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# **Recovering experience, confirming identity, voicing resistance: the Braceros, the internet and counter-coordination**

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## ***Abstract***

This paper argues that the learning trajectory of corporations utilising information and communication technologies have been matched by the trade union movement. However, a broader set of on-line practices are illustrated. The paper argues that these can be harnessed to move beyond the reactive shadowing capital to innovative forms of monitoring and critiquing policies and outcomes of governance through which to argue for a different understanding of the nature and consequences of the current mode of globalisation

## **Introduction**

This paper describes a new form of counter-coordination which combines the lessons learned by unions and organised labour with the paradigm of social and cultural movements which have developed through the use of networked technologies. It sets this new paradigm against the history of the diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within commercial and government organisations.

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The development of new forms of electronically supported administration and commerce has triggered corresponding innovation within the trade union movement. This progression of understanding within the union movement is set against wider responses to issues of identity and networking encountered in the present form of globalisation. Key contributions to the globalisation debate are coming from broader political movements sitting outside both the business context and outside mainstream party politics as practised in Western liberal democracies. The forms of discourse developed by NGOs and broader political movements complement those within the formal labour movement. Such forms allow alternative views of events to stand against the dominant narrative and provide the basis of a new form of governance of both public and private policy

## **A History of Transformation**

The role of ICTs in the current mode of globalisation requires an examination of the wider issues of networking and identity. It will examine a convergence between the strands of labour identity, movement and counter-coordination, suggesting a form in which the lived experience of individual workers and their families can be combined with the political experience of organised labour in a rich medium of record.

“Globalisation” is not a novel and irresistible process delivering unproblematic technological transformation of economic and social relationships. Such presentations of globalisation represent an ideological interpretation of significant technological changes. Globalisation delivers, at best, partial and selective inclusion in local and distant relationships. A range of

discussions of globalisation from a variety of perspectives (e.g. Castells, 1997; Clarke and Clegg, 1998; Giddens, 1999; Stiglitz, 2002; Clegg, Kornberger and Pitsis 2005) acknowledge a transformative element to current changes. Globalisation has repositioned the combination of the personal and political, celebrated in nineteen seventies slogans, in terms of their reciprocal impact on domestic as well as public spaces through networking (Little, 2000; 2004). The understanding of micro-spatial decision-making around urban spaces (eg Nelson, 1988) now applies to the global selection and location of resources (Castells, 1996, Dicken, 1998).

A recent driver of globalisation for the corporate sector has been the reduction of transaction costs achieved through ICTs which replace a production or supply “chain” with much more densely networked patterns. The dynamics of the underlying information and communication technologies mean that the focus of attention has shifted from flows of material to flows of information and knowledge. Production and consumption of goods and services take place in an increasingly complex web, in which sophisticated and commodified products may be produced and consumed at either its centre or periphery.

In the deep and complex history of the internationalisation of trade (Diamond 1997), the Western mercantile tradition developed around a specific set of technologies, such as reliable navigation aids, developed by Portuguese mariners (Law 1986). Hirst and Thompson (1996) argue that a functional plateau was reached with the reliability and regularity of the steamship and electric telegraph by the conclusion of the nineteenth century. The regularity and reliability of communication achieved by these technologies represented a step change from earlier situations of long-distance coordination blighted by the tyranny of distance (see for

example Blainey's description of European settlement in Australia: Blainey, 1966).

Information and communication technologies are essential to evolving levels of control over critical resources spatially distributed across national boundaries.

In the past, when capital was largely nationally concentrated, one such critical resource was the supply, control and disposition of labour. National labour movements were able to exercise significant degrees of organization and mobilization in reaction to strategies that employers enacted in national labour markets, in order to maximize their nationally comparative competitive position. The entrenchment of a "White Australia" labour market policy in the program of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was perhaps the most spectacularly successful of such enactments. The origins of the 'White Australia' policy can be traced to the 1850s. White miners' resentment towards industrious Chinese diggers culminated in violence on the Buckland River in Victoria, and at Lambing Flat (now Young) in New South Wales. The governments of these two colonies introduced restrictions on Chinese immigration. Factory workers were vehemently opposed to all forms of immigration, which might threaten their jobs - particularly by non-white people who they thought would accept a lower standard of living and work for lower wages. At the time of Federation in 1901 a dictation test was introduced for prospective immigrants, to exclude certain applicants (those who did not conform to the "white" test) by requiring them to pass a written test in a language, with which they were not necessarily familiar, nominated by an immigration officer. With these severe measures the implementation of the 'White Australia' policy was warmly applauded in most sections of the community, especially those that represented organized labour (Connell and Irving 1980).

Analytically, the White Australia policy represented an example of an extended attempt to exclude competitive labour. More typically, these strategies have been enacted at the firm level as firms seek cheaper labour inputs and unions seek to either exclude or organize these inputs. Clearly, taking the White Australia policy as an extreme example, rigging labour markets is an effective way of protecting domestic labour providers. With the offence that systems of exclusion provide to liberal opinion it is hardly surprising that such responses are no longer a part of the repertoire of national labour movements. Bargaining and exclusion has to occur over more explicit skill-based requirements and definitions. Yet, such bargaining is conducted in national industrial relations systems. It should be evident that the extent to which national firms can loosen their capital from a given national sphere and deploy it more globally, the greater the leverage they will have over any given nationally organized labour movement.

What strategies of loosening have been followed by firms operating transnationally? Ford Motor Company Europe began a process of "complementarisation" across its European manufacturing resources from 1966 onwards, ensuring that multiple and redundant sourcing of components minimised both the threat of disruption and the bargaining power of the unions in any single jurisdiction. The unions responded by networking their separate nationally constituted organisations to match this coordinative capability. The subsequent restructuring of such relationship across much wider geographical dispersal has led to what Lipietz (1992) terms the end of the "Fordist compromise", in which manufacturing activity was matched by co-located consumption. ICTs have made it possible to minimise the cost of labour by separating producer and consumer with little loss in productive efficiency. The emergence of a political discourse which challenges the exploitative nature of such separation

of core consumer and peripheral producer has demonstrated the capacity of ICTs to deliver monitoring and criticism of top-down policies to both policy makers and the wider public, leading to the possibility of a new mode of *metagovernance* of these network relationships (Grieco, Little and Macdonald, 2003; Little, 2003).

Locational strategies employing state-of-the-art ICTs allowed white collar work from the US mainland to be relocated off-shore to the Caribbean as far back as the 1980s. Long before the current level of out-sourcing and call-centre activity "front office" tasks in prestigious locations were divided from "back office" tasks that had been relegated to the more local periphery of outer suburbia (Nelson, 1988). With the new freedom of location facilitated by electronic coordination, however, high and low value activities occupy a more complex spatial relationship. Research and development, raw materials sources and routine manufacturing, final assembly, markets and after-market support may involve physically adjacent activities supporting different value chains in different industries. Such complex inter-penetration of peripheries and cores requires appropriate underpinning information and communication infrastructure in addition to physical location.

## **Networks and Practice**

Globalisation has always hinged on key technological developments (see Sproull and Kiesler, 1991). Associated with these have been forms of social learning reliant on lived experience in the new situation which are often neglected in the emergence of new forms of practice.

Technical innovation may achieve efficiency gains but social learning is necessary to achieve transformations of effectiveness (see Zuboff, 1988). The first and second industrial revolutions led to a spatial hierarchy involving resources, manufacturers, and consumers,

characterised as an orderly pattern of flows of resources from a colonised periphery to a developed core and the distribution of goods and services, followed by diffusion of "advanced" practices from centre to periphery.

Centripetal forms of spatial organization may be said to have been dominant in the history of commerce. However, a critical shift from centripetal hierarchical models of organisation to more open, networked relationships is recently apparent. It is encapsulated in Saxenian's comparison between Route 128 and Silicon Valley in the United States (Saxenian 1994). Route 128 around Boston emerged as a centre of high technology industries in the 1960s. The East Coast approach relied upon established companies and a new relationship with universities and central government, the core of President Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex". However, on the West Coast, relatively closed, large, individual organisations have been superseded by densely networked environments sustaining a rapid rate and high volume of innovation, typified by Silicon Valley, which is dominated by the loosely networked companies which grew up with the new technologies they promote in a milieu which provides a labour market and financial services appropriate to networked innovation.

By the end of the twentieth century the vertically integrated multinational corporation, under unified ownership, had been replaced by networks of externalised relationships between associated but often autonomous firms. This wider separation of networks which link locations in East Asia with the U.S. and Europe is typified by the operations of electronics companies such as Texas Instruments which distributes research and development between Austin Texas and Taipei. Smooth operation relies upon a synchronised corporate database physically replicated on identical hardware at each end of the link using a high-capacity



datalink. The notion of “networked enterprise” promoted by Castells (1996) as a means of geographically and temporally constrained collaboration in order to enter and shape specific market has, however, already been superseded by more durable modes of operation.

Companies such as ARM Holdings (<http://www.arm.com/>) produce high value intellectual property utilised by other companies that rely, in turn, upon third party manufacturing facilities delivered by companies such as Flextronics (<http://www.flextronics.com/>). The actors located at each node of the network have a range of geographical locations available in which to produce. The distribution of intellectual property and physical processes through ICTs represents the furthest development of ICT dependent re-configuration.

When one considers these conditions of production it is evident that trade unions face a new reality. Their initial responses to Ford’s geographical strategy were to network transnationally as a counterweight; however, it is evident that they now have to respond to a much more complex set of relationships. These undermine their ability to co-ordinate appropriate responses to management demands for ever lower costs and higher productivity. Organised labour has had to match the learning trajectory of that capital in whose employ it is globally arraigned. The literature addressing the use of IT in business and administration, and its consequences for social and industrial organisation (eg Dunlop and Kling; 1991, Zuboff; 1988), provide an archive of the learning process involved in these changes. Mainstream information systems text books provide an unobtrusive measure of the shifts in business understanding. For example, Sprague and McNurlin (1986, 1993, 1998) characterised this change in focus of IT use in organisations as a move from *Looking Inward* to improve company processes and structure to *Looking Outward* to incorporate products and services to *Looking Across*, that is linking to other organisations in order better to manage the supply and

value change in an increasingly complex business environment (Sprague and McNurlin, 1997).

Computerisation within commercial and administrative organisations initially represented an extension of earlier office technologies designed to address internal efficiency. As the potential of computers to manage supply chain and customer relationships became apparent, organisational effectiveness became a primary objective. Finally, as the innovations in business models and inter-firm relationships permitted by the synergies of networking became apparent, inter-organisational management of the production and value chain became the focus of both local and global systems.

Unions and organised labour have of necessity followed a comparable learning trajectory, in response to the consequent shifts in the dynamics of the workplace. Hogan and Greene (2002) argue that their initial strategies, which applied ICTs to the recruitment and servicing of members – equivalent to the internal efficiencies, have been succeeded by a focus on the organisation and mobilisation of membership. Significant global campaigns have emerged from within the trade union movement and from the critics of globalisation. The next section looks at how these are leading to a form of electronic coordination which represents more than a reactive response to events.

## **Emerging Practice and Sustainable Responses**

A globally distributed mode of production, consumption and supply has a significant impact on organised labour since inward investors can pick their distributed points of presence from a beauty parade of aspiring recipients. By openly seeking the most favourable infrastructures

and government support, local and national, the large inward investors have ensured that governments in turn argue for labour market deregulation and weak employment legislation. This is seen as essential to the attraction to inward investment or the prevention of the re-location of existing activities (Clegg, Kornberger and Pitsis 2005). The electronically coordinated global economy requires a degree of open connectivity. One consequence may be that there arises a conflict between national social conservatism and containment and the demands of non-national inward investors. For instance, the inherent tensions in the modernisation strategy of Malaysia have been highlighted by Holmes and Grieco (2001), who illustrated how the necessary infrastructure for participation in a global economy created new forms of discourse (see also Greico this volume). Other political discourse has emerged at an inter- or trans-national level, using the same technologies. For example, tensions on an international scale have emerged over one of the most globalised industries – big pharmaceuticals – with contestation between drug providers and social movements representing the infected and affected drug users (Little and Greico, in press).

While “Big Pharma” maintains its own presence and its internal discourse on-line (see: <http://www.biospace.com/index.cfm>) these are subject to on-line critique by campaign activists (see: <http://www.global-campaign.org/bigpharma.htm>). Act Up represents the U.S. AIDS activists who demonstrated physically against pharmaceutical companies in the 1980s, and continues to monitor events and archive the struggle (see <http://www.actupny.org/reports/milano.html>). Debate from within affected regions that might otherwise be seen as marginal, geographically, becomes possible. For instance, an African Aids portal has been established with the sponsorship of the South African Government At <http://www.afroaidsinfo.org/>. The South African Treatment Action Campaign in turn targets

this government's policies at <http://www.cosatu.org.za/docs/2000/hiv-ned.htm>. The responsibility of employers for the health of their employees is highlighted by <http://www.treat-your-workers.org/endorsements.html>. The engagement of organised labour in campaigns for treatment and monitoring can be seen in the policy statements of the congress of South African Trades Unions at <http://www.cosatu.org.za/docs/2000/hiv-ned.htm>.

In April 2001, in the face of concerted campaigns in both real and cyber space, a major concession was won from Big Pharma. Pharmaceutical companies withdrew a court bid to stop South Africa from importing or producing cheap versions of patented AIDS drugs, in effect, surrendering intellectual property to which they were legally entitled in the face of globalised political counter-coordination. At a wider level of analysis, anti-globalisation activists have made extensive use of the internet, from Seattle onwards, to present their arguments. Klein's work in collating the arguments of the most exploited participants in the global system (Klein, 2000) is now presented in the form of an on-line portal linking to the struggles described at <http://www.nologo.org/>.

Elsewhere, the combination of armed and virtual resistance developed by the EZLN – the Zapatistas – delivered the striking image of the laptop in the rainforest as the ultimate disintermediation between the periphery and the information-rich core, viewable at <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html> and at <http://www.uff.br/mestcii/cleaver.htm>. Regionally focussed struggle provides a core image of this new paradigm for activism. While the EZLN articulates a set of political demands, these are firmly embedded in an understanding of indigenous identity and culture which is also

conveyed through cyberspace (see [http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/2001/ccri/juchitan\\_feb.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/ezln/2001/ccri/juchitan_feb.html)). The free flow of information and resources required by the current mode of globalisation facilitates the distribution of these alternative narratives.

Alternative narratives present a set of problems when viewed through the lens of the U.S. inspired “War on Terrorism”. Disruption of perceived terrorist networks implies the potential to disrupt or constrain global flows of information. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (U.N., 2004) requires member states to legislate in order to prevent the diffusion of technical knowledge and resources relevant to the development of weapons of mass destruction by non-state actors. A concern to avoid potentially dangerous technology leaving the control of established governments is understandable. Arms control regimes, particularly those concerned with chemical and biological weapons, are designed to deal with national programmes involving many tonnes of active material. Terrorist attacks, such as the sarin attacks on the Tokyo subway system, have involved tens of grammes. As with earlier attempts to limit the diffusion of advanced information technologies to the Communist Block, however, these constraints also have the potential to undermine the free flow of information and resources routed by the current mode of globalisation.

Of equal concern in the terrorist framework is the cross border movement of labour, legal and illegal. The electronic movement of capital, real and intellectual, is matched by significant flows of labour between low cost and high cost environments. Since regions with higher costs seek to retain higher value work, which requires relevant skills and commands corresponding rewards, there is often a corresponding shortage of resources for the remaining lower grade,

low wage activities. Outsourcing strategies that have re-distributed white-collar work on a global basis are of no use for low value physical work in assembly, personal services and agriculture within specific developed world national spaces. When an activity cannot be sent where the wages are lower then the low waged must be brought into the national space. Of course, this is often accomplished illegally. An underclass of workers who are often illegal immigrants works sporadically in extreme conditions outside the formally regulated labor market: think of sweatshops in the garment industry, for instance. As Jones (2003) reports, there is research from Deloitte & Touche (1998) that suggests that informal sector activity ranges from 40% in the Greek economy, through to 8% to 10% of the British economy. States often encourage the informal sector as an arena from which street-level and taxable entrepreneurs might develop in enterprises other than the marketing of drugs, prostitutes, and the proceeds of crime (Deloitte & Touche 1998; Sassen 1998).

In the United States, during World War II Mexican migrant labour was brought into the country to replace a US workforce which had been diverted to war production. Many individuals stayed after the war. It is estimated that there are approximately one million US residents who are descended from these workers or their families. Moreover, given the porous land borders of the United States, many wealthy middle-class people in major cities live off the backs of migrant, often illegal, labor. Victor Villaseñor's (1992) book *Rain of Gold* tells a moving story. He writes of a Mexican American friend who swam the Rio Grande five times before he became a hybrid, and of another who lived and raised a family in New York City for seventeen years. When he first came, he told him, it was difficult to adapt because there were no shops selling the ingredients of Mexican cooking, no chilies, tomatillos, or masa harina. Now those items can be bought five minutes from his New York

home. Even in cities such as Melbourne or Manchester, far from Mexico, it is possible to buy these things. The globalization of languages, food, and cuisines, together with the spread of places of worship, is a good index of globalization, because wherever people move, they take their everyday material cultures with them, and their language, religion, and food are the most evident manifestations of such culture. Well, at least they do where they are able to stay. There are, however, some categories of worker that are shipped in and then shipped out and who never achieve residency, whether legal or not.

In common with many other countries, the U.K. has operated a Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme since WWII (see [http://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/comments.php?id=740\\_0\\_4\\_0](http://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/comments.php?id=740_0_4_0)). The scheme allows foreign students to enter the UK to fill seasonal farm jobs as legal workers but the treatment and status of these workers provokes continuing debate, (e.g. Elliot; 2000; Lawrence; 2003) while the expansion of the European Union to twenty-five members has provided new sources of legal and illegal labour that may still be relatively disadvantaged (Kosviner, 2003). The experiences of these individual and their families, the legal mechanism around their status and their treatment are now logged on the internet. The next section describes the creation of an active archive of this material.

## **Indexing the Braceros**

*President Bush has declared his intention to restart negotiations over immigration reform with the Mexican government. But the main reform under consideration, in the post 9/11 era, is no longer an amnesty for undocumented immigrants. Both governments have proposed a temporary worker program that looks hauntingly*

*familiar -- like the bracero program of 1941-1964. One participant in that program, Rigoberto Garcia Perez, remembers that while it was humiliating and abusive, it also led to his family settling in the US. He told his story to David Bacon, as part of a documentation project on transnational communities sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. (See <http://www.labornotes.org/archives/2002/04/f.html>).*

Post 9/11 anxieties over nationality and identity have led to a resurrection of the arrangements applied to the Braceros – the strong arms – that came north to replace agricultural workers drawn into wartime manufacturing production in the United States. Instead of a normalisation of the status of migrant workers, as expected, a much less equitable set of arrangements is now being proposed by the Federal administration. However, these are themselves subject to critical cyber scrutiny. The Oaxaca Index was constructed as a shadow exercise during the tenth APROS international colloquium held in Oaxaca, Mexico in December 2003 (see <http://www.aeo-uami.org/apros/oaxaca/>). The aim was to generate a set of resources in support of the face-to-face interactions and observations that were taking place in Mexico. Materials created at the colloquium were also placed on the website, linked to existing resources (see [http://www.geocities.com/archiving\\_practice/outsidein.html](http://www.geocities.com/archiving_practice/outsidein.html)). The aim of the Oaxaca Index was to capture existing materials using a simple word search function on the world wide web, in order to create a matrix of materials surrounding *los braceros*, the migrant Mexican workers who crossed the US border. For translation of Spanish text into English a free online resource was located at <http://www.freetranslation.com/>. A simple html template was used to log the keywords used and the search results, providing live links to the materials discovered at [http://www.geocities.com/archiving\\_practice/losbraceros.html](http://www.geocities.com/archiving_practice/losbraceros.html). A similar search was used to



discover material and narratives based around the international boundary between Mexico and the United States at [http://www.geocities.com/archiving\\_practice/boundariesandborders.html](http://www.geocities.com/archiving_practice/boundariesandborders.html) which links in turn to a portal for resources documenting the nature and implications of this international divide(see <http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol2no1/borderlands.html>). These searches uncovered a range of material, from family archives (see <http://www.cmp.ucr.edu/students/glasshouses/>) to personal histories (at <http://www.labornotes.org/archives/2002/04/f.html>) and contemporary records create by U.S. academics.

*The Braceros in Oregon Photograph Collection is an artificial collection; the images were drawn from several University Archives collections. They include the Extension Bulletin Illustrations Photograph Collection (P 20), the Extension and Experiment Station Communications Photograph Collection (P 120), the Extension Service Photograph Collection (P 62), the Agriculture Photograph Collection (P 40), and Harriet's Collection.*(<http://digitalcollections.library.oregonstate.edu/bracero/>)

*Labour Management Decisions* has placed on line a set of official photographs taken of the processing of Mexican workers on arrival in the U.S. (see [http://are.berkeley.edu/APMP/pubs/lmd/html/winterspring\\_93/gallery.html](http://are.berkeley.edu/APMP/pubs/lmd/html/winterspring_93/gallery.html)). An attempt at the construction of a comprehensive archive can be found in Spanish at <http://www.farmworkers.org/bespanol.html> and in English at <http://www.farmworkers.org/benglish.html>

Current material includes records of a class action being conducted in the United States in pursuit of wages set aside under the UDS-Mexican agreement as a form of compulsory saving but never passed on to the workers involved.

*About 350,000 contract workers (called "Braceros," Spanish for strong arms) were hired beginning in 1942 to assist the United States in response to the depleted national workforce caused by World War II. The Braceros provided farm labor and worked in rail road yards. Under a bilateral agreement between the United States and the Government of Mexico, forced savings accounts were created for the Braceros. Into each account, a portion of the Braceros' wages were deposited. The purpose of these accounts was to ensure that the Braceros would return home to Mexico upon termination of their contracts*  
[\(<http://www.lieffcabraser.com/braceros.htm>\)](http://www.lieffcabraser.com/braceros.htm)

House Resolution 522 of the California State Legislature acknowledges the contribution of the Braceros with Braceros Day  
[\(\[http://www.house.gov/ose/Press/Press\\\_Releases/2003/September/22sept03\\\_braceros\\\_recognition.htm\]\(http://www.house.gov/ose/Press/Press\_Releases/2003/September/22sept03\_braceros\_recognition.htm\)\)](http://www.house.gov/ose/Press/Press_Releases/2003/September/22sept03_braceros_recognition.htm).

One striking discovery was of the *retablos*, a remarkable collection of which can be seen in Frida Kahlo's house in Coyoacan, Mexico City.

*These wooden alter screens emerged in Mexico during the early eighteenth century as a blend of European and Amerindian votive traditions. In time, the term retablo came to refer to individual paintings on wood, tin, or canvas. In colonial Mexico, paintings*

were commissioned by individuals or purchased from untrained traveling artists and included in home altars. (<http://www.bloomingtonlatino.net/retablosdescription.html>)

This form is used for both religious and secular narrative. As with the EZLN a clear stand of identity and cultural orientation is evident in the extant materials from the Braceros community. The assembly and re-framing of the Braceros material into an index of action, past and present coupled with the rich infrastructure of cultural identity demonstrates the recovery of historical practice in a manner which challenges the re-creation of that practice under similar conditions of perceived national threat to the United States. The real-time assembly of extant material provided a means to broadcast and network such conceptions of practice. It also represents a step in a process of social learning within the Odyssey Group of organisation researchers that has been conducted over several years and on several continents (see [http://www.geocities.com/the\\_odyssey\\_group/](http://www.geocities.com/the_odyssey_group/)).

The on-line materials which archive the experience of the Braceros represent a combination of pre-existing cultural forms – the *retablos* with their graphic narrative content carrying a cultural identity to new territory– and more widely familiar forms of on-line record. The Oaxaca Index functions as a portal to a set of resources relevant to the experience and aspirations of the Braceros and their families. A portal is a home page which provides structured links into resources appropriate to its users. The rise of the portal metaphor to organise web access allows the margins to communicate with the centres: for instance, a country such as Estonia provides public access in its own Finno-Ugric language (Abbate, 2000). Freely available “front-end” translation software, as incorporated in the Index, can

now overcome the language barrier. Miller and Slater (2000) describe a distinctive set of social activities undertaken on the Internet by the Trinidadian diaspora:

“Indeed the significance of studying the Internet is the degree to which it transcends dualisms such as local against global. It forces us to acknowledge a more complex dialectic through which specificity is a product of generality and vice versa” (Miller and Slater p. 7).

The incorporation of personal, cultural and political identity into this new mode is a necessary response to the penetration of public and private space by the logic of globalisation (Little 2000). While forms of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other identity-based politics have been able to use the internet effectively to carve out a viable presence in cyber space, what is the potential for more traditional collectivist organizations from the labour movement?

### ***Counter-coordination as Governance***

Hogan and Greene (2002) argue that member services, outreach and mobilisation have been succeeded by contestations over the nature of internal democracy within unions. They contrast the relative lack of success of the service-oriented strategies with the degree of mobilisation achieved around the contestation over internal processes. Inter-union coordination in response to the globalisation of value chains was taken forward by the Liverpool dockers dispute which took place between 1995 and 1998. Extensive mobilisation of support from within and beyond the labour movement was achieved through the use of ICTs in concert with more traditional forms of mobilisation (Carter, Clegg Hogan and Kornberger, 2003). Following the defeat of the dockers, the skills developed in the struggle

have been carried forward to archive the dispute (<http://www.mmm.merseyside.org/cd.htm>) and to develop a sustainable skill-base within the community (<http://www.mmm.merseyside.org/project.htm>). Within 48 hours of the settlement of the UK dispute an identical dispute broke out in Australia, a locus of support for the Liverpool workers and a regulated labour environment. This second dispute is archived at <http://mua.org.au/war/> and is discussed in Clegg (1999). Of critical significance was the role of the Federal Australian government in planning the dispute, involving overseas training of serving members of the Australian armed services: <http://mua.org.au/war/cloak.html> <http://www.ilwu19.com/global/wharfie/update65.htm>.

Clearly learning and counter-coordination is taking place on both sides and new forms of coordination and counter-coordination can be expected. The hijacking of the EZLN logo for commercial purposes and the response to it shows what is in play: <http://www.spacehijackers.co.uk/html/projects/boxfreshres.html>

The emerging global system is far from complete and far from determined, but it is having a profound impact on social and working life in the regions included within and excluded from it. Information and communication technologies are driving the distributed processes of globalisation. ICTs provide new forms of cultural and political indexicality. They also provide new forms of counter-coordination for excluded constituencies. In turn these are the means for the potentially excluded to refine and develop their experience and knowledge most relevant to the new relationships. The richness with which the consequences of policy can be illustrated and archived provides the critical link in the construction of a process of

metagovernance - governance of governance – in a critical discourse from which the national and local state has too often withdrawn.

The speed of change in markets, competition and technology means that there is a socio-institutional lag as any new techno-economic paradigm emerges (Perez, 1983). For example, e-commerce is already mutating into m-commerce: mobile delivery of services. Despite the relative inadequacy of current WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) mobile telephony, the combination of low earth orbit (LEO) satellites with Global Positioning Systems (GPS) will allow location-sensitive services to be delivered to individuals and groups on the move (Taplin, 2000). Federal legislation which predates 9/11 requires GPS transmitters to be fitted to all US cell-phones. There will be continuing reassessment of the spatial and cultural dynamics of flows of capital and labour. The lag presents an opportunity to develop and demonstrate forms of metagovernance from within and between the affected communities themselves

## **Conclusion**

The paper argues that unions and organised labour have had some success in harnessing the key technologies driving current globalisation and that they have much to learn from the ways in which various identity-politics have used web space. They have matched the sequence of innovation and organisational learning evident in the commercial development and deployment of ICTs and emerging global forms of interaction. However, the example of the Oaxaca Index in collating the on-line resources of the Braceros indicates a potential proactive advance over even the most sophisticated versions of distributed coordination. The

incorporation of a cultural frame is of critical importance given the cultural dynamic identified in the role of global brands (Klein, 2000).

The open approach represented by the Oaxaca Index and related on-line artefacts retains an advantage over the corporate model. The significant value of the intellectual property at the centre of the ARM/Flextronics paradigm of global production described earlier demands a restriction on the open flow of ideas and of the growth of network relationships. There is a need for caution and constraints to be placed on actual and prospective partners in order to preserve intellectual property. As with the paradigm of Open Source software development (Raymond, 2003) in which software code is shared freely and openly across a community of developers, the public good approach exemplified by the Oaxaca Index on the Braceros shows that personal and public information and materials can be shared freely and that critical synergies can emerge from such free exchange.

The construction of identity and the recovery of experience are essential to the formulation of sustainable resistance and to repositioning around the processes of globalisation. The reframing and indexing of extant materials logging the experience and aspirations of the Braceros, in both economic and cultural terms, is a demonstration of a capacity for networked responses to networked problems. The capacity to counter and contextualise otherwise unchallenged assertions allows a form of governance beyond the constraints of national or regional remit. The success of AIDS campaigners is shifting both government and corporate policy suggests that this *metagovernance* takes counter-coordination to a new level of social discourse.

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