is usually a fair smattering of tourism and travel related enquiries and advice. The two conferences, and to a lesser extent /SOC/CULTURE/BOSNIA/, are marked by a smaller range of frequent posters, usually members of the Diaspora and, often, university students in the United States. A typical week will find many of the same 'threads' in both the Croatia and Yugoslavia conferences, with a large number of crosspostings, similar to that noted in a recent review of SOC/CULTURE/INDIA and related newsgroups (Mitra, 1997). The post-Yugoslav conferences have fewer postings than Mitra's conferences, but display the same characteristics of divisive conflict, and most often consist of a series of statements and counter statements, together with mutual name-calling, in which either Chetnik or Ustase crimes from the Second World War are judged to be of continuing relevance to contemporary events.

5.4 These conferences are available to members of *zamir*, although I know of few users who subscribed for very long, unless undertaking a piece of research. Nevertheless, some *zamir*-based groups have copied their analyses and reports to these conferences. Usually, these stand alone and are ignored although, occasionally, as when the Croatian branch of the Balkan Peace Team, *Otvorene Oci*, posted their report of a visit to Knin, then the 'capital' of the self-styled 'Republic of Serbian Krajina' ('RSK'), which was well- meant and set out an important, if contentious, position, the public and private response was extreme. Indeed, the eMail address used, that of one of the team members, was bombarded with eMails which, effectively, amounted to death threats. The widespread use of crude nationalist invective, by users who appear in many other respects to be 'normal' citizens - many 'footers' (identification markers at the end of an eMail) suggest successful business people or students of science and technology - is a phenomenon certainly worthy of further exploration.

5.5 Recent exchanges following the death of Gojko Susak are typical of the genre, not least for the absence of any real argument, beyond that of repetitious assertion of 'the truth':

> The death of the Republic of Croatia's Minister of Defence, Gojko Susak, and his vital role in Croatia's fight for independence should be remembered by future generations of Croatians as the United States today still remembers and honors the memory of its Revolutionary War Generals, Nathaniel Greene and Henry Knox ...
>
> The fact that Croatia had its own history, language, culture and identity from the ninth century provided, in addition to its right to freedom and sovereignty, even more justification for a 'nationalist' like Susak than 'nationalists' like Greene and Knox. ... ('Susak Like U.S. Revolutionary War Generals', eMail from badurinapr@aol.com in SOC/CULTURE/CROATIA, 5 May 1998)

> The Nazi War Criminal Gojko Susak is dead and burning in Hell. The man who helped resurrect Croatia's Nazi Ustasha past never got to stand trial for war crimes against humanity at the Hague. He now stands before a higher judge.
>
> Susak will be remembered in the press and in history as the racist, neo- Nazi leader who helped exterminate Croatia's minority Serb community. A born Ustasha, Susak openly praised Croatia's horrific Nazi past when in WWII the country was one of Hitler's greatest allies.
>
> Today's Nazi Croatia is neither democratic nor free. Susak's brand of hate is today being taught to a new generation of Croat youth - a pure hate which does not tolerate anything non-Croat. That is Susak's legacy to the world. ('War Criminal Susak Dead', eMail from nt@sentex.net in SOC/CULTURE/CROATIA, 5 May 1998).
>
> So miracles do happen after all. More than 30,000 dead Serbs, and still they are marching back to Ustasha state of Croatia. What urges them to go back? were they born Ustashe as Gojko Susak too. ('Re: War Criminal Susak Dead', eMail from jurcicp@cadvision.com in SOC/CULTURE/CROATIA, 5 May 1998).
>
> It's quite simple. We do not live in 1941, so today's Croatian Ustase do not have freedom to commit such genocide as they were. Secondly, some people like their homes that much that they can't live without them and because of that, they would accept living in a nasty racist state. ('Re: War Criminal Susak Dead', eMail from aleksandar@myna.com in SOC/CULTURE/CROATIA, 6 May 1998).
>
> Dead is the creator victorious army that swept chetniks into garbage can of history, but his acomplishments live forever. May eternal glory be with him! ('Re: Susak Dead', eMail from crestest@cadvision.com in SOC/CULTURE/CROATIA, 6 May 1998).

5.6 One feature which is noteworthy in these, and the majority of similar messages, is that the English language is used, although most of the writers probably have Croatian/Serbian language skills. The first message seeks explicit comparison with the United States' War of Independence, which also indicates that the authors are seeking to have a wider influence. There are few other signs of 'openness', in the sense of participating in a debate, about these messages, however. Indeed, one other reply, to the second posting, simply quotes part of the message and then states: 'An old Serbian saying: "Say the lie twice and it will become the truth."'. Statements such as 'we do not live in 1941' could, of course, lead to an interesting and illuminating discussion on the pertinent differences between then and now but, of course, they do not. Indeed, by explicitly responding to a question, and breaking the code which states that 'then' and 'now' are identical or homologous moments, this posting is unusual.

5.7 The two /SOC/CULTURE/ conferences are more of a 'noise', then, in the sense that the threads go nowhere other than into and against themselves in a series of endless repetitions. The space, presumably, exists for an explicit challenge to this dominant framework but, to my knowledge, this has not been systematically attempted, from within *zamir* or elsewhere. It is as if a group of people with a particular position have, also, not unlike other eMail groups, found their virtual home and are happy in the acrimonious exchange of ideologies.

Conclusions: Trust, Social Capital and the Maintenance of Virtual Communities

6.1 In assessing the lessons from the three case studies, my own explicit ideological and political commitment to the *zamir* network clearly informs what follows. However, I hope to have shown that *zamir* is most effective as part of a *localised repertoire of counter hegemonic meanings*. As soon as *zamir* meets a wider discourse, that of the peace movements in Western Europe and North America, in the /APC/YUGO/ANTIWAR/ conference, some of its critical edge is lost. The conference shows, acutely, the difficulty of constructing a peace discourse in a wider arena marked by radical asymmetry of power and of understanding. Real debates are doubly removed from the conference - in terms of both the formal, top-down, political level, and the oppositional, civic, voice. The latter is, therefore, by no means as democratic, or process-oriented, as it appears.

6.2 The 'noise' from nationalist discourses in the /SOC/CULTURE/ conferences, clearly mitigates against any meaningful debate. I last subscribed to the conference in 1995 but, resubscribing to gather material for this paper, I was struck by the essential sameness of the postings, and of the people who posted. Perhaps in some ways, with some notable exceptions, the same could be said for *zamir* and, certainly, for

/APC/YUGO/ANTIWAR/. In a sense, this is the profound problem about all of the eMail conferences on the wars: they depend upon, and themselves construct, a notion of fixed positions, in which the professed and profound 'anti-nationalism' of some conferences becomes weakened by being little more than a mirror image of the nationalism, no less assured, of others.

6.3 As Maja Povrzanovic, in a series of perceptive essays, has argued (cf. Povrzanovic, 1993a; 1993b), such fixed categorisations are unhelpful when discussing the shifting concerns of ordinary people and, indeed, intellectuals, in war conditions. In terms of the conferences discussed above, there seems to be no place for the profane, the dubious, the doubting, or the simply confused - into which categories most of the population, even most of the eMail using population, probably fall, at least some of the time. For all its post-modern apparel, then, eMail may be revealed as the last refuge of a peculiarly modernist discourse and politics.

6.4 I would suggest that one way of developing a framework for discussing eMail conferences in times of conflict would involve a reassessment of work on forms of trust or what Putnam has termed 'social capital' defined as 'features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, 1995: p. 67). As Putnam defines it, social capital is clearly meant to be a 'public good', existing in a series of virtuous circles as trust builds upon trust, in contrast to Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' (cf. Bourdieu, 1984), which is far more fractured, individualistic and defined through indefinable competition (in which someone is allowed to say: 'I have it, you don't').

6.5 For me, both 'cultural' and 'social capitals' exist at very different levels, from the small group, through the nation state, to the global level. Indeed, elsewhere, I have made much of the ways in which the fashion for particular kinds of NGO networking has done little more than perpetuate the 'global cultural capital' accumulation of a group I have defined as the 'new globalised professional middle-class' (cf. Stubbs, 1997b; 1997c). This may be too cynical and pessimistic a position to hold, however. The conversion of cultural capital accumulation into social capital, or general trust and co- operation, is likely to be a much longer-term process than I have previously suggested. I would continue to assert, however, that this move from 'the cultural' to 'the social' is far more likely at local levels than at global levels, and also requires a degree of openness, inclusivity, and commitment to articulating alternative common sense, and being heard, within the wider community.

6.6 It is certainly the case that, within any of the post-Yugoslav countries in conflict, outside support for particular kinds of 'anti-nationalist' discourses have, at best, had little wider effect and, at worst, have been used by dominant forces to spread mistrust of any such movement. This is the greatest problem with Turmir's optimism regarding the 'distributive and emancipatory' claims of cultural capital within the globalisation process. The idea that eMail, to be an effective tool, should be one part of a localised battle for hearts and minds is a radical challenge to current understandings and suggests that globalisation processes cannot be assumed to operate linearly.

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