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**KKP406: GLOBAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION
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ASSIGNMENT 1:

GLOBAL MEDIA THEORIES

1. Introduction

This essay will convey an analysis of and intellectual debate about global media theories, in the fields of Mass Communication and Cultural Studies. It is conducted by way of the relevance of these theories to Australian Indigenous media practice and development. Firstly, outlined below as a pretext to the essay topic, are three distinct aspects of the context, necessary to engagement with this analysis and debate.

1.2 Relevance

My experience of Indigenous community video, film and media arts practice as writer, producer, director, in Brisbane S.E. Queensland, extends over a 25 year period. The work - involving extensive video coverage of events, production of information programs, documentaries, exhibitions and media organisation functions - provides a valuable record of cultural, political, social, economic, educational and spiritual aspects of community life and media practices and development, from 1985 to the present (Uniikup Productions Ltd. Optical Media Collection, 1985-2010).

This experience is the basis for understanding the values and intent endogenous to local, place based Indigenous media, and analysing the impact and application of exogenous media development theories and practices from sources in mainstream society (Melkote 2003 p135 and Appadurai pp 323 and 326). This

Australian Indigenous perspective is peculiar to ethics, values and social and political issues relative to colonisation, sovereignty and marginalisation.

1.2 Local Indigenous Media Development

Definition of Media: the medium – the means by which something is communicated; an agency or means; the middle quality, degree; an intervening substance through which impressions are conveyed to senses etc. (Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1987).

“Black Nation” was published at the beginning of the 1980s by Indigenous Australian Gangulu-Birri-Gubba activist Ross Watson, as a means to communicate political views, history and social and cultural news in the Brisbane Indigenous community. It was a collaborative effort with Ross Watson as editor. Local Indigenous electronic media also developed in Brisbane during the 1980s supported by a community development program initiated by Kombumerri-Wakka-Wakka activist Mary Graham, located in the Brisbane Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency at West End and Woolloongabba. Again, the work was collaborative, involving local political expertise and knowledge and culturally specific decision making processes and practices used in development and production.

The program activities engendered economic, cultural and political independence; with an underpinning policy of recognition and promotion of rights inherent in Australian Indigenous sovereignty; so honouring developing and sustaining Indigenous determined organisations, policies and ethics that stabilise and progress society (land and people). Thus expertise, knowledge, culture, processes and practices are strengthened and provide a solid basis for development. The Brisbane Indigenous Media Association, Radio 4AAA-98.9FM, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Independent School (Murri Community School), Link-Up Queensland (reuniting members of the Stolen Generations with their families, culture and communities), Youth Program (now First Contact, Resource & Referral, Development and Training Facility) and

Murriimage Community Video and Film Service (now media arts organisation Uniikup Productions Ltd.) developed from these origins (Peacock, 2006).

1.3 Global/Globalisation

Globalisation is “a term used to describe, and make sense of, a series of interrelated processes” (Flew and McElhinney, 2006, p.287). So begins what is deemed normative discourse to prepare for an understanding on global media and communication.

However, terms of reference, as a basis for understanding, are determined by perspectives from cultural and socio-political strata occupied within a prescribed global paradigm, with academics and intellectuals an instrument for appliance of the definitions. In this respect, cultural and socio-political concerns are articulated by Palawa scholar and activist, Maggie Walters in her Chapter “Indigenous Sovereignty and the Australian State” in the publication Sovereign Subjects (2007, p.157).

The societal change wrought by the process of globalisation has direct repercussions for Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous rights. As in other Western nations, this new political, economic and social terrain has not impacted equally across Australian society. While many have benefited – especially the highly skilled and those residing in the larger cities – there is increasing evidence that the restructuring aspects of globalisation entrench or exacerbate existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage. For Indigenous Australia, this means that not only is our current social, economic and political disadvantage likely to be amplified but, as Gale (2005) argues, in a globalising world, dominant expressions of Western culture and whiteness are privileged even further.

The basic terms of reference for understanding globalisation in Flew and McElhinney, (2006, p287) are the interrelation of processes such as “internationalisation of production, trade and finance, with the rise of multinational corporations ...”; and “international movements of people (as immigrants, guest workers, refugees, tourists, students and expert advisers) ... However, from the context of a first nations (denoting sovereignty prior to discovery doctrine),

ethically, politically distinct perspective, an understanding of globalisation, would begin as follows:

“Globalisation” serves to camouflage and legitimise contemporary imperialism, an historic series of interrelated processes of “a system of exploitative control of people and resources” (Schiller, 1991, p17). Using an all encompassing and seemingly embracing term, “global” or “globalisation”, and its promotion as the inevitability of progress, dominates discourse, deflecting from the historic series of violent and ulterior interrelated processes of “civilisation” through imperialism and colonialism. Globalisation and civilisation have in common the overt and covert use of invasion for property and resource appropriation, denial and suppression of national laws, languages, knowledge and cultural practices, and abuse of humanity and land, to relentlessly pursue world economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual domination. Hugely deficit social and economic conditions in afflicted countries, mark them as highly vulnerable to exploitation today, allowing globalisation to appear legitimate, inevitable and paradoxically beneficial.

Likewise, terms like “Internationalisation”, their origins in the paradigm as described, maintain the legitimacy of expansion through corporate domination, and in an economic environment where such supranational institutions as the World Trade Organisation and World Bank, are having an “influence in shaping national structures and processes to an extent never quite known before” (Sinclair, 2004, p65). As well, the term “International movements of people” can be seen as subsequently induced responses to global opportunity, oppression and exploitation arising from economic and cultural domination, and transformed by global media images into imagined lives of economic stability and social progress in wealthy countries. Appadurai (2000, p325) characterises this trend as an “ethnoscape” now constituting “an essential feature of the world” and a form of “deterritorialisation”.

Furthermore, George Monbiot (2009) in his report on current social unrest in Britain undermines a *strong globalisation* theory that “the analytical and normative categories that guided social analysis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the nation-state, society, national economies and national cultures, will be less and less applicable” (Flew and McElhinney, 2006, p289):

“For the past 300 years, the revolutions and reforms experienced by almost all other developed countries have been averted in Britain by foreign remittances. The rebellions in Ireland, India, China, the Caribbean, Egypt, South Africa, Malaya, Kenya, Iran and other places we subjugated were the price of political peace in Britain. After decolonisation, our plunder of other nations was sustained by the banks.

Now, for the first time in three centuries, they can no longer deliver, and we must at last confront our problems. There will probably never be a full account of the robbery this country organised, but there are a few snapshots. In his book *Capitalism and Colonial Production*, Hamza Alavi estimates that the resource flow from India to Britain between 1793 and 1803 was in the order of £2m a year, the equivalent of many billions today. The economic drain from India, he notes, “has not only been a major factor in India's impoverishment ... it has also been a very significant factor in the industrial revolution in Britain”. As Ralph Davis observes in *The Industrial Revolution and British Overseas Trade*, from the 1760s onwards India's wealth “bought the national debt back from the Dutch and others ... leaving Britain nearly free from overseas indebtedness when it came to face the great French wars from 1793”.

Development of response institutions like Amnesty, Greenpeace, Red Cross, follow logically in the wake of internationally organised domination and exploitation; as did missions and reserves for the “welfare” of Australian Indigenous peoples with so called settlement. As well, vast support for public diplomacy and soft power campaigns (Nye, 2008) are necessary to generate opinion and debate to validate “globalisation” as a principle concept of modernity, at international, national and local levels, through NGOs, governments and multinational corporations. The campaigns include indirect promotion of globalisation theory, policy and discourse through documentaries, journal and newspaper articles, academic publications, issues within popular TV programs, consumer advertising and films, use of internet sites, etc. Whilst Nye (2008, p. 101) regards the term propaganda as an information process which has lost

credibility, the function of propaganda, public diplomacy and soft power (which employs the term globalisation) in getting one/many to do what you want, serves to validate a political, economic, social and cultural system with values not counter to domination through organised extreme violence and exploitation.

Subsequent to the perspective outlined above, global media incorporates the drive for globalisation, developing and employing strategies, like mass communication and its theory, to sustain and strengthen the economic systems and cultural influence of dominant nations. Indeed, theory itself derives from Aristotle's concept, "a function of his ontological presupposition" where "one single predicate, whatever it is, of one subject alone must necessarily be either affirmed or denied" (Jullien F. 2009). This method of reasoning and accounting for the world, deeply embedded in Western philosophy and epistemology, applied globally, can be seen as perpetuating the domination of European and capitalist schools of thought; and subjugating anything which challenges or contradicts its determination and intent. Mass communication, for a society with this ontological and philosophical underpinning, rises as a monolithic opportunity in the expansion and pursuit of economic, political, cultural and social domination.

2. CULTURAL STUDIES and MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY

Melkote (2003, p.130) argues that there remains a "split between those who view communication as an organisational delivery system and those who view communication more broadly, as inseparable from culture and from all facets of social change". "This orientation", he maintains, "rests on certain assumptions consistent with divisions in views on development, empowerment, and development communication." The overarching concepts in this field he identifies as communication, modernisation, development, participation and empowerment.

Moreover, culture and mass communication may be inseparable, but “ironies and resistances” arising at the intersection of their complex driving elements – technologies, images, money, ideas, compatibility and theories – creates what Appadurai (2000, p327) defines as disjunctures; evidence that globalisation and capitalism is not a blanket organism as the public is encouraged to believe.

2.1 “There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses” (Williams, 1958)

McQuall (2005, p50) writing on mass communication development, identifies “three sets of ideas .. of particular importance from the outset” - power, social integration or disintegration, and promotion of, or diminished, public enlightenment. These ideas shaping the media environment in which Australian Indigenous communications media has both developed since the early 1980s and is currently operating, reveal how mass communication theory as a strategy of globalisation, is relative to the concerns raised above by Maggie Walters.

The Australian Racial Discrimination Act passed in 1975, drawing the nation into line with the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination to which Australia is a signatory, brought pressure to bear upon state and national political parties to more seriously address basic human rights negligence throughout Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society. The provision of access to communications media was one area which received due attention, employing a model similar to that developed in Canadian for Indigenous populations. The goal was to include Indigenous culture within national broadcasting programming, support newspaper and journal publications, provide substantial government subsidy for infrastructure for television stations and satellite access. This support established Imparja Television in Alice Springs and the development of, firstly, a National Indigenous Radio, and then Television Service.

These developments afforded the power through media communications for both more organised social integration – subjecting regional and remote Indigenous people to social marketing techniques for changing values and knowledge as well as behaviour patterns (Melkote 2006, p. 135); and public enlightenment - placing Indigenous people and culture into a context which would promote cross-cultural inclusiveness and familiarity. Under both government and industry policies and conditions, issues and information pertaining to outcomes of historical conflict – economic, social and cultural dependence, particularly from a sovereignty perspective - were strictly controlled, with programming agendas acting to secure national political homogenisation.

Thus inclusion and integration into main stream media meant rights to Indigenous political expression became subordinate to the competition for audiences; what Nicholas Garnham (1995, p. 247) describes as the “politics of consumerism”. Whilst inclusion seemingly enhances public enlightenment, this mass communication style of programming control also results in less informed public debate, as well as less use of local culture in artist and production practices and knowledge.

Indigenous people of all ages and from various communities were, and continue to be, given communications media training in the Western/Australian mold of communications media development so embedding dominant forms and practices of Western expression and knowledge. The rationale was the inclusion of Indigenous media product and producers across the national and international communications industry and market. This process however, is what Canadian Mohawk Elder Michael Doxtater (2004 p.9) argues, is part of a filtering process, through a congruence paradigm, maintaining that:

Europeans take retrospective authority to define ancient Indigenous knowledge within the congruence paradigm Consequently Europeans assume authority to authenticate contemporary Indigenous culture while deducing life from the paradigm, based on soft criteria approved through Western knowledge.

It is also what Maggie Walters identifies as privileging dominant forms of Western expression and whiteness; with the appearance of integration serving to mask continuing patterns of gross disadvantage across Indigenous communities, as well as regressive government policies.

All the concepts arising from cultural studies and mass communication theory and strategies, have been and continue to be applied to, or are adopted by, Australian Indigenous media development in one way or another. However, little room is left for an endogenous application to this development of either underpinning Indigenous principles as outlined in 1.2 above; or Indigenous determined communications media power, social integration and public enlightenment, as McQuall asserts is, inherent in mass communication.

Nevertheless, as Appadurai found in Iyer's account of an emerging global cultural system in the Philippines, societies are filled with "sometimes camouflaged ironies and resistances" (2000, p. 323). Australian Indigenous radio and television program production and development, with an increasing use of a variety of technologies, indicates that the disjunctures of global media caused by ironies and resistances are creating opportunities which people are keen to harness as a means of power, integration into Indigenous society, and promotion of public enlightenment, locally, nationally and globally. In this way it is an act of continuing to "look back at a world we never lost" Appadurai (2000, p. 323).

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