Rivista Italiana di Antropologia Applicata
ANALISI DEI PROCESSI SOCIOCULTURALI NELLA SOCIETA' CONTEMPORANEA – ISSN 2499-1848

TECNOLOGIA DIGITALE INDIGENA. WEB-SITE E ARCHIVI DIGITALI TRA I TAICHO ED I YELLOKNIVES DENE

INDIGENOUS DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES. THE TAICHO AND YELLOKNIVES DENE'S WEB-SITE AND CULTURAL ONLINE ARCHIVES

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Abstract

Cyberspace is only one of the many metaphors used to describe the Internet. While there is a growing body of literature on the identity formation in cyberspace, there are important gaps in this field. One of these is related to the analysis of the use of digital technologies by the Northern Canadian Indigenous people. Precisely, the author, focusing her attention on Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene communities in Northwest Territories of Canada, analyzes the contents of their web-sites and online archives in order to understand how these native groups promote their culture and spread out their knowledge through digital technologies for working toward decolonization.

Keywords: Indigenous cyberspace; Online Indigenous Methodology; Indigenous web-sites and archives; post-colonialism studies; revitalization.

Introduction

Indigenous peoples' survival, recovery, development, and self-determination hinges on the preservation and revitalization of languages, spiritual practices, social relations, and arts.

Virtual environments, with their unique combination of story, design, code, architecture, art provide a rich medium through which to explore different strategies for pursuing such preservation and revitalization.

Specifically, a sense of place is a vital part of how Indigenous people of Northwest Territories of Canada develop and interpret identity and community. While land is a fundamental part of this conception, many contemporary scholars working in Indigenous studies are also analyzing the development of off-land Indigenous space. This is not to say that connections to land and traditional ancestral territory are any less important, or that struggle for these territories should be foregone[1]. It is to argue that Indigenous Canadian people have found, in the digital technologies, an instrument to work against settler forces and where they can voice their political needs.

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[1] Boyer, 1992, p. 115.

In Canada, the documentation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and traditional activities are now increasingly cited as priorities in support of well-being in Indigenous communities. Although undermined for generations by colonial institutions and processes, the elders and the youth in Indigenous communities actively use appropriate emerging technologies to strengthen their traditions and language in ways that challenge conventional representations of the digital divide[2]. While cutting edge technological efforts in the 1970s included specially modified typewriters and custom-made fonts to represent Indigenous writing systems, contemporary native communities draw upon digital tools (online, text, Internet, radio and mobile devices) to nurture the continued development of their languages and cultures.

Historically, media technologies in English (and other colonial languages) informed how settler cultures imagined Indigenous peoples, whether through print, photography or film[3]. In these kinds of stereotypical narratives, Indigenous peoples appear as they are not present in modernity.

Although much has been written about mobile communication and mobile media, the Canadian Indigenous people have been largely ignored. Yet, Indigenous people are an integral part of the mobile revolution, using a variety of mobile technologies to bring their traditional cultures into the Twenty-First Century. The explosion of mobile devices and applications in Indigenous communities offer the potential to address issues of geographic isolation, build an environment for the learning and shearing the knowledge, provide support for cultural and language revitalization, and furnish a means for social and economic renewal[4].

Yet, just as aboriginal writers, photographers and filmmakers have carved out powerful Indigenous spaces in earlier media, so many Indigenous communities in Canada are working to develop unique networked, digital tools that support their work. Therefore, cyberspace, the notional environment generated through computer networks, is one of the "cities" that Indigenous people now populate.

"The information superhighway", "The global village", or as is common called "Cyberspace", are only a few of the metaphors used to describe the Internet, a vast global interconnected computer network which has dominated life in the 20th and 21st Centuries. While online media spaces are often described as an open limitless frontier by scholars and users alike, recent scholarships have shown that racism, sexism, and other discriminatory forces shape user experiences. Therefore, in this way, some scholars argue for the need to collapse the real/virtual binary, which dismisses the co-construction of the real and the virtual in cyberspace[5].

While there is a growing body of literature on race and identity formation in cyberspace, there are important gaps in this field. Some of these gaps include: understanding how this space is shaped by computer architecture/programmers and designers/institutions; analyzing the spatial politics of cyberspace; outlining how other identities (aside from race) are articulated online; and, most importantly, dissecting the connections between material embodiment, feelings, and cyberspace. Nevertheless, some scholars have published important works on this topic. One of these is Amanda Frances Brown's. As she proposes, the "virtu-real", which reconnects the Internet to the bodies and to the daily life, interacts on/around/through online and offline spaces. Using the Dr. Adrienne

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[2] Peters, Andersen, 2013, p. 8.

[3] The design of the Internet, initially envisioned to serve specific military functions, unexpectedly developed into a widely available, free and relatively open space, available to anyone with access to a computer and a level of comfort in one of its principal languages.

[4] Martinez, Cobo, 1987.

[5] Brown, 2015.

Keene's popular blog "Native Appropriations" as an important forum to discuss these issues, Brown analyses how Indigenous participants tie their experiences online to their offline bodies. Along these lines, Brown introduces the concept of *Cyborg-Intimacy* to explain the ways that intimacy happens in/on/through cyberspace. Therefore, she defines *Cyborg-Intimacy* as the embodied closeness a user feels/creates/presses against/moves through when interacting with technologies.

Another important scholar in this branch of research is Christine Boyer's. Notably, she asserts that since the new informal network the computer matrix called *cyberspace* is commonly defined as a huge megalopolis without a center, both a city of sprawl and an urban jungle[6]. According to Mike Patterson, a Métis scholar, cyberspace is, for Boyer, a place where the forest meets the highway[7], where land-based people such as Natives in Canada meet the landless world of e-commerce, dotcom, and global change. In the moment from forest to highway, from material to digital, from rural to urban, cyberspace extends traditional city setting into computerized spaces, throwing into sharp relief conversations on *landless* identity and demonstrating from a new angle the ways in which Indigenous culture persists and creates awareness among youth generations.

While digital technologies certainly can and do mediate Indigenous experiences, in this article I am more interested in the ways that aboriginal culture and traditional knowledge from Northwest Territories of Canada, and in particular of Tåîchô from Behchokǫ and Yellowknives Dene, create meaningful lives for Indigenous people in cyberspace, remediating cultural practices and challenging the ways in which we commonly refer to as cyberspace in relation to their emic conceptions of the land. While the emerging literature on the issues surrounding cyberspace has uncovered important anthropological aspects, this article takes a different approach and considers the potential possibilities of new media technologies for Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene communities. Notably, in this article I consider the main online Indigenous web-sites where data on Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene communities' culture and communications are collected. Therefore, I consider the follow web-sites: http://www.nwtexhibits.ca; http://ykdene.com/; http://research.tlicho.ca/resources/digital-archives.

Moreover, by focusing specifically on the possibilities for Indigenous users, I argue that cyberspace is a critical landscape for Indigenous peoples to work toward decolonization, carve out Indigenous spaces online, and foster Indigenous cultures and knowledge. Furthermore, I will try to demonstrate how cyberspace is important for them to negotiate their social and political questions with Canadian Government both online and offline.

Especially in the Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene communities, availability of versatile and mobile technologies in a very marginalized geographical areas near the North Pole has created high expectations among young people in terms of what digital tools can do, how they function and what they should look like.

The topic discussed in this article is also connected to an important question related to hand down Indigenous cultural heritage. Although rarely addressed in the scholarly literature, there are sometimes significant trauma-based barriers to culture and language mobilization within Indigenous communities. As a result of the legacy of the Indian Residential school system, many native language learners and teachers still carry feelings of distress and shame in relation to their culture and language and can have deep emotional responses to learning, hearing and sharing their knowledge linked to

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[6] Boyer, 1996.

[7] Patterson, 2010, p. 143-144.

the land, to traditional activities and language. Such behaviors are rooted in complex historical, social and emotional contexts that go far beyond simply building and implementing a curriculum.

1. Indigenous methodology

Indigenous studies, an interdisciplinary field of research exploring the history, culture, politics, issues, and contemporary experience of Indigenous peoples of North and South America, intersects with a number of issues related to access, preservation, and methodology that are, in this article, problematized through the development and deployment of digital tools.

While work has been done around the social use of digital technologies, there has been much less attention paid to the ways in which digital objects, practices, and methods function within native communities. Another problem within "digital native studies" is related to Western knowledge, with its flagship of research, which has often advanced into Indigenous people's communities with little regard for the notion of Indigenous world views and self-determination in human development. Therefore, in this issue, barriers to digital fluency in native American studies are varied and include such obstacles as cultural rules regarding access to sensitive materials, the advanced technical expertise that software and hardware often requires beyond basic digitization and problems of community engagement and trust that might limit the display of digital materials about native peoples.

There is an existing body of scholarship by Indigenous and various other social critics that questions the ethics of research involving Indigenous people brought on by misguided interests, motivations, and assumptions of an old order of scholarship. Various disciplines within the Western academy are implicated in embodying various types of research practices and knowledge claims that contribute to these concerns about ethics. Indeed, as some Indigenous people told me during my ethnographic research in Yellowknife, native American communities have had extensive first-hand experience with the ways that information resources held in distant institutions can impact their quality of life, their practice of religion, and their future as a people, sometimes with disastrous consequences, sometimes to their benefit. Nevertheless, Indigenous people can create, through dialog and cooperation, mutually beneficial solutions to develop new models for sharing stewardship and reciprocity between them and researchers or foreign institutions.

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith states, *Indigenous methodologies* tend to approach cultural protocols, values, and behaviors as an integral part of methodology. They are factors to be built into research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood[8].

Aboriginal people traditionally passed most of their worldview (customs, medicines, protocols, cultural practices, ceremonies, creation stories etc.) using oral methods. Much of this orality continues to the present day. In this context, protocols are a means to ensure that activities are carried out in a manner that reflects community teachings and are done in a good way. As Margaret Kovach argues, one of the most important approach that researchers should use during their researches among Canadian Indigenous people is called *conversational method*[9]. As the author highlights, the *conversational method* is of significance to *Indigenous methodologies* because it is a method of

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[8] Simon, Tuhiwai Smith, 2001.

[9] Kovach, 2010, p. 40.

gathering knowledge based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. It is relational at its core. Therefore, the relational dynamic between self, others, and nature is central.

During my research among Tåîchô from Behchokǫ and Yellowknives Dene, I focused myself on the method proposed by Kovach in order to understand a way which could be useful from an Indigenous perspective and create trust between them and me perceived as non-Indigenous researcher. Furthermore, as Shawn Wilson has argued, the concept of *Indigenous methodology* is a paradigmatic approach based upon an Indigenous philosophical positioning or epistemology[10].

Thus, it is not the method, per se, that is the determining characteristic of Indigenous methodologies, but rather the relationship between the method and paradigm and the extent to which the method, itself, is congruent with an Indigenous world view.

Since *Indigenous methodologies* are relatively emergent within western qualitative research[11] it is useful to explain what exactly is meant by the claim that *Indigenous methodologies* are a paradigmatic approach. As Neuman[12] reminds, a paradigm is a basic orientation to theory and thus impacts method. Within this approach, significant attention is paid to the assumptions about knowledge. This is differentiated from a more pragmatic approach (or applied research) which is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality[13]. Therefore, where using the term *paradigmatic approach* in relation to *Indigenous methodologies*, this means that this kind of research approach flows from an Indigenous belief system that has at its core a relational understanding and accountability to the world[14]. Indigenous epistemologies hold a non-human centric relational philosophy[15] and while tribal groups hold differing relationships with place and its history, as evident in local protocol and custom[16], there is a shared belief system among tribal groups[17]. This distinctive Indigenous paradigmatic orientation is a theory of how knowledge is constructed and as such it guides assumptions about what counts as knowledge[18] and offers guidance for research methods. Furthermore, an *Indigenous paradigm* welcomes a decolonizing perspective which is significant to focus on indigenous-settler relationships and seek to interrogate the social powerful that marginalize Indigenous peoples[19], even if decolonizing analysis is born of critical theory found within the transformative paradigm of Western tradition[20]. In other words, while a decolonizing perspective remains necessary and can be included as a theoretical positioning within research, it is not the epistemological center of an Indigenous methodological approach to research.

The *conversational method*, aligned with an Indigenous world view, was essential for me to understand how Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene people adopt digital technologies for social and

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[10] Wilson, 2001, p. 177.
[11] Absolon, Willett, 2004; Kovach 2005.
[12] Neuman, 2006.
[13] Creswell, 2003, p.12
[14] Steinhauer, 2001.
[15] Deloria, 2004; Ermine, 1995
[16] Battiste, McConaghy, 2005.
[17] Littlebear, 2000.
[18] Kirby et al., 2006.
[19] Nicoll, 2004.
[20] Mertens, 2005.

economic needs. In general, most Indigenous communities in Canada, and especially in Northwest Territories, are small, remote and rural. Furthermore, Indigenous groups are often concentrated within a small geographic footprint to support local infrastructure development such as water, wastewater, electricity, roads and telecommunications. In Yellowknife, and to a smaller extend in Behchokǫ, public services including education, health, justice, and governance facilities are usually surrounded by the housing units within relatively tight clusters of buildings. While these settlements are practical for development purposes, there are ongoing challenges such as housing shortages, high cost of transportation, food costs, maintenance and operation of all the facilities[21]. Moreover, most Indigenous communities require unique programs and services to properly operate, maintain, sustain, and upgrade the infrastructure required to support the residents. At the same time, digital infrastructure costs are much higher in remote areas such as Behchokǫ and in zones near Makenzie Delta then in other regions of the country. The economic situation combined with the high cost of connectivity suggest that in these remote areas, Indigenous people may be struggling to pay the high costs of using digital technologies. Simultaneously, Indigenous people from Yellowknife and Behchokǫ demonstrate to be eager users of digital technologies and they adopt them to meet their economic, social and cultural needs. Moreover, one of the most positive issue in these contexts are certainly that they can also extend the historic and ongoing reality of the offline economic, social, political and cultural marginalization of Indigenous people by colonial power in order to co-create and rethink important questions such as the Impact and Benefit Agreements established between Indigenous communities, mining companies and Federal Government. Indeed, in these remote areas, historic issues caused by colonization and cultural marginalization affect Indigenous people, above all in Yellowknife, that aren't engaged in the mining company's industry. Starting from 1930s, Yellowknife has been the base for the mining exploitation, at first for gold mines and, during 1990s, for diamonds mines. Mining industry, as well as previous socio-economical relationships with European settlers, began in XVII Century, has caused damaging impacts on Indigenous culture and their traditional activities in the areas around Yellowknife. Therefore, Indigenous people, through digital self-determination, started about ten years ago, to seek to elaborate the links between networked digital infrastructure development, the autonomy and agency of Indigenous communities. Simultaneously, digital self-determination is also a way in which these infrastructures are not only tools of emancipation, but they can increase the surveillance and control on Indigenous people by powerful State and corporate interests. However, cyberspace provides a discursive platform in which difference is mediated and negotiated by power.

Therefore, in this article is also fundamental to understand the ways in which globalization is likely to affect the lives of Indigenous people, both positively and negatively. For Indigenous communities of Northwest Territories this is a time of great opportunities for potential cultural changes at an unprecedented rate and scale. Nevertheless, on the one hand, there are areas of serious conflict that need to be addressed such as: what are culturally appropriate methods for sharing Indigenous knowledge? What protocols should be developed for its curation?

On the other hand, globalization provides the chance for Indigenous people to advance recognition and acceptance of their cultural values in innovative and effective ways and to empower themselves by harnessing the power of public opinion and by becoming familiar with each other's problems, solutions and successful strategies.

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[21] Anaya, 2014.

Therefore, in the present article, I am concerned not only with the opportunities for Indigenous people that emerge from the development of global communication networks, but also with the strategies by which Indigenous people are dealing with the pressures that arise from being part of an interconnected world[22].

Before introducing the analysis focused on how Indigenous people are involved in the diffusion, construction, governance and use of networked digital infrastructures, it is also necessary to understand the historical and cultural contents diffused by them through digital technologies. Historical and cultural contents are indeed the main elements to support native self-determination. These processes are often guided by a recognition of autonomy that is grounded in and emergent from diverse Indigenous laws, customs, and institutions.

Fundamental to this struggle are the issues of Indigenous identity and its articulation with place. As all native Canadian communities, also Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene people inherit rights and responsibilities to particular tracts of the land. These rights to land cannot be bought, sold or reinvented. They were established in the ancestral past of Indigenous people and are reiterated in the present through conceptualization of spirituality. Thus, land is central to the definition of self, is expressed in a variety of media, and is crucial to the survival of Indigenous identity.

Besides, globalization can involve a redefinition of identity on many levels. Integral to this is the complex interplay of forces tending towards nationalism and/or the emphasis of local Indigenous identity on the one hand, and those of globalization and broader notion of identity on the other. Barbara Kahn[23] has highlighted the paradoxical nature of stressing the former at a time when a "borderless world" of communications and universal trade and investment is developing, along with a concomitant apparent cultural uniformity. This applies not only to nation-state that Kahn discussed, but also to ethnic minorities, often defined by invasion and colonization, of Indigenous people within nation-state.

2. Communicating identity: the two hypothesized cases that boosted the online archives' creation

Post-structuralist archival theory continues to drive the critical discourse surrounding Indigenous archives and, while it does not always align with conventional Indigenous knowledge, it has proven to be a productive tool for deconstruction the complicated relationship between Indigenous political resistance, aesthetics, and archival practices:

«[*I*]f 'archive' is the name we give to the power to make and command what took place here or there. [*Then*] the postcolonial archive cannot be merely a collection of new artefacts reflecting a different, subjugated history. Instead, the postcolonial archive must directly address the problem of the endurance of the otherwise within – or distinct from – this form of power, the material conditions that allow something to be archived and archivable; the compulsions and desires that conjure the appearance and disappearance of objects, knowledges and socialites within an archive; the cultures

[22] Smith, Ward, 2000, p. 4.
[23] Kahn, 1995.

of circulation, manipulation and management that allow an object to enter the archive and thus contribute to the endurance of specific social formations»[24].

Leading digital humanists are engaging tribal communities in the creation of powerful online archives. In the cases examined, Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene people control exactly which materials will be made visible on the Web, and under what conditions. These take a range of forms from impromptu practices like sharing and annotating historic photographs on Facebook to sophisticated apps for language revitalization[25].

To understand the web-sites and the online native archives' objectives, as well as the nature of their contents, it is also useful to hypothesize two possible case histories that boosted their creation by Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene people: the first one is the distributed brochures telling that the Yellowknife Indians were extinct; and the second one is related to "The Caveat Case" brought before a judge in 1973.

Before starting to argue these questions, I would like to introduce some important information that allows to understand the Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene communities' socio-political contexts. They belong to the Dene Nation (called by them as *Denendeh*) which is a political organization, meaning "The Land of the People", located in Northwest Territories of Canada[26]. Therefore, the Dene Nation is not an organization itself, but all the people in *Denendeh* are part of a larger group of Aboriginal cultures known as the *Athapaskan* people. This larger group includes other related Athapaskan-speaking people in Alaska who call themselves *Den'a* ("The People"), as well as Navajo and Apache who live in the American Southwest.

Therefore, in the past, the Dene were spread across an immense terrain of land to the north that stretched from the Alaska coast extending through Yukon territory and beyond the Mackenzie Delta region in the Arctic Circle and almost reaching the Hudson Bay in the East.

The Dogrib landscape's vegetation is dominated by trees of the boreal forest, soils are poorly developed and thinly distributed, and the pervasive, exposed bedrock is interspersed with thousands of lakes. Toward the northeaster edge of Dogrib lands, the spruce trees thin to give way to the barren lands, or tundra, characterized by low-growing, shrubby and herbaceous plants. Subsistence was traditionally derived (as it is today) from barren land and woodland caribou, moose, small game such as beaver, muskrat, hare, ptarmigan and grouse, and from a variety of migratory waterfowl and fish species. Caribou and fish are of prime importance. Trapping is instead now in decline[27]. This landscape is known intimately to Dogrib elders. Trails, which are used year-round, provide access to a vast harvesting region, and link thousands of place names, each with a narrative of some form, sometimes many, inextricably bound to the place. Names and narratives convey knowledge, and in this way Dogrib culture is tied directly to the landscape.

Regarding the first case written above, it could be related to the cultural origins and concerns of the problematic misunderstanding created by the anthropologists June Helm and Beryl Gillespie. In 1980s, the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife distributed brochures

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[24] Povinelli, 2016, p. 152.
[25] Senier, 2014, p. 396.
[26] See: https://denenation.com/
[27] D'Andrews, Zoe, 1997.

summarizing the histories of Dene, Inuit and Inuvialuit. The one for the "Yellowknife Indians" claimed that they were extinct, the last having died in the influenza epidemic of 1928. The explanation given for the existence of the Indigenous people of Yellowknife, Dettah and Ndilo was that they were Tłįchǫ who moved, in the late 1800s, into the void created by the extinction of the "Yellowknives Indians". The source for the information in this brochure came from the Smithsonian Institution's Handbook of North American Indians. Precisely, during the 1960s and 70s University of Iowa anthropologists June Helm[28] and Beryl Gillespie[29], conducted field work among the Dogrib (Tłįchǫ) of "Fort" Rae (Behchoko). Their studies were then published in academic journals and, most significantly, in the Smithsonian's Handbook.

The most famous researches that June Helm edited was "Subarctic"[30] in the "Handbook of North American Indians" series, "Dogrib, Folk, History and the Photographs of John Alden Mason: Indian Occupation and Status in the Fur Trade, 1900-1925"[31] as well as the "Dogrib Oral Tradition as History: War and Peace in the 1820s"[32] written with her research associate Beryl Gillespie. This latter also wrote the chapter of "Yellowknife" in the "Handbook of North American Indians" with her chronology of "Events and Conditions in Yellowknife History" where, on ends with the year 1928, she wrote: «Influenza epidemic: native populations of Yellowknife River and eastward into the east

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[28] June Helm was born on September 13, 1924 in Twin Falls, Idaho. Her family moved to Kansas City in 1930 where she attended public and high school. She graduated from high school in 1941 and attended the University of Kansas City until 1942 when she transferred to the University of Chicago. In 1945, Helm married Richard MacNeish, an archaeologist. In 1949, Helm and MacNeish moved to Ottawa where he held an appointment at the National Museum of Canada. During his summer archaeological survey of the Mackenzie River, MacNeish learned that the small community of Jean Marie River required volunteer teachers. In the summer of 1951, June Helm and fellow graduate student, Teresa Carterette went to Jean Marie River as volunteer teachers, however, Helm also started to compile ethnographic field data at this time, which became the basis of her PhD dissertation. She received her PhD from the University of Chicago in 1958. In 1959, the Tlicho (Dogrib) people became the focus of Helm's fieldwork, which entailed ten trips to the Northwest Territories between 1959-1979. In the 1970s, she served as an expert witness and land claims researcher for the Indian Brotherhood (Dene First Nation), and as a consultant to the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Enquiry. During the years that Helm lived in Canada, she was a sessional lecturer at Carleton University in Ottawa (1949-1959) and at the University of Manitoba (1953). After she and MacNeish divorced in 1958, she became a professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the University of Iowa in 1960. In 1968, she married architect Pierce King. In 1969, the University of Iowa established the Department of Anthropology, where Helm, at intervals, served as department chair. Between 1993-1996, she chaired the American Indian and Native Studies Program. She was also the president of the American Anthropological Association (1985-1987), served as editor of American Ethnological Society publications (1964-1968), was president of the Central States Anthropological Society (1970-1971), chaired Section H of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (1978), was associate editor of American Ethnologist (1979-1981) and was president of the American Ethnological Society (1982-1983). She was also elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1994. June Helm was professor emerita at the University of Iowa, having retired in December 1999 after 40 years of teaching. June Helm died on February 5, 2004. See: June Helm fonds, NWT Archive.

[29] Beryl Clemetsen Gillespie was born in Evanston Illinois on June 18, 1938. She received her B.A. at Cornell University in 1960 and her M.A. in Anthropology at the University of Iowa in 1969. Beryl Gillespie was a research associate of northern anthropologist Dr. June Helm for several years, conducting ethnographic fieldwork with Dene consultants in Detah, Behchoko (Rae), Deline (Fort Franklin), and Tulita (Fort Norman) between 1968 and 1981, as well as archival research. Beryl's M.A. thesis was an ethnohistory of the Yellowknives Dene, and she continued graduate studies at the University of Iowa Anthropology department for several years. She was also a consultant for the Indian Brotherhood from 1973-1975 and the Berger Commission in 1976. In 1981, Beryl Gillespie participated in the project to build the mooseskin boat currently on display at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. Shortly thereafter she retired from academia. See: Beryl Gillespie fonds, NWT Archive.

[30] Helm, 1981a.

[31] Helm, 1981b.

[32] Helm, Gillespie, 1981.

arm of Great Slave Lake suffer many deaths»[33] and goes on to claim that the Yellowknives Dene: «were no longer an identifiable dialect or ethnic entity in the twentieth century»[34].

Beginning in the late 1960s Helm sent her assistant Gillespie on several trips to Yellowknife to conduct fieldwork among the 'Dogrib' of Yellowknife Bay. As is written in a document archived on online Yellowknives Dene's archive[35], elders remember Beryl Gillespie's work in their community. They say she spent weeks conducting interviews in Ndilo, Dettah and Yellowknife and that she was accompanied by a Dogrib interpreter from Rae. This interpreter only knew the Tłı̨chǫ language and elders claim that he only took Gillespie to interview individuals who spoke Tłı̨chǫ and who had strong ties to the Tłı̨chǫ from Fort Rae. No conversations were conducted in *Tetsǫ́t'ıné*, a language that more recent research has demonstrated to be spoken by the majority of the people interviewed. However, Gillespie's poor research and ill-conceived conclusions have been proven by more recent research to be wrong. Furthermore, in the "Yellowknife" chapter there are some obvious shortcomings vigorously disputed by the Yellowknives Dene. Nevertheless, this work has been very influential in shaping scholars' perception of the history of Dene people. However, even if she admitted that her knowledge of these people was: «based on published sources and on fieldwork among the Dogrib of Yellowknife Bay»[36], the chapter's lack became clear in the pages that follow her examination of published sources.

Nowadays, Gillespie's field notes are held by the Northwest Territories' Archives, but access is restricted until 2032[37]. Therefore, Yellowknives Dene don't know which questions Gillespie asked to her informants and if some questions concerned their cultural identity or family histories.

The Gillespie's case is detrimental to Yellowknives Dene, as well as to Tłı̨cho. An example is given by the "Avalon's Rare Metals Inc. Developers Assessment Report" for the Thor Lake Project[38] which contains historical and cultural information that is grossly inaccurate and insulting to the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. Related to Gillespie's study, Avalon report believes the Yellowknives Dene to be relatively new-comers to the area, that they occupy lands belonging to the Tłı̨cho, that they have no true identity and therefore no traditional rights in this area. Believing and disseminating these misperceptions can only taint the future relationship between the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and Avalon Rare Metals Inc.

For this reason, Yellowknives Dene and Tłı̨cho are now very selective in any new relationships with foreign researchers and very careful to manage their information. In general, this behavior is well explained by The First Nations Information Governance Centre whose objective is to assert data sovereignty and to support the development of information governance and management at the community level through regional and national partnerships. Furthermore, the nature of data, kept in very remote communities where people operate on a slower speed, has always played a big role in its day-to-day routines. Often data are just oral storytelling that plays a central role in maintaining the culture and history and, for this reason, it is considered a precious worthy asset by Indigenous groups.

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[33] Gillespie, 1981, p. 289

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] Yellowknife Dene First Nation, Online Archive: https://ykdene.com Yellowknives Dene First Nation Land and Environment, *Proposed Dinàgà Wek'èhodì Protected Area YKDFN Traditional Knowledge Report.*

[36] Ivi, p. 290.

[37] See: https://www.nwtarchives.ca/accession_display.asp?Accession_Number=N-1998-042

[38] Thor Lake is a deposit of rare metals located in the Blachford Lake intrusive complex. It is situated 5 km north of the Hearne Channel of Great Slave Lake, Northwest Territories, Canada, approximately 100 kilometres east-southeast of the capital city of Yellowknife.

In relation with the second case mentioned above, in the early 1970s, Dene leaders in the Northwest Territories of Canada began to document their own communities understanding of treaties, made between 1899 and 1921, in order to assert continuing land rights in the Mackenzie Valley.

That was a time of a rapid economic change in the region related to the new mining and development project, as well as of massive oil and gas pipeline exploitation. It was also a period of national political ferment and disputes across Canada and internationally concerning the rights on Indigenous people to the maintenance of their lands and collective identities. In this tumultuous circumstance, Dene leaders aimed to increase the recognition of their land rights. They also wanted to more firmly establish their distinct standing in the nation-state as first people and solidify their own communities' historical identity. Furthermore, in this period, they did so by creating what Miranda Johnson called an online "treaty archive"[39]. The latter was created with a particular political purpose in mind. The archive transformed the "law archive" by countering the official story of treaty-making told by Canadian State about treaties with Indigenous people as expedient instruments of empire[40].

Central to this archive was the testimony of Dene elders who were present at treaty signings and were asked to remember the promises made to their communities during those events. The testimonies were key evidence in a legal case that Dene leaders brought in 1973. Guided by lawyers and the judge in the case, Dene people were asked to turn their stories of treaty-making into legal doctrine known as "aboriginal title". Furthermore, the records that were produced in the case, notably court transcripts of those testimonies, enlarged the treaty archive[41].

As reported by Miranda Johnson, the legal transcript documented something else, and did so perhaps more clearly and certainly more poignantly than either the judge or others involved in archiving would readily admit. Indeed, the transcript records the struggle that Dene elders experienced in presenting accurate memories that they thought the court wanted to hear[42].

Besides, Johnson reported that on 3 April 1973, a young Dene chief, François Paulette, along with 15 others, applied to lodge a caveat under the Land Titles Act 1970 in order to protect their communities' interests to 400.000 square miles of land that a proposed oil and gas pipeline would cross. The caveat that they sought from the Northwest Territories Supreme Court would not recognize Dene peoples' land right in the first instance, but it would serve to demonstrate their previous interests in the land. Because of the unusual nature of the caveat, that it was based in a claim to aboriginal title and treaty rights, the Registrar of Titles forwarded it to the Northwest Territories Supreme Court[43]. As Johnson highlights, the legal case of "Re Paulette and Registrar of Land Title" in 1973, commonly referred to as "The Caveat Case", as to be contextualize in the larger political, economic, social, and cultural situations in Canada in that period.

Supreme Court Justice William Morrow began hearing the case on 15th May 1973. Justice Morrow took a unique approach to hearing testimonies. His court travelled to all communities in the claimed area and heard oral evidence directly from Dene elders who were present at the signing of Treaty 11 and who remember the treaty-making negotiations. The issue was whether the Chiefs who signed Treaties 8 and 11, or the Dene they represented, knew they were giving up "ownership" of the land.

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[39] Johnson, 2016, p. 195.
[40] Mawani, 2012.
[41] Johnson, 2016, p. 196.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] Johnson, 2016, p. 197.

Most witnesses were resolute in saying that during treaty negotiations the issues of land ownership was not raised. Discussion had centred mostly on hunting and fishing rights and how the land and resources would be shared in a peaceful way. On September 6th, 1973 Justice Morrow found that the Dene were the "prima facie" owners of the lands covered by the caveat, that they have what is known as aboriginal rights. He also found that, notwithstanding the language of the two Treaties here is sufficient doubt on the facts that aboriginal title was extinguished that such claim for title should be permitted to be put forward by the short lived. Morrow's decision allowing the placing of a caveat on a million square kilometres of land in the Northwest Territories was overturned on appeal to a higher court. The latter did not question the ruling that Dene had "aboriginal rights" to the land. The partial victory made it obvious that land rights in the Northwest Territories needed clarification. In 1976 the Government of Canada, the Dene Nation and Métis Association of the Northwest Territories agree to enter into negotiations on a Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement.

Seven years of meeting, from 1981 to 1988, resulted in an Agreement in Principle that had one major sticking point. The Government of Canada was insisting that the Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim include surrender Aboriginal Title to the land.

The two cases explained above could be considered two important steps that allow to increase, in Indigenous communities considered, a political and historical consciousness, as well as a cultural identity. In other words, Yellowknives Dene and Tłącho, through digital technologies, objectified their culture and in doing so, began to understand that their culture had value not only to themselves but to at least some outsiders who agreed that their culture should be enhanced. Indeed, as the anthropologist Terence Turner states, the power and technology of representation become a symbolic benchmark of cultural parity[44].

Nowadays, Yellowknives Dene and Tłącho are very attentive to collect and save their historical and cultural information in their open web-sites and online archives. These documents describe the very opposite of the vanishing ethnic group: the data characteristics show these people simultaneously embracing modernity and critiquing settler colonialism, asserting their sovereignty, creatively adapting their traditions and communities.

3. Contents of online archives: local legends, Treaties 8 and 11, News and Communications

The structural formats of online archives and the web-sites considered are very pragmatic: Yellowknives Dene and Tłącho divide, in a sort of methodological differentiation, two main topics where are distinguished the cultural knowledge from the current social questions, information and communications spread in the communities. In other words, in the first topic, can be inserted historic letters to colonial officials, diaries, histories and tales of historical events, dictionaries and children's books. These topics are collected in the online archives by both groups. Whereas, the second topic is a rich community publication like newsletters and newspaper clippings collected by them in the communities' web-sites.

As follows, I would like to give examples of some contents of these different sectors. For space reasons, I will introduce just some online archives' contents such as legends and treaties 8 and 11 signed by Aboriginal people from Northwest Territories and by Federal Government. However,

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[44] Turner, 1992.

especially in Tłı̨cho online archive, an important part is also dedicated to movies and documentaries on community culture and traditional activities, as well as audio testimonies, community members' publications and photo galleries.

In the following paragraphs, I will proceed with an explication of some contents' characteristics of social, economic and political news and communications spread in the Yellowknives Dene and Tłı̨cho communities.

Traditional legends

In examining the composition of Indian legends, it is possible to identify at least four types specifically in operation among plains tribes. Although the legends may be differentiated for the purpose of analysis, there was also considerable overlap in their structure and use. The major types include: "entertainment legends"[45], which are related primarily to the purpose of amusement; "teaching legends", which were employed for the purpose of dispensing information about natural phenomena or tribal beliefs and customs; "moral/legends", which intended to enact certain behaviors; and, "spiritual legends", which could be related only by an Elder or other approved individual at a designated time and place.

Legends comprised only a part of a tribe's spiritual system which also included ceremonies, rituals, festivals, songs, and dances. These cultural attachments often involved physical objects such as fetishes, pipes, painted designs, medicine bundles, and sacred places. Familiarity with these components comprised religious knowledge, and everything learned was committed to memory. Viewed together, these entries represented spiritual connections between people and universe which, with appropriate care, resulted in a lifestyle of assured food supply, physical well-being, and the satisfying of the needs and wants of the society and its members.

As written above, an important part of the first section in online archives is dedicated to the local legends[46]. In general, stories are powerful pedagogical tools that help learners understand indigenous' history and the environment in which they live[47]. The teachings from stories allow listeners to come to their own decisions and conclusions. They help demonstrate that there are many different ways of looking at problems and at their solutions. Storytelling has been and continues to be a central part of Indigenous identity as people and as nations[48]. Furthermore, there are two types of Indigenous storytelling[49]. The first type consists of personal stories that include observations, accounts of places, and experiences. These stories evolve over time and are influenced by the needs of the peoples and their relevancy. The second type consists of stories on the creation of myths and legends and the way in which they have been told. Many of these stories, which are spiritual in nature, remain unchanged over time. Indeed, Spirits or the Creator gave these sacred stories to the people, which have been passed down from generation to generation. Moreover, some elders were blessed with knowing tribal secrets in the form of stories, rituals, ceremonies, and Indigenous knowledge. They shared their

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[45] Entertainment legends are often highly amusing even to non-Indian listeners.

[46] The study of Indian legends can be a source of enriched learning, illustrative of the sophistication of pre-Colonial First Nations education.

[47] Iseke and Brennus, 2011.

[48] Johnston, 1999; King, 2003; Belanger, 2010.

[49] Kovach, 2010.

knowledge when it was time to do so with selected audiences, starting with young children. Later on, they would elaborate the more intricate details of their knowledge with handpicked young men and women who were to be entrusted with the responsibility of passing on the sacred knowledge. The elders recognized that education of the young was concerned with character formation, the making of human beings.

Through stories and storytelling, Indigenous societies transmit essential knowledge critical to survival and provide a cultural framework for promoting happy, healthy communities. In this way, stories hold a lot of power. They can elicit strong emotions from humans, making people cry, laugh, and experience feelings such as anger, relief, empathy, and love[50].

Furthermore, the legends often take place in a winter evening, when people stretch out to rest for the night, and wait for a storyteller to begin his tale.

As each First Nations, also Yellowknives Dene and Tåîchô have creation stories handed down in oral tradition. Moreover, there are four general elements that characterize Indigenous peoples' storytelling: connection between generations; acknowledging change over generations; moral guide and social mechanisms; and transmission of history and culture[51].

Some examples can be useful. As Yellowknives Dene tell, they are descendants of the *T'satsaot'ine*, or Copper People, who were known for the tools they made from raw copper collected far to the north on the Coppermine River. *Yellowknives* is the name given to them by the fur traders who came to their land in the late 1700s. Many people living around Great Slave Lake today trace their ancestry to the T'satsaot'ine.

Moreover, many Indigenous legends tell about medicine men who have the gift, given by Creator, of medicine power to help the aboriginal people to survive.

A very important story of Yellowknives Dene tells about Sazea and Yamoòzha. A long time ago, there lived two brothers, *Sazea* ("Little Bear") and *Yamoòzha* ("Walks Around the World"). In childhood, the two brothers played many superhuman but cruel tricks on their fellows. Eventually, Sazea went down to the Artic coast. Yamoòzha remained in the bush country of the Mackenzie River drainage, creating many of the natural features of the region.

After Sazea left, Yamoòzha was very lonely. To take his mind off his brother, he walked for many days. As he was walking, he came to a girl who was alone because she had lost her family. Yamoòzha asked her to marry him. The young woman agreed, but only if Yamoòzha could keep one promise; that she would never get her feet wet. She said: "Don't ever step in grassy water or go over a little creek". Yamoòzha laughed: "That is an easy promise to keep. You don't need to worry about getting wet. I will take very good care of you". In the beginning, Yamoòzha kept his promise.

The two walked for many years across the country. Yamoòzha took good care of his wife. When she was tired, they rested. When they came to rivers and streams, Yamoòzha cut down trees and bridges them so his wife could cross. One day in late summer, they came a tiny creek with only a small trickle of water. Yamoòzha thought that his wife would be all right, so he did not cut down a tree. He though: "She can step over it without any problems". In one stride, he crossed the water and kept on going. But, Yamoòzha had a lot on his mind and walked a long way before he realized that his wife was not behind him. When he turned around, she was gone: "Now what has happened to that girl?" he wondered, "I had better wait for her to catch up".

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[50] Humans enjoy both telling stories and listening to them. Wherever and whenever people meet and gather, there are stories being told. Outsiders tend to see these stories as legends, fiction, folklore, myths, or fairy tales.

[51] Dumbrill, Green, 2008.

The man waited for a long time, and then he began retracing his steps through the forest. When he reaches the place where he had last seen his wife, he was astonished to find that the small trickle of water had turned into a big lake. In the middle of the lake was a big beaver house. A beaver swam out of the lodge, and the man asked it if it had seen his wife. The animal answered that it was his wife until he forgot his promise and let her feet get water. Because he did not take good care of her, she changed into a beaver. Yamoòzha became furious: “My magic is powerful”, he answered the beaver, “I will catch you and turn you into a woman again”. He began to chase the beaver.

When they came to Marian River, he lost her. He looked for her everywhere, digging into the bush. For Yellowknives Dene tracks of this legend are around Shoti Lake where today there are little creeks made when Yamoòzha hopelessly dug in the earth and he did not find his beaver wife[52].

Another important legend handed down by Tåîchô tells about a young woman who did not have a husband and lived with her two brothers. One day a handsome stranger came to their house. The brothers said to the sister: “This handsome man has come for you so you must marry him.” So, the couple got married.

On their wedding night the young woman awoke to the sound of a dog gnawing on a bone. The woman’s husband was also no longer at her side. She jumped up, lit the fire, and searched the tent but there was no dog in the tent.

The woman went back to bed and fell asleep. Once again, she was awakened by the sound of a dog gnawing on a bone. The woman called out to one of her brothers who threw a hatchet in the direction of the noise. There was a loud cry and then silence. The woman and her brothers quickly lit the fire and found a large black dog lying dead. The woman’s husband did not return. Eventually the woman gave birth to six puppies. The woman loved these puppies, but she was also ashamed of them and concealed them in a sack. One day upon returning to the camp, the woman noticed the footprints of children around the camp. The next day instead of checking her snares as she usually did, she hid behind a bush close to the tent. After she had left, the six puppies crawled out of the sack and turned into three girls and three boys. The woman ran towards them but before she could reach them, two of the girls and one of the boys jumped back into the sack.

The remaining three children grew up strong and healthy and produced many children.

Still today, this legend represents a spiritual and cosmological storytelling for Tłı̨cho people because it describes how they descended from the three children of the woman[53].

Treaties 8 and 11

Beginning in the 1600s, the British and French made treaties with various First Nations in order to regulate relationships with them and also to secure their access to Indigenous lands and trading networks. The Numbered Treaties are sometimes called the Post-Confederation treaties. Between 1871 and 1921, the Canadian government made 11 treaties with First Nations. While the broad philosophy of treaties is generally similar (setting the terms for how to relate to each other), each treaty is a unique agreement with unique circumstances. Though many treaties predate Confederation, they are living documents (much like Canada’s Constitution) and their interpretation has been

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[52] https://www.nwtexhibits.ca/yamoria/

[53] https://tlichohistory.com/en/stories/how-tlicho-people-came-be

continuously debated by Canadian and Indigenous lawmakers. In addition, treaties continue to be negotiated. In 1982, when the Constitution Act was passed, treaty rights were recognized and affirmed by Canada's Constitution. The Aboriginal rights and title specified by the Constitution Act is the backdrop to the ongoing legal battles that result from treaties being unfinished business and, at the same time, the highest law in the land.

With Treaties 1 to 7, negotiated between 1871 and 1877, the government put its policies of control and assimilation of Indigenous peoples into action. This included defining reserves. Treaties 8 to 11, made in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, addressed a growing demand for natural resources and agricultural land.

As a result of the agreements made under these treaties, all the land from northern Ontario and as far west as the Rocky Mountains was ceded to the government. This includes all of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, as well as northern Ontario, northeaster British Columbia, part of Yukon and much of the Northwest Territories.

Nowadays, media plays an integral role in (re)producing their social construction of reality. When viewed in light of Canada's colonial legacy, media's power has undoubtedly been implicated in circumscribing Indigenous peoples and indigenous–settler relations. Moreover, mainstream media predominantly relies on stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and tends to neglect historical and current political complexities, thereby perpetuating stagnant indigenous–settler relations.

Against this background, it is easy to imagine that Indigenous communities and the Canadian government had different understandings of what the treaties intended to achieve. Many were ready to make treaties as a way of protecting their ways of life from the increasing immigration of settlers on their ancestral lands in return for various payments and promises. Resources that had sustained Indigenous communities across Canada were rapidly disappearing, and the treaties seemed, for many native people, to be a way of ensuring survival.

Cultural and language differences played a significant role in the divergent interpretations of the written and oral contents of the treaties. The Indigenous understanding of the spirit and intent of the treaties accepted the Numbered Treaties to be a nation-to-nation agreement, similar to the spirit of the Peace and Friendship Treaties. However, for the Crown, the treaties granted certain benefits to Indigenous signatories in return for the complete surrender of land title.

For Indigenous peoples, the sacred and binding character of treaties is not found primarily in the documents' legalistic language. Instead, the true force of treaties is rooted in what was actually said, often in Indigenous languages, at the time of the negotiations. In addition, treaty deliberations were frequently accompanied by ceremonial conventions such as the smoking of sacred pipes (*calumet*) symbolizing their nationhood, and sense of responsibility for the past, present, and future, or an exchange of symbolically significant presents (e.g., *wampum belts*). In general, they encompassed First Nations epistemologies and protocols through their beliefs, values, relationships, laws, languages.

Accordingly, many Indigenous peoples look to their elders who are schooled in oral histories as the highest authorities on the spirit and intent of the treaties.

Specifically, in Northwest Territories of Canada, Treaties 8 and 11 were signed, by Indigenous communities and the British Crown. Yellowknives Dene as well as Tåîchô give a big importance to some historical events related to these treaties. Treaty 8 was signed in 1899 and includes parts of British Columbia, the northern half of Alberta, Saskatchewan and parts of the Northwest Territories including Yellowknives Dene. Treaty 11, the last of the numbered Canadian treaties, includes a large area of the Northwest Territories as well as a small section of both the Yukon and Nunavut Territories.

The finalization of these treaties was key to the government's aim of extracting valuable natural resources from Canada's North. Treaties 8 and 11 differ from other Canadian treaties because of the particular northern location, and for the relationship with the golden and diamond mines. As it is explained in some documents update in the online Indigenous archives, the land in this area of Canada was deemed unsuitable for agriculture, so the Federal Government was reluctant, in 19th Century, to conclude treaties. Immediately following the discovery of oil at Fort Norman in 1920, however, the government moved to begin treaty negotiations. With treaties, hunting regulations and conservation measures were drafted, passed, implemented, and enforced. Initially these measures were justified by the Government as it claimed that there was an indiscriminate slaughter of the caribou by the Great Slave Lake Indians. Gold and diamond mines transformed and mobilized new relationships in the Mackenzie Valley between First Nations, above all Yellowknives Dene and Tåîchô, Canadian Federal Government, and mining companies. In order to control the mining impact, aboriginal peoples and government are now seeking a new negotiation, not often simple. Some proposes have been thought, such as a resolution through the court, even if it is expensive and time-consuming. Moreover, it also might not guarantee a result, as the courts could direct government and the aboriginal group back to the negotiating table to find a solution.

When government and aboriginal groups sit down to negotiate in order to provide clarity and certainty regarding Indigenous or treaty rights, they usually negotiate one of the following two types of agreement: Specific Claims; and Comprehensive Land Claims. The first ones are claims made by First Nations against the Federal Government relating to the administration of land and other Indian assets, or the non-fulfilment of promises made by government under the historic treaties. These are also called "Treaty Land Entitlement" agreements, or *TLEs*. The second one, also known as "Modern Treaties", define the ongoing legal, political and economic relationships between Aboriginal parties, the Federal Government and the provincial or territorial governments who are signatories to these agreements. In recognition of the number of claims being made against Canada by First Nations, the Federal Government created the Office of Native Claims in 1973 to try and address both specific and comprehensive claims. Starting from this venture, Canadian government has also developed a policy on specific claims and guidelines to assess them, known as "Specific Claims Policy"[54].

The following chart can summarize the general understanding of treaties, explained in some documents uploaded in the online archives, given by Indigenous people in Northwest Territories, the Crown and Federal Government nowadays[55].

Indigenous people	**Crown**	**Federal Government**
The elders maintain the traditional knowledge rooted in their land by passing it down orally. So, treaties become functional to this transmission of their culture.	The Crown considers Indigenous Peoples with an Eurocentric assumption; in doing so, it takes as a matter of fact its sovereignty over Indigenous People, their lands and resources.	The Government recognizes Indigenous self-government as critical to Canada's future. Indigenous rights must be incorporated in all the aspects of this relationship.

[54] http://www.aadncaandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100030501/1100100030506
[55] https://research.tlicho.ca/resources/digital-archives

Nevertheless, in Northwest Territories the most important problem related to Indigenous land claims is connected with the impact that diamond business causes culturally and environmentally, as well as politically, on native people. Indeed, diamond exploration projects are the prospecting ventures that determine whether or not a particular location should be mined. Beyond their physical intrusiveness, exploration projects are of major importance in mapping out the ways in which rights over land and resources are handed over to corporations. In line with Laforce, Lapointeand and Lebuis, in most contemporary societies influenced by Western law, the notion of free mining includes not only the possibility of freely acquiring ownership rights of the mineral resources of the territory, but also provides guarantees concerning the right to engage in exploration to seek out these resources, and, in cases of discovery, right to extract them[56]. This principle, mentioned by Laforce, Lapointeand and Lebuis, prioritizes private business interests over any other[57]. It effectively puts the companies on an equal legal footing to the Indigenous communities (to say nothing of their economic or strategic footing), particularly for the northern Indigenous communities who have unsettled land claims (which will be discussed below), and, as such, do not have legal rights to their land. Instead, the land is treated as property of the Federal government, while Indigenous communities only have consultation status, in formal terms. Thus, in this situation, both the Indigenous community and the corporations are simply deemed interested parties[58].

4. News and Communications

Public communication is an essential element of many First Nations' cultures. Sharing news with each other or between groups has always been one of the social responsibilities of Indigenous people from time immemorial. Aboriginal communications are today's reality which is practiced on a daily basis by aboriginal communications staff.

News and communications are foundations for the success of Indigenous organizations. In this section, prevalent on web-sides instead of online archives, Yellowknives Dene and Tåîchô communicate specific claim settlements, health or education, economic development projects, self-government agreements, as well as communities' economic and politic annual goals. Moreover, in this section are also communicated some job positions.

Furthermore, effective communications have often the power to change the way a community functions and how it is viewed by members and non-members. It can also facilitate community development. Moreover, some kind of news emphasizes the words, values, practices and customs handed down to modern-day aboriginal people by their ancestors.

It is also possible to state that the "cultural knowledge" and "current social questions, information and communications" are however related between them through paying constant attention to new and old relationships. In the last twenty years the economic relationship between Indigenous communities and transnational mining companies should be read not only as an economic, but also a social, cultural, spiritual and symbolic one. Historically, Yellowknives Dene and Tåîchô have rarely been employed in the extractive economy, so that now they receive job offers, business opportunities,

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[56] Laforce, Lapointeand, Lebuis, 2009, p. 55.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] Hall, 2013, p. 379.

and agreement making, they interpret all of them as practice of freedom. Simultaneously, this new engagement represents a critical historical moment, yet it does not conform to the expectation treaties mining companies hold of pure economic exchange. As mining companies produce diamonds in the Canadian north, they encounter the expectation of reciprocity that represent a norm deeply embedded in sub-arctic society. This norm of reciprocity guides social relationships; indeed, it has been the basis for survival in a harsh and unforgiving climate. It continues to give shape to rules, practices and values, emerging from past and current relationships, setting the foundation for the experience of the mining economy in the Mackenzie Valley[59].

5. Conclusion

Media technologies for Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene communities are related to a story of local endurance and perseverance against enormous oppositions. Simultaneously, for Indigenous communities, to continue to participate and co-create their shared digital future, ongoing investment in the common digital backbone is essential.

The analysis of media technologies, and in general the construction of cyberspace possibilities in geographical emarginated communities as Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene, should be considered inside the wider conceptualization of post-colonialism studies that is a political and intellectual approach that critiques the impact of colonialism and the reproduction of colonial relations, practices, and representations in the present[60]. Therefore, the current relationship between Indigenous people and the Federal Government as well as mining companies in Northwest Territories, can also be described as one of internal colonialism that shapes, among other questions, the motivation to create, by Tåîchô and Yellowknives Dene, the indigenous' open web-sites and online archives. Additionally, one of the most important explanations to the creation of these cyberspaces, could be connected to the aboriginal recognition of their rights, wills and needs tied to their political and cultural identity.

Thus, considerations on cyberspace encompasses the creation of a tangible, performative link between past and present, ancestors and descendants, Indigenous culture and colonial histories, as well as reified definitions of Aboriginality.

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[59] If this new relationship does not engage and re-engage past and current relationships, then Treaty mining companies run the risk of failing to build the necessary relationships and conditions that will ultimately determine the success of the industry, both commercially and socially, in the North.

[60] Gregory, 2000, p. 561.

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