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KKP406: GLOBAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION  
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**ASSIGNMENT 2:**

**A CASE STUDY RELATING TO  
CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN GLOBAL MEDIA  
AS THEY RELATED TO  
MEDIA ORGANISATIONS, AUDIENCES OR  
PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE.**

**“If a group of Aboriginal artists (in this case media practitioners) meet in a forest and no white Western academic is present, did it still happen and does it have relevance?” (Mundine, 2006, p.61)**

**1. Introduction**

It can be deduced from voluminous reading prescribed for the study of contemporary developments in global media, in a typical Australian university course, that the above tongue-in-cheek statement by Aboriginal arts curator John Mundine amply depicts an absence of perspectives from contemporary Indigenous Australian media organisations, audiences or professional practitioners; or those from other similarly, politically and culturally situated societies. This essay accordingly offers a case study of contemporary Indigenous Australian media development in a global environment generally; and its effects upon Brisbane community media arts organisation UniiKup Productions Ltd. in particular.

The case study will critically respond to particular, as well as various aspects of, global media theory. Intercontextual Hybridity Theory (Appadurai, 1996 in, and Kraidy, 2002, p 333) reveals the “mutually constitutive interplay and overlap of

cultural, economic and political forces”; and takes into account that context, as Jennifer Daryl Slack explains, is constituted by identities, practices and effects generally and “is not something out there within which practices occur of which influence the development of practices” (1996, in Kraidy, 2002, p.333). Aspects of transnational theory in contemporary developments of global media are also examined, in the light of a perception that Australian media development and politics exists within a dual context. The essay attempts to reflect and illuminate, rather than contrast these aspects of media development and application.

## **1.2 Ontological and Epistemological Specificity**

The conceptualisation, authoring and application of many theories on globalisation, from a non-Western perspective, uses a lens calibrated by an authoritarian universalism, stemming back to Aristotle, and beyond to the Sophists of ancient Greece. Their rule of logos (word, reason, account) is an instrument of thought which is the basis of scientific discourse and theorisation, determining much of what is considered reasonable, and subsequently truthful. (Jullian, 2009 pp.185, 186, 187.) Marcuse in challenging this position framed it as “a positivism which in its denial of the transcending elements of Reason, forms the academic counterpart of the socially required behaviour” (Marcuse, 1964, p.13).

This essay will privilege ontological and epistemological orientation to examine contemporary developments in global media, and how such orientation can contribute to the “transformative dynamics of growth” (Willis, 1990 in Graham 2006 p.7). Engaging what is intelligible between cultures and societies, rather than reasonable (Jullian, 2009, p.187), this approach also seeks to free the flow of knowledge, information, cultural, political and economic contexts, processes and practices, which contribute to the transformation of relations in a world aspiring to “global communication”.

## 2. Place and Transnationalism

**... place is epistemologically and ontologically central to notions and discussions regarding action or intent. Not only history but meaning arises out of place, whether place is geographically located or an event in time. The saying "the past is another country" is, from Aboriginal logic, pertinent to multi-dimensional time, that is, all events that have occurred and are occurring within any of the range of senses of time occupy a place (in time) (Graham, 2006, p. 7).**

In a study of Native American scholarly literature (published after 1998) to ascertain the extent to which it included an analytical category on transnationalism, Robert Warrior - a citizen of the Osage Nation, located outside the boundaries of Oklahoma in the United States - found that Native critics generally have not adopted a robust position on transnationalism to contrast its conceptualisations; which he observed, as an analytical category is "all over the place" (Warrior, 2009, p. 121). "Native American critics in general", he stated "have established a strong practice of warily regarding various theoretical trends, including the move to transnationality, when studying American Indian texts and issues ....and, according to Womack, have tended in many cases to continue to focus on the national political claims of Native nations." Warrior goes on to argue that "a resistance to (or perhaps resistance against is a better way of saying it) ideas like transnationality can be (though certainly is not necessarily) intellectually defensible and provides fruitful theoretical insight (Warrior, 2009, p.122)".

The recognition of the reality of the continuing dilemma caused by colonialism, put simply – "they are in this country but not of it - we are in this society but not of it (Graham, 1989)" - by Native Americans, Canadians and Australians (and many other societies), originates from a common ontological position. Relationship to land and to each other is the primary humanistic value from which material, social and spiritual growth develops in order to achieve real progress; ie without the mounting environmental, social, economic and moral crisis we are witness to today. This is to locate development in "place" as described above.

The absence of this recognition, continuing consonance with post-colonial theory, and application of a single ontological view within transnational analysis has resulted in what British scholar Paul Giles argues is a “residual cultural transcendentalism that fails to acknowledge the national specificity of its own discourse” (quoted in Warrior, 2009, p.123), “its major proponents, in spite of broader inclusivity, remain(ing) in the end more interested in what is beyond their borders ... than the transnationalism produced by colonialism within its borders” (Warrior, 2009, p. 122-23). This has led to a “discipline alienated from at least some of the circumstances of its world” (Cooppan in Warrior, 2009, p.123). Thus, global transnational control of media content and distribution within nations, assisted by neo-Liberal “free market” policies that open the door to further transnational penetration (McChesney, 1991, pp. 81, 82, 83), continues to compound this situation, as practitioners, audiences and theorists are absorbed by this unfolding environment.

Transnationalism/ity in this context remains a point of conjecture in relation to the benefits it brings to contemporary Indigenous media development, where there is both a basic ontological and historical contradiction to overcome before the ideas and principles of this contemporary movement could be considered even relevant. Such contradictions, whilst seemingly miniscule in the scheme of global media development, create areas of exclusivity and exceptionalism of some ethical concern, which Indigenous theorists continue to address with valuable insight for equitable global communication and theory.

Indeed, this position could begin to be considered with some empathy by nations other than those where Indigenous people are subjected to the continuing dominance of colonial traditions, as failure of economic policy and practice in so called first world countries exposes the effects of high levels of corruption in the financial operations of transnational companies and banking services. Such an environment will induce an equivalent level of wariness and analysis, from citizens of countries whose nation state status has been damaged so badly by

these global economic networks that their social security has collapsed.

An examination of Indigenous media development then, opens an area of Australian media development which has been marginalised by global media development theory; not because it is of itself irrelevant, but because the theories remain restricted to European meta-narrative styles of research and writing by theorists who seemingly cannot see the benefit of a vastly different perspective on, and approach to the scope of the data processed and its analysis. These conditions leave the field of study largely in a place of exclusivity, where Indigenous perspectives on media development are an exception rather than sought as a solid contribution to scholarly accounts of contemporary global media development; and assist with shaping and challenging ideas, at the same time expanding consciousness and knowledge.

### **3. Indigenous Media Development**

#### **3.1 Intercontextual Hybridity Theory**

As a means of examining the way in which Indigenous media has developed in Australia, my point of view is privileged in this essay, as a practitioner with 25 years experience in the field (Peacock, 2006 and Uniikup Productions Ltd, 1985 – 2010). Intercontextual Hybridity Theory, along with the traditional meaning of hybrid, is used to locate and orientate understanding from an Indigenous perspective.

**In contemporary Australian society, Aboriginal people lack both ideological and economic bases of power – they control neither things nor ideas. Whites control resources, production and distribution. Howe, 1982.**

Indigenous community media arts organisation, Uniikup Productions Ltd, began in Brisbane in the 1980s as part of a community development initiative project. The organisation was founded by a group of Aboriginal community development activists whose analysis of colonialism and its effects upon Aboriginal society were fundamental to its principles and activities. Its development was peculiar to

“place”, as described above at point 2 by Mary Graham, and sustained financially over 25 years by a range of government initiated programs aimed primarily at establishing Indigenous visual media production, business and training facilities in metropolitan, regional and remote areas. At this time, Central Australian Media Association (CAAMA) and later Imparja Television; Warlpiri Media Association, Ernabella VTV, and later the Yuendumu Tanami Network; Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association; Torres Strait Islander Media Association; Western Australia Indigenous Media Association, and a number of smaller initiatives also competed for the same development funding support.

The support for these initiatives resulted from Aboriginal advocacy for media as an essential service, and for national and state equal opportunity employment and training schemes, which supported on-the-job training of Indigenous people within public broadcasting organisations - Australian Broadcasting Commission and Special Broadcasting Service. These national broadcasters were also funded to extend their schemes to assist the development of Indigenous media content, training and broadcasting. As well, individuals participated in courses with the Australian Film Television and Radio School and some had been trained and employed in commercial broadcasting companies and other institutions like Film Australia.

Indigenous Units were consequently established in the ABC and SBS as well as Screen Australia (at that time the Australian Film Commission). National media organisations - National Aboriginal and Islander Broadcasting Association, followed by the National Indigenous Media Association, Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme, and currently the Australian Indigenous Communications Association - were instituted to organise Indigenous media practitioners for: input into government policy at state, national and international levels, networking and progressive development, and advocating and addressing self-determination.

A cross-fertilisation of practices, skills, skilled media personnel, socio-professional networks, development programming, production facilities and cultural perspectives emerged throughout the country, which contributed to a distinct national Indigenous media identity and the development of hybrid audio visual production and training schemes across a range of program genres. Faye Ginsberg observed nonetheless, "This should not mask the fact however, that Indigenous media are also a product of relations with the government responsible for the dire political circumstances that motivated the mastery of new communication forms as a means of resistance and assertion of rights. (Ginsburg, 1993, p.559)."

Furthermore this development activity could be viewed as in-line with modernisation whereby "tradition" was not considered a legitimate element of civil society; and communication, seen as a trust-building exercise between leaders and led, (Curran and Myung-Jin Park, 2000, p.3) could be used to give the appearance of addressing many of the problems arising from the dichotomy separating Indigenous people and Australian society. Also, this significant investment in development did not simultaneously either build upon existing community structures, or create new structures, as a framework for economic independence. Indigenous media development is consequently kept in a state of dependency on government funding - often leading to various types of crisis in management arising from political control - making it difficult to begin to play an active part in the national economy, let alone a global one.

### **3.2 Hybrid Production Models**

**What Bhabha's word 'hybridity' [revives], in the masquerade of deconstructing anti-imperialism, and 'difficult' theory, is an old functionalist notion of what a dominant culture permits in the interest of maintaining its own equilibrium (Chow, 1993 in Kraidy, 2002, p.323).**

A hybrid form was an objective from the outset of government policy devised to support Indigenous media development, ensuring the fulfillment of multiple

purposes. There was growing international recognition of, and concern about, the human rights crisis with regard to the Australian Indigenous population, in particular the high numbers of incarceration and deaths in custody. As well an International Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People was on the agenda at the United Nations; a land rights case had been mounted which prospectively challenged the legitimacy of the doctrine of terra nullius used to validate invasion and illegal occupation of Indigenous land, and the property laws of Australia; and the government was also now answerable to the U.N. Committee to Eliminate Racial Discrimination, having enacted the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act in 1975.

This national and global political sea change brought into the spotlight the great discrepancies in equity regarding government services to Aboriginal people in health, housing, employment, education, social security, independent economic development, family well being, as well as the issues of land rights, self-determination, a treaty and the plight of generations of Indigenous people removed from their families and countries by government policy based on theories normalising racial superiority. It was also at this time that the Reconciliation Movement began to gain momentum, causing reviews of public opinion, information and consciousness, resulting in increased public support in much the same way as did the campaign for the 1967 referendum on the granting of Australian citizenship rights to Aboriginal people.

The development of Indigenous media in this environment created kudos for a government in need of national and international recognition of its commitment to improving delivery of basic human rights for Australian Indigenous people; including official inclusion of Indigenous people in the public sphere. A hybrid model of development served to maintain a style of Indigenous audio visual (and radio) media production suitable for public consumption, presenting a generally homogenous view of Australian history and relations between Indigenous people and the post-1788 population.



### 3.3 The Question of Effect in the Public Sphere

**“... it is the interaction between citizens, civil society and the state, communicating through the public sphere, that ensures the balance between stability and social change is maintained in the conduct of public affairs” and that “there are civil society actors who defend local or sectorial interests, as well as specific values against or beyond the formal political process (Castells, 2008, p.79).**

In many ways the official entry into the public sphere, by way of Indigenous media practitioners relying upon maintaining stable relations with government to sustain their operations, has reduced the effect that Indigenous people had in bringing their issues to light, in terms of exercising independent community involvement and action. As Castells notes “some analysts argue that this form of civic engagement is on the decline, as individualism becomes the predominant culture of our societies” (Castells, 2008, p.79). Does a persuaded homogenisation of Indigenous perspectives in media production bring the whole issue of the public sphere into question, with regard to realistic benefits Indigenous people derive? Here can be found parallels with the root problems of transnationalism/ity , as outlined in 2 above.

Media development and production by Indigenous people outside the hybrid model on the government agenda, was and remains unconsidered. The sophistication of Indigenous ontological and epistemological perspectives, knowledge, philosophies and practices was not given either due consideration or treatment, so preserving in the content and styles of production a continuing form of colonial perspective, that of social dependency and cultural and social inferiority. Even the overwhelmingly positive global reception of Indigenous art, due to the successful marketing of the above mentioned attributes, has not changed the general impression of the Australian public, that the art of Indigenous people and culture is neither relevant as a nexus of national identity and international status, nor a valuable and essential element of the knowledge and creative economies. Indeed, the idea that Indigenous people and culture

can make a significant contribution to Australian society is still unthought-of in most circles.

A preference for hybrid styles of production, story telling and marketing of Indigenous audio visual production, supported by film funding organisations and various government programs, has now been established. There is an expectation of a certain type or genre of Indigenous program, with a network of media arts producers - armed with the required level of skill to provide desired production values - ready to provide this product. This situation emerged from exogenous development policies, and consequently, as Ginsberg points out, "Aboriginal people have become implicated in the circulation of commodified images of Aboriginality .... Such imagery escapes the control of Indigenous filmmakers, even as it valorizes and romanticises them (Ginsberg, 1993, p.562).

### 3.4 Market Theories

.... **"When we had done discussing the merits of the latest book, it was natural to wonder how many copies had been sold, what advance the author received and how much he was likely to make out of it .....** excerpt from W.Somerset Maugham (1919) *The Moon and Sixpence*, in Allen, 2008, p.312.

The intercontextual position of Indigenous media within Australian media and creative industries, as outlined above, indicates that domestic growth of Indigenous audio visual product remains problematic. At the same time the type of hybrid practices utilised in the production of Indigenous audio visual media, unlike that of Aboriginal art, restricts its reception on an international level, as, with compromised authenticity it is unable to create a niche market which would attract the interest of audiences seeking to encounter a distinct experience of the complex life, culture and history of one of the world's oldest cultures.

Correspondingly, the audio visual product market is reliant upon advice from domestic markets, and the support of financial schemes, for indications on which

national products will give the best returns on their own investments. It would seem then that a “key claim that globalisation is extending the basis of communication and cultural exchange” (Curran and Jin-Park, 2000, p.7), is, within the varying complexities of local, national, realities, a long bow to draw.

The context addressed above, has impacted upon the development of Uniikup Productions Ltd. with principle members and board of directors constantly realigning, reviewing and readapting activities, to sustain project production and operations and maintain this community media arts resource. The integrity of the organisation’s political and cultural principles upon which it was founded is what has kept the organisation and its members active ie.:

Whilst praxis develops, the way knowledge and skill is attained fundamentally remains the same: local, place-based resources are primary sources for cultural information and direction, and praxis reciprocates the development needs and aspirations peculiar to both people and place.

Maintaining these values and some form of cultural and political independence has taken its toll in terms of concrete and material development, but by adapting to change (a 40,000 year old practice) this community media resource remains sustainable and open for prospective development.

Over a period of 10 years, 1987-97, when Indigenous social development was high on the list of priorities of the national government and influencing state governments to be more progressive, funds provided for training, production of local information programs for local Indigenous welfare organisations and state government departments, as well as documentaries on e.g. cultural development, community relations, language salvage and revival for wider consumption, allowed Uniikup Productions to meet the needs and aspirations of its community. The organisation also developed an exhibition arm of its operations as a means of screening programs which were either not made for, or rejected by, broadcasters. Various events were designed to suit the local social

landscape and economic environment, and were consequently experimental, in the search for a market niche.

When the national political will changed to adopt commercially driven policies to address the needs within Aboriginal affairs, and media and arts development generally, production of audio-visual programs was at the mercy of domestic market consumption and socio-political trends. There had occurred a turning away from the “modernisation” of Australian society and its representation, reverting to conservative notions of industrialisation and commercialisation of arts and media services, with a curious mix of the idea of one nation and multiculturalism - for the good of the economy.

During this era relations with government were consolidated with funding provided for a National Indigenous Television Service - a public company limited by guarantee incorporated in New South Wales and registered on 1 December 2006. NITV is contracted to provide content for Foxtel satellite and cable television and national public broadcaster, ABC 3. Film makers who had fulfilled the required training and development requirements were financed to produce a few feature films and new aspiring individuals were funded to follow the successful career paths of their predecessors, with NITV increasing the viability of working in the film and television industry. The financial investment in the planning and development of Indigenous media services has met the intended performance indicator, and Indigenous media practitioners have joined the existing circle of media players, nationally and globally.

#### 4. Conclusion

**Media systems are shaped not merely by national regulatory regimes and national audience preferences, but by a complex ensemble of social relations that have taken shape in national contexts. It is precisely the historically grounded density of these relationships that tends to be excluded from simplified global accounts, in which theorists survey the universe while never straying far from the international airport (Curran and Jin-Park, 2000, p. 12).**

In response to this political change and the now burgeoning digitization of media, Uniikup Productions Ltd. expanded the practice of film-making into new media arts and developed the Colourise Festival to showcase Indigenous screen culture. The internet has changed the dynamics of the organisation's operations, from a focus on administration of its operations, to producing audio-visual product by freelance media practitioners devising and working on projects across a range of digital platforms and art forms. This change of focus has fragmented the operational mode of the organisation, but after 25 years, it is normal practice to respond to new circumstances creatively and rethink our economic position. This approach is derived from the concept of the transformative dynamics of growth, which is not quantitative but qualitative, can be observed by those within the dynamic, and offers a growth which is embedded in humanistic action and seasonal productivity.

Global media and communication theory, although occupying a place of exclusivity in relation to the level of Indigenous media development, engages the strong ability of Indigenous practitioners to critically analyse texts and glean useful political information. This overcomes to some extent, the frustrating absence of other perspectives but whether Indigenous theorists in any significant numbers will venture into the field to contribute to the thought and knowledge, given the immense effort involved to bring about a change in Eurocentric approaches to the field, is yet to be seen.

Over 25 years there has been much achievement as well as unfulfilled intentions in the field of Indigenous Australia media development and its future, like that of its competitors and alliances, remains open to speculation. To this end given the dynamics of social and environmental impacts upon societies, perhaps media in the field of global communication, in terms of consistent influences, power and growth, is an undecidable "that which no longer allows itself to be understood within ... binary opposition, but which ... inhabits it, resists it and disorganises it,

but without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution (Derrida in Kraidy, 2002, p.332).

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