Songlines to Satellites

Indigenous Communication in Australia, the South Pacific and Canada

Helen Molnar and Michael Meadows

First published in 2001 by Pluto Press
Australia Locked Bag, 199, Annandale
NSW 2038 www.plutoaustralia.com

Published in New Zealand by Huia
Publishers 39 Pipitea Street, PO
Box 17-335, Wellington, Aoteoroa
New Zealand www.huia.co.nz

2001 Cover design by Leah King-Smith Copyedited
by Kerry Davies Typeset by Bookhouse, Sydney
Printed and bound by Hyde Park Press

Australian Cataloguing-in-Publication Data Molnar, Helen, 1952-. Songlines to satellites: Indigenous communication in Australia, the South Pacific and Canada

Bibliography. ISBN 1 86403 028 3 1. Mass media and minorities. 2.
Ethnic mass media. 3. Indigenous peoples. I. Meadows, Michael. II. Title.

302.2308 NZ ISBN 1
87726 81 7

Contents

Acknowledgments

The arrival of yet another researcher in most Indigenous organisations these days is not usually a time for celebration. There is a sense that little, if anything, is returned to the communities for the time and effort they put in to look after another inquisitive visitor. We trust that the information in this book, gathered from so many different sources, will ‘go back’ into communities as a resource for future planning and policymaking. Organisations which have played a key role in our project include: the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia, the Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association, the Pacific Islands News Association, the South Pacific Commission Regional Media Centre, the National Aboriginal Communications Society, Television Northern Canada, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, Northern Native Broadcasting (Terrace), Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, and the Wawatay Native Communications Society.

Completing a project such as this is not possible without the support of so many people. For their patience and generosity, we thank the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who took the time to talk to us about their experiences, their histories, their stories. We wish to acknowledge them all. We apologise for not naming them here—there are simply too many and we would most certainly inadvertently omit some of them. We thank them for the interviews and resource material they provided and hope that they find the book useful and inspiring.

Helen Molnar & Michael Meadows

July 2000

Introduction

The voices of the people

An examination of the development of Indigenous media throughout the world shows that people do not necessarily see themselves as imprisoned by the dominant culture of the mass media and, in fact, find their own ‘spaces’ in which to produce alternative viewpoints and cultures. In fact, some suggest that the media and wider cultural fields can be conceived of as ‘battlefields, as spaces in which contests for various forms of dominance take place’ (Schlesinger 1991, p. 299). There are many examples of active resistance by Indigenous peoples to imposed national cultures. This resistance or ‘Indigenisation’ has been described as ‘tribalism’ — a return to smaller, more cohesive and self-reliant communities, shaped by a common language, ethnicity or religion. In order to extend this ‘tribalisation’, people find ‘hidden places’ in which to express themselves, regardless of restrictions on communication. The media adopted by such groups generally do use the capital intensive technology of the mainstream media and often lack their coverage. But this makes them no less important as forms of cultural expression and resistance because they are essentially about empowering local groups and cultures. Central to this empowerment is the ability of Indigenous communities to control the means of production of culturally specific media products.

All societies have their own lines of communication and, while ‘songlines’ relate specifically to Indigenous Australian culture and communication, we have used this term in the title as a

metaphor for a way of thinking about communication within the many Indigenous cultures we discuss. Through the title *Songlines to Satellites* we also suggest that the use of information technologies by Indigenous people remains linked to traditional forms of communication. If this link is broken, the nature of the communication changes. Technology does not replace traditional communication forms; rather it offers Indigenous communities another tool for communicating. In this way, Indigenous media producers appropriate technology for their own ends. At the same time, there can be a constant tension between traditional processes of discussion and decision-making and the 'modernising' constraints of time and technology in program production (Barclay 1990, p. 9). . This is because the link between traditional communication forms and communications technologies is not seamless; rather it involves a process of negotiation, because what is being created is a new cultural product that grows out of the traditional form. This idea is central to the way in which we have approached Indigenous media production in the three regions we consider in this book — Australia, the South Pacific and Canada.

The growth of Indigenous media

The enormous growth of community-based media over the past two decades illustrates the value people place on participating in media production at a community level. This participation is being encouraged by the increasing number of media technologies available, such as community radio, video and online news services, and the introduction of less labour-intensive forms of production, such as desktop publishing and digital recording and editing.

The pattern of development of Indigenous media worldwide has been influenced by the recognition of the possibility of using these media as tools for cultural and political intervention — allowing Indigenous people to 'speak as well as hear' (Girard 1992, p. 2; Dowmunt 1993). This response is driven by several impulses — combating stereotypes, addressing information gaps in non- Indigenous society and reinforcing community cultures. While in one sense this process can exist at the periphery of mainstream society, as it does in Australia and Canada, the implications are far

more profound. Behind much of the impetus for the development of Indigenous broadcasting is the fear of further cultural and language shifts because of the influence of mainstream media, particularly satellite television.

Global mass media tend to define world events by collapsing them both spatially and temporally into unproblematic, easily consumable vision clips and sound bites, obliterating

identity (Jayaweera, cited in Dowmunt 1993, p. 11). This de-contexualised information glut encourages us to think about identity as monocultural and detached — diametrically opposed to historical accounts, which reveal the formation of identities and culture as a more complex process (Suzuki 1997). Some have suggested this as a powerful incentive to establish a dialogue between cultures if we are to genuinely progress towards a sense of identity far more dynamic and progressive than that offered by daily news reports (Langton 1993; Said 1993).

Indigenous perceptions of racism in mainstream media have also been a major impetus for the development of Indigenous media. Some have attributed the spectacular emergence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community radio in Australia and Maori tribal, or *Iwi*, radio in Aotearoa (New Zealand), for example, to disaffection with mainstream media representation. Indigenous people seek access as a form of cultural control (Girard 1992; Dowmunt 1993). But finding a voice on the airwaves has been as much of a struggle as winning back custodianship of the land, particularly for Indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada.

In 1991 the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Inquiry into Racist Violence noted that the media could play a significant role 'both in communicating and soliciting the ideas, fears and resentments of racism and in informing and educating Australians about each other' (HREOC 1991, p. 355). It criticised the mainstream media for the perpetuation and promotion of negative racial stereotypes, a tendency towards conflictual and sensationalist reporting on race issues and an insensitivity towards, and often ignorance of, minority cultures [which] can all contribute to creating a social climate which is tolerant of racist violence (1991, p. 356).

A fundamental problem for Indigenous Australians is that mainstream media images of and messages about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people 'are constructed within the dominant Anglo-European cultural framework for consumption principally by those who share this framework' (Jennett 1983, p. 28). Native Canadians face a similar problem. In the Pacific Island countries, racism can also be an issue as evidenced in the Fiji coups in the late 1980s and again in 2000.

Conflicts of interest

So how then can the media be made more relevant for Indigenous people? The draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples reminds us that First Nation Peoples have the 'right to the use of and access to all forms of mass media in their own languages'. Some organisations proclaim such rights in their constitutions. New Zealand's national organisation of Maori communicators, *Te Manu Aute*, for example, states that

‘every culture has a right and a responsibility to present its own culture to its own people’ (Barclay 1990, p. 7).

However, the current mainstream media models make Indigenous access difficult. National radio and television models (commercial and national public broadcasting) are organised along centre– periphery lines. This makes them inherently unequal as the resources tend to be concentrated at the centre rather than at the periphery (Samarajiva and Shields 1990). This ignores the crucial need for audiences living in rural and remote areas to exchange information with each other for the benefit of themselves and their communities. Examples from around the world suggest that participatory

media models, which are local and decentralised, combined with regional and national media, are more effective as vehicles for a diversity of Indigenous communications.

At the same time, there is much euphoric rhetoric around global technologies such as the Internet and the benefits that these will bring. This rhetoric often ignores the inequality of access to computers, to affordable connection and usage fees, and to ongoing operational resources and training for many Indigenous people. Indigenous Australians, Native Canadians and Pacific Islanders living in rural and remote regions are unlikely to get immediate benefit from the Internet because these regions often do not have electricity or adequate telecommunications infrastructures. Cost of access to the Internet, where feasible, is also prohibitive.

Technology, information and media content are marketed as if they are neutral or value free (Lent 1986; Haan 1988). But no technology is neutral; it comes with a host of existing constraints—from training and operating standards through to maintenance and production with a potential for creating new dependencies. Technical constraints are sometimes not so obvious—for example, video has been designed to cope with light-coloured skin tones reflecting an inherent cultural bias. These issues are particularly relevant for developing countries seeking to emulate imported production standards and program forms. Some years ago, Tunstall observed:

While technology alone determines nothing, the new technology is hammered into shape as the result of commercial and political struggles, and it then reflects these forces. Since the commercial and political forces are American ones the established technology is arranged into an American format and carries with it various other American assumptions (Tunstall 1977, p. 76).

Alternatives

This book centres on the idea that technological empowerment — specifically 'smaller' technologies like video and radio — brings with it a change in the traditional view of mass media and the information revolution. Lorna Roth and Gail Valaskakis (1989, p. 230), for example, suggest that the most interesting broadcasting developments in Canada are taking place at the periphery — regionally and locally in Native communities — contributing to the distinctiveness and democratisation of Canadian broadcasting. What is clear, they argue, is that prolonged exposure to 'US-style, commodity-oriented programming does not *necessarily* result in flattening out of social and cultural differences'. Radical, emancipatory media projects are taking place in Indigenous communities in Australia and Canada, and to a lesser extent the South Pacific, enabling the *possibility* of a different kind of media, in form, content, goals and effects, from the mainstream.

Peter Kulchyski (1989, p. 50) suggests that what is occurring in Indigenous communities in the Arctic is that 'social relations condition the way in which media will be used'. Graham Murdock (1999), too, reminds us that, in the wake of the digital revolution, we need to pool our resources and argue for a new kind of 'cultural commons'. We need to mobilise in the service of 'citizenship, civility and shared fate'. The future, he suggests, is part of a network of 'cultural nodes'. We need a new kind of cultural commons — a network of social commitment and social endeavour to be able to deliver to people what they have always deserved. Social relations must be the basis for how media technologies in the digital age are used, not the other way around.

Ien Ang (1990) raises another contradiction: transnational communications systems more and more are enabling new ways of 'forging cultural communities' through, for example, the exchange of culturally specific videotapes by diasporic communities around the world, having the effect of constructing and maintaining a sense of identity. Recent work in Australia by Cunningham and Sinclair (2000) confirms the importance of ways by which various cultural communities use

videotapes to reaffirm their sense of identity. Some suggest that it is the very 'cracks' in broadcasting systems, which become the focus for media empowerment:

> It is here that we see new constructions: local and regional identity formation, linguistic and heritage differences, possibilities for the development of new interactive relationships between producers and audiences, models for uses of broadcasting to change the consciousness of audiences, and the development of participation and political awareness (Roth and Valaskakis 1989, p. 232).

Indigenous peoples in various regions of Australia, the Pacific Island nations, and Canada are

‘inventing’ their own forms of culturally appropriate communication. But it is inappropriate to assume that such inventions of form or style are confined to remote areas where it is often perceived that the ‘culture is strong’. Such assumptions are linked to notions that the very nature of ‘remoteness’ brings with it an implied traditional purity (Chase 1981; Cowlishaw 1987; Keen 1988; Langton 1993). Indigenous cultural production in the three regions we consider in this book has a strong urban focus as well. Jesus Martin-Barbero (1988, p.460) reminds us of the long-standing populist-romantic links between the ‘the Indigenous’, ‘the original’ and ‘the primitive’, making the idea of ‘Indigenous’ irreconcilable with modernity.

But what emerges from the kinds of Indigenous production we talk about here is an engagement with construction of identity as well as attempts to reclaim control of histories and knowledges. Throughout, the crucial social links between producers and audiences re-emerge as a powerful mediating influence in the kinds of cultural production underway. Kellner (1989, p. 144) makes an important point here:

> An alternative media system would thus provide the possibility for oppositional, counter- hegemonic subcultures and groups to produce programs expressing their own views, oppositions, and struggles that resist the massification, homogenisation, and passivity that Baudrillard and others attribute to the media. Alternative media allow marginal and oppositional voices to contest the view of the world, values, and life-styles of the mainstream, and make possible the circulation and growth of alternative subcultures and communities.

Indigenous media production is a hybrid process — a melange of policy issues, practices and strategies (Ginsberg 1991). Tom O’Regan (1993, pp. 189–90) suggests that the diversity which exists in Indigenous broadcasting should be considered within three frameworks — the differences *within* broadcasting itself, Indigenous community aspirations and the influence of government policy. Indigenous broadcasting thus becomes the result of a negotiation by Indigenous people of the very nature of the broadcasting industry and their relationship to cultural, policy and funding issues. This idea must necessarily be framed within notions that recognise the multifarious related influences on Indigenous cultural production — ceremonial processes, the production of art, provision and operation of community services, local media production and kinship affiliations and obligations. This approach must also acknowledge Indigenous people’s prior and continuing relationship with the land (and the sea), their customary law, and the effects of dispossession. Omission of any of these removes a critical context.

Colonial encounters

One of the most enduring influences on Indigenous people in the regions we consider has

been the impact of colonisation and its continuing effect. From the earliest explorers' journals, through the emerging colonial press to modern mass media, Indigenous peoples have been represented in ways

over which they have had little control. This has been one of the most significant catalysts for the emergence and expansion of Indigenous media systems. The predominant images of Indigenous people in Australia, the South Pacific and Canada continue to be perpetuated largely through mainstream media. Many of these images are not only narrow and stereotypical, but are remarkably persistent, having emerged at the time of first contact with Europeans

Australia

The clear picture that emerges from the early explorers' observations of Indigenous populations in Australia is a description of the so-called 'primitives' in terms of the explorers' own existence, based on predominant ideologies. In the journals of Dampier (1697) Australia was described as the 'primitive other'. 'The miserablest people in the world' was Dampier's description of Aboriginal people (Turner Strong 1986, pp. 175–79). Perhaps it is not surprising, given that illustrators of medieval maps imagined the undiscovered great southern land as being inhabited by monsters with backward-turning feet, who walked upside down (Turner Strong 1986, p. 176; Gibson 1984, p. 142). Descriptions like these preceded Captain James Cook's historic 1770 voyage. Cook's travels coincided with two interpretations of non-European societies: primitivism and theorists of the four stages — placing Aboriginal people as the most rudimentary form of human development. When Cook's journals were eventually published in 1773, his reflective, and often sympathetic, observations of Indigenous people were omitted (Williams 1985, pp. 44–46).

Over a period of nine days between 18 and 26 January 1788, eleven British and two French ships entered Botany Bay. They carried 290 seafarers, soldiers and civilians, and 717 convicts. Colonisation had begun. Captain Arthur Phillip's initial failure to try to identify himself at first contact was the first sign of a long history of miscommunication between the colonists and Indigenous people. The colonists' inability to understand why they were persistently shunned or attacked by Aboriginal people near the new settlement showed their total ignorance of Aboriginal life (Stanner 1977, p. 9). Race relations passed through several stages in the first twelve months of the new colony — from the 'cautious friendship' of the first few days, through a period where relations were 'neither frequent nor cordial', to open animosity. The first Aboriginal prisoner was taken on New Year's Eve, 1788 (Stanner 1977, pp. 16–20). The colonial pattern had been set, as Stanner observes (1977, p. 22): 'One

cannot make full human sense of the development of European life in Australia without reference to the structure of racial relations and the persistent indifference to the fate of the Aborigines.' He argues that it this 'fact of indifference' is the very foundation upon which life in Australia has been built.

By 1830 Aboriginal people had been decimated — as much by diseases like smallpox, influenza and alcoholism as at the hands of squatters on their land (Broome 1982; Gibson 1984, p. 174). But it was the theft of land which many writers argue was the most murderous of all. As pointed out in the report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC 1990, p. 9), the current high rates of Aboriginal imprisonment are seen as indicative of the alienation that has stemmed from dispossession. Along with the continuing significance of an estimated 20,000 Aboriginal deaths in the long battle for settled Australia (Reynolds 1987, p. 196), ultimate dispossession figures strongly in black consciousness. Reynolds observes (1987, p. 195), 'Ancient injustice burns like a beacon across the generations. In black Australia, the flame is fed by two of humanity's most keenly felt grievances — lost land and martyred kin.'

The colonial press

The colonial press, too, played a significant role. For more than fifty years since its inception on 31 January 1880, *The Bulletin* promoted racist stereotypes, and from 7 May 1908 proclaimed openly under its masthead: 'Australia for the White Man' (*The Bulletin, Centenary Issue* 1980, p. 279, Winroe 1987, pp. 7–8). When *The Bulletin* was sold by the Prior family to Australian Consolidated Press in 1960, one of the first tasks for new editor Donald Horne was to change the wording of the magazine's masthead (1980, p. 327). Cryle (1987, p. 23; 1992, p. 69) stresses that although the contribution made by newspapers to the processes of colonisation is ambivalent, in an overall sense, the colonial press was the perpetrator of 'virulent racism and white supremacy', with Aboriginal people being the prime target. By the 1890s there was rejoicing in the media that the passing of Aboriginal people would contribute to the solution of the race problem in Australia. But while much of the writing about Indigenous people in the colonial press was either paternalistic or racist or both, Indigenous affairs were generally high on the news agenda — perhaps much more prominent than during the past eighty to a hundred years. Amongst this coverage of Aboriginal issues, there were a significant number of articles written by observers opposed to assimilationist policies and the strategy of 'dispersal'. However, the overall negative trend eventually gained the upper hand.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the press generally supported the notion that Aboriginal people, as well as the Chinese and Melanesians were expendable as part of the process of industry development. The colonial press played an important ideological role in legitimating dominant ideas about Indigenous people and the place they occupied in settled society. It set up a framework for thinking that has proved remarkably persistent.

Modern media images

Studies of reporting practices of Australian journalists over the past twenty years have revealed that Indigenous voices continue to be marginalised in issues that affect them and their communities. Australian journalists use Aboriginal sources between one-fifth and one-third of the rate of non- Indigenous sources in stories about Indigenous affairs (Meadows 1993; Hippocrates and Meadows 1996; Meadows 1998). One study of news coverage by the Canadian newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, revealed a similar lack of reliance by journalists on Indigenous sources (Meadows 1999). This omission of alternative voices is a continuing practice, which enables perpetuation of dominant ideas and assumptions about Indigenous people.

In the 1990s, media debates around Indigenous people in Australia were fuelled by the emergence of a new kind of racial intolerance. This was promulgated by the ultra-conservative One Nation Party. Its simplistic representation of problems, and its equally simplistic solutions, attracted audiences conditioned by more than 200 years of media misrepresentation of race relations. The Australian media coverage of One Nation and its ideologies included scant criticism. It was only towards the end of 1997 and in the lead-up to the 1998 federal election that journalists and the mainstream media began to more critically assess the party's assertions. But by then eleven members had been elected to the Queensland Parliament. By 2000 the party had been deregistered in Queensland over a technicality. But the ways in which Indigenous people were framed in the party's policy speeches bore a strong resemblance to the kind of rhetoric which emerged from some sections of the colonial press 100 years earlier.

As we detail in chapter 1, communication in Australia began long before a non-Indigenous media system imposed a non-Indigenous framework for representing Indigenous people and their affairs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a long history of seeking access to media technologies — from the first attempts with the hand-written *Flinders Island Chronicle* in 1836 to more recent experiments with the Outback Digital Network, linking remote communities by satellite. In this way, they have created their own communication

‘spaces’.

The South Pacific

When the models for development are all from one source, when external cultural stimulation is from a single cultural tradition, and when the technology and philosophy of communicating a national and cultural consciousness are external, the possibility of fostering a heritage based upon Indigenous models is significantly diminished (Takeuchi 1981, p. 3).

Unlike Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, Pacific Islanders have the advantage of being the Indigenous majority rather than a minority in their countries. But their education systems, media and institutions have been dominated by the languages and cultures of their European colonisers, with the result that during colonial periods they were defined as ‘the Other’ in their own countries (Hau’ofa 1987). There are twenty-two Pacific Island countries and territories, with some of the smaller countries among the most remote in the world. A number of Pacific Island countries have gained their independence only in the past thirty years, the most recent being Vanuatu in 1980. Each has its own history and diversity of languages and cultures.

Western communication and information technologies were originally introduced by colonial governments, and are now being marketed by these former colonial powers and other Western countries. The question facing a number of Pacific countries is ‘how to utilise a technology of the West for purposes of intellectual decolonisation of masses of people, without being consumed by the very same hardware and software’ (Gilliam 1986, p. 3).

South Pacific countries face considerable challenges because their relatively recent independence means they have only begun to address questions of self-identity and nationalism in the past decade or two. At the same time, Pacific Islanders are tackling a number of issues to do with the survival of their cultures and lifestyles. When they were colonised by Europeans, Pacific Islanders, like Indigenous Australians, had their cultures and languages denigrated and dismissed as uncivilised (Meleisea 1980; Aiavoa 1983). Prior to colonisation, a quarter of the world’s languages were spoken in the Pacific (Litteral 1992). But European colonisers and missionaries did not respect this, viewing them as inferior and the cause of communication problems. The Europeans justified the imposition of their languages, as they did in Australia, as a precondition to elevating Pacific Islanders to a ‘higher stage of civilisation’. Moreover, some Pacific Islanders, like Indigenous Australians, were not allowed to speak their languages publicly or in schools. Pacific Islanders in turn assumed that becoming literate in the English language would lead to the ‘white man’s riches’. However, literacy has largely been institutional, with the result that, in some Pacific countries, the

institutions of literacy developed before widespread literacy itself. As a result, the oral cultures of the Pacific remain under threat. Radio and video programs, along with bilingual newspapers and newspapers in local languages, might assist in resolving this dilemma by acknowledging the value of these languages.

Throughout the Pacific, there are divisions between the small, urban-based overseas-educated Indigenous elites who speak English or French well, and who are supportive of expatriate ideals, and the communities living in rural areas and outer islands, where cultural diversity is more obvious

and where literacy rates among non-metropolitan communities vary significantly. The elite groups run the institutions — including media institutions — and control the political and economic agendas. As will be seen in the chapters on Pacific television and radio, Pacific Island governments see broadcasting as a vehicle for uniting their nations so that they can strive for development and economic goals. But because of the centralised nature of Pacific media, a diversity of languages and cultures cannot easily be represented on the airwaves.

While multi-channel media are ideal for this, the task facing these countries is immense — from Papua New Guinea (PNG), which has more than 850 languages, to smaller countries like the Solomon Islands, with around 100 languages spoken. The imposition of a national culture is a threat to Indigenous cultural diversity, and cultural tensions in Fiji, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea illustrate the conflict that can arise.

Western ideas of news

For decades the South Pacific has relied on Western news agencies for news about itself and other countries. As a result, Pacific Islanders, like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, have learnt about themselves largely from the perspectives of others. This changed only in 1987 when the regional news agency PACNEWS was set up. Today television, cinema, books, daily newspapers and magazines are largely controlled by outside (Western) interests, with radio, video and community newspapers being the only real Indigenous media.

The Western news and information programs broadcast in the Pacific reflect Western news agendas, and coverage of the Pacific remains minimal (Krause 1989). There is the rare sound bite of a Pacific politician but, in general, Pacific Islanders do not hear their own voices or see their faces on international news services. They are in this sense like Indigenous Australians, either invisible or always being spoken for (or about) by Western journalists.

The major criticism of Western journalists — common in many developing countries — is that they are interested only in the region during times of crisis (Hill 1990, p. 18). They ‘parachute’ in, often with little understanding of local culture, languages or issues, and apply a predetermined Western framework — and then leave (Morgan 1987; Molnar 1988). Most are usually ill-equipped to report on Pacific cultures because they have very little knowledge of the region. This can result in news coverage that is offensive and even destructive. An example of this contemptuous treatment was given by then Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka of Fiji. According to Rabuka, a New Zealand news service allegedly used footage of African soldiers and tanks to ‘illustrate’ the first Fijian coup in 1987. Fiji has no tanks and the coup was bloodless (Dean and Ritova 1988, pp. 86–87). A cynical but accurate reading of this is that Western news editors, in need of footage to illustrate the story, saw the ‘black faces’ as interchangeable. In another report shown in New Zealand and Australia, the offices of the Bank of New Zealand in Fiji had apparently been damaged by rioting crowds. This was a case of Western reporters seeing what they wanted to see, because, in that instance, the building was in the process of being demolished to make way for a new one (Dean and Ritova 1988, p. 87).

When the first Fiji coups took place in the late 1980s, the Australian media referred to the events as ‘Paradise lost’. References to ‘island paradises’ have again been made by journalists during the coups in Fiji and the Solomon Islands in 2000. American films have generally romanticised Pacific Island cultures as simple and pure, representing a way of life that is now lost to the industrialised West. By continually depicting Indigenous cultures as ‘happy, carefree people’, the media perpetuates the myth of the ‘Pacific paradise’ populated by simple ‘natives’ — images imbued with

paternalism. Pacific Islanders are keen to redress this imbalance as this observation from the interim deputy chairman of the PNG Moving Images Association Rodney Sinaune indicates:

> People will be educated if we use the mass media; they will become equal partners in development. There have been many productions made about PNG (by expatriates), but we are not supporting a local industry. People from overseas are gaining mileage out of us. We should have local content and participation. The need is there, the demand is there, but the Government needs to give proper direction (*The National*, 2000).

The impact of

television

It is widely perceived in the South Pacific that television will cause ‘a decline in knowledge of history, genealogy, songs and stories, all the vehicles which, in a society with an oral history, carry culture and identity’ by disrupting traditional family and community life *(Islands Business* 1986, p. 6). Seigal talks about ‘the Samoan way’ changing in recent years. The elders decided to change from Sunday the weekly gathering, or *lotu*, a much valued part of Samoan life, so that they could ‘watch their favourite television program, *All-Star Wrestling’* (Seigal 1980, p. 18). Researchers in other parts of the world have noted similar concerns (Coldevin 1977; Granzberg *et al* 1977; Lull 1988; Reddi 1989; Kottak 1991; Meadows 1992). But Seigal argues that it is important not to overemphasise ‘signs of Western acculturation’ and assume that these fundamentally alter culture, because, while the village *lotu* in Western Samoa may have been changed, it still takes place. Researchers such as Hamelink take a more pessimistic view, arguing that this is another example of global ‘cultural synchronisation’ (Hamelink 1983, pp. 2–3).

Pacific Islanders, like Indigenous peoples in Australia and Canada, place great emphasis on oral transmission of knowledge and the right to know and communicate these ideas. Television has changed the ways in which members of Pacific societies interact because it ignores the rules governing activities, communication and access to information. Thomas (1986, p. 19) explains that now, ‘whole families, and in some cases communities, sit together taking part in the same experience with equal access to what television provides, often viewing experiences that would be unthinkable in a real life situation’.

The issues we have raised here should not be dismissed simply as an attempt to preserve the past. While some older Pacific Islanders may prefer to maintain the way of life with which they are familiar, the challenge facing their communities today is similar to the one facing Indigenous people in Australia and Canada:

> The Pacific Way does not mean the old way ... What we hope we mean is the retention of the positive aspects from the past for the present; marrying the beauties of the old with the advantages of the new, out of which we may evolve a distinctively Pacific model for 21st century living (Vusoniwailala 1976, p. 4).

The appropriation of information technologies for Indigenous communications is part of this process.

Canada

When Columbus first sighted the shores of San Salvador on 12 October 1492, he coined

the name *indios* to describe the inhabitants he saw (Brown 1971, p. 2). It was almost 500 years after Norse seafarers had first established a small colony on the north-east tip of Newfoundland. It was abandoned in the early 1400s. The next contact between Canadian Indians and Europeans came

shortly after Columbus's voyages attracted fishers to the Grand Banks, just south of Newfoundland, and by 1534, the fur trade was well established (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs 1990, p. 49).

Within a 200-year period, it is estimated that Indian populations were reduced by up to 95 per cent. The first permanent settlers in what is now the United States, in 1607 (in what was to become known as Virginia), shared the vast continent with an estimated 600,000–900,000 Indigenous people from an unknown number of tribes speaking around 190 languages (Krauss 1992, p. 76). Twenty-five years later, the population had been reduced to about 300,000, all forced to live west of the Mississippi River. Atrocities by a group of Dutch settlers against the Indigenous people on Staten Island were first detailed in 1640. The pervasive images of the first 300 years of contact between white colonists and the Indigenous peoples of North America was, according to Brown, largely formulated between 1860 and 1890. He describes the period as one in which the myths of the west were created:

> [It was portrayed as] an era of gold-seeking, violence, audacity, sentimentality, undirected exuberance, and almost a reverential attitude towards personal freedom for those who already had it ... only occasionally was the voice of Indians heard (1971, p. xi).

Inquisitive newspaper reporters did interview some chiefs in the late nineteenth century, when curiosity about Indian survivors of the wars reached its peak. But Brown claims the quality of the interviews is variable, depending on the availability of interpreters and on some reporters being hoaxed by their interviewees. Brown documents media complicity in the cover-up of a seemingly endless series of atrocities committed against America's Indigenous people until 1890 — the symbolic end of Indian freedom at Wounded Knee (1971, p. 13). Like Brown, Sandoz acknowledges the tremendous amount of public conditioning which enabled the image of the 'great red hunter' to be transformed into a 'dirty, treacherous, bloodthirsty savage standing in the way of progress' (1953, p. vi).

While the nation fought to 'free' the blacks from slavery in 1864, it accepted a policy of extermination for its Indigenous peoples. President Abraham Lincoln did not object when the Cheyenne were massacred at Sand Creek, Colorado, in that year. The media of the day effectively ignored the numerous Indian rebellions — the Perce Nez in 1877; the Sioux, Bannocks, Arapahos and Poncas in 1878 — and even the 2500-kilometre trek by the Northern Cheyenne from Indian territory back to Yellowstone in the same year. The media

eventually took the side of the Cheyenne when 170 Indians were massacred at Fort Robinson (Sandoz 1953).

A Canadian case study

In the summer of 1990, Archbishop Desmond Tutu visited a little known Ojibway reserve, Osnaburgh, in north-western Ontario. The event attracted media from all over Canada. A local Native communications society, Wawatay, organised a mobile satellite uplink for television news coverage to be broadcast live internationally (Rowlandson 1991).

The resulting news stories became the subject of an attack by prominent Canadian commercial television journalist Eric Malling, accusing the media of being manipulated by the Osnaburgh Ojibway and by Archbishop Tutu. The television current affairs story he produced included an interview with the Osnaburgh Ojibway chief, Frank Kaminawash, whose command of English paled in comparison with his experienced interviewer, enabling Malling to bully the chief into making some doubtful admissions.

Malling's claim of having told 'the real story' prompted Wawatay Operations Manager, John Rowlandson, to challenge the reporter's version. Rowlandson claimed the media failed to inform Canadians about Osnaburgh that day:

> Their lack of skill, their failure to probe issues, to seek them out, to ask hard questions, left a feeling among a lot of people ... that something was wrong. Unfortunately Eric Malling was able to take those feelings and appropriate them to a very particular form of malaise and that was that Indians were manipulating the Canadian public (Rowlandson 1991).

Rowlandson described one incident where Archbishop Tutu spoke to an Ojibway woman standing near a run-down shack. The Archbishop whispered a few words to her and went to move on. One camera operator asked Tutu to repeat what he had said because the camera had been switched off:

> Tutu, rightly, said that he wouldn't, and continued on with the tour. That stands as a fairly prominent example of the media trying to manipulate the event for Canadians as opposed to Indians manipulating the media for Canadians (Rowlandson 1991).

Rowlandson, like some previous commentators, points to the importance of the stories, which are *not* covered as an indication of a particular set of ideas and assumptions prevalent

in mainstream media. He drew the attention of one TV producer to several children in the community centre, ‘blasted’ from sniffing glue, at the precise moment Tutu was touring the reserve. He identified it as a very real incident in the life of Osnaburgh — a reserve which had almost ceased to function as a unit. The CBC producer declined the invitation. Rowlandson observes, ‘And that’s where a significant absence emerges amongst the stories: the broadcast journalists were unprepared to deal with real issues; with the realities of everyday life.’ He contends that the reporters there had no idea how to cope with showing Canadians the realities of an Indian reserve in disarray. All reporters remarked on the lack of Indians at the ceremony and suggested that the visit was something of a failure as a result:

> The fact was that they didn’t understand that they had left Canada and entered a different culture. Indians don’t gather in large numbers, especially in northern Ontario where there’s fewer Native people ... than there is in most small towns in southern Ontario ... (Rowlandson 1991).

Malling did not mention in his ‘investigative’ story that all media failed to speak to the Ojibway people themselves. Instead, they relied on what Rowlandson refers to as a ‘fixer’ — someone to arrange interviews for them:

> And as a result, the human factor was lost ... Certainly the Canadian population were manipulated by the fact that they weren’t able to get inside the minds and the feelings of everyday people on the Osnaburgh reserve.

Rowlandson’s observations continued long after the journalists and the news crews had left. He watched two Ojibway people walk up to the only tap in the community to draw water—the first time he had seen daily life in the community return to normal:

> ...it was only after that [non-Native] culture had left that they could begin to emerge again and live their lives. It became a long-standing visual metaphor, the way that non-Native journalists see Native culture; they always see an interruption of life rather than a process (Rowlandson 1991).

Rowlandson’s perceptive observations contrast with the ideologically constrained ‘journalese’ of mainstream reporters. It is a powerful illustration of the nature of non-Native or mainstream media representation.

A royal commission into Native Affairs in 1991 examined issues such as Native history, self-government, land claims, the constitution, treaties, the Metis, and the Indian Act. Its agenda

was significantly different to that of mainstream Canada although some would argue the position of Native people in Canadian society is little better than their Australian counterparts (Delacourt and Platiel 1991, p. 24; Devine 1991, p. 10). On both continents, the processes of representation have been mediated through the concepts of race and racism and their often problematic meanings. As with the other regions we consider in this book, Indigenous communication in Canada existed long before the arrival of the first settlers. And while Native affairs is still largely framed by this colonial experience, Aboriginal agency has always been present. Indigenous communities across Canada, like their counterparts in Australia and the South Pacific, have adopted various communication technologies to suit their own needs—and to tell their own stories.

Making spaces

Despite the long history of mainstream media misrepresentation of their lives and their affairs, Indigenous people in Australia, the South Pacific and Canada are by no means passive. They have been and remain ‘active agents’ in the process of identity construction through various forms of media (Attwood 1989). Conflict which results from this, too, is more frequent, now that Indigenous groups are more aware of media processes, having become involved in their own forms of media production. The very existence of this conflict is evidence that a struggle over the nature of media images continues.

While there are fine examples of journalism which have sought to expose inequitable and inhuman practices against Indigenous people, the overwhelming tenor of the mainstream media coverage continues to be less useful and is generally negative. In the following chapters, we outline the growth of Indigenous print, broadcast and other media as a counter to the predominantly negative or patronising images Indigenous people continue to experience.

Through a comparative analysis of Indigenous media in Australia, the South Pacific and Canada, this book will show the extent and diversity of Indigenous media developments in these regions. By taking this regional approach, we hope to begin to dispel the notion that Indigenous media are the product of a series of isolated developments that occur on the periphery of mainstream media. A comparative study is also informative, because while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Pacific Islanders, and Native Canadians live in different cultural millieux, they express similar fears about the impact of non-Indigenous-dominated media on the survival of their cultures and languages. The increasing influx of Western media content via satellite, combined with real concern about the viability of Indigenous languages, has added a degree of urgency to these issues. The most effective solutions will come from Indigenous peoples themselves.

We cannot and do not claim this book as *the* definitive account of the intricacies of Indigenous media development in these three regions. Indigenous perspectives on these issues have always existed, published in various forms — sometimes in print, but most often in the form of oral histories, and often through the very media which are the subject of this book. Although we have relied heavily on such sources for this account, our approach can only ever be *a* perspective, *a* history, based on *a particular set* of knowledges, viewed through non-Indigenous eyes. The more

traditional forms of storytelling existed long before we began to contemplate this project, and will no doubt persist long after, correcting our inadvertent inaccuracies or adding necessary layers of meaning to our interpretation of events. But, if through this book we are able to provoke an increased awareness of the significance of Indigenous media in Australia, the South Pacific and Canada, then our aim will have been realised.

PART I: AUSTRALIA

Chapter one

Finding a voice: Indigenous media policy development in Australia

> The Aboriginal child ... listens all day and night to only English. The child is bound to feel that their parents and their language are not important. It's our duty to make sure this does not happen. It's our duty to point out that we will always be Aboriginal and what makes us Aboriginal is our language, our customs and our community (CAAMA 1987, p.3).

Indigenous communication systems on the Australian continent existed for millennia before European colonisation but the existence and validity of these information systems was largely ignored following the invasion in 1788. The information available on early Indigenous media in Australia is sketchy but it reveals a widespread Aboriginal dissatisfaction with mainstream media representation of their affairs. Before the middle of the 19th century, Aboriginal people had realised the link between media and power and had sought access to enable them to speak to their own people in their own ways. However, as technologies such as broadcasting emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, Indigenous people were excluded both from access and representation. It took the social justice battles of the 1960s and 1970s for policymakers to acknowledge the need for Indigenous access to the airwaves through community radio.

Historically, telecommunications and media growth in Australia has focussed on the requirements of non-Indigenous Australians living in urban areas and to a lesser extent major rural centres. Communication needs in remote Australia (sections of Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland, and the Torres Strait Islands) where up to 70 percent of the Indigenous population lives, have not been well served. The telegraph, then railroads, highways, and microwave transmission towers followed the corridors where non-Indigenous people settled in the Australian interior. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were never seen as clients for these services (Michaels 1986, p.98). Instead, they were used as labour to build the communication facilities and in many cases, evicted from their lands so that these schemes could proceed. Over the years, there have been a number of government programs to help bring television and radio to remote areas. These schemes invariably favoured non-Indigenous Australians because of the costs involved and because the media delivered were mainstream radio and television services, dominated by English-language programming and non-Indigenous culture. Indigenous people usually received these services only when they lived in areas where there were a number of non-Indigenous Australians.

However, non-Indigenous media models, whether commercial or public service, are not neutral and come with inbuilt programming assumptions and notions of ‘professionalism’. These factors, along with the economic imperatives under which mainstream models operate, severely restrict the potential for Indigenous programming on commercial television and national public service stations in several ways: firstly, through the importation of overseas and nationally-produced programs at the expense of local, Indigenous programming; and secondly, by imposing non-Indigenous program forms on Indigenous content, compromising the Indigenous nature of the content in order to make it more palatable for non-Indigenous audiences. The technologically-determined nature of some broadcasting services has meant

that television, in particular, has not facilitated Indigenous production in the ways that it could. Instead, successive Australian governments have opted for

technological solutions with little regard to the social and cultural applications of communications technology, usually with minimal or no consultation with the Indigenous people involved.

As television expanded across Australia, it was seen by many remote Indigenous communities as *another* threat to languages and cultures already under enormous pressure as a result of colonialism and other cultural incursions such as education. It was only by their own efforts that Indigenous people in Australia have been able to salvage something from the Australian media environment. Every step has been hard-fought within a context of dispossession and the resultant lack of an economic base. In many ways, the struggle for access to speak out in the Australian media is akin to the continuing struggle over land rights. Although both battles are far from being won, the Indigenous media sector represents a potentially powerful symbolic force which is not only providing its multifarious audiences with a first level of service, but also is offering a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

In this chapter we explore the emergence of an Indigenous presence in the Australian mediascape through the development of Indigenous media policy. In the following chapters, we examine the growth of Indigenous newspapers, broadcast media and film production, and the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people use the media as an extension of Indigenous culture.

Indigenous media policy development

The Indigenous broadcasting sector in Australia has developed in spite of an almost complete lack of policy on Indigenous media and varying levels of support from the relevant Australian government departments. The former manager of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), Freda Glynn, once said ‘policy is something that happens behind us’, and this is still the case today (Glynn quoted in McCarthy 1989, p.24). More tellingly, she reminds us that Aboriginal broadcasting has developed ‘through struggle and opposition’ with CAAMA itself beginning a long lobbying process to win access to the airwaves in Central Australia around 1980 (Glynn 1986). One underlying problem facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is that Indigenous media are heavily

dependent on government funds. In an era that favours deregulation and privatisation, the reality is that only some of the larger Indigenous media associations will ever be able to generate a reasonable level of revenue. But this is nowhere near enough to allow them to operate independently of government, despite a sector-wide desire to do so.

The other problem faced by Indigenous media sector is the number of government departments and agencies involved in this area—the Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA), the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). Of these, DCITA, DETYA, and ATSIC are the main points of contact for Aboriginal and Islander broadcasters. DCITA is responsible for broadcast policy and the licensing schedule. It also provides limited funding to the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) for Indigenous people working in community radio in urban and rural areas. DETYA has been primarily responsible for training and the allocation of funds in this area. In July 1992, ATSIC briefly took over the responsibility for community training, but it later lost this and now has some responsibility for providing training in remote areas only. The broadcasting section of ATSIC has overall responsibility for Indigenous media policy and directly funds a number of Aboriginal and Islander media associations, providing money for wages, capital costs, and training.

These divisions mean that Aboriginal and Islander broadcasters are often involved in time-consuming applications and consultations with all three departments. Complicating this further is the fact that each department has a vested interest in Indigenous broadcasting, and can appear more concerned with its own departmental agenda rather than addressing the more significant issue of policies for Indigenous broadcasting.

Since its establishment in 1990, ATSIC has played an important role in the development of Indigenous broadcasting, particularly in radio. Given the public service nature of Indigenous broadcasting, it is doubtful that the sector would be as significant as it is today without this funding assistance.

The satellite debate

The first serious acknowledgment that Indigenous audiences might have a stake in the nature of television programming offered did not take place until the mid 1980s. It was at this time that a federal government policy decision to adopt a particular technology—satellite broadcasting— pushed Indigenous concerns to centre stage, albeit momentarily. There is a

striking resemblance to the chain of events on the other side of the Pacific Ocean 12 years earlier when the Canadian government elected to use satellite technology to broadcast mainstream television programming into remote Native communities. These technological decisions have had a powerful impact on the policymaking process, creating an environment with which Indigenous people are still engaging.

The initial impetus for Australia to have its own domestic satellite relates to the ambitions of Kerry Packer to extend his Channel Nine Sydney and Melbourne television stations nationally. Packer received support from the then Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. Fraser represented a Liberal/ Country Party constituency that supported the extension of metropolitan media services to 'the bush'. Hazelhurst (1990, p.16) claims that Fraser saw the satellites as 'vote winners' and this added urgency to the debate before the 1977 general election.

The introduction of technology is often driven by business interests disguised by rhetoric about public service and AUSSAT was no exception to this. The key theme of both the political and commercial rhetoric about television reception by satellite was 'equalisation'. Donald Bond, an American consultant hired by Packer to write a report on satellite television, summed up the prevailing political rhetoric when he said (1977, p.20):

> All citizens of Australia should have equal opportunity to receive a diversity of television programs for entertainment, information, education and cultural enrichment. This goal implies a choice of several programs broadcast simultaneously, with full availability in remote areas just as in major cities.

This 'ennobling vision' had particular appeal to the government, which was caught up with the idea of technology uniting the nation and being the key to development. However, these ideals did not appear central to the debate on the adoption, design and use of the domestic satellites. From the very beginning, those arguing for the domestic satellite system (engineers, communications bureaucrats and government ministers) simply assumed that this would be of benefit to remote communities. They also presumed to know what remote communities wanted. Meanwhile, the issues of service and content were subsumed beneath inquiries about the cost benefit and operation of the satellite. The technology was well and truly driving the debate and as such it obscured the 'hard, tedious, intellectually demanding and risky task of identifying one's goals' (Fraser 1990, p.35).

When the Hawke Labor government came to power in 1983, it established AUSSAT, as a wholly government- (75 percent) and Telecom- (25 percent) owned enterprise. AUSSAT, at the insistence of Telecom, was then given a very restricted charter. The restrictions,

combined with an inadequate capital base, soon resulted in serious problems for the company. In order to raise revenue, AUSSAT charged remote commercial television companies inflated prices for transponder rental, leasing 30 watt transponders when 12 watt transponders would have been sufficient (DOTAC 1990, pp.74-76). The decision to use the 30 watt transponders also cut down on the flexibility of satellite use for Indigenous broadcasters. Their vision of part-time access to the satellite and networking among local communities became prohibitively expensive. Freda Glynn, representing CAAMA, one of the major proponents for Indigenous access to the satellite, summed this up when she wryly observed (Glynn quoted in *Satellite Dreaming* 1991), 'There's so much magic in that satellite, there's so much you could do, and it has never been used for what it was put up for.' In reality AUSSAT (now Optus) became a very expensive vehicle for the distribution of metropolitan commercial television services.

Prior to the launch of the AUSSAT satellites in 1985, the company did conduct an investigation, through consultant Brian Walsh, into Indigenous fears, perceptions, and expectations of satellite communication. The report recommended that AUSSAT provide support for the evolvement of independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander production centres, and suggested that particular attention be given to the design and development of the second generation of AUSSAT satellites due in 1993 to facilitate Indigenous production (Walsh Vol. 1 1984, p.17). AUSSAT did not act on these recommendations.

In November 1983, the federal government set up its own inquiry into how commercial television licensees would access the new telecommunications facility. This was conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT, now the ABA) and reported in two volumes—the Satellite Program Services (SPS) inquiry. About 300,000 people in remote Australia were able to receive ABC programs via Remote Area Television (RATV) provided through INTELSAT (Gray *et al* 1987, p.3806). Commercial television interests argued at the inquiry that their services, too, should be available to remote Australians.

Aboriginal people convinced the ABT to hold a special hearing at Kintore, in the Central Australian desert. This gave Indigenous video producers the opportunity to express their fears about the likely impact of non-Indigenous television on Aboriginal culture and languages. Prior to colonisation in 1788, between 200 and 250 distinct Aboriginal languages were spoken in Australia and there around 500 different dialects spoken by as few as 100 people, or as many as 1500 (Rickard 1992, p.63). It is estimated that 50 of these are now extinct, about 100 have very small speech communities, and 50 are likely to survive beyond the year 2000. Of those still in a relatively healthy state, some are used at community level for communication, including use in Aboriginal newsletters, newspapers and radio. In order to counter the problems associated with the introduction of non-Indigenous media, Indigenous groups told the ABT hearing at Kintore how they proposed to produce their own television and

requested broadcast licences. The inquiry examined Canadian Government responses to similar fears by Native people there about satellite broadcasting to remote area communities. Significant evidence came from CAAMA representative Clive Scollay. He told the tribunal that many Aboriginal communities had taken to video technology because of reservations about bringing non-Indigenous programs into communities. Scollay made it clear that the real enthusiasm about the satellite was its potential for local Indigenous broadcasting. The Kintore hearing stands out as a rare example of consultation with Indigenous people.

The Remote Commercial Television Services

The SPS inquiry concluded in 1985 and the federal government accepted its recommendations, moving to license four RCTS. One, the southeastern zone footprint, was not pursued because of a perceived lack of economic viability and the area was subsequently divided between the central (Imparja) and northeast (QSTV) regions (ABT 1988, p.10).

The evidence presented to the Tribunal at the Kintore hearings influenced the RCTS licence conditions. Licensees were required to provide ‘an adequate and comprehensive service’ for the specific needs of the area concerned. It was the first time that television licence applicants were required to make such an undertaking. The Tribunal acknowledged that specific programming relevant to minority groups in general and to specific local groups was not being produced by Australia’s commercial television system. It suggested providing free access for specific types of programs dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, education and religion, and allowing for ‘windows’ where locally produced material could be inserted or ‘embedded’ where appropriate (ABT 1985, p.187). The Tribunal indicated it was important for licensees to ensure adequate training of Aboriginal people so they could be responsible for their own programs (Law 1986). With the exception of Imparja Television, this has not occurred.

The Tribunal also outlined its understanding of ascertainment, borrowed from the United States Federal Communications Commission. It suggested RCTS licensees liaise with other service providers and representatives of special interest groups as part of an ‘on-going’ ascertainment. Establishment of advisory committees was necessary: one to liaise with educational bodies, the other with Aboriginal groups (ABT 1985, pp.10-11). With one brief exception, the RCTS licensees did not do this, and this combined with the lack of any specific

requirements for Indigenous content, meant the stations were able to circumvent their licence conditions.

By the late 1980s it was also clear that the viability of the RCTS was seriously threatened by the high satellite transponder charges. As a result of the financial difficulties being experienced by the RCTS, the federal government reviewed their operation in and decided to subsidise the services for a set period to offset the losses that they were making and keep them operational. Imparja was in a particularly difficult situation. Both the governments of Queensland and Western Australia had provided support for their respective RCTS stations; however, the Northern Territory consistently refused to support the Aboriginal-owned Imparja (*Australian Associated Press* 1991). The federal government through ATSIC, in 1992, granted Imparja an additional $4.2 million to meet the company's accumulated satellite transponder debt to AUSSAT. By 1998, this amount was reduced to $2 million and was eventually cut entirely the following year.

The three original RCTS licensees—Golden West Network (WA), Imparja (NT), and Regional Television (formerly QSTV) (QLD)—have operated with mixed financial and programming success. But only Imparja still has Indigenous program content as part of its mandate. In 1999, Imparja and Regional Television entered into an arrangement sharing a new central-eastern Australia zone and a new RCTS, WIN Television (WA) began operating in the west (ABA 2000a).

Out of the Silent Land

As debate over the impact of AUSSAT reached fever pitch, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) was pushed to address the concerns of remote, rural and urban Indigenous communities. In

March 1984, DAA commissioned Eric Willmot to prepare a report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasting. This was DAA's first major policy initiative and one that was to have a profound impact for more than a decade. It has since formed the basis of ATSIC's first major broadcasting policy statement in 1993.

In its introduction, the task force report—*Out of the Silent Land*—noted that Aboriginal concern over possible effects of the launch of the domestic satellite had led to pressure on the government to define Aboriginal broadcasting policy. The satellite would transmit a range of television and radio services to rural and remote areas for the first time. While the task force acknowledged that the report was put together in haste (Willmot 1984, p.1), it was, nevertheless, the first attempt to develop a coherent policy on Aboriginal broadcasting in

Australia. In all, the Willmot report made 55 recommendations. The following were of particular significance to remote communities:

• the coordinated introduction of satellite radio and television reception and re-broadcasting facilities to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;

• the provision of facilities to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to control programs broadcast in their communities; and

• the encouragement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasting in radio and television production (Willmot 1984, pp.vi-xiii).

All 55 recommendations by the report were accepted by the federal government. Willmot's primary concern was that Indigenous people in remote areas should have the means of producing community radio and television. To this end, DAA was given the task of administering a new broadcasting scheme for this purpose—the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS). However, the government's view of BRACS was limited, as it saw the scheme as a technological answer which could be neatly packaged and *given* to remote Aboriginal and Islander communities. By doing this, the government misunderstood the diversity of Indigenous uses of community video and television, and attempted instead to impose uniformity on Indigenous community media. It is not surprising then that as BRACS developed, it soon became clear that the government had little idea about how Indigenous people would really use it.

Out of the Silent Land had some other critical flaws, which need to be touched on briefly (Shimpo 1984; Michaels 1986, pp.114-117; Holding 1987). The first and most serious concern for many communities was the lack of appropriate consultation about their communication needs. Secondly, the task force, having failed to recognise that Indigenous people wanted access to the satellite in their own right, recommended that the ABC be the major source of Indigenous programming and training. This is a role that the ABC did not want, and it is completely contrary to Indigenous people's arguments for control of content and transmission. Thirdly, in recommending BRACS, the task force adopted a technological solution for remote Indigenous communities without consideration of the necessary infrastructure to support it. Moreover, the key issue of funding was all but ignored, leaving the responsibility entirely with DAA (Willmot 1984, pp.vi-xiii).

The report also came in for some spirited criticism from one of its special consultants and contributors, American anthropologist Eric Michaels, who criticised it for being vague and for ignoring the imminent launch of AUSSAT. Michaels' own recommendations included a need for specific proposals for intended projects, funding structures, administrative responsibilities, and alternative local and regional training, matched with specific timetables. Indigenous community broadcasting, he argued, should be identified as 'the major corrective' to imported

programming with licensing of such broadcasting a priority (1984-85, p.10). The emergence of BRACS, a system of limited community control and local broadcasting, was one answer to these many concerns.

The task force report did identify a failure by commercial broadcasters to contribute to Aboriginal broadcasting and placed an onus on ABC and commercial stations in remote areas to cater for Aboriginal concerns (Willmot 1984, p.127). And it went a step further in recommending that licensing provisions for remote area commercial services should recognise the special interests of the remote Aboriginal population (Willmot 1984, p.142). While this recommendation did eventually find its way into the television licence conditions, as we noted earlier, the commercial pressures on each of the RCTS along with an uneven commitment by them, made implementing this either difficult or impossible.

By concentrating on Indigenous people living in remote areas, *Out of the Silent Land* also failed to acknowledge the special communications needs of Indigenous people living in rural and urban areas. The report encouraged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people living in urban and rural Australia to seek access to existing media in those areas. Yet these media, in particular the more popular commercial media, do not provide access to minority groups. Moreover, while the performance of the national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, has improved over the past decade, they are not required to provide access to their airwaves. Both tend to purchase or produce programs for Indigenous people that suit their own program formats and target audiences. Public (now community) radio, which was introduced in the 1970s with a philosophy that encouraged community access, has been a major outlet for Indigenous media production. However, it has been difficult for Indigenous people to access non-Indigenous-controlled community radio in more conservative urban and rural areas of Australia. The task force had worked on the false premise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in towns and cities had sufficient access and encouragement to be involved with community radio and the mainstream media (Willmot 1984, p. 30). In reaching this conclusion, it misunderstood the communications environment in which urban and rural Indigenous people exist. More critically, it also seemed to misunderstand that Indigenous urban and rural communities could also suffer loss of culture and identity, and that this was not confined to Indigenous people living in remote Australia.

As a result of the emphasis on remote Indigenous media development in this report, DAA's budget for broadcasting for the rest of the 1980s (and ATSIC's early budgets in the 1990s) focussed on remote media and regional media associations. Some of these groups had responsibility for training remote media producers and networking their programs. At the same time, both DAA and ATSIC paid insufficient attention to the needs of Indigenous media organisations in urban and rural Australia and this continues to be the case despite the large

Indigenous populations living in major cities and rural towns.

The Paton Report

In 1989, the DAA made another attempt at formulating an integrated Indigenous broadcasting policy. Willmot task force. In a background paper which acknowledged the lack of satisfactory government action in the past, it argued for Indigenous broadcasting to be set up and funded by the federal government along the lines of the two national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS. This was one of the first official acknowledgments that Indigenous broadcasting should be established as a sector by itself, rather than being divided up among government departments. This same recommendation re-emerged 11 years later in 2000 following an investigation into Australia's broadcasting system by the Productivity Commission.

The author of the DAA report, Sue Paton, was very much in favour of more resources for remote media and community radio, and the creation of Aboriginal community radio licences. Paton's review was to have been published in conjunction with the Department of Transport and

Communication (DOTAC, now DCITA), but officials in that department did not like the strong line it took. They commented (Ellis 1989): 'In summary we believe any problems that Aboriginal broadcasters may experience as a group are better addressed within the existing framework, and do not warrant the kinds of initiatives that are flagged in the paper.'

Twelve months later in 1990, when the combined review was still not forthcoming, DOTAC opposed the draft policy paper insisting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should work within existing structures. This approach seriously misunderstood the need for Indigenous Australians to control their own broadcast media production and distribution (Fell 1990, p.14).

In August 1991, the long-awaited review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcast policy was released for discussion. Based on the 1989 draft, and on *Out of the Silent Land*, the discussion paper left more questions unanswered than those it resolved (Department of Aboriginal Affairs 1989; *Communications Update* 1991, pp.6-7; Meadows 1992). Specific detail of funding possibilities was removed, along with a considerable weakening of the key premises on which the original document was based—the right of Indigenous people to self-determination and access to resources based on the continuing high level of community disadvantage (ATSIC 1991, p.10). But overall, the most disappointing aspect was the omission of funding options such as a dedicated program production scheme. The paper did

acknowledge the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody which urged adequate funding for Aboriginal- controlled media (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991, p.59). A similar view was expressed in the 1991 *Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1991, p.366).

In January 1993, ATSIC circulated a draft policy statement to Indigenous broadcasters for comment and subsequently this was adopted as Australia's first Indigenous broadcasting policy. It was based on the 1991 discussion paper but re-introduced key social justice issues linked with broadcasting in its preamble—the right to self-determination and consultation, special consideration because of social disadvantage, and the role of broadcasting as part of an essential struggle to redress the effects of disadvantage (ATSIC 1993, p.55). This material had been deleted from the 1989 version. ATSIC had regained control of the policy process following lobbying from the Indigenous broadcasting sector and the new policy was justified in these terms (1993, pp.55-56):

• *Equity considerations*: Indigenous people should have the right to full access to information and entertainment available through national and regional media.

• *Cultural restoration, preservation and growth*: Broadcasting has the potential to provide communities with means to maintain languages and cultures.

• *Efficiency of communication*: Indigenous access and/or control of local radio and television can substantially improve delivery and exchange of vital information on such issues as health, child welfare, substance abuse, domestic violence, education etc.

• *Employment*: Indigenous control provides employment and training opportunities in urban and remote communities and the possibility of access to mainstream media employment.

• *Enhanced self-image*: Watching or listening to culturally and linguistically relevant programming enhances a sense of worth and community profiles.

The policy's stated objectives mirror these ideas, stressing the need for both access to, and participation in, existing broadcasting facilities with the fundamental goals being the maintenance of languages and cultures. The role of BRACS was cemented with emphasis on using this as a major conduit for foreign and local programming. ATSIC proposed a national survey of BRACS communities to determine their needs, and this lead to the introduction of the BRACS Revitalisation
Scheme. The policy also acknowledged the need for culturally relevant programming along with the need for the interests of Indigenous women to be taken into account (ATSIC 1993, p.57). However, the policy process as outlined was largely concerned with definition rather than enabling future development.

Another spin-off from the adoption of Australia's first Indigenous media policy was the re-creation of a national organisation aiming to represent the interests of Indigenous media producers. Between 1982-85, a National Aboriginal and Islander Broadcasting Association (NAIBA) had existed as lobbying voice for broadcasters. It folded largely because of lack of funding by the federal government and political divisions within the emerging Indigenous broadcasting sector. Following a seven year silence, the emergence of the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (NIMAA) in December 1992 represented the potential for a major new force in Indigenous media policy development. With a membership of community broadcasters, print, film, television and multimedia producers, NIMAA has taken up key sector policy issues by working at grass roots level. But it is a formidable task for a vastly under-resourced organisation.

Funding

While the ATSIC budget has remained relatively stable during the 1990s, ranging from $11 million to just over $12 million, the criteria for budget allocation are not always clear. Moreover, as the funding can be administered through ATSIC's national, multi-regional and regional budgets— further qualified by each budget having to fund a number of competing projects across all sectors— long-term funding is never guaranteed. A large amount of ATSIC's budget has been devolved to its 35 regional councils and not all of these are supportive of media development. They prefer to use the funds on more pressing development areas, for example, health and education. Pacific Island governments face similar dilemmas when allocating scarce resources.

The lack of clear funding guidelines, combined with regional interpretations of what criteria there are and differing regional priorities, have caused considerable consternation for Aboriginal and Islander broadcasters because the application of policy can appear very *ad hoc*. It has also meant that some media associations have benefited from being in regions where there are sympathetic regional officials, while others have suffered because their local agencies have little interest in broadcasting. This situation has favoured the larger Indigenous media associations that have the resources to lobby for funds. Moreover, prior to NIMAA's establishment, government departments used the lack of a peak body that represented all Indigenous media producers as an excuse for their inaction in areas such as funding, training, maintenance and policymaking. They claimed that they needed to discuss overall Indigenous broadcasting policy with a 'representative' group, but until 1992 there was no such group. NIMAA now fulfills this role.

Digital Dreaming

Issues surrounding funding remain critical and have yet to be addressed by federal government policymakers. The next serious attempt to deal with this issue came in 1998 in an ATSIC- commissioned review of the Indigenous media sector—*Digital Dreaming*. The 500 page report made 131 recommendations, including the establishment of a dedicated Indigenous broadcasting program production fund. ATSIC accepted all of the recommendations and subsequently published an edited version of the report in 1999, called *Digital Dreaming*, and at the time of writing, had prioritised its implementation. The review team identified a number of key issues:

• that Indigenous media provided their communities with a first level of service;

• that in view of the unique service Indigenous media offer their audiences, the federal government view continued funding of Indigenous media as an investment to enable planning for the industry's long-term sustainability;

• that Indigenous media workers in the various sectors need to work with ATSIC in planning five- year funding and development strategies;

• the need for relevant funding agencies—specifically, ATSIC, DETYA and DCITA—to adopt a 'whole of organisation' approach in coordinating their activities in relation to the Indigenous media sector;

• the need for all Indigenous media organisations to develop their own business and marketing plans;

• that in view of the convergence of content production, delivery systems, and service providers, ATSIC needs to develop integrated strategies for making the best use of this technological environment;

• the need for federal government departments to be aware of the extent and nature of the Indigenous media sector and to use it as a unique service provider;

• that federal government departments use the extraordinarily diverse range of commercial services offered by the Indigenous media sector; and

• that the widely-expressed desire by Indigenous media workers for economic independence will not be possible in some locations. Some government assistance will always be necessary

in view of the cultural and economic benefits generated by industry sectors.

The Productivity Commission inquiry

In 1999, the Productivity Commission began an inquiry into Australian broadcasting, issuing its final report in April 2000. Not only did the report acknowledge the existence of Indigenous media, but also it ascribes to it a significant place in the Australian broadcasting policy environment. So for the first time since its inception, the Indigenous media sector was acknowledged both for its existence and its cultural significance.

The submissions made to the inquiry by ATSIC and NIMAA signified a push in earnest for centralising the management and organisation of Indigenous media through a statutory body, tentatively called Indigenous Communications Australia (ICA). The *Digital Dreaming* review identified this entity as an Indigenous Media Authority (1999, pp.66-67). This idea is central to the idea of a National Indigenous Broadcasting Service (NIBS), identified by both ATSIC and NIMAA, which incorporates both radio and television broadcasting.

NIMAA put forward strong views that argued the Indigenous media sector was the only distinct broadcasting group that 'cost-effectively, culturally and linguistically provides essential service information to Indigenous Australians'. The submission underlined the continuing need for government funding and the importance of maintaining 'access and equity for Indigenous Australians' to appropriate media technologies to enable maintenance of Indigenous languages and cultures (NIMAA 1999a, 2). Importantly, the submission acknowledged the role of the sector in fostering reconciliation.

In response, the Productivity Commission made some significant recommendations although it stopped short of recommending recognition of the special place of Indigenous languages and cultures in the *Broadcasting Services Act*. This has been part of the *Canadian Broadcasting Act* for more than 20 years, and part of New Zealand's equivalent legislation since 1991. The commission accepted that broadcasting is important for Indigenous communities in that it provides 'a primary level of service in remote areas and in local languages' (2000, p.3). The report continued (2000, p.28):

> Indigenous radio and television help to sustain language and culture; they provide a vital channel of news and information for Indigenous people; and they have the potential to provide a means for better communication between Indigenous and

other Australians.

Significantly, the Commission stated that the objectives and management of Indigenous media are ‘very different from those of community broadcasters’ (2000, p. 28). This is implicit in three of the four recommendations relating to Indigenous media:

> Recommendation 6.6: The ABA, in consultation with the broadcasting industry and the public, should develop a series of templates for licence areas with different characteristics, setting out the number of national, community and Indigenous services for which spectrum should be reserved. All unreserved broadcasting spectrum should be made available for commercial broadcasting (2000, p.34).
>
> Recommendation 8.5: A new licence category for Indigenous broadcasters should be created, with appropriate conditions relating to advertising (2000, p.37).
>
> Recommendation 8.6: Spectrum should be reserved for Indigenous broadcasters to provide a primary service for Indigenous communities, where appropriate (2000, p.37).

In acknowledging the submissions made by both NIMAA and ATSIC, the Productivity Commission recommended that the Government ‘examine the need for, and feasibility of, establishing an Indigenous broadcasting service’ (2000, p. 37). By April 2000, ATSIC had already called for tenders to start this process.

This acknowledgment of the ‘unique role’ of Indigenous media in Australia and their primary objective to provide a ‘first level of service’ for Indigenous people is a significant move away from past thinking on policymaking which has tended to view Indigenous and community broadcasting as synonymous (Productivity Commission 1999, p.100):

First, Indigenous media seek to provide information and locally made programs which are in Indigenous languages and relevant to Indigenous communities. Such programs include news, children’s programming, documentaries and sport coverage. Second, Indigenous media aim to disseminate public service information to Indigenous communities on subjects such as law, health, housing and education.

Reflecting the key recommendations of the 1998 *Digital Dreaming* report, the commission also notes that that Indigenous media ‘have the potential’ to serve both relatively large Indigenous populations and non-Indigenous audiences. This suggests Indigenous media are involved in other important social, cultural and economic objectives within the Australian broadcasting environment and it expressed them as follows:

• to offer a ‘cultural bridge’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Despite

limited research on the subject, audience studies suggest that some Indigenous media services have

significant non-Indigenous audiences, and may play an important cross-cultural role in furthering reconciliation; and

• to offer skilled work opportunities and the potential to reduce the economic dependence of Indigenous communities on governments, in remote and regional Australia and in urban centres (Productivity Commission 1999, 101).

This acknowledgment alone suggests that recent moves in the policy process—particularly the *Digital Dreaming* review—along with a new sense of understanding of Indigenous media offer a new way forward. The policy process has taken another step towards recognising the critical role that communications, in all its varied forms, might play in enabling Indigenous people to speak their own languages and to dream their own dreams.

Chapter two

Speaking out: the emergence of Indigenous newspapers and radio

In North America and Australia, Indigenous communities' first regular use of print technology came quickly—in 1828 and 1836 respectively—considering the nature of European settlement on both continents. In the Pacific it coincided with the arrival of missionaries in the middle of the 19th century. While radio is the most extensively used Indigenous media, Indigenous print media has a long history in Australia. And it is a history which has evolved without the significant funding which has flowed into the broadcast sector.

Newspapers

The earliest identified publication produced by an Aboriginal organisation is *The Aboriginal* or *Flinders Island Chronicle*, first published in September 1836 (Langton and Kirkpatrick 1979, p.122). It continued for more than 12 months. In a similar vein *Abo Call: the voice of Aborigines* was possibly the first 'advancement movement' newsletter to be published. It ran for six months from April 1938. Langton and Kirkpatrick observe (1979, p.122), 'These [advancement newsletters] contain the views of Aborigines on their social and political situation, views which were rarely reported elsewhere.' As with Native publications in North America, Indigenous newspapers and newsletters in Australia sometimes appeared irregularly or were short-lived.

From the two early publications of the 19th century, few details exist of any others until the 1950s where just three titles have been identified—*Council for Aboriginal Rights Bulletin* (1955); *Westralian Aborigine* (1957); and the *Aborigines Advancement League Newsletter* (1959). There have been numerous small, community-based publications like newsletters that have been spreading the word within Aboriginal communities for many years. Some use local Aboriginal languages and became a resource for the language 'renaissance' which occurred (and is still occurring in certain areas) as a result of the homelands and outstation movement in the Northern Territory and north Queensland in the late 1970s (Langton and Kirkpatrick 1979, p.120). Land Council newsletters have been a major contributor here:

> They are written and published in an Aboriginal context—unlike the 'whitefella' media whose coverage of land rights is distorted by cultural concepts such as 'newsworthiness', business interests and just plain bias and ignorance (Langton and

Kirkpatrick 1979, p.120).

The number of such publications increased dramatically during the land rights protests of the late 1960s and 1970s and has continued since (Langton and Kirkpatrick 1979). The direct threat of what some termed ‘a second invasion’ by non-Aboriginal broadcast media also set the publishing wheels in motion again. An Aboriginal response to racist media representation emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in the form of demands for control of that representation (Langton 1993, p.9). Marcia Langton reminds us that this demand has been expressed at ‘every major film and media conference during the last twenty years’ and insists that it is essential for Aboriginal people to control the *means* of production for any meaningful change to take place (1993, p.10).

Newssheets—some regular, other less so—appeared particularly in the early 1980s, in response to talk of launching Australia’s own satellite and the possible effects broadcasting would have on remote communities. The Kimberley Land Council’s *K.L.C. Newsletter* (1979) and the Warlpiri

Media Association’s *Junga Yimi* (1978-1986) are two prominent examples. In addition, much was being written in publications, some community-based, and others either partially or wholly sponsored by the DAA in the 1970s-80s: *Identity* (1971), *N.T. Aboriginal Newsletter*, *ADC News*, *Koorier*, *Aboriginal Quarterly*, *N.A.C. Newsletter*, *Duran-duran* (1970), *Australian Kurier*, and *Aboriginal Newsletter* (Langton and Kirkpatrick 1979, pp.122-127; Wagner-Pitz 1984, pp.447-457). Langton and Kirkpatrick (1979, p.120) suggest that the subject matter of the Indigenous press in Australia was indicative of the political environment in which Indigenous people found themselves: ‘The Aboriginal context is one of burgeoning consciousness, self-organisation and confidence. The Aboriginal coverage of the meaning and effect of whitefella politics is astute and uncompromising.’

One example is the publication by the North Queensland Land Rights Committee, *N.Q. Messagestick*, which appeared regularly from the mid-1970s. It was published from December 1975, until about 1986 with a number of editors including Barbara Miller, Shorty O’Neill, Peter Noble, George Villaflor, and Ted Maza (*N.Q. Messagestick* 1986, p.2). The monthly newspaper, *Land Rights News*, based in the Northern Territory, began publishing in 1976 as a roneoed newsletter by the Northern Land Council in Darwin. It turned tabloid in 1980 and continues today as one of two regular national Aboriginal newspapers (Plater 1993). Also first appearing in the mid 1980s, the Brisbane-based *Black Nation*, edited by Ross Watson, raised Aboriginal community concerns surrounding the planned bicentenary and Expo celebrations. Watson went on to become the first station manager of Radio 4AAA in Brisbane.

The 1990s saw a resurgence in Aboriginal newspapers led by the successful Lismore-based monthly, the *Koori Mail*, which began publishing in mid-1991 (Rose 1996). The newspaper has become self-sufficient after paying back a start-up loan from the ATSIC. It is also one of the few Indigenous newspapers to have an Indigenous editor. The *Koori Mail* is a national resource carrying a large volume of government advertising. It is seen as the pre-eminent place to advertise for Aboriginal employment because of its broad readership. A huge number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations subscribe to the newspaper with the result that each copy tends to be read widely as it is passed around the office or workplace. The paper publishes 6,000 copies. In 1997, the New South Wales Library began indexing the *Koori Mail* and this is available, on-line via the Internet (http://www.nrg.com.au/koorimail/). Another regular publication is *Land Rights Queensland*, published by the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA) Corporation since 1994 in Brisbane. The newspaper focuses on land rights issues but includes other news of specific interest to its Aboriginal community readership. This newspaper includes commentary on politics, legal, social and cultural issues by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers. Two community newspapers also emerged in the mid-1990s in Western Australia. *Yamaji News* began in 1994, linked to a community language centre at Geraldton. While the newspaper prints around 2,500 copies, its readership is estimated to be four times higher. The *Noongar Warda* is a new community newspaper produced in Bunbury, Western Australia.

Indigenous print media in Australia in the 1990s are largely funded by subscribers and government advertising although the latter has been slow to reach newspapers other than *The Koori Mail*. ATSIC has funded some newspaper production over the past five years, but as we noted in the previous chapter, this funding has been very limited and the Commission has no funding policy for print media.

Despite the number of Indigenous print media, there are only few Indigenous people working in print media and fewer still whose income is derived from employment as a print journalist — let alone as a sub-editor, editor or advertising salesperson. One of the major reasons for this has been the lack of access to culturally relevant training for Indigenous Australians interested in working in

the print media. It is not unusual, therefore, to find non-Indigenous Australians working in this industry, often in key roles.

Radio

The move by Indigenous people into radio broadcasting in Australia was a slow but steady

one. The driving force was a negative perception of mainstream media portrayal as Tiga Bayles explains:

> Negative aspects of the Aboriginal community are sensationalised. The negativity, bias and misrepresentation in the media has forced Aboriginal people to look around and see what media resources we can access ourselves. We identified public radio—community radio— as a vehicle for us to get some information out (1993, pp.10-11).

The first moves by the Australian government to give Aboriginal people a voice on radio began in the early 1970s within DAA. A government representative examined the Papua New Guinea Government Broadcasting Service and suggested such a system could be set up to service Aboriginal communities in Northern Australia but these recommendations were not implemented (Lewis 1974, pp.5-7). In 1976, recommendations to give Australia's Indigenous people 'air rights' surfaced again in another DAA study. This study recommended a role for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation) and for the planned new public FM stations about to be licensed around the country (Moore 1976). From the late 1970s until it was replaced by ATSIC, DAA did provide some financial support to Indigenous media associations working with public radio stations and ABC regional radio.

Since its humble beginnings in Australia in 1974, public radio (now referred to as community radio) has proved to be one of the most accessible media for Indigenous people. The first Aboriginal public radio program went to air on 5UV in Adelaide in 1972. However, there are reports of Aboriginal people being involved in commercial radio in Queensland in the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s, Indigenous-produced programs were regularly broadcast on public radio in Tasmania, Melbourne and Canberra, and in the early 1980s, Indigenous broadcasters were involved with public radio stations in the Northern Territory, Queensland, and NSW. During this period, Indigenous broadcasters also began broadcasting weekly on the ABC regional services and the SBS. The experience gained by broadcasters working in public radio, the ABC and SBS lead to a significant growth in Indigenous radio.

So much so, that by the end of the 1990s, there were 95 licensed Indigenous stations in Australia broadcasting more than 1,000 hours of Indigenous content weekly. Eighty of these are community radio stations in remote communities established under the BRACS scheme and 12 are Aboriginal community stations in metropolitan and regional areas. They are licensed by the ABA as Aboriginal community stations. There are three narrowcast radio services (one is an open narrowcast), a commercial radio station, and two temporary community broadcasting licence (TCBL) with a second imminent. Early in 2000, there were 10 aspirant groups working towards a community radio licence in metropolitan and regional Australia, and up to another 30 broadcasting organisations planning to pursue licences. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have won this access to the airwaves following

persistent campaigns and now, most major urban and regional areas have an Indigenous broadcaster, complementing the existing mainstream media.

In addition to the community stations, there are two Indigenous radio networks. NIMAA coordinated the setting up of the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS), launched on 25 January 1996. It enables a potential 200 community radio stations (including non-Indigenous community stations with Indigenous programs) to link either into national programming or choose

to broadcast locally. The long-term aim is to link all Indigenous community radio stations in remote, regional and metropolitan areas to the service. This will give the NIRS a potential reach second only to the ABC. As discussed in the previous chapter, in early 2000 ATSIC has began investigating a process to set up Indigenous Communications Australia (ICA) which would incorporate a National Indigenous Broadcasting Service (NIBS), including both radio and television.

The other Indigenous radio network is The Aboriginal Program Exchange (TAPE). TAPE was established in Melbourne in 1985 and currently distributes programs weekly on audiocassette tape to all Indigenous community radio stations and Indigenous media associations broadcasting on non- Indigenous community radio stations. TAPE compiles the material from programs sent in by Indigenous radio stations and broadcasting groups.

The NIRS and TAPE are two good examples of the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters have extended the capabilities of community radio by using it as a means to access new technologies. Regional media associations have also done this. The Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association (TAIMA), for example, set up a satellite radio delivery system—the first of its kind to target remote communities in Queensland (ATSIC 1991, p.38). Other regional Indigenous media associations have since established radio networks involving remote community broadcasters in South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Central Australia and the Torres Strait Islands.

Indigenous Radio Access

The extensive nature of Indigenous radio in Australia has given this sector considerable prominence. Over the past 18 years a number of factors combined to make this situation possible.

The introduction of public radio in the 1970s opened up the airwaves to a range of people who were dissatisfied with the mainstream media. In urban areas and major rural towns,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people became increasingly interested in public radio because it has offered them a level of access not possible within the mainstream media (commercial, ABC and SBS).

For its part, the ABC has concentrated its attention on regional Indigenous media associations who serve large Aboriginal and Islander populations in rural and remote Australia. In the early 1980s, the ABC realised that its usual non-Indigenous content was not appropriate for these communities and established working relationships with regional Indigenous media associations. The ABC's Indigenous Broadcasting Unit (IBU) carries on this work today. The IBU can provide training assistance, arrange for the provision of transmission time through channel sharing, advise on funding sources and equipment, and on how to set up a media association. Generally, the ABC is involved in areas where there is no community radio to serve the local Aboriginal community. By the late 1990s, regional Indigenous media associations were broadcasting for around a 100 hours each week on ABC regional transmitters in North Queensland, the Torres Strait, South Australia and Western Australia, as well as on short-wave in the Northern Territory through the ABC's High Frequency Inland Radio Service. A number of Indigenous media associations have also used the experience gained from broadcasting via the ABC to set up their own community radio station.

In addition to these services, ABC radio also employs Indigenous broadcasters to produce two national Indigenous ABC programs. A weekly program called *Speaking Out* broadcast on ABC regional and national radio features profiles of prominent Indigenous members of the community along with Indigenous music, interviews and news. It emanates from Brisbane and began in 1990.

The other program, *Awaye,* means 'listen' in Arrernte and focuses on Indigenous arts and culture. It went to air on ABC Radio National in 1993.

SBS changed its programming mandate in the late 1970s to include Indigenous people. The first Aboriginal radio program ran for thirty minutes and was broadcast on SBS's Sydney station, 2EA, in November 1980. Soon after this, Aboriginal broadcasters began a regular program on SBS's Melbourne radio station, 3EA. Since then, SBS has provided Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people with another broadcast outlet. However, because of the numbers of language groups SBS has to serve, the Indigenous radio programs account for a small amount of the total airtime.

In the late 1980s, two other factors combined to increase the number of Indigenous media outlets: the introduction of BRACS in 1987 and the awarding of a number of Aboriginal

community radio licences (prior to 1992 referred to as ‘S Class, Special Interest) in metropolitan and regional areas. In 1985, CAAMA received the first Aboriginal licence and started to broadcast via 8KIN FM. Then, in the early 1990s, more licences were allocated starting with the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association (BIMA) in 1991, and followed by TAIMA in Townsville and Waringarri Media, Kununurra (WA) in 1992, Umeewarra Media, Port Augusta (open narrowcast) in 1993 and WAAMA in 1994. From 1997, more Indigenous media associations received licences: Goolarri Media in Broome, Wangki Yupurnanupurra Association at Fitzroy Crossing, Puranyangu–Rangka Kerrem Media Association at Halls Creek, the Torres Strait Islander Media Association (TSIMA) on Thursday Island, Mt. Isa Aboriginal Media Association (MIAMA), Cherbourg Radio (narrowcast), Central Queensland Aboriginal Corporation in Rockhampton, and Larrakia Radio in Darwin. Waringarri Media also has a narrowcast tourism service, and both Bourke and Palm Island have a temporary community broadcasting licence (ABA 2000b). The sole Aboriginal commercial licence is in Carnavon, Western Australia.

The growth of Aboriginal community radio has been very important because ‘access’ to non-Indigenous community radio stations is always conditional. In a number of instances, Indigenous people have also not been treated well by community stations (Molnar 1993). There is a significant difference between ‘access’ — where one assumes a client status — and *control*. Indigenous people argue that media control is essential if they are to have the freedom to set their own communications agendas. When Indigenous people broadcast on either non-Indigenous community radio or mainstream radio they are working within communications models that are designed by and for non-Indigenous Australians.

Radio as a vehicle for Indigenous communication

Radio has a number of advantages for Indigenous use. Radio technology is much cheaper than video or television technology, and radio’s operational costs are lower. It is also a very personal medium, which depends on the spoken word. In comparison to print, television and video, radio is much less dependent on written or spoken English. This has encouraged language broadcasting on a number of stations, including Koori Radio in Sydney, which broadcasts important announcements in NSW Indigenous languages. Radio’s informality, combined with its dominant program form— people talking to an audience—has also meant that it has been easier for this medium to develop a community audience and, significantly, a sense of community.

At a political level, the adaptability of radio has meant that the medium has been used as a vehicle for empowerment because it gives Indigenous people the opportunity to shape and

control their social, cultural and political agendas by participating in the design and production of their own programs. These programs can then be transmitted to other Indigenous people, creating electronic

networks. A senior member of the Torres Strait Islander community, Getano Lui Senior (1988), described the coming of Islander-controlled radio to the archipelago in these terms: ‘It’s just like a dream. Before [we] sent letters to the other islands. Now it’s instantaneous. Communities across the South Pacific and in the Canadian arctic speak of similar experiences with the arrival of radio.

Traditional Indigenous communications networks were severely disrupted when Australia was colonised, and Indigenous radio has given communities the opportunity to re-establish these networks electronically. Access to radio and television is perceived as essential to counter the influence of non-Indigenous-style programming broadcast by satellite (Implementation and Management Group 1980, p.13).

Indigenous development and self-determination also depend on strong individual and collective identities. Radio plays a considerable role in this area through the reinforcement and regeneration of Indigenous culture. As we have noted, language broadcasting has been an important aspect of this, along with the fact that Indigenous radio has been a major outlet for Indigenous artists. Indigenous music, drama and comedy have all featured on radio, providing in some instances the only outlet for these activities. This in turn has stimulated the growth of other Indigenous industries. Indigenous music, for example, now has a considerable prominence in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities because of its exposure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander radio. Radio has in this way played not only an important cultural role, but also a social and economic one.

The social and economic benefits of Indigenous radio are further emphasised by the fact that radio has created local employment opportunities. In Australia this is vital for Indigenous people because they have the highest unemployment rate in the country. In remote areas, in particular, there is often no employment available. While a number of Indigenous broadcasters are paid only part-time wages by the Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP), or work as volunteers in community radio, Aboriginal community stations and some aspirant groups do receive funding for core staff from ATSIC. In 1998, there were at least 170 people employed in Indigenous radio stations in regional and urban areas, funded by ATSIC, CDEP (or a combination of both), on training wages (federal or state government subsidy of 50 per cent) and with assistance from the ABC. The number of Indigenous people employed in remote radio stations as part of the BRACS is more difficult to estimate as this varies considerably depending on available funding and personnel and is

unlikely to be full-time. One 1998 review estimated that there were 106 funded BRACS positions in remote Indigenous radio and television (Turner 1998).

CAAMA

The growth of Indigenous media associations and their efforts to secure airtime has been critical to the success of Indigenous broadcasting. It is estimated that there are up to 150 media associations. At least 12 of these, such as TAIMA, TSIMA and BAMA, are major regional associations with radio licences of their own and a range of production interests, including video and television production. CAAMA is the oldest association and it has been an important 'beacon' for Indigenous broadcasters around Australia. In the early 1980s, CAAMA was broadcasting via a community radio station—8CCC-FM—in Alice Springs and via the ABC. In 1985, CAAMA won a licence for its own dedicated FM public radio station, 8 KIN-FM—the first Aboriginal community station in Australia. CAAMA Radio now broadcasts for more than 100 hours each week via satellite and daily on the ABC's High Frequency Inland Radio Service to areas within a 450 kilometre radius of Alice Springs. Programs initially were broadcast in six Aboriginal languages but this was reduced following a re-structuring. Provision of language programming was unreliable because people with 36 those skills were required to live in Alice Springs and the necessary loss of contact with their communities made this difficult. CAAMA Radio has since negotiated to have language broadcasts coming from the communities themselves—effectively decentralising the programming to enable places like Santa Teresa, Yuendumu, Ernabella, and Tennant Creek to provide their own locally- based language input. CAAMA plans to use existing technologies to achieve this, including a videoconferencing scheme—the Tanami Network—to enable radio broadcasting from the Tanami Desert communities.

But the limits of broadcasting pose a dilemma. The former Manager of CAAMA, Freda Glynn, explains that by broadcasting in one of the most widely-spoken Australian Aboriginal languages, *Arrernte*, one of the *Arrernte* dialects, *Kaytej*, (with only about 200 speakers) was in danger of being swallowed-up by the larger language group. Nevertheless, CAAMA was still able to translate news and information from the outside world into some local languages, giving most remote Aboriginal Australians a chance to hear what is happening beyond their borders (Glynn 1987):

> When we first broadcast, I've seen women cry when they heard (Aboriginal) language on the radio—just so excited and laughing and joking, you know. And I don't think people could manage now without CAAMA; without having a radio station broadcasting in their own language.

One of CAAMA's many Aboriginal broadcasters echoes Glynn's obvious

pride:

> When you hear your own language and what's being spoken, you take a lot more notice. Since CAAMA, people are more aware of what politics is about because we can interpret what the people are saying exactly. And we can let the community know what people are saying (Glynn 1987).

There are, however, inherent problems with language broadcasting, especially when a number of language groups have to be served. This is also an issue in Pacific Island countries where there can be more than 100 spoken languages. It is very hard for Indigenous community stations to resource broadcasters for each language group. In order to do this, they would need to find and train the appropriate language speakers interested in broadcasting and this is not always possible. The decentralised BRACS model, which is community-based, is probably in the best position to involve local community speakers in remote areas, but BRACS is also the most under-resourced sector and generally operates with volunteer assistance.

In addition to its radio services, CAAMA has become a major production house for audio and videocassettes for distribution throughout Aboriginal communities and broadcast television. In 1993, another production arm of CAAMA—CAAMA Music—signed a music distribution contract with Mushroom Records. Since its establishment in the mid-1980s, CAAMA Music has had a major impact on the growth of the Indigenous music industry in Australia. Contemporary Indigenous music produced by CAAMA has been broadcast across Australia on community radio, the ABC and SBS further strengthening this important cultural industry. CAAMA is also the only Aboriginal media association to operate a remote commercial television service, and this will be discussed in the next Chapter.

BRACS

The Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) is a bit of technology that's seen as belonging up there with satellites and white people and a long way away, but once the

community realises its potential—there's a real gut political strength about it (Terry Hartney, Batchelor College 1991).

There are 101 BRACS stations and 80 of them operate with community radio-television licences. While video production is an important component of some BRACS stations,

overall radio programming has dominated, greatly increasing the amount of Indigenous community radio produced around Australia. Unlike Indigenous radio in urban areas, BRACS radio can feature a number of programs in language.

However, the history of BRACS illustrates the problems that can be caused by centralised government decision-making. As we noted in the previous chapter, the primary concern of 1984 Willmot report, *Out of the Silent Land*, was that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people should have the means of producing community radio and television. To this end, the DAA was given the task of administering a new broadcasting scheme to serve Indigenous people in remote areas. BRACS was announced in 1987 as a means of delivering satellite radio and television to 28,000 remote Aboriginal Australians (Venner 1988, p.37). However, the federal government misunderstood the potential diversity of Indigenous uses of community radio and video, and attempted instead to impose uniformity on Indigenous community media through the installation of BRACS units in remote communities.

The original BRACS units were basic—a satellite reception dish, a decoder, a transmitter, a mast and an aerial, a radio studio including a microphone, FM/AM tuner, a cassette deck, two VCRs, speakers, a camera recorder, a TV monitor, a control panel (not a mixing desk), a remote TV control unit, a cassette tape recorder, and a video camera and this further constrained the development of Indigenous community video and radio. The equipment has now been upgraded as part of the BRACS Revitalisation Strategy (BRS) funded by ATSIC in the 1990s, but a number of fundamental problems with BRACS remain such as lack of on-going resources for training, operators, producers and materials.

Notwithstanding the problems with its implementation, the ideal behind BRACS is one that Indigenous people in remote communities have argued for since the early 1980s. BRACS gives them the opportunity to receive all ABC radio and television services along with one remote commercial radio and television service via satellite. Most significantly, BRACS communities are able to produce their own radio and vido programs on the equipment provided, and then ‘embed’ this material into the mainstream programming by turning off the main signal and transmitting their own programs locally. Tribal elders or designated community members can also assess the programs coming off the satellite. This is because BRACS allows the signals to be received at a central point, and a decision can then be made as to whether to re-broadcast this material to the rest of the community. Another important feature of BRACS is that all community members, if trained, can operate it on a community basis.

In these ways, BRACS has the potential to give remote Indigenous communities access to, and control of, their own media and information at a local level. This is vital as loss of control of scheduling/programming can be equated with a loss of control of culture (Michaels & Granites 1984, p.23). Community-based production also has the advantage of helping to

integrate media into community life, contributing to its improvement. Properly resourced, BRACS could become a vital part of the community development infrastructure, working along with and supporting other agencies like health, education, welfare, law, substance abuse control, and community management in exploring ways of raising the quality of life in remote communities (Newsom 1991, p.11).

BRACS Installation

DAA started planning for BRACS in late 1987 and set up an implementation planning group consisting of itself, the Department of Communications (DOC), the ABC, and Telecom (now Telstra). The department had hoped to establish BRACS in 1988—Australia's bicentennial year. The aim was to equip remote Aboriginal and Islander communities in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Central Australia, Queensland, and the Torres Strait with BRACS units. In order to qualify for a BRACS unit, a remote community had to have a population of at least 200 people, of whom 80 percent had to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. A further condition was that the community did not receive any terrestrial ABC or commercial television service. A subsequent review (Dick 1991) found that these criteria were not always met, and that some communities that qualified for BRACS did not receive a unit while others that did not qualify did receive a BRACS unit.

The project moved slowly in the early stages because the initial estimated cost of each unit was high —$250,000. DAA then approached Leo Sebire, Telecom's Director of Broadcasting to see if he could produce a cheaper unit (Molnar 1993). DAA specified that it wanted the BRACS unit to be portable, easy to operate and capable of a broadcasting range of between three and five kilometres (Terry 1989, p.5). Sebire was able to reduce the initial cost estimates by designing BRACS as a 'home entertainment system'. This meant that the re-designed units used cheap equipment available for domestic use, cutting the cost to around $30,000. It was felt that the quality of this equipment had improved to the point where it was unnecessary to purchase the more expensive professional equipment (Sebire 1992).

Part of the pricing philosophy also involved manufacturing the units in bulk, and then installing them on a state by state basis over a two-day period. Each unit was transported to the communities in crates and then assembled by two Telecom personnel who would give nominated community members some training on the basic operation of the equipment during the two-day period. In some instances Telecom trained non-Indigenous people. Telecom did not provide backup training nor did it provide any of the 'arty-crafty training side of broadcasting', because this was not part of its contract (Molnar 1993). The training was the

Department of Education Employment and Training's (DEET, now DETYA) responsibility; however, DEET was not involved in the project at this stage.

Overall, initial BRACS installation was not a major expense for the government. The budget for the project was $2.2 million for 1987-88—by 1991-92, this had risen to $3,364,285 (Dick 1991, p.2). The first BRACS unit, a prototype, was installed at Jigalong (WA) in April 1988 for test purposes. The major installation of BRACS units started later in 1988, and around 80 units were in place across remote Australia by the end of 1991. Although there are now 101 BRACS units, only the original 80 have community licences.

Criticisms of BRACS

In 1991, ATSIC reviewed the scheme to see how effective it had been. Questionnaires were sent to all 80 BRACS communities, but only 29 replied. ATSIC said this might indicate that the communities that replied had a more active BRACS program than those that did not respond. The survey found that the major complaints about BRACS included:

• the lack of community consultation prior to the development and installation of the units;

• duplication of equipment already operating in some communities;

• the absence of a planned approach for the future operation of the units including funds for repairs, maintenance, operational expenses and paid operators;

• the absence of a coordinated training strategy to enable the units to be used to meet the requirements of the community and the objectives of the scheme; and

• equipment being installed without trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander operators (Dick 1991, p.5).

One of the key aims of BRACS—to allow communities to monitor in-coming television signals— had also not eventuated. In practice, this has been difficult because BRACS communities do not have the equipment or personnel to monitor incoming programs and there is often more than one transmitter in the community, which means that at least one mainstream service can be rebroadcast, uninterrupted. In 1998, another review of BRACS also noted that that many of the BRACS communities had not put in place a set of practices to deal with the scheduling of mainstream programs and local material, so that young

BRACS operators have very little guidance in this area (Turner 1998). It is difficult for Indigenous communities to put in place appropriate guidelines when they have not been adequately consulted about the operation of BRACS and the potential for them to monitor programs.

Consultation

Many of the communities supposedly consulted about BRACS knew nothing about the scheme. In introducing the program, the federal government made a decision *for* Aboriginal people. There was little or no negotiation; little funding support for training or maintenance; no policy to guide future development. Critically, there was no attempt to enshrine the concept of BRACS in community social structures—a fundamental flaw, which limited the likelihood of success. It seems almost as if BRACS' communities were placed in a position where the initiative would fail (Corker 1989, pp.43-44). So despite the potential of BRACS, for some communities at least, it may as well not exist. Toyne (1993) recounts receiving a telephone call at Yuendumu in 1993 from a remote community in which the Indigenous speaker remarked, 'I think we have a BRACS' unit in our community!' and proceeded to ask him how it worked. Chase (1993) tells a similar tale of a BRACS unit arriving in the Lockhart River community one day in 1988 unannounced. The Telecom technicians installing the equipment invited a willing community member from the street for a brief lesson on which buttons to push—and then left.

As it happened, in a few instances, some of the communities did not even want BRACS. Moreover, even when DAA had claimed to have consulted with communities, there were mistakes. As a result it was not unusual for the Telecom technicians to turn up in a community to install BRACS to find no suitable building when DAA had said there was one. Remote communities were also given no options when BRACS was discussed. For example, some might have preferred to phase in radio before TV, or vice versa, rather than simultaneously. They might also have liked to postpone commencement of the service until they were properly trained and had the opportunity to assess the suitability of mainstream programming (Steele 1990). Instead, a letter of offer arrived, the community was asked to respond, and the BRACS unit was then delivered and installed. A community member was taught how to switch the unit on and 'that was that'.

This approach reflected DAA's paternalistic attitude to remote Indigenous communities. In the early stages of the project, DAA also saw BRACS as a way of preserving culture in remote Indigenous communities as if Indigenous people were relics from a past era (Paton 1990). Fortunately, this thinking has shifted and ATSIC has promoted BRACS as a vehicle for cultural

assertion and political self-determination. This new emphasis is reflected in the attitudes of Indigenous broadcasting students at Batchelor College (NT) who redefined the term ‘cultural maintenance’ because they saw this as static, and replaced it with ‘cultural regeneration’ (Hartney 1991).

A number of other problems arose following the installation of the BRACS units — all the result of inadequate consultation.

Communities had to provide their own air-conditioned building but in many cases, the only suitable locations available were under the control of non-Indigenous people—schools, council buildings, post offices and even bedrooms. The decision to buy identical units meant that the different production requirements of remote communities could not be taken into account. Some communities were already well-advanced with video production and wanted to upgrade their equipment. This request was rejected as DAA viewed BRACS as ‘all or nothing’ technological solution and the only option was for communities to accept the units. The underlying problem with the first phase of BRACS was the very basic nature of the equipment. The domestic standard of the equipment was not suitable for harsh conditions in remote areas. In the Torres Strait in 1992, the vast majority of the 14 island BRACS units were suffering salt air corrosion because of the lack of a filter on air-conditioning units.

The five kilometre broadcast range of BRACS is also a limitation. Indigenous people can travel considerable distances from their communities to hunt and for ceremonies, and need to stay in touch with their communities via radio for news and vital information such as weather forecasts. The ABC has found that even its 20 kilometre range in the Kimberleys is too restrictive. This limited transmission range is a particular problem for the huge outstation movement. It is estimated that at least 17,000 Aboriginal people live on outstations some distance away from the main communities in groups as small as one family (Hartney 1991).

Initially there was no provision for on-going resources for BRACS. This changed in 1991, when ATSIC allocated $16,000 per community, $8500 for wages, and $7500 for equipment, software and repairs. This amount has increased due to inflation but it does not provide a reasonable wage for one or two operators and the necessary level of resources for maintenance. ATSIC still appears to assume that BRACS operation is a largely ‘voluntary’ activity. Moreover, as we noted in the previous chapter, this funding is not guaranteed and is dependent on the priorities of ATSIC Regional Councils. Throughout the 1990s, significant numbers of BRACS stations in Western Australia, Central Australia and the Top End either received no operational funding, or inconsistent funding.

John Lent referred to the media having a ‘momentum’ of their own, but this was completely ignored when BRACS was designed (Lent 1986, p.13). Sebire observed that the ‘crazy thing’

about BRACS was that there was money available to manufacture the units, but there was never any money devoted to their operation (Sebire 1992). The expectation was that the communities would find the money needed to keep BRACS running. He said that it was almost like ‘pork barreling’— as if DAA had said ‘we’ll put in something, we’ll get everyone on side, but then we won’t worry about it because the people can look after it’ (Sebire 1992).

The BRACS Revitalisation Strategy (BRS)

The BRS commenced in 1993 when ATSIC provided approximately $7.6 million for equipment upgrades and training. However, fundamental issues such as the provision of wages for operators and on-going resources for production and training are still to be addressed. If BRACS is to be put

on a more stable footing, payment for the BRACS operators and funding for trainees is crucial. This is especially important in remote communities where Indigenous unemployment rates are very high. BRACS offers employment opportunities because a small core staff and part-timers are needed to produce local television and radio material. Non-Indigenous people in Australia have been paid for producing ‘professional’ broadcasting for years, yet the government appears to assume that Indigenous ‘community’ broadcasting can largely exist with volunteer labour.

The media association, TEABBA, has suggested that BRACS operators should have a salary and industrial structure similar to the existing categories of community worker, for example, community manager, health worker, sports and recreation people, because this would reinforce ‘the strong perception that BRACS work is an integral part of the community more than an outpost of the broadcasting profession’ (Newsom 1991, p.16). Some of these ideas first appeared in the early 1980s but have been sidelined as technology-led policymaking processes have dominated (Michaels 1986). But the 1998 ATSIC review of the Indigenous media sector, *Digital Dreaming*, determined that little had changed.

Part of the complexity of BRACS, like other areas of Indigenous media, is that it involves a number of government departments and agencies, which do not always work in conjunction with each other. *Digital Dreaming* found no change in this lack of coordination among departments servicing Indigenous affairs in Australia. Largely as a result of this lack of support, in 1998, it was estimated that only 56 BRACS communities produce radio and/or video content on a reasonably regular basis (Turner 1998). BRACS units not producing material are awaiting equipment, operators or training, and a number are only retransmitting mainstream satellite television. This latter point is not surprising given the lack of adequate

community consultation about BRACS.

One solution to the critical shortage of BRACS resources could lie in regional groupings of BRACS communities in charge of training and program exchanges as this would keep the focus on localism (Newsom 1991, p.14). BRACS communities in the same geographic locations, which have similar interests, cultures and languages, might exchange personnel and programming where appropriate and be mutually supportive. This has begun to be explored in some areas such as Yuendumu, Ernabella, the Top End of the Northern Territory, the Torres Strait Islands, and the Kimberleys. This idea was first raised in the early 1980s by a commissioned inquiry into alternative uses of AUSSAT (Walsh 1984).

The major source of BRACS training has been Batchelor College (NT) which teaches a certificate course in BRACS operation and maintenance, but it cannot accommodate all the BRACS operators. It is vital that BRACS training is extended to community level organised, as suggested above, either on sub-regional or regional lines. This is particularly important as BRACS operators find it very difficult to be out of their communities for any length of time, so community-based training is the ideal. Given the fact that non-Indigenous Australians have access to diverse training opportunities in media and communications, this makes it even harder to understand why DETYA (and before it DEETYA and DEET) along with ATSIC cannot put adequate training projects in place for Indigenous people.

Community production

As we have suggested, the uncoordinated introduction of and support for BRACS has had a mixed reaction from communities involved. Most BRACS communities have tended to make a choice between radio or video, depending on the available expertise in the community. For instance, during the 1990s, the Warlpiri Media Association concentrated on television rather than radio given

its experience with video production. The first BRACS coordinator in the Torres Strait, on the other hand, had a radio background, so training focussed mainly on radio with some video only. The differences between the two media have also influenced the choice of production. Radio is much easier to operate, as the announcer only has to turn on a switch to broadcast. Radio also requires fewer resources. An announcer can more easily put together a program using CDs and cassettes, interspersed with community news and requests. With video, while the BRACS camera is not difficult to operate, there are other considerations such as the availability of battery and tape supplies and finding an event to record.

When evaluating BRACS, it is also important not to judge its success by comparing its output

with the mainstream media's 24 hour program schedules. The amount of BRACS material produced in each community varies greatly depending on the resources available and the motivation to broadcast. Some communities may broadcast eight hours a week of radio or video, while others may only produce a few hours of radio and some occasional video. The lack of support for training and equipment maintenance directly relates to many communities' low level use of BRACS equipment and this is particularly so in the Torres Strait Islands, where the BRACS Revitalisation process has been slow. There are 19 BRACS units in the Torres Strait, but a number of these are not able to produce local content. However, in one BRACS community former ABC-SBS journalist Constance Saveka, working on Badu Island, was putting out nine hours of radio each day at the end of 1999. She explained that it was so popular that the island bus always tuned in. In one incident, a passenger waiting at an island bus stop called the BRACS radio station to remind the bus driver that he was running late!

Initiatives such as regional networking, where a number of BRACS communities produce material which is broadcast by a larger regional media association, is another solution to cash-strapped communities. This has worked well in Central Australia (CAAMA), the Top End (TEABBA), South Australia (PY Media) and North Queensland (TAIMA).

The future

BRACS is potentially one of the most interesting and important developments in Indigenous media because of its close links with community and its ability to be 'a community loudspeaker'. With the advent of digital technology and delivery systems, the potential for BRACS to become community communication hubs disseminating information via broadcasting, computer and on-line is becoming more feasible. Properly resourced, BRACS could be an invaluable vehicle for communication, information and entertainment, providing a range of services from the delivery of government information in Indigenous languages, education and telemedicine, through to e-commerce and cultural programs for school-age children. There are already BRACS radio information hubs being coordinated by larger regional media associations in Queensland, the Northern Territory, and South Australia. These local radio networks give BRACS communities the opportunity to communicate with each other via radio and to hear each other's programs.

However, if BRACS is to really meet its potential, staffing and resources have to be improved. The reliance on one or two part-time operators—essentially working as volunteers—is unrealistic. In some instances, when the operator leaves the community the BRACS station ceases to operate. It is necessary to have at least two core paid staff, and some experienced volunteers. The 1998 review of BRACS communities identified a number of factors that need to be taken into account when considering their future potential (Turner 1998):

• the isolated and often small population numbers of communities;

• the high level of unemployment in remote communities;

• the lack of ATSIC Regional Council support to more than half the BRACS communities;

• the lack of community support in some areas, which may result in diversion of BRACS operational funds into other areas and, overall, in disinterest in the operation of the station;

• the availability of a trained operator or operators on a consistent basis;

• the amount of time and resources available to the operator to consider income generation. At present this is minimal to non-existent, with the exception of a few longer established media associations; and

• the lack of trained expertise in marketing.

Generally, BRACS audiences are too small and isolated to attract commercial sponsorship. Some have found ways to generate alternative income and reduce their total dependence on ATSIC Regional Council support by producing and selling video programs for mainstream television and corporations, but this type of income generation is not guaranteed and tends to be ad hoc. If BRACS is to develop, the entire scheme needs to be examined in light of how BRACS can be integrated into the community and how it can be used to complement and extend other government programs. To date, government departments have been slow to recognise that the most effective way to distribute communication to Indigenous people in remote areas is via Indigenous regional radio networks and BRACS stations. Locally produced Indigenous information is much more likely to be effective than material distributed to all Aborigines and Torres Strait from Canberra.

From the earliest attempts at communicating using the new technology of print in 1836 to accessing digital broadcasting in the new millennium, Indigenous people have been active in negotiating the conditions under which they could use these important cultural resources. But it has been a long and difficult path. While a central aim has been to gain some control over the means of production within the framework of community social structures, this has always been difficult because of the media environment in which Indigenous producers have had to operate.

Despite the many difficulties, Indigenous voices have emerged in various languages both in print and on the airwaves. The pioneering work by Indigenous writers set a powerful example of how to use available media technologies in attempts to advance their social and political status. Throughout the era of land rights' activism of the 60s and 70s, Indigenous people used print media in highly varied forms—hand-written papers, newsletters, magazines, and eventually, regular newspapers to speak to their own peoples and to speak out against the conditions under which they were compelled to live. From the very beginning, this set up a framework in which Indigenous writers spoke both to their own people and to an increasing non-Indigenous audience. This dual function of Indigenous media remains today.

As Indigenous people gained access to the airwaves following the expansion of the FM radio sector in Australia from the mid-1970s, the strength of oral communication quickly became apparent. Indigenous people adopted radio as a medium by which they could interact with their own communities and spread the news of conditions and events in their own countries, far and wide. The pattern of providing a first level of service to the local community along with offering a cultural bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences continued—and was strengthened as much by the nature of the community radio sector as by the desire of Indigenous people to 'put the record straight'.

The advent of BRACS offered the potential for Indigenous producers to not only gain more control over satellite-delivered mainstream broadcasting schedules, but also to produce local programs in

local languages. As we have suggested, the program was ill-conceived in many ways, primarily through a lack of attention by policymakers to training, maintenance and resourcing. But BRACS has enormous potential and it seems a great pity that a good idea has been left hanging so precariously. Media consultant Brian Walsh once wryly observed that the effectiveness of such government policymaking was akin to 'a watering can in the desert'.

Despite the obstacles placed in their path, Indigenous media producers have prevailed. There are networks of BRACS communities that produce regular language broadcasts; there are a series of regular newspapers serving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences across Australia; and there are plans to link around 200 Indigenous and non-Indigenous radio stations through the NIRS. Newspapers and then, radio, set the scene for a new communication future for Indigenous people. But the battle over television and its perceived impact on Indigenous languages and cultures was looming.

Chapter three

‘Cultural nerve gas’ and cultural resources: Indigenous video,

TV and film

Torres Strait Island people must understand what that thing [television] is all about because I see it this way: I don't like it if the culture of the Torres Strait and our language fades away. We want to preserve it, therefore we must have our people trained to know the right way to use that thing so our language can be preserved (Noah 1988).

Indigenous video, television and film production have developed more slowly than Indigenous radio because of a lack of access to resources, training opportunities and outlets for distribution. However, by the end of the 1990s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island producers were involved in remote commercial television, ABC and SBS TV, community television, BRACS, and video and film production for a range of client groups. Indigenous television became a reality in the 1980s with the establishment of CAAMA Video (now CAAMA Productions), two pirate TV stations run by Aboriginal communities, and the introduction of BRACS and commercial television to remote areas.

Control of information

The highly controlled information flow in traditional Aboriginal societies does not sit easily with Western notions of editorial independence and the public's right to know. In fact, O'Regan suggests (1990, p.61) that non-Indigenous journalism routines, if anything, *encourage* violations. Indigenous media producers are confronting similar difficulties in coming to terms with the non- Indigenous notion of copyright and how this might interact with Aboriginal concepts of ownership of cultural products, for example, who controls Indigenous intellectual, creative and cultural property? Even within Indigenous communities, Torres Strait Island broadcaster Aven Noah (1988) reminds us that journalistic methods of information gathering must be modified to take into account local cultural mores: 'You respect the old people. You don't just go up to them with a microphone and shove it up their mouth. You've got to talk your way into it. I carry on culture. I know my traditions.'

The potential conflict between broadcasting and the traditional Aboriginal concepts of information exchange is enormous. Broadcast television is equally accessible to all in a community as opposed to the highly restricted Aboriginal ownership of knowledge. It usually advantages younger community members as it bypasses the traditional gatekeepers of knowledge in community and undermines their power base. Cultural knowledge thus becomes free and uncontrolled. Broadcast television information is also widely dispersed geographically, whereas Aboriginal information is highly localised. Broadcast television is one-way, impassive and impersonal—Aboriginal knowledge exchange is based on personal

face-to-face interaction linked to complex kinship rules (Michaels 1986, pp.124-135).

In an address to a session of the 1985 ANZAAS Conference, Indigenous linguist Eve Fesl told delegates that satellite television would be a ‘cultural nerve gas’ unless broadcasts were in community language conveying cultural norms(Fesl 1985a). Fesl’s fears closely parallel those of the former president of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, Rosemarie Kuptana, who, 10 years

earlier, described the possible effect of southern television on the northern people of Canada in no uncertain terms (in Brisebois 1983, p.107): ‘We might liken the onslaught of southern television and the absence of native television to the neutron bomb. This is the bomb that kills the people but leaves the buildings standing.’

Perceived fears over the impact of satellite television, particularly in remote Australia, led to a concerted lobbying campaign by experienced broadcasters like CAAMA, along with a range of policymakers and academics working in the area. Significantly, the tone of the debate soon shifted from one in which the technology of television was perceived as necessarily bad, to another which suggested ways in which Indigenous communities could appropriate television and video to *strengthen* their languages and cultures—the very things threatened by mainstream programming.

‘Inventing’ Aboriginal television

One of the founders of CAAMA, Freda Glynn, once described Aboriginal broadcasting as creating a new industry for Aboriginal people (ABC 1986): ‘And who should control Aboriginal culture? It should be Aboriginal people. And who can best do it? It’s Aboriginal people.’ For years, Indigenous people have been the object of non-Indigenous film and video makers but this situation began to change when Indigenous community television commenced in Central Australia in the early 1980s.

From the mid-1970s, non-Indigenous Australians were largely responsible for the presence of video cameras and VCRs in remote areas. Adult educators working with Education Departments incorporated video programs into their teaching but in some instances, trained Aboriginal people so that they could make their own video programs. Church groups also used video programs and non- Indigenous Australians living in remote communities rented video movies for entertainment. These factors, combined with cheaper, reasonable quality portable video technology, encouraged the development of Indigenous video production. By the mid-1980s, at least 12 remote communities were producing video programs.

Two of the best known communities—Yuendumu and Ernabella—took this a step further and set up illegal, low-powered television stations in 1985. One of the problems facing DOC at this time was that there was no existing licence category for public or community television and the only way this could have been created was by amending the *Broadcasting and Television Act*. But the political will to make this possible did not exist in the 1980s (Molnar 1993). With the AUSSAT launch date less than three months away, the Warlpiri Media Association (WMA) conducted its first test transmission at Yuendumu on 1 April 1985—without a licence. The following day, the community met and decided on a four hour daily transmission schedule (*Junga Yimi* 1985, p.3). The WMA television studio and low-powered transmitter cost only $4000.

In 1984, Ernabella established the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Media Association (PY Media) and set up its own low-powered television station, EV Television. When EV Television went to air in April 1985, the total cost of the transmission system was less than $1000, purchased from a 10 cent surcharge on chilled drinks from the store (Turner 1990, p.45). Video producers at Yuendumu and Ernabella were concerned they would be 'bombarded' with non-Indigenous television programs, and saw their own productions as a way of 'fighting fire with fire'. In doing so, they set up what were amongst the cheapest television stations in the world at that time. The newly-established WMA aimed to use local video programs to improve the community's economic and social conditions in three main ways: as an educational tool 'asserting a continuous source of pride and respect of tradition'; to provide the opportunity for employment which in turn would be a source of

income for the whole community; and to improve services in Yuendumu, such as producing video letters to government departments.

Indigenous notions of accessibility, as we have suggested, can directly conflict with non-Indigenous ideas of the recognition and identification of individuality, reflected in the mass media. Under the Warlpiri system—as in many Indigenous communities—no single individual has the authority to 'tell' a story or has ownership over such a story. In this way, stories come from the past, through the present, and continue into the future, linking people, communities and places (Michaels 1987b, pp.23-33). Michaels recounts how the videotaping of one story—the re-enactment of a 1929 massacre at Coniston—required the presence of 27 people to legitimate it although only a handful actually appeared on camera. In the same video, the camera work featured an apparently erratic pan along a line of hills, stopping here and there with zooms in and out. But he discovered it was not merely 'home movie style, naive camerawork'. The Warlpiri camera operator explained that each pan, pause or zoom highlighted significant points along a Dreaming track, a Songline—or information corridor:

> Shifts in focus and interruptions in panning pick out important places and things in the landscape, like a tree where spirits live or a flower with symbolic value. The camera adopts technical codes to serve a predetermined system of signification in this radically *Yapa* [true Warlpiri] mise-en-scene (Michaels 1987b, pp.54-55).

This attention to landscape is common in Warlpiri video production and Michaels proposed that such techniques of filmmaking were linked directly to the way the Warlpiri related to the land (1986, pp.62-63). In this way, he asserted that the Warlpiri 'invented' their own version of television—a highly localised version that contrasted with the delivery of mainstream television via satellite. Like the Warlpiri, the Pitjantjatjarra are able to translate to video such concepts as Dreaming tracks or Songlines—paths taken by mythical ancestors which help to explain the existence, in part, of landscape features and people's relationships to them along with their associated songs and dances. By the early 1990s, Ernabella's media association—PY Media—had amassed around 1000 hours of videotape recordings, and used these to instruct young people in this essential knowledge.

EVTV has always received a great deal of support from the Pitjantatjara people because it is seen as an important part of cultural life—part of the social structure of the community. The recordings have in turn 'helped engender a local renaissance in traditional dance, performance, and singing', strengthening traditional beliefs and values within the communities (O'Regan and Batty 1992, pp.13-14). An example of this type of revival was seen when PY Media was invited by a nearby community to record the Seven Sisters Dreaming on video. The community wanted the dances recorded and broadcast so that people could see them and say 'it is true'. In this way, video enabled them 'to do the same sort of thing they used to do traditionally. That is to visit sites and to re- empower those sites through performance and to keep them alive as a thing of great cultural significance' (Turner quoted in CAAMA Productions, 1991). The custodians of the site were so happy with the recording that they sang a song they had not sung for years and included this in the broadcast, thus revealing the old song especially for video.

EVTV has also used video to record community work projects, meetings, concerts, sports events, NAIDOC celebrations, gospel conventions, story telling, oral histories, bush trips, travel tapes documenting trips to other communities and sacred sites, local news, rock groups, and community service and health programs. Children, in general, have responded very positively to video and they come to the studio after school to 'dance in front of the camera and watch themselves transmogrified by special effects!' (Turner 1990, p.45).

The WMA, like PY Media, also considers children's programming significant. Non-Indigenous education based on non-Indigenous texts is seen as failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander children (Michaels 1988, p.112; Christie 1989, p.28). On the other hand, Indigenous video and radio, used as part of a bilingual education program, can stimulate the children's interest in education because these programs place learning 'within the complex fabric of Aboriginal meaning- making' (Christie 1989, p.28). A teacher at Yeundumu has argued that some of the money that is 'being poured into European education' should be put into activities like this which can assist Indigenous children's learning (quoted in *Satellite Dreaming* 1991). The WMA is well known for its production of an award-winning children's series *Manyu wana.* A rough translation of *Manyu wana* means 'to have fun' and its format resembles *Sesame Street* except that the entire program is in Warlpiri. A version with English subtitles has been broadcast by Imparja Television and SBS.

In common with Indigenous video producers in the arctic, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander producers in remote Australian communities are reluctant to edit. Fiction as a genre does not exist in Aboriginal lifestyle because people do not tell false stories (Michaels 1984, p.7). The events in the stories actually happened and videos tend to be produced in 'real time' from start to finish 'because this is how it happened'. To edit would mean leaving out vital information. Remote video makers do edit out material that is sacred to a particular area before it is shown elsewhere. This editing, as opposed to non-Indigenous editing, is dictated by cultural concerns. However, when videos are commissioned by organisations for non-Indigenous consumption, editing is regarded as appropriate. It is also not as problematic, as the content of these videos has less traditional significance to the community.

PY Media, like the WMA, limited broadcast hours when it started transmission. It went to air from 6.00pm to 10.00pm four times a week, with no weekend programming because this would disrupt traditional activities. Some local stations in the Pacific have also done this for similar reasons. In addition to this, the WMA and PY Media turn off their stations when there are important community events or funerals. However, when Imparja began broadcasting to remote areas in 1988, the demand for extra television hours grew and the transmission time was extended into the weekend.

The WMA and PY Media continued to produce Indigenous content throughout the 1990s, but the amount produced varied greatly depending on the funding available from ATSIC and potential client groups. During a very lean time in the early to mid-1990s, when no ATSIC funding was made available, the WMA was at a standstill and was unable to produce any video programming. This again highlights the need for guaranteed on-going government funding for Indigenous broadcasting in Australia.

BRACS video production

The pirate television stations at Yuendumu and Ernabella were forerunners of BRACS

television and following the introduction of this scheme, Yuendumu and Ernabella received BRACS equipment and now broadcast via BRACS. However, as we suggested in the previous chapter, BRACS has offered a more limited form of local control. Chris Lee is a former video lecturer and Aboriginal broadcaster at Batchelor College in the Northern Territory and the head of NIMAA for most of its existence between 1993-1998. Lee has found that one of the most popular BRACS TV programs in the Northern Territory involved community members sending greetings to each other via a camera set up in the studio. The media in this way has become an ‘electronic message stick’.

Storytelling is another example of this function. Lee gave the example of older women telling traditional stories to young children via BRACS. These women may be related to many of the children, but BRACS has provided an effective way of transmitting stories, because it is difficult to get the children together in one spot and the old women have traditional responsibilities and are not always available (Lee 1991).

The use of video for language maintenance and regeneration is another strong feature of remote video programs. Some older Indigenous people who have grown up with radio still have a preference for radio over video. But in the past few years, this situation has started to change. For example, in the South East Arnhem region, there are two of the last known speakers of an Aboriginal language. One of them asked to be filmed, sat down and told a story in her language, and then retold it in *Kriol* so that it could be translated. She said that she wanted the film to be put away for only a short period after her death, and then brought out and shown to the younger people so that they could learn the language. According to Lee, this is not an isolated incident, and older people in a number of communities are ‘eager to tell stories in language and now say—when I die you put the video away, and my family will tell you when to bring it out, and then I want you to show everybody’ (Lee 1991).

Other programs have developmental themes and some communities set aside certain days for particular issues. BRACS equipment is also being used for in-house community use. In some places there are different drawers or boxes for tapes— ‘men only’ business, ‘women only’ business, ‘sacred country’, and ‘not to look’ shots.

A few BRACS producers have produced content for mainstream television and had their documentaries shown on either the ABC or SBS as part of a series of Indigenous programs. However, it is important for community producers to maximise broadcast of BRACS productions on television networks without the stigma of them being considered to be of second-rate quality. To achieve this, BRACS producers must gain access to ‘broadcast quality’ Betacam or digital format cameras and editing equipment—for special projects at least—even though the SVHS format is fine for community broadcast. To this end, Pilbara

Kimberley BRACS (PK BRACS) and PY Media purchased Betacam cameras with revitalisation funds to generate revenue through broadcast sales and commercial contract production. PK BRACS contributed snippets to *Milbindi,* the now-defunct Aboriginal magazine program on the remote commercial television service in Western Australian, and used this camera for its documentary *Nyawa Kulila Wangka* (*Look, Listen, Speak*), which had a $30,000 presale to the ABC. PY Media have contributed footage to, and negotiated co-productions with, CAAMA's *Nganampa Anwernekenhe* program, which is broadcast on Imparja. With the availability of cheap digital cameras, the dramatic price-reduction of non-linear edit systems, and the ready adoption of this format by the broadcast industry (for example, the ABC's *Race Around the World* and Channel 7's Olympic coverage), 'broadcast quality' production equipment is now within reach of most BRACS communities.

In 1997, Imparja Television committed itself to buying 13 half-hour programs annually from BRACS producers in Central Australia for broadcast, and this was later followed by a decision by CAAMA Radio to network at least 15 hours a week of BRACS radio. The transition from BRACS community video to television, however, is not straightforward. For a number of years, Imparja Television was not interested in BRACS video programs because the station said they lacked the necessary professional quality for commercial television. In the wake of the BRS, this situation has started to change. Issues such as 'professionalism' and 'technical quality' raise interesting questions for BRACS and mainstream television not only in Australia but also in small Pacific Island countries, where local television content is being developed. In Canada, too, Native television producers have had to work with a fraction of the budgets and with variable quality equipment

unheard of in mainstream production.

Broadcast quality video production will enable Indigenous producers to capitalise on a growing market for Indigenous community video productions. The new Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) in Canada is actively seeking Indigenous programming from around the world and it seems highly likely that markets such as this will increasingly sought after by Indigenous producers from across Australia. However, while some remote Indigenous producers have successfully marketed BRACS productions to mainstream media, it does need to be stressed that the majority of BRACS communities are unlikely to either produce or sell enough broadcast quality material to become self-sufficient.

Remote Commercial Television—Imparja

> I see our job as getting as many black faces on TV as possible. This is not so easy to do— our people are still very shy. We have to show them that what they say and do is just as important as what the whitefellas do. CAAMA is all about giving people pride in themselves (Erica Glynn quoted in CAAMA, 1989, p.10).

The introduction of the RCTS to regional and remote Australia from the late 1980s is illustrative of many of the problems Pacific Island countries now face with the introduction of Western television models and program content. Concern by Indigenous communities—particularly in remote areas— over the impact of satellite television on languages and cultures, had a major impact on the policy process in Australia. The RCTS along with BRACS were the options adopted by policymakers and again presented to Indigenous communities as a *fait accompli*. As this case study of Imparja Television illustrates, a commercial television framework may not have been the most appropriate solution.

CAAMA first expressed interest in using the satellite in 1982 in a submission on Aboriginal broadcasting presented to DOC. CAAMA argued that the AUSSAT satellites should be configured in such as way to allow limited access for small public groups. This view was also shared by other Aboriginal media associations in Central Australia. At this stage CAAMA was interested only in using the satellite to extend its radio broadcasts. However, videotape use was becoming increasingly widespread in remote Aboriginal communities and this prompted CAAMA to consider video production. In 1983 the association commissioned a feasibility study to identify Indigenous media and education requirements in the region. The report recommended that CAAMA establish a non-commercial television production and training unit to produce Aboriginal language programs and cultural material so that it could meet a series of interrelated social, cultural and educational needs. These were: the effective dissemination of information in Aboriginal languages by and for the Aboriginal communities in Central Australia; maintenance of cultural integrity and identity; and television and video education programs produced for children and adults in Central Australia (Walsh 1983, p.5).

CAAMA's interest in video really got underway in 1984 when its new video unit began producing bi-monthly video newsletters which were sold to remote communities. The videos were one of the few sources of regular Indigenous-produced material in Central Australia (ABT 1986, p.12). They were modeled on CAAMA's successful audiocassette magazine, which had been sold to at least 30 remote communities since the early 1980s and contained news and information and popular rock music. During this period, the ABC and the commercial networks started to use CAAMA Video as a resource when they needed material for reports on Indigenous issues because they did not have trained Aboriginal video personnel in Alice Springs. A number of other potential client groups

including Land Councils, health services and educational institutes also indicated their interest in having an Aboriginal-run, high quality video production service available to them.

In 1984, CAAMA shifted its focus from community video and considered applying for a newly created central zone RCTS licence. The aim at that point was not to gain exclusive rights to run a TV station, but to be able to 'piggyback' its radio service on a TV service and to distribute educational television programs to remote communities (Michaels 1986, p.122). During the early stages of its licence application, CAAMA saw itself working in a consortium, as it was seeking only a 1/20th part of a 12 watt transponder to distribute its radio programs and educational television content *(Land Rights News* 1983, p.23). CAAMA felt that if it was part of a consortium, it could have a major role advising on television content that might be offensive to Aboriginal communities. Despite discussions with several non-Indigenous organisations, the CAAMA board eventually rejected the idea of a consortium on the basis it had learnt from previous experience that it could not rely on 'the goodwill' of non-Indigenous media organisations to gain access for its programs. CAAMA then joined with several other Indigenous organisations and Imparja Television Pty Ltd was born. CAAMA owns a majority of Imparja with other shareholders including Land Councils, Aboriginal media associations, and the former federal government-funded Aboriginal Development Commission.

Imparja subsequently won the licence to operate the central zone satellite footprint of the RCTS, and on 15 January 1988, the world's first Aboriginal-owned commercial television station began broadcasting. 'Imparja' is an Arrernte word which means 'footprint' or 'hunting tracks' (Perkins 1993). The service covers an area from Bathurst Island in the north to Kangaroo Island in the south and including extensive areas of New South Wales and Victoria. In 1999, Imparja entered into a sharing arrangement with Regional Television (formerly QSTV), which means that it can be received across northeastern Australia as well as in the centre.

Winning the licence was a major struggle. In August 1986, the ABT awarded Imparja the licence after two long hearings. The Northern Territory Government which supported the unsuccessful applicant for the licence bitterly opposed Imparja (Crisp 1987; Corker 1986). The territory government refused to hand over to CAAMA $2 million promised to the winning applicant after losing a federal court appeal against the tribunal's decision. The refusal by the Northern Territory to provide the funding it promised threatened to prevent Imparja from accessing an AUSSAT transponder, needed to broadcast to its planned Central Australian 'footprint' (Crisp 1987, p.23). The struggle by Imparja Television simply to gain access to the airwaves in central and southern Australia is symptomatic of the nature of the struggle for

Aboriginal rights in other areas like land.

Largely because of commercial constraints, Imparja Television is committed to broadcasting selected programs from Australia's three commercial networks with well over 90 per cent of its output standard commercial fare. The Aboriginal component on Imparja was initially limited to advertisements in Aboriginal languages and two Aboriginal-generated programs: a current affairs show, *Urrpeye* (Messenger); and a magazine-format program, *Nganampa-Anwernekenhe* (Ours), the latter broadcast in three of the most widely spoken Aboriginal languages, Arrernte, Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara—with English subtitles (Cochrane 1988, p.2). Currently Imparja broadcasts a series of language programs, *Nganampa-Anwernekenhe*, produced by CAAMA Productions, local news, a very popular children's program, *Yamba's Playtime*, and a series of programs produced by BRACS communities in remote areas. In September 1999, Imparja used a second channel to broadcast two hours of material produced by BRACS stations across Australia. This was the first attempt at establishing a national Indigenous television service in Australia and it has the potential to be a model for distributing a diverse range of Indigenous television content. Imparja, on the other hand, is unlikely to ever be a large producer of Indigenous material because of the commercial constraints 52
under which it operates. Imparja pays approximately $185 an episode for the top rating Australian mainstream program, *Blue Heelers*. On the other hand, one episode of an Indigenous program, *Nganampa*, produced by CAAMA Productions*,* costs Imparja roughly $15,000. This cost comparison is indicative of the dilemma facing organisations like Imparja, which have a mandate to produce Indigenous content.

While Imparja's advertising and sponsorship have developed in 1990s, advertisers still prefer to put their advertisements in the higher rating non-Indigenous programs. Moreover, government departments and agencies, including ATSIC, are not making sufficient use of Imparja—nor, for that matter, other areas of the Indigenous media sector—to distribute information and messages to Indigenous people. In order to maximise its advertising opportunities, Imparja formed a company in the late 1990s with other remote area television services—Regional Television/QSTV, RTS (Riverland), GTS (Port Pirie) and SES (Spencer Gulf)—for marketing purposes. The company is called the Central Television Network (CTN) and it has sales agents in all capital cities. Imparja, like the Pacific Island stations, also has guidelines on respecting cultural sensitivities. For example, it does not accept advertisements for alcohol and has withdrawn advertisements that it considers vulgar and racist.

An area in which Imparja has made some inroads is Indigenous staffing. In the early to mid-1990s, the station was mainly staffed by non-Indigenous people. By the end of the 1990s this had begun to change and around 40 per cent of the staff were Indigenous. However, non-Indigenous people remain in senior management positions. Prior to leaving CAAMA and

Imparja in 1991, Freda Glynn was philosophical about the dilemma the station faced. Glynn says they would have preferred a non-commercial television licence:

> Our original aim was to get some control over the satellite so that we could use it to suit our own purposes...I remember saying that television was like a second invasion of our country, that it would be just as destructive as alcohol...We wanted to see a lot of black faces, people speaking our own languages...We were especially interested in using it for educational purposes...Maybe this can still happen...but look at Imparja now, it's no different than any other commercial TV station...In a way, it has become what we tried to stop (Freda Glynn, cited in Batty 1993, p.123).

Glynn's deputy during this period, Philip Batty, sees Imparja Television as an example of how government policy threatens notions of Aboriginal cultural identity and self-determination (1993, pp.123-125). The rejection of a publicly-funded model—suggested by CAAMA in the early 1980s —is evidence of this. The contrast between what CAAMA Radio was able to achieve with 60 per cent of its programming in local languages and Imparja's financially hamstrung commercial framework is stark. Clearly, the commercial television model is severely limited in a cultural sense although Imparja maintains that it will remain a commercial enterprise, providing employment for an increasing number of Aboriginal people.

The other two RCTS licences awarded in the mid-1980s, GWN in Western Australia and QSTV in Queensland, have not made a serious commitment to Indigenous programming, despite the fact that their licences require them to provide 'adequate and comprehensive' programming for the audiences in their regions. Initially, GWN did produce programs containing Aboriginal content, commencing in 1987 with a five part series, *Milbindi.* It was the first Aboriginal magazine series produced for mainstream television. It concentrated on the positive aspects of Aboriginal life, culture and achievements in order to break down barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, and to redress the negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people in the mainstream media. *Milbindi* has since ceased production and GWN has not replaced it. Despite a brief commitment to Indigenous

content during its probationary period, QSTV/Regional Television has shown little interest in its Indigenous audiences in Queensland claiming the cost of local production is prohibitive. Limited finances continue to be a factor for RCTS stations and this enables them to argue against developments that are not in their commercial interests. This inflexible economic environment was a factor in GWN ceasing production of *Milbindi.*

SBS: *First in line*

Besides the RCTS, the other two mainstream outlets for Indigenous television production are the ABC and SBS, both of which transmit to urban, rural and remote areas. The ABC has the largest coverage of any network in Australia and SBS now covers about 90 per cent of the country. SBS was specifically set up and funded by the Australian government to cater for ethnic communities. Initially, it did not feel that Indigenous broadcasting was part of its brief, but this changed in 1980 when it employed Aboriginal film maker and broadcaster Lester Bostock. It was only in the mid-1980s, though, that SBS started to develop Aboriginal television, and this was mainly due to pressure from Aboriginal people. CAAMA had written to the Minister for Communications to complain that 'the federal government provided substantial funds to purchase television programs in a multitude of "settler" languages', but provided 'little to no funding for programs in the languages of the country's original inhabitants' (DAA 1980; O'Regan and Batty 1992, p. 27). SBS now regards the production and presentation of Indigenous radio and television programs as an integral part of its service and in its 1999 Code of Practice, reiterates its commitment to Indigenous programming and acknowledges the 'social, cultural and spiritual integrity of indigenous societies' (SBS 1999, pp. 7-8). SBS to date is also the only mainstream broadcasting organisation in Australia which publicly recognises the validity of Aboriginal claims for land rights.

Bostock's production guidelines for non-Indigenous Australians working with Indigenous communities are a manifestation of SBS's commitment and are referred to in the organisation's Code of Practice (Bostock 1990; 1997; SBS 1999, p.10).

SBS policy on Aboriginal broadcasting resulted in 1989-90 in its Aboriginal and Islander television unit producing a program called *First in Line*. The series of half-hour magazine programs made by an Indigenous production team shown in prime time was the first of its type on Australian television. The choice of format was deliberate, as the producers wanted to show that Indigenous people could produce and present a program of similar standard to non-Indigenous productions. The main aim of the series was to 'educate the wider Australian audience about the lives and culture of their Aborigines and to share it with them' and to inform them about Aboriginal history, 'so that they can understand why Aborigines are the way they are' (Weiniger 1990, p.5).

Most significantly, the series saw itself redressing the stereotypes of 'violent, drunk and obnoxious' Aboriginal people seen in the media (Alcorn 1989, p.9). To this end, it also deliberately steered away from interviewing the 'Aboriginal activists' regularly sought out by the mainstream media. The series was interested instead on focussing on the 'quiet achievers' in Aboriginal communities and encouraged Aboriginal groups in all states to contribute ideas and to submit video programs. *First in Line* was partially funded by DAA and consisted of 38 programs. In 1991, SBS consolidated its commitment to Indigenous programming by establishing an Aboriginal Unit, headed by a former CAAMA trainee,

Rachael Perkins. In 1992, Perkins completed a four part, one- hour documentary series, *Blood Brothers,* which examined a range of subjects from traditional culture through to survival and contemporary Aboriginal culture. The series was partially funded by SBS, in conjunction with the Film Finance Corporation (FFC), and City Pictures, an independent production company of which Rachael Perkins is a director. Perkins has continued a successful

career in the Australian film and television industry and now is executive producer of the ABC's Indigenous Unit.

In 1991, SBS broadcast the *Nganampa-Anwernekenhe* series made by CAAMA Video—the first time it had screened an Aboriginal language series. SBS has since screened other Aboriginal- produced content as part of its series, *Through Australian Eyes.* Four of the programs in 1992 were produced by video makers in Aboriginal communities. One was made at Lajamanu (NT). In June 1992, SBS worked with the Warlpiri Media Association producing another four programs for the association's children's series, *Manyu wana*. This was screened in SBS's educational television timeslot and was the first to feature Aboriginal-produced content. The programs represented an innovation for SBS as their form and content were a major departure from the usual educational television material screened. In the late 1990s, the station's Indigenous unit launched a new magazine-format program, *ICAM*. SBS has also broadcast other Indigenous-produced programming including the animated series, *Bobtails*, produced by the West Australian Aboriginal Media Asspciation (WAAMA).

ABC: *Blackout* and *The First Australians*

> We need to be in more contact with more communitybased film makers or artists or whatever to give us more of an influence in mainstream because one of these days more Australian people will get to see programs that Aboriginal people have complete control over, and then they will be able to really see what an Aboriginal perspective is (Francis Peters, Director Aboriginal Unit, ABC, quoted in CAAMA Productions, 1991).

The ABC's commitment to the development of Indigenous radio in remote areas has been in evidence since the early 1980s. Its contribution in this area has been, and still is, considerable. However, the organisation has not articulated the same policies and concerns about Indigenous involvement in television. One reason for this is that ABC television is a national service, programmed largely from Sydney with input from the other states. This

emphasis on Sydney has meant that ABC TV, unlike ABC radio, does not have the flexibility to determine different programming at local or regional levels. It is also important to acknowledge here that a continuing reduction in funding for the ABC by successive federal governments since the early 1980s has put additional pressure on the corporation's activities across the board.

In 1984, the ABC commissioned a report on the role the corporation could play in Indigenous television (Ketchum and Geyer 1984). The authors made a number of recommendations, all of which the ABC has ignored. These included the suggestion that the ABC allow access to its transmitters so that community-produced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander material could be broadcast, and that the corporation draw up a standard access agreement for communities interested in this (Ketchum and Geyer 1984, p.24). As we outline later in this book, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, through CBC North, enables access by several Aboriginal language groups across Canada. ABC television has not done this and in its one experiment in a similar area, appeared less than enthusiastic. This was in 1987 when the ABC allowed Imparja to broadcast late at night for 14 weeks prior to the station going to air. However, according to Batty, the ABC was worried that these broadcasts would open 'the floodgates' to other groups, and since then has not encouraged repeat performances (Batty 1989).

Another recommendation of the 1984 report was that ABC television, where possible, train Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within their own organisations, with regard to the different cultural requirements of Indigenous broadcasters (Ketchum and Geyer 1984, p.32). But

ABC TV has persisted in training Indigenous people within the ABC. A further recommendation was that the corporation develop a national Indigenous magazine, ensuring that it was not a 'ghetto' program, or that it was seen as all that needs to be done by the ABC in this area (Ketchum and Geyer 1984, pp.37-39). In late 1987, the ABC did set up an Aboriginal program unit to produce and buy Indigenous television programs. The first major series produced was *Blackout* and this was followed by *The First Australians. Blackout* went to air in May 1988. The series concentrated on positive issues, particularly to do with Indigenous culture. It has been suggested that the impetus for the series came about when the ABC realised that SBS had stolen the initiative by screening *First in Line* in April 1988 (Bostock 1992). Subsequently the unit has produced the *Songlines* and *Kum Yan* series. These programs included a mixture of magazine-style interviews, innovative documentary styles, studio audience discussions, Indigenous music and dance, interviews and news.

In September 1992, the ABC moved into new territory by broadcasting 12 hours of the

Broome Aboriginal Music and Culture Festival nationally as part of its 60th birthday features. The driving force for this broadcast was the ABC's Remote Broadcasting Service (now the IBU) in Canberra. The unit negotiated copyright and cultural issues (such as what shots could and could not be used) so that guidelines were in place for the broadcast. The ABC has also screened one-off Indigenous- made documentaries in its documentary timeslots and in 1997, broadcast the first series of documentaries produced through the ATSIC-funded National Indigenous Documentary Fund.

There are different perspectives on the involvement of Indigenous media producers in mainstream organisations like the ABC and SBS. Some feel that the institutional constraints are too great, while others argue that it enables the diversity of creativity within the Indigenous community to be recognised. While it may not suit some Indigenous media producers, it has enabled others to gain valuable skills they have put to use in the Australian film and television industry. Non-Indigenous Australians responded positively to *Blackout.* In fact one could argue that by putting Indigenous issues into a mainstream magazine format, the ABC, like the RCTS, has raised awareness of Indigenous culture for non-Indigenous Australians

At an organisational level within the ABC, there have been other encouraging developments. Firstly, the ABC has produced a guide to non-discriminatory language for its journalists and producers, *Thoughts that glow and words that burn.* These guidelines, combined with cross cultural awareness training for ABC personnel, are helping to increase the non-Indigenous ABC staff knowledge of Indigenous culture and issues. The corporation features a range of guidelines on its website (www.abc.net.au).

Through approaches like these, the ABC can claim that it is encouraging Indigenous content but there are still very few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander faces on ABC television. If the ABC is to provide its viewers with a better understanding of Indigenous issues Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders need to appear on camera in a range of different programs, rather than being slotted into Indigenous-only programs. News and current affairs programs in particular should be targeted as these are the ABC's flagship programs.

Overall, ABC television's efforts to produce Indigenous programming can at best be described as disappointing, or as some have said 'opportunistic' (Newsom 1992). Michaels was particularly critical of ABC-TV in the 1980s, claiming that it initiated projects which could attract special funding and political prestige rather than 'cleaning up the mess of past projects or responding to ongoing problems' (Michaels 1987b, p.8). While the ABC's commitment to Indigenous television content has improved in the 1990s, its commitment to Indigenous radio is more significant and much more flexible. However, given the cutbacks to the ABC, mentioned earlier, it is unlikely that ABC TV will develop more Indigenous TV content because it is currently having difficulty meeting

all its existing commitments.

Film and video in urban areas

> I'm sick of being told I'm part of a race of people who are continually on the verge of emerging. For christ sakes we're here baby! (Moffat in McCarthy 1989, p.27)

Indigenous video and film producers in urban and rural areas have faced considerable challenges getting access to funding. Despite this, by the end of the 1990s there were a number of established Indigenous film and video makers, some of whom had won awards in Australia and overseas. ATSIC has provided some assistance with this development. Its Office of Public Affairs used to produce a television magazine, *Aboriginal Australia* and distribute this to television stations nationally. However, the program tended to be aired between 3 a.m. and 5 a.m. on commercial television raising the question about how effective it was. ATSIC transferred the funding for the magazine to CAAMA and then to NIMAA. The total funding of $600,000 is now split between SBS (*ICAM)* and the National Indigenous Documentary Fund (NIDF) administered by NIMAA. The NIDF receives funding of around $380,000 from this. In 1996, the Australian Film Commission's (AFC) Indigenous Branch contributed additional funding and this resulted in the production of a series of documentaries—*From Sand to Celluloid*—which have been screened on the ABC. In subsequent years, BRACS producers have also benefited from the NIDF and produced a series of documentaries for broadcast on the ABC.

Overall, Indigenous film and television makers have had to rely on corporate revenue, state and federal film funding agencies, and the ABC and SBS, and the results have been very mixed and often unsatisfactory. Their situation has been particularly difficult because of the tendency of agencies to 'ghettoise' Indigenous funding in niches such as the AFC's Indigenous Film Fund. This means that they do not have access to other AFC funds. Young producers also need support to build up portfolios they can show to funding bodies and to training institutions like the Australian Film Television and Radio School.

Aboriginal film and video producers have been more active in video and film production than Torres Strait Islanders because they have had more access to equipment and training opportunities. The first opportunities for access for Aboriginal video makers in urban areas came towards the end of the 1960s when community film and video access centres were established in several capital cities. Despite the limitations of this scheme, some video

makers went on to become very successful independent producers. More Aboriginal people began producing videos in the 1980s in response to the availability of cheaper, portable video recording equipment and the increasing demand from Indigenous audiences for their own programming. One of the groups established in this period was Murriimage in Brisbane. The organisation was set up by the Brisbane Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency in 1984 to assist in community related services and staffed mainly by volunteer producers. The group is totally self-funding and produces programs which focus on Indigenous history, culture and identity. Murriimage also produces some corporate videos, but on- going funding was still an issue for the group in the late 1990s.

A number of independent Aboriginal film producers are based in Sydney, where the major film producing city in Australia. They make video programs for community viewing, videos on Indigenous issues for government departments, and documentaries and films, which receive airplay in smaller cinemas. They also work with organisations like the SBS, producing one-off series or programs for television. Some of the films and television series such as *Lousy Little Sixpence, My Survival as An Aborigine,* and *Women of the Sun* have received national and international awards.

Another significant area of video growth involves the larger regional Indigenous media associations, which have moved into video production over the last three years. At present, the number of video programs produced by the associations varies depending on the requests from outside organisations and the available resources to meet these. Health departments and welfare agencies, for example, have worked with Aboriginal video makers to make programs that are more relevant to target communities. However, while there has been an increasing demand for Indigenous-produced material, there remains a huge ignorance of the nature and extent of the Indigenous media sector within state and federal government departments.

The mainstream media, with the exception of the ABC and SBS, are failing dismally in their obligation to provide training and production outlets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program makers. Contrary to the impression left by the media, the real power in any production lies behind the camera, not in front of it. It is therefore essential that Indigenous people be given the skills to control their own productions. It is also important to increase the number of Indigenous people ‘behind the camera’ in the mainstream media as a way of sensitising these media to Indigenous issues so that they will present more appropriate images of Indigenous people and ways of life.

The more fundamental problem facing Indigenous people wanting to produce video programs in urban and rural areas is a lack of broadcast outlets with community television

and a proposed national channel some suggested options (West 1993).

Imparja and an Indigenous television narrowcast service in Broome, Goolari TV, provide two other outlets, but access to funding and training are still critical. To date the community television stations in urban areas have not provided much support for Indigenous programming. This sector relies on volunteers who can attract their own funding and this is a major obstacle for interested Indigenous producers. It has also been difficult for the producers to attract sponsorship for their programs, again reflecting the problem that Imparja Television has faced in this area.

The recommendation in 2000 by the Productivity Commission for the federal government to explore the feasibility of establishing an Indigenous Broadcasting Service is a significant step forward for Indigenous film and video producers. Should such a television service be set up, it would provide an immediate outlet for the wide range of Indigenous-produced material which currently cannot easily access the existing television system. But the danger in such a service is that Indigenous material may become ghettoised on a particular channel rather than competing with other programming of equal relevance to Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences on mainstream channels. If an Indigenous television channel was included as part of a package on pay television, this may offer a possible source of revenue. The 1998 decision by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission that Television Northern Canada (now the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network APTN) must be carried by all cable companies—along with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the commercial network, CTV—meant that APTN increased its revenue base by around $15 million. Although the pay TV roll-out in Australia at the time of writing was slow and had reached only around 13 per cent of Australian homes, it nevertheless offers a potential future source of revenue for an Indigenous program producers. For this to be realised, however, significant changes would need to be made to the existing *Broadcasting Services Act* along the lines of similar legislation in both Canada and New Zealand. At the very least, the special place of Indigenous cultures and languages need to be enshrined in the *Act* (1999, p. 28).

The Tanami Network

Since their pioneering work with local ‘pirate’ television, the community at Yuendumu, along with three other communities in the Tanami Desert have developed other innovative uses for new technologies. The forced establishment of Aboriginal settlements like Yuendumu severely disrupted traditional interactions between the Warlpiri and Pintubi peoples. The move to outstations—there are around 20 near Yuendumu—and access to motor vehicles to

enable travel, is one way of redressing this historical separation (Yuendumu Community Education Centre 1990a, p.4). But the four Tanami Desert communities are separated by up to 20 hours' road travel—some more than 550 kilometres apart—which makes maintenance of traditional links difficult. This factor, combined with poor telecommunications facilities linking the communities prompted a creative response. The Tanami communities adopted satellite technology developed by an Australian company, AAP Communications Services, and this gave rise to a new communications experiment in the central Australian desert. The system integrates compressed videoconferencing and satellite technologies linking four Tanami Desert communities—Yuendumu, Kintore, Lajamanu and Willowra—with Alice Springs, Darwin, Sydney and the rest of the world. The scheme is based on three basic criteria (Toyne 1992, p.5):

- Aboriginal control;
- the need for a mixed package of media services (computer links, fax, telephone, local video production, broadcasting); and
- a wide application of technology to achieve cost effectiveness.

The scheme began to return an operating profit in 1993-94. All profits are for the benefit of the communities involved.

While the network has enabled hundreds of hours of sessions since its 1991 launch, there are some who argue that it tends to be controlled too much by non-Aboriginal administrators. However, the crucial element throughout is local control and the way in which the network is structured. Like every other structure within the participating communities, the operation of the network is governed by cultural rules. The owners of the enterprise—the Tanami Network Trust—hold the assets of the company as well as the 'traditional knowledge and social outlooks of the Aboriginal groups involved'. Between the workers and the owners are four directors, chosen from each of the four participating communities, whose job it is to 'interpret and bring into harmony the intentions' of all users of network services (Toyne 1992, p.6).

The network has been used for a range of purposes, including successfully reuniting prisoners in Alice Springs jail with their families many hundreds of kilometres away (Tanami Network 1993a). The influence of families on the rehabilitation of young offenders through communication technology like the Tanami Network might help to reverse the alarming trend of deaths in custody which has touched every Aboriginal community in Australia (Tanami Network 1993b). The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified the need for such measures.

The Tanami Network has also been used to market Aboriginal art, Aboriginal knowledge (for

input into conferences, for example), and educational opportunities for Aboriginal people to contribute in areas like culture, languages and contemporary themes (Tanami Network 1993c). In 1993, the network was used to link Warlpiri artists in Yuendumu with a symposium on contemporary Aboriginal art being held in London (*Canberra Times* 26.7.93).

The development of such a telecommunications network by an Indigenous community has profound implications for community activities, including broadcasting. The appropriation of media in this way clearly demonstrates the possibility for empowerment inherent in such technology. The technology itself is not a threat—it is how the technology is used which is important. The Tanami communities' use of state of the art satellite videoconferencing technology represents a radical opposition to postmodern notions that a system of social control and power is inherent in mass media, making exchange of information 'impossible' (Baudrillard 1988). The idea behind the Tanami Network has now been incorporated into its extension into the Outback Digital Network (ODN) through the Remote Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (RTIF)—money made available by the federal government from the partial sale of Telstra in 1997. The ODN aims to provide videoconferencing, e-mail, fax and telephony to around 60 remote communities across the country.

The new millennium

As we have suggested throughout these chapters, technological determinism has had a considerable impact on the Indigenous media policy and production environment in Australia. As a result, policymaking has largely ignored the important relationship between Indigenous cultural production and the social structures from which this emerges. As each of the various media technologies have been adopted by mainstream Australian society, there has been little, if any attempt to include Indigenous people or to take into account their special needs. Despite this, Indigenous media producers have been able to appropriate various technologies and apply them in culturally appropriate ways. Unfortunately, this is not a universal experience, largely because of an unevenness in the availability of funding for establishment, training, maintenance, and production costs.

Throughout this book we also argue that the communications media such as radio, video and multimedia are more flexible and adaptable for Indigenous needs, and that their cost effectiveness combined with the accessibility of the technology involved, encourages Indigenous community involvement in a way that the mainstream media do not. These media technologies can also be decentralised and run on participatory lines. They do not have to follow the non-Indigenous program forms adhered to by the mainstream media, because their

form and content are shaped by the communities in which they are situated. But this is not an argument for Indigenous people to participate *only* in small media—access to mainstream media is an essential element of the Indigenous communication spectrum. The small media are ideally placed to complement the mainstream as they can offer community-specific programs in the language or languages of the area they serve. Mainstream media will at best take a pan-Indigenous approach which makes it difficult to reflect the diversity of Indigenous languages and cultural agendas.

The best known of the new media is the Internet and it is already being used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander print, radio and video producers to produce Indigenous multimedia forms. Remote Indigenous communities are also accessing the Internet to communicate locally and internationally. One community has been holding successful art auctions via the Internet for a few years, and while these developments are relatively recent, indications are that Indigenous use of the Internet and multimedia production will continue to grow. What is significant about these developments is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people have been able to access the technology on their terms and define how they would like to use it. The Outback Digital Network and its many regional variations are good examples of this.

There is no doubt that appropriately used, communications technology can reduce the isolation of Indigenous people living in remote Australia by delivering a range of services to these areas. Perhaps more importantly, it enables networking between communities—local, national and international—and state and federal government departments and agencies. The new digital environment offers a number of new opportunities but it also raises problems such as the ownership of information and images and the right to distribute these and to whom. These challenging issues have been taken by Indigenous communities from the Torres Strait to Tasmania and will continue to be high on the agenda as the use of digital technologies increases (ATSIC 1998). In many ways, the question around intellectual property and protocols are central in determining how Indigenous people will use any of the new technologies and how they will incorporate these into community social structures.

While there have been significant innovation by Indigenous people in their use of communications technologies, the fundamental issues of affordable access, training opportunities, ownership and control of equipment, and resources for on-going operation remain. They need to be tackled if Indigenous Australians are to have the same opportunities to access these new technologies as non- Indigenous Australians. The majority of ‘Indigenous’ sites on the Internet, for example, have been produced by non-Indigenous people. This serves as a stark reminder that access to communication technology is never equal nor is it always affordable.

PART II: THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Chapter four

Reaching out: the rise of radio

The use of mass media to disseminate information in the South Pacific via the airwaves began in the 1930s—around 110 years after the first printing press was set up on Moorea in 1817. One of the earliest obstacles for newspapers was literacy. In 1973, almost two-thirds of senior newspaper editors in the South Pacific were non-Indigenous—by 1989, Indigenous

people made up just over half of the total number (Layton 1992, p.15). Newspapers have played a significant role in information dissemination in the Pacific and continue to do so. Between 1973 and 1989, the number of newspapers in the South Pacific more than doubled from 63 to 156 (Layton 1992, p.9). Only a small number of these are daily newspapers, and many take the form of community newspapers published by NGOs, churches and government departments.

There has been a shift in ownership of the Pacific Islands' press in the two decades from almost 60 per cent private ownership in 1973 to a more even spread in 1989—35 per cent private, 30 per cent government, 24 per cent church, and 11 per cent non-profit/trust ownership. However, privately- owned titles still dominate in the region (Layton 1992, p. 17). Like their counterparts in Australia— and to a lesser extent, Canada—Indigenous newspapers in the South Pacific compete in small advertising markets making their profitability uncertain (Layton 1992, p. 33).

A continuing frustration over the high cost of entry, questions of literacy—for example, Papua New Guinea has around 850 languages—and limited markets has meant that the Indigenous press has not been able to capture the hearts and minds of people in the South Pacific in the same way as broadcasting:

> Radio broadcasting is very much a part of the information sector. Indeed I would say that in our situations of scattered islands and meagre money resources, it is the primary medium for the dissemination of information for development, just as it is for almost anything else of an information nature in my own country, where radio is used to deliver all kinds of messages including those you would normally deliver by telegram or telephone here in Fiji (Wickham 1986, p.38).

Many of the PICs consist of islands spread over large distances. Fiji, for example, is made up of 322 islands, 100 of which are inhabited, while Tonga has 170 islands, 36 of which are inhabited. Island nations like Tonga, have two main languages — Tongan and English. However, others like the Solomon Islands have 120 languages. Pacific Island culture also has a strong oral tradition. Literary rates in some countries like Fiji and Tonga are very high, but in other PICs the literacy rate can be as low as 30 per cent of the total population. The combination of oral culture, varying literacy rates and the geographic spread of the islands makes radio an excellent vehicle for the dissemination of information in the PICs.

Radio's easy accessibility to most South Pacific Island people, has meant that it has become very much a way of life with broadcasters claiming that 'everybody listens to the radio' (Avery 1986, p.1). National public service radio models are the dominant media. They are a colonial legacy and are similar to services found in African and Asian countries with colonial ties to Britain. The most significant difference between these stations and Indigenous radio

in Australia is the ability of the Pacific stations to transmit nationally. This has a number of advantages for Pacific Island broadcasters as they can inform people in urban, rural and outer island areas about each other.

However, the centralised nature of these services, along with their organisational structure, can compromise broadcasters' ability to produce diverse and relevant Indigenous programming.

AM radio services have been the dominant media in the PICs since their establishment as they are the only media with the potential to reach audiences across an entire Pacific country. Even so, in some PICs, ineffective transmission systems combined with geographic and atmospheric obstacles, mean that radio signals can be variable to non-existent in remote rural and outer lying island areas. Despite this, radio still performs better than the print media and television. The print media and local television services mainly serve urban centres and their distribution outside these centres has generally been difficult and costly. Many rural and outer island areas are yet to receive electricity and this, along with the expense of establishing television, has been an impediment to local TV. Battery-run radios, on the other hand, are widespread. It is difficult to estimate how many radio receivers there are as statistics are dated, but most homes in the South Pacific are capable of owning a radio.

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media have grown in the 'margins' of the mainstream media and are now developing into a separate sector. In the Pacific, Indigenous radio is the mainstream media because it is the primary source of communication and thus, the first level of service. The first national radio services were introduced into the Pacific by colonial administrations 'to facilitate the adoption of Western institutions' (Barney 1978, p.299). As a result, centralised Western public service models of radio dominate in the Pacific. However, the metropolitan models on which the Pacific stations are based have changed considerably over the past decades and now place more emphasis on decentralisation and localism. With the exception of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in PNG, which has 19 provincial stations, the Pacific national stations are still highly centralised.

The beginnings of broadcasting

The first Pacific Island radio service was set up in PNG in 1933 followed by Fiji in 1935. These stations were run by government information offices and provided very limited services to local communities. Other Pacific countries did not get radio services until the

sixties — Niue in 1967 and Nauru in 1968. More than half of the national stations were established after 1961. The history of Indigenous broadcasting in the Pacific, as it is in Australia, is very recent.

During the colonial period, radio was run by Europeans essentially to service expatriates in business or government. As a result, there was very little Indigenous content or orientation. The main programs consisted of weather bulletins for ships, ‘metal prices for miners, copra prices for planters, and news bulletins for Europeans far from the centres of settlement’ (Hill 1982, p.21). By the 1970s, when more South Pacific countries had gained their independence, expatriates had gradually been phased out of the radio stations. The national services are now run by Pacific Islanders, and unlike Pacific local television, contain significant amounts of Indigenous content.

The importance of these services for Indigenous communication becomes clearer when examining the number of national radio services that exist in the South Pacific. Fiji, Kiribati, the Cook Islands, Niue, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Nauru, and PNG all have national radio stations. The larger stations broadcast from early morning to around midnight, whereas the smaller operations are on air for shorter periods during the day. Staffing levels vary from stations like *Radio Sunshine* in Niue with three full-time staff and some part-time announcers to serve a population of around 2000, to the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) with 50 staff serving a population of around 450,000**.** The two largest stations are the Fiji Broadcasting

Corporation Limited (FBCL), which employs 117 people for a population of just over 800,000, and the NBC in PNG, which has a staff of 350 for 4.7 million people.

Most of the national radio services are set up as statutory institutions, initially funded by government. This is no longer the case. Over the past decade, Pacific governments have been cutting costs, forcing the stations to rely more on advertising and sponsorship revenue. During this period a number of the stations have been corporatised and downsized, and in the case of the Cook Islands, privatised. The NBC, for example, had 600 staff in the early 1990s and the FBC (now FBCL) had 170. Even smaller stations like Radio Tuvalu which originally had 13 staff, have been downsized following a global pattern of deregulation and privatisation.

As a result of funding upheavals in the 1990s, the level of government funding for national radio in the South Pacific varies considerably. Radio 2AP in Samoa, with a staff of 29 receives government funding to cover staff and operational costs, but must raise 700,000 tala a year as part of this funding agreement. This is then returned to government, but 2AP can keep any funds it raises over and above this amount. The SIBC receives only

$S200,000 and this goes towards the operation of its regional station. It has to raise another $S1.8m a year to fully fund its AM and FM services. This is raised mainly from advertising, sponsorship, with government departments and NGOs paying for program time. In Fiji, the FBCL only receives funding to cover its public service functions and must fund its FM music services itself.

National radio stations have been faced with the challenge of suddenly having to change course and rethink their mandate and program content. In smaller PICs where there is only one radio station, and where there are few other media reference points, this has proved very difficult. Even if the stations were able to remake themselves, a number do not operate in economies that can generate the markets necessary to attract a reasonable level of advertising or sponsorship. Niue, with a population of 2000, is probably the most extreme example of this, but countries like Tuvalu (10,588) and Kiribati (85,501) also find this a major challenge. The national broadcasters have been further handicapped by the fact that they now need to 'sell a product' to their audiences. With the exception of Fiji and PNG, the stations generally do not have access to audience research.

Some of the public broadcasters have to spread their resources over more than one media. In Tuvalu, for example, the radio station produces the newspaper the *Tuvalu Echoes*. The stations in Kiribati and Vanuatu are also responsible for newspapers, and while these are not daily, they are another form of media they have to support from limited funds. The introduction of local television has had a considerable impact on public radio. In a number of instances, the national radio stations have been given responsibility for local television (Vanuatu, Niue, Nauru, Tonga, and the Cook Islands). Staff have been multi-skilled in radio and television production, often to the disadvantage of radio.

Commercial Radio

There are commercial radio stations in the following countries: Fiji (three stations), PNG (two stations), the Cook Islands (one station), the Solomon Islands (two stations) and Samoa (one station). In Fiji, Tonga, PNG, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, national radio services also operate a commercial FM music station in addition to a national AM service. The only exception to this is the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited which has two FM stations. During the 1990s, the need to raise revenue provided the impetus for national radio services to establish commercial FM stations. The aim was to use the commercial service to subsidise the more expensive AM stations. However, the establishment of commercial FM music stations has not been easy for national

broadcasters. They have had little experience formatting music stations and limited access to audience/market research. Generally their announcers are learning about music presentation ‘on the job’. There is no guarantee that commercial stations will operate successfully in PICs as some of the existing iones are not making a profit. Commercial radio has developed slowly in the South Pacific because of small audiences and advertising markets. This is likely to be the case for some time to come as large numbers of Pacific Islanders live outside urban areas and rely on subsistence economies.

The privately- owned commercial stations are very Western in orientation as they are modelled on Western commercial radio, with formatted contemporary music, news and sport. Despite the inclusion of contemporary Pacific Island music, the stations sound similar to commercial radio in Australia or America. Some of the announcers have even adopted a ‘vague American twang’ when they speak and their announcing styles are similar to those in Australia. One of the most successful commercial stations is English language service FM 96 in Suva, Fiji. In the first week of January 2000, its Top 10 featured songs by The Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears, Army of Lovers, Lauryn Hill and Bob Marley, and Celine Dion (www.fijivillage.com/radio/fm96.htm). There is a Fijian language commercial station and an Indian language station in Fiji, but despite the language used and the content, the prevailing format is Western commercial radio.

Commercial radio’s dominant content — Western music — has obvious appeal to younger Pacific audiences as it links them into global youth culture. American Rap and dance music, in particular, has influenced the clothing styles and language used by young Pacific Islanders. The long-term impact of these listening trends on the national services is difficult to forecast. However, in many Pacific countries, increasing birth rates have resulted in a large under-30 population This age-group now has the opportunity to grow-up listening to commercial radio rather than the national AM talk/ music station. The 0-14 age group in the Solomon Islands in 1999 was estimated to make up 45 per cent of the total population; in Samoa this age group accounts for 39 per cent of the population; and in Tuvalu, 35 per cent.

The news services on commercial radio, while brief, have provided an alternative to the news produced by the national public broadcasters. Some of the news services on national stations can be constrained because of their link to government (Robie 1995; PINA online IFEX bulletins). At the same time, commercial stations cannot afford to be service-oriented or to appeal to disparate audiences and in countries with scarce communications resources, are not the ideal vehicle for development and education, or for material aimed at uniting the nation. Government-funded public service models are much more appropriate for this role because, despite the financial pressures on them, they still have a mandate to serve different audiences and do not need to be as concerned about commercial imperatives. They also have a much wider transmission range as a number of the commercial stations transmit to

urban areas only.

Radio Models

The presence of expatriates in the formative years of the national public services has left its mark. European influence has also been continually reinforced by the dependence Pacific stations have on Western aid donors to provide equipment and trainers. Neither Pacific governments nor the media organisations have the resources to fund on-going training for media staff (radio, TV and print). Pacific governments have also not given media training a high priority, preferring to concentrate on other development areas such as health and education which also urgently need funding. Western characteristics are apparent in the studio design and in the type of equipment used, as well as the accompanying program formats and divisions of labour. These characteristics combine to constrain

the potential of Indigenous broadcasting by imposing programming standards and expectations that the stations cannot always meet. These standards are not necessarily appropriate for the Pacific, but their dominance has meant that Pacific Island broadcasters have generally not questioned their relevance for Indigenous radio. The on-air result is often one of unease, as these imposed forms do not sit comfortably with Pacific cultures. The most obvious example of this on the national radio stations are the ‘talking head’ programs — forms inherited from the BBC or the ABC. These programs dominate the talks content of the AM stations and generally feature one person reading from a script for up to 15 minutes or longer. The programs aim to disseminate information on a range of important development issues but the form they are presented in does not actively engage audiences. Programs from Deutche Welle, the BBC, Radio Australia (RA), Radio New Zealand International (RNZI), and Voice of America (VOA) are all distributed at no cost to the stations. However, they can sound quite incongruous when broadcast on Pacific radio as they often have little local relevance. The only exceptions to this are overseas news services produced for the Pacific (for example, RA and RNZI) and the contemporary music programs. The national stations broadcast some of these programs ‘as fillers’ because they lack other program content and re-use the tapes to record local programs as some of the poorer stations have few tape stocks.

The dominance of the national broadcasting models and the lack of smaller models such as BRACS or community radio, has meant that Pacific Island broadcasters have not had the same amount of freedom to experiment with their own program forms as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island producers. Alternative uses of radio in the Pacific are rare, as are overtly political uses of radio. Radio Free Bougainville, a clandestine radio station run by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) is a good example of the latter form as is Radio

Dijou, the Kanak station in New Caledonia (Seward 1999). The Kanak movement uses this as an outlet for its political aspirations (Togna 1990, pp.26-27). In the late 1990s, UNESCO provided funding for more community radio stations, and a new community station operated by women's groups is broadcasting outside Suva, Fiji. The University of PNG runs a community station run by journalism students and in 1999, UNESCO provided funds for another community station in PNG.

The slow growth of community radio in the Pacific is understandable when the economies of the countries are considered.

Radio Program Forms

When listening to Pacific national radio one gets the definite impression of a Pacific 'sound' or identity because radio's oral qualities and community links are obvious despite the adherence to Western program forms. This has been helped by the fact that public service broadcasters have managed to give some of their programs more of a community orientation, similar to that of Indigenous community radio. The national services also attempt, with varying degrees of success, to include material from the rural and outer island areas and make a commitment to developmental information. This further strengthens the community orientation of these services, along with the fact that radio speaks in language. Pacific radio services generally broadcast programs in the dominant Indigenous language and English. The only multilingual stations are in Fiji (English, Fijian, Hindustani) and in PNG (English, Pidgin, Moto and provincial languages).

One of the most distinctive uses of radio in the Pacific involves sending messages. People living in rural areas and outer islands without telephones can communicate with people outside their villages by sending messages to the radio station, either in writing or via the community radio-telephone. Messages can range from birthday greetings and funeral notices to reminders to employees that their leave is finished and they are due back at work. Governments and other organisations use

these programs extensively to publicise government policies and projects and other issues of relevance to the audience. The messages are a source of revenue for the stations as they charge a small fee to cover the cost of the broadcast. NGOs and government departments also produce programs to communicate with their workers. In the Solomon Islands, the Solomon Island Development Trust (SIDT) uses its weekly half-hour program on the SIBC to disseminate information to its network of 200 plus field workers. The many functions of message programs illustrate how a big medium, such as national radio, can be adapted to community purposes.

Developmental and Educational Programs

When Third World countries were arguing for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the 1970s, they stressed that the media in developing countries had a special responsibility to work with the government to promote information for the national good. Radio has been the main source of developmental material in Third World countries, and Pacific Island radio is no exception. Some stations have been producing developmental programs for more than 20 years, so this approach to programming is well established.

Development programs are the most obvious distinguishing feature between the national public service broadcasters and the private stations. National radio services are able to provide programs for many different target audiences — women, farmers, health workers, people living on outer islands, children in school, and teachers — because they are not totally dependent on advertising for revenue and have a mandate to serve all people. These programs are mainly produced by NGOs and government departments working in development areas. Developmental programs have their problems but they do enable the media to be used as a loudspeaker, legitimator and an equaliser, thus helping to reduce the disadvantages suffered by Pacific Island people living in rural and outer island areas. The number of developmental programs varies from station to station, but generally they form a considerable part of the evening broadcasts on many national AM services, with a focus on educational programs in the morning. These programs are not overtly political but they are about cultural, political and economic empowerment as they give Pacific Islanders the opportunity to define their own problems and solutions. Some of the most successful development programs have been produced by women's organisations and they have been the catalyst for forming women's groups. This is considered very important in the Pacific as the status of women is not high and women's organisations argue that if Pacific countries are to develop, then the status of women status must be improved (Emerson 1990).

Radio has the advantage of being able to reach rural and outer island communities on a regular basis with weekly programs whereas extension workers from government departments or NGOs cannot. However, for this programming to be useful, it needs to reflect the interests and concerns of the rural communities it serves and be local, participatory, and appropriate. One constraint on this is the shortage of government funding which makes it difficult for radio broadcasters and departmental officers to travel to the outer islands on a regular basis to collect material.

Literacy rates throughout the South Pacific can be low and some countries do not have

compulsory primary or secondary school education. The quality of education is also extremely variable, with rural areas and outer islands in particular having few resources and often poorly trained teachers. Educational radio programs can provide quality and consistency in primary and secondary education and as such, be used as a complement to teaching. However, with some exceptions, schools programs have generally taken the form of traditional classroom teaching and as a result, they have not been as effective as they could be. Moreover, some of these programs can be very dated. A consultant working at the NBC in the early 1990s found that education programs from

before PNG's independence in 1975 were still being broadcast.

Cultural production

The other major program form on the national stations is music. Western countries tend to dismiss the cultural significance of music because Western music dominates the airwaves. However, Indigenous music recording is considered very important culturally. This is because Pacific Islanders, like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, have used music for centuries to pass on their beliefs, languages and knowledge to the next generation. The sound of traditional music is very distinctive and is not derivative of Western music, unlike some of the contemporary Pacific Island music. Consequently, even when traditional music is sandwiched between Western music, it contributes to a 'Pacific sound'. And while it is certainly true that younger Pacific Islanders enjoy Western music, requests for traditional Pacific music come from all age groups.

Recording of music, whether traditional or contemporary, is constrained by a lack of resources. Radio Cook Islands, for example, has had limited funds to record Indigenous music for years and has had to rely on recordings made of special events and band competitions for new Indigenous music. The SIBC had a policy of two local songs for every overseas one, but there was a shortage of locally recorded material at the station, so this policy was not put into practice. Lack of funding has also meant that stations do not employ broadcasters specifically to record music, so music production has to be fitted in with other duties. This has resulted in intensive collection periods when broadcasters are given the opportunity and funding to travel to outer islands to record as much as possible. These tapes are then relied on for years until more recordings can be made. One consequence of this is that the quality of the recordings deteriorates and the tapes can sound very 'muddy'. With the exception of PNG, Fiji and the Cook Islands, few Pacific countries have the resources, equipment and personnel to establish and maintain an Indigenous music industry. Some of the smaller Pacific stations do sell the music they record on cassette, but this happens in a

very *ad hoc* way. The recording studio and record label that CAAMA has set up in central Australia would be an excellent model for many Pacific countries as CAAMA Music is not labour- or equipment-intensive. The increasing availability of cheaper digital recording equipment, too, offers a potential solution.

The production of Pacific music and other Pacific program forms is being undermined by the easy availability of contemporary Western music. Western contemporary music, including the weekly Top 10, is supplied free of charge in pre-produced programs from organisations like Radio Australia and Voice of America. Some Pacific stations, lacking the trained staff and funding necessary to produce more complex spoken word programs, play a large amount of music. This has been referred to as the 'jukebox syndrome'—music with little spoken word input (Bussiek 1988). This is the case with some Indigenous community radio and BRACS stations in Australia.

The situation in Tuvalu is indicative of the problems smaller Pacific broadcasters face, and of the contradictory demands Pacific governments place on national radio stations. In 1991, the government criticised Radio Tuvalu in Parliament for playing too much Western music, but at the same time it was not prepared to give the station the funding it needed to buy the copyright for Tuvaluan songs (Etomi 1991). The copyright amount was very small — five dollars (equivalent to Australian dollars) per song. The real issue was one of government priorities. This is important culturally and economically, as Tuvalu is like a remote Aboriginal community, with very few jobs available. The subsequent downsizing of Radio Tuvalu in the 1990s has made the likelihood of staff and resources being available to record local music even more remote.

Drama, comedy and story telling are other Pacific program forms considered important for cultural maintenance and regeneration but they, too, are under-resourced and as a consequence, are not broadcast on many Pacific stations. In the early 1990s, the SIBC broadcast custom stories told by two former SIBC employees, which were very popular with children. The then general manager, Paterson Mae, said that these stories were important because 'culture is going away very quickly' as more young people coming out of school are not interested in 'older ways'. By broadcasting custom stories, the SIBC hoped to pass on Solomon Island traditions to future generations (Mae 1992).

At Radio Tuvalu, one of the producers used to write a script and then get 'actors' (other staff, friends, and hotel employees) to rehearse the parts before recording it as a radio play. This was the Tuvaluan way of producing a universal form and it defied Western expectations about standards. The audience's ability to identify with the characters and the plots made it a successful program, whereas a highly-produced BBC drama with professional actors

would be less effective because it would not have the same cultural relevance, and would lack immediacy. Drama productions like this are examples of the way Pacific Islanders negotiate Western program forms, adapting them to suit the economic and cultural environments in which they work.

In the late 1990s, drama production has received a boost as theatre groups have been making the transition from the community stage to radio. In Vanuatu, the well-known theatre group, Wan Smol Bag, began producing a drama series for radio and in Kiribati, Te Itibwerere developed drama for the national radio station. Both groups are interested in using drama to disseminate social messages and information. This is something that the Pacific community theatre groups have done effectively for many years in rural and outer island areas.

Producing the news

Local news is developing in the Pacific and all stations have newsrooms — a few of them with as many as six or seven journalists. The larger stations, like the FBCL and the NBC, have always produced news bulletins, but some of the smaller stations only started producing their own news in the mid to late 1980s. The news agenda in the Pacific has been shaped by colonial models inherited by broadcasters, the dominance of overseas news services in the region, and overseas trainers. Until the late 1980s, Pacific countries have largely learnt about each other and the world through overseas news agencies. For example, Radio Australia news is usually recorded by the stations each day and then replayed. In some instances, it is put straight to air. A number of stations also translate the RA news into the major local language and broadcast the translation later in the day or the following morning.

PACNEWS — The Pacific News Agency

> Our kids rattle off the names of the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Britain, Australia, New Zealand and America, but you pose a question about Vanuatu and no one knows because information hasn't been coming out (Prasad 1988).

In 1987, Indigenous news production in the Pacific received a major boost with the establishment of the regional news exchange, PACNEWS. It encouraged stations to produce local news so that they could contribute to PACNEWS regional bulletins, and, most significantly, to a Pacific news perspective. It is in line with developing countries around the world (Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean) who have set up national and regional news agencies as a way of countering the one way flow of information from the West.

PACNEWS was set up by a regional radio training project, the Pacific Broadcasting Training and Development Scheme (PACBROAD), which at that time was funded by the German foundation, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and UNESCO. UNESCO subsequently withdrew its funding, and the service was funded by FES and subscriptions. FES funding has finished (as of January 2000) and the service is funded by subscriptions from PICs and overseas countries. PACNEWS' operation is overseen by the Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association (PIBA), one of two regional media associations in the region. PACNEWS has set up a relationship with 15 contributing member countries — Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, the Marshall Islands, Fiji, PNG, the Solomon Islands, FSM, Tonga, Niue, the Cook Islands and the Republic of Belau. The newsagency has these aims:

- to provide a regular news service to inform Pacific Islanders of what is happening in the region (geared towards regional media use), and not to 'sell' news in a commercial sense;
- to balance the coverage of regional events by international news organisations and agencies, whose reports are often based on a foreign concepts of news, by covering not only socalled 'hard' news but development news as well;
- to establish a free flow of information (news exchange) with which journalists from the region and listeners/readers closely identify as a local initiative;
- to help unite the culturally diverse audience/readership in the region;

and

- contribute to informing the international public more accurately and more fully about Pacific life (PACBROAD 1987).

PACNEWS was originally housed with PACBROAD in Suva. It was relocated to Honiara in the Solomon Islands when both were expelled by the Fijian Government in May 1990. The post-coup Rambuka government had a number of concerns about PACBROAD, namely its efforts to support press freedom and to train critically-aware journalists. After its expulsion, PACBROAD spent some time in New Zealand (Radio New Zealand offered it a temporary home) before relocating to Honiara late in 1990. During the changeovers, PACNEWS continued to supply daily bulletins. PACNEWS eventually moved from Honiara (because the telecommunication costs were prohibitive) to Port Vila, Vanuatu, where PACBROAD had relocated after its expulsion from Fiji. In 1998, PACNEWS and PACBROAD, along with PIBA, returned to Fiji. The Rabuka government was still in power, but the political times and sensitivity about the media had changed sufficiently to make this possible. Fiji is the ideal hub

for the service as it has one of the better telecommunications infrastructures in the region.

Difficulties in setting up inter-island communications had previously been the major obstacle to a regional news service. When PACNEWS started, there were few telephone lines into some Pacific countries (telephone calls had to be placed through an operator) and some countries had to rely on radio-telephones to make contact with people overseas (Seward 1999). Initially PACNEWS used telephone and telex to gather news, but this proved expensive because of the length of time involved and the unreliability of the transmission systems. However, this was an advantage to the service in its initial stages as it meant the stations could use their existing equipment and the service could become operational (Bussiek 1990). PACBROAD then approached the German Technical Foundation (GTZ) for funding for fax machines for all the stations. This allowed each of the contributing stations to send news items to the PACNEWS editor by fax. Now, with the exception of Tuvalu, e-mail is used to transmit the news items between the member stations and the PACNEWS office.

The PACNEWS editor compiles three bulletins a day, five days a week, by selecting and editing material from the news items sent by member countries. The number of items sent tends to vary

from station to station, with the stronger newsrooms (NBC, SIBC, FBCL, Radio New Zealand) sending the largest number of stories. Along with these stations, newspapers in Fiji, the Cook Islands, Samoa, PNG and New Zealand also make significant contributions.

The PACNEWS subscriber base has grown and in addition to Pacific media subscribers (radio, TV and print), it includes subscribers in Australia, France, and the United States. Its move onto the Internet has assisted this and made PACNEWS more accessible to potential overseas subscribers (see www.piba.org.fj/pacnews/pacdetails.html). With media markets in the Pacific Islands being so small, overseas subscriptions are important as they help generate revenue to run the service. PACNEWS has provided a source of regular and reliable material to overseas subscribers such as RA and RNZI, with the result that both these news services have increased their Pacific coverage.

The Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) also has a regional news service now — PINA NIUS — (five days a week) which it transmits via the Internet, and in 2000, it started an on-line feature service. In addition to this, PINA produces another on-line news service (www.pinanius.org/pina/ index.html) which monitors threats to media press freedom in the Pacific. The availability of two regional services — PACNEWS and PINA NUIS — supplemented by a growing number of Internet news services as newspapers and other media go on-line, means that the amount of Pacific news available across the region has

grown considerably over the past decade.

PACNEWS would be a valuable model for Indigenous broadcasters in Australia. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters in urban and rural areas already have access to fax machines and e-mail at the stations from which they broadcast. And in remote areas, community councils or local schools usually have a fax machine and sometimes e-mail. BRACS broadcasters could access this. In addition, the staffing model for PACNEWS is not expensive, consisting of two editors and an administrator.

Government influence and the media

The degrees of government control of the news media in the Pacific varies from benign forms of interference to more serious attempts to restrict press freedom (Robie 1995; Weber 1999; Seward 1999; PINA IFEX on-line reports). It is not unusual for Pacific Island politicians to criticise what they perceive as bias or inaccuracy in the news media. The impact of this criticism is felt more directly by the media in the PICs, especially those with small populations, because the media, politicians and the community are in much closer contact than they are in Australia — they can literally be living and working side by side. The lack of diverse media outlets in PICs also means that it is much easier for politicians to target the one national radio station or the only daily newspaper. Some politicians, in circumstances like these, also believe that they can run the media better, and from time to time have attempted to regulate the media and/or design media policies to achieve this.

More overt forms of government influence range from suppressing stories and releasing information after an issue is no longer current, to costly libel suits against under-resourced media outlets. However, even in these instances, censorship, where it does occur, tends to be *ad hoc* and reflects the political concerns of the party in government. Pacific politicians have also used ‘culture’ and the journalist’s need to understand this as a way of containing news. This is a complex issue because respect for culture is important, but is not necessarily at odds with the media being a watchdog, reporting on corruption and inefficiencies in government or the bureaucracy (Helu 1995). Some of the existing restrictions on news flow are in place because Pacific Island governments do not fully understand the role of the news media in a democracy, and have picked up on the negative aspects

of news coverage rather than the positive possibilities. Some government ministers are suspicious of any media and keep them at arm’s length. This is not helped by the fact that the media are new institutions in the Pacific and the status of journalists is not high. While

the number of tertiary educated journalists is increasing, in many PICs, the media employ school-leavers who have to learn on the job. This is difficult for media organisations because most do not have the resources required to provide in-house training and depend on donor assistance for this. Training is therefore *ad hoc* and short-term.

Reporting by the print media in the Pacific can be variable in quality and some is inaccurate and biased. Radio is generally less exposed because of the 'spoken' form of its bulletins. However, both radio and print have a problem with English translation. Pacific journalists and producers are expected to be fluent in their main Indigenous language and English. Politicians and those in the urban centres who read newspapers and listen to the English bulletins on radio can be critical of the standard of English. This is a good example of the impact of imposed or transferred media forms from English-speaking countries, which do not fit comfortably in a Pacific context. It is exacerbated by the fact that Pacific Islanders who have traveled to New Zealand or Australia bring back with them expectations about newspaper, radio and television standards which their own English language news media sometimes find hard to meet. This perceived lack of standards is a problem for the news media as they appear 'unprofessional' and this can make them vulnerable to political criticism.

Independent media content requires real separation from government and a level of resources that gives the news media the freedom to pursue their goals. Over the past decade, the corporatisation of the national radio services, the growth of commercial radio, and the increase in privately-owned newspapers, has assisted with this independence. However, some Pacific media organisations are still too small, too recent, and too much in need of government funds or news patronage to be really independent.

Resources: a question of priorities

There is a need throughout the Pacific for more resources to improve the quality of Indigenous broadcasting. Until recently, government funding was an advantage as national radio services were able to develop outside the highly competitive commercial sector. But this is now increasingly a disadvantage as cutbacks force programming compromises. The problem facing national service broadcasters is that Pacific governments are largely reliant on aid agencies to fund media development, but give media a low priority. This is a concern because aid agencies react to government priorities. One of the most immediate consequences of this is that some Pacific national radio stations, particularly the smaller ones, are no better equipped than the community radio stations Indigenous broadcasters use in Australia or Canada. Pacific stations have benefited from aid projects. AIDAB (now

AusAID) funded studios for the SIBC and Radio Vanuatu in the early 1980s and both have five on-air studios and a production studio. UNESCO has also been active in this area. But the need to rely on aid for equipment purchases and studio construction is problematic because all studios and equipment have a certain lifespan and require upgrading after that period but there is seldom a guarantee of more funding.

State of the art equipment is not necessary for Pacific stations, nor is it essential for good production. However, in too many instances, the standard of the equipment and studios has a direct impact on the type of programs that can be produced. Some Pacific broadcasters cannot record material because of the lack of tape recorders and software, or because their equipment is so antiquated that it is impossible to produce a reasonable level of programming. When station

equipment is limited, staff usually produce basic program forms without recorded input. The result is a very conservative form of programming that is not stimulating to listen to, and which does little to elevate the status of broadcasting. One response would be for Pacific governments to give broadcast equipment a higher priority when requesting aid, but even this may not result in the acquisition of appropriate equipment. Western consultants contracted by aid agencies usually recommend studio designs and equipment which they are familiar with, but these may not be the most suitable choice for Pacific stations. This approach to providing broadcasting resources resonates with the problems confronting BRACS in Australia. If aid is to be of real value, the appropriate choice of equipment needs to be made in consultation with local station staff and the community. Serious consideration also has to be given to the on-going resources necessary to maintain the equipment and whether the radio station can afford this.

Another problem with aid is that the application process and the eventual receipt of the aid can take years. Radio Tuvalu waited five years for the equipment from one agency. The equipment, which was minimal, was not delivered all at once, but came separately over that period. If Pacific radio stations did attain some level of standardisation, they could band together to demand better service from the major equipment suppliers. The same applies equally to Indigenous broadcasters in Australia and Canada in rural and remote areas who are very much at the mercy of equipment manufacturers. PIBA has worked towards this over the last decade and on a number of occasions received funds from GTZ for a standard range of equipment for its member stations. Despite this, it cannot meet all the equipment needs of each station. In 1998, Native broadcasters in Canada began to join forces to get better deals on equipment and maintenance. A lack of trained Pacific Island technicians and engineers means that Pacific radio stations are unusually reliant on technical information from overseas experts. This factor, combined with the Pacific’s isolation from major markets, has meant that

stations often lack the information necessary to make informed choices about equipment and studio design. This situation will not change until more Pacific technicians are trained and the information flow improved.

Finding a balance

The most pressing issue for the Pacific Island national broadcasting services is survival and their need to be guaranteed a reasonable level of funding each year. Some incentive to raise extra revenue is reasonable as this helps to keep the radio stations focussed on the service they are providing. However, the pressure to raise funding is threatening to compromise their public service role — one which is vital as national radio is still the major vehicle for communication in the PICs. At the same time, a lack of resources and expertise has meant that many national stations have not developed or implemented a strategic plan that defines their new role and work.

Stations in the South Pacific need to work in conjunction with government to put in place long term plans covering issues such as equipment and staff requirements. Central to these plans should be some clarification of the role of a national broadcaster and its relationship with its constituencies, the urban, rural, and outer island audiences. Part of this process could involve detailing the program priorities of each group and what this entails in terms of staff and equipment resources. Some notion of balancing the needs of all three target groups (and the diversity of communications requirements that exist within each group) will also be essential. Once this has been done, an overall program plan could be constructed which sets out how program priorities will be met — who will be served, how and when. Training staff in a range of areas from management to new program forms will then be necessary to assist them make this transition. These types of initiatives are needed urgently because national broadcasters are increasingly competing with commercial radio

and television, and risk losing their primacy as a communications medium. Moreover, Pacific governments, already strapped for funding, may use the growth of these new media as an excuse to cut their funds further, as they could argue that there are enough other media to serve the country.

The urgent question facing Pacific governments is whether they want their radio services to be really effective nationally—delivering information that only national services can to a range of audiences—or whether they are going to continue to reduce their political and financial support, eventually allowing the distinctly less Indigenous, less service-oriented commercial media to dominate.

Chapter five

A leap of faith: the emergence of ‘big’ television

> We Pacific Islanders have met and tamed other strange creatures before such as radio and telephones. Television in the Pacific will be what we make of it (A. Baiteke, Secretary- General of the South Pacific Commission in UNESCO 1989, p.45).

Commercial and semi-commercial television stations in the Pacific are the norm. The semi-commercial stations are government-funded and accept advertising to cover their operating costs. The history of — and rationale for — the emergence of commercial and semi-commercial television illustrates how difficult it is to produce Indigenous content when working within imposed television models and technology. The introduction of commercial television also demonstrates how political interests and technological determinism can compromise the ideal of the media being used for development and education. In Australia, the political rhetoric around the RCTS claimed these would meet the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in remote areas. In the Pacific, politicians have emphasised similar themes: the need to provide better education and information services to remote areas; and to unite and develop nations through the use of communications technology.

The colonial legacy

The dominant television models in the PICs — French and American television — were established prior to 1980 in territories of either France or the United States of America. This followed a pattern set in the 1960s when Western countries set up metropolitan models of television in developing countries of economic and strategic importance to them. This type of colonial legacy is obvious in the Pacific, as both France and America have used television to extend their influence in the region (Thomas 1986, p.16). While the French and American governments initially introduced television as a service for their expatriates working in the region, they also felt that metropolitan television programs, dominated by French or American values and assumptions, could be used as a means of acculturation (Hill 1982; Johnstone 1984; Thomas 1986). This prompted the Kanak independence movement to accuse France of using television as ‘one of the pillars of the colonial policy of integration against the Kanak people’ (Hill 1982, p.19).

In the American territories private companies largely run television, as they do in the USA,

and the services consist of broadcast channels as well as cable television. The programs are received via satellite or videotape cassette straight from the West Coast of the United States or Honolulu. All services are dominated by entertainment programs and carry news, information programs, and advertising from the mainland with little or no Indigenous content. On the other hand, France extended its public service model of television to the Pacific, transmitting television and radio via satellite and videocassette straight from Paris to New Caledonia and French Polynesia (Johnstone 1984; Marere 1990). French television does include some Indigenous programming, particularly locally produced news and information. In June 2000, a subscription satellite television pay service will be commence in French Polynesia. A similar service was introduced in New Caledonia in November 1999, through a new TV satellite channel, CanalSat, offering thirteen channels (including sports, movie, cartoons, general news and RFO-French Overseas Network-) for a monthly subscription of around 100 US dollars.

In the 1980s, it was estimated that the amount of French and American content on these services ranged from 90 to 96 percent (Thomas 1986, p.16; Fell 1989, p.5). This was still the case in the late 1990s. Waqavonovono (1981, p. 15) noted that as a consequence, public communication or ‘mass media’ are not accessible to — or are aimed at — the mass market. Pacific Island countries are ‘largely recipients of mass media, forms whose primary point of reference is the productive and political processes of industrial societies whose historical experience and present capabilities are vastly different from our own’. The dependence on overseas programs has also meant that the dominant television languages in the Pacific are English and French. As there is very little content in Pacific languages, these metropolitan languages are reinforced as superior, as is by inference, European culture.

Britain, Australia, and New Zealand did not provide television in their own Pacific territories. Johnstone (1984, p.4) argues that this ‘probably owed more to parsimony than to policy’. Britain was involved in an unsuccessful attempt to establish television in Fiji in the mid-1970s and Australian and New Zealand companies have subsequently set up television services in the Pacific —PNG 1987, Niue 1988, the Cook Islands 1989, Nauru 1991, Fiji 1991, Vanuatu 1992 and Samoa 1995. Despite a great deal of rhetoric about the need for Indigenous content, Australian and New Zealand companies have done little to foster this in their years of operation. They have also imposed their own media models on their client countries.

When Pacific Island countries do establish television, they have the option of limiting their transmission hours so that they can provide a reasonable balance of Indigenous content and overseas material, or providing a broader service with a larger percentage of overseas material. The first option is very difficult because the combination of imported models and

technology generally determines that certain types of programming will dominate. Once the technology is acquired — as we have seen with the RCTS in Australia — station managers are under pressure to fill up broadcast hours to get some return from their investment. The least expensive option is to import overseas programs because they are sold at prices that vastly undercut the cost of producing local programs. The lack of available Indigenous programming further exacerbates the problem.

The emergence of television

Until 1980, television developed slowly in the Pacific because it was an expensive medium and Pacific Island governments felt that they had more pressing development needs. However, as was seen in the examination of AUSSAT in Australia, the marketing of the technological revolution can circumvent social impact concerns. During the 1980s, a number of South Pacific countries expanded their telecommunications networks because they felt that they were under pressure to modernise their countries — to bring them into the 20th century. Pacific governments have been susceptible to marketing claims by Western corporations about the 'communications revolution'. Isolation is one reason for this as many PICs lack access to the technological expertise they need. More significantly, Western corporations are targeting Pacific countries as they are interested in using the region as a 'stepping stone' towards global networks (Cook 1992; Fell 1986, 1989, 1992). They may provide services to some of the larger Pacific countries, but overall, the region is still viewed as a small, insignificant market. In practice, these firms — along with the elites in Pacific countries — will be the major beneficiaries of technological expansion, not people living in rural and outer island areas (Fell 1986; Marjarom 1990). The focus of this development also tends to be on telecommunications (phone, fax, data services) for urban areas

PEACESAT

One notable exception to this technology-centred approach, is the Pan-Pacific Education and Communication Experiments by Satellite (PEACESAT), established by the University of Hawaii in 1971 to service 20 Pacific locations. PEACESAT's mission statement says that it facilitates development and public service telecommunications, and that this is essential in the Pacific because of the cost of access to the Internet (http://obake.peacesat.hawaii.edu). Between 1971 and 1985, PEACESAT made use of NASA's first Applications Technology Satellite (ATS-1) to provide information to non-commercial sectors such as education, health, public welfare, environmental and scientific organisations and emergency communications

(Seumahu 1982, p.61). It resembles experiments in the late 1970s in northern Canada with satellite television in remote Inuit communities — an issue we will discuss in following chapters. Although the age of the initial Pacific satellite, combined with its positioning, limited the range of communications options possible, the potential for satellite technology to link people up to each other across such vast distances was considered very valuable. This was especially so as groups did not have to pay to access the network. PEACESAT operated again briefly using a different satellite in the late 1980s and is now fully operational using yet another satellite. The PEACESAT systems are capable of voice, data and videoconferencing, and continue to experiment with different technical applications. There are now well over 40 PEACESAT sites and main form of communication use is for voice and data. However, PEACESAT was not a Pacific initiative and questions still remain about the way Pacific governments approach satellite technology and development (Seumahu 1982, Seumahu & Davies 1983, Hudson 1982, Hudson 1983a, Hudson 1983b, Cooperman 1991).

The impact of television

The pressure to modernise is powerful and the introduction of television into the South Pacific along the lines seen in other developing countries illustrates this. Many well-traveled, middle class Pacific Islanders — a number of whom have been educated in West countries — have developed a taste for overseas content and international affairs. Advertisers interested in targeting this profitable section of the audience reinforce this preference for overseas material as they place their advertisements in the programs popular with this audience sector.

The other prevalent forms of Western technology and content in the Pacific are VCRs and imported video movies and television programs. VCR ownership increased steadily in the 1980s in urban and rural areas and the outer islands (Richstad 1981, 1984; Johnstone 1984; King 1984; Thomas 1986; Ogden 1991; Plange 1991). As a consequence, video hire shops sprang up throughout the Pacific. Apart from stocking videos that are readily available in Australia, Pacific video stores also carry a great deal of pirated material. The widespread availability of such video programs in the 1980s was one of the factors that influenced the television debate in the Pacific. Pacific governments became increasingly concerned about the ‘video invasion’ and their lack of control over the video rental market. As a result, some supported the introduction of local television because they felt that this would give them the opportunity to monitor and shape programs, providing ‘appropriate cultural content’ to help counter the influx of unwanted overseas video material. The introduction of television was rapid, particularly between the late 1980s and the year 2000. All of the 22 countries and territories of the South Pacific are now able to receive some form of television, with the majority of this content coming from the West.

There is concern throughout the Pacific that television has started without adequate thought being

given to other options. Countries adopting TV appear to have given little consideration to its long- term economic and sociocultural implications. In 1989, UNESCO, the SPC, and the Asian Broadcasting Union (ABU) sponsored a meeting of Pacific media people and government representatives in Suva to discuss these concerns. It became clear that different groups of Pacific countries viewed the introduction of television in three ways — conditionally, developmentally, and oppositionally (Horsfield 1990, p.13). The first group felt television should be introduced because it would benefit their economies but argued there had to be controls to protect and nurture Indigenous cultures. This group included PNG, Fiji and Tonga. On the other hand, the Solomon Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia saw TV mainly as a vehicle for educating and training 'for socio-economic development, moral awareness and national unity' (Horsfield 1990). The third group — including Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Kiribati — felt that TV was too expensive and were concerned about the impact of an alien cultural form.

Many of the speakers at the meeting stressed the need for caution when introducing television, and referred to the Caribbean — another region of island nations — where television stations are almost totally dependent on imported American programs (Lent 1988). The meeting heard that many of the Caribbean countries 'rushed into television' and now wished that they could turn the clock back 'to allow them to plan properly' (UNESCO 1989, p.12). It was stressed that the Pacific is one of the few regions in the world where television was yet to become widespread and this meant that Pacific countries could gain from the experience of others (UNESCO 1989, p.42). Strategic planning, however, can be very difficult for Pacific countries (Apted 1983; Madden and White 1987).

A legislative vacuum

Thomas (1987, p.35) points out that very few of the Pacific countries have the 'organisational structure to establish adequate policy or legislation'. This becomes clear when examining existing legislation or policies which appear more concerned with technical standards than with questions of Indigenous content, advertising standards, and ownership regulations. Western media corporations have been the major beneficiaries of this. The decision to adopt television has often been made by a few key people in government without widespread consultation. This has resulted in the interests of Pacific countries being displaced by large business interests from outside the region 'who do deals with Ministers' (Johnstone cited in

Molnar 1990, p.12). And despite the rhetoric about national development, such ‘deals’ have clearly favoured foreign media owners who seek to sell equipment and to enlarge the audiences for their programs and advertisements. One of the real difficulties is that the prevailing technological determinist approach leads to a sense of ‘inevitability’ of television coming to the Pacific. Television has been compared with a new strain of flu which sneaks ‘into the country somehow in this jet age of superfast transport and communication’ (Richstad 1981, p.5). If communication technology is to be effective, it must be part of local infrastructure rather than just being ‘dropped out of the sky’.

The introduction of broadcast television into the PICs has been characterised by a number of common features. After an initial period of review where television was delayed for economic and developmental reasons (as in PNG, Fiji, the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tonga), Pacific countries have either accepted a foreign offer or contracted a foreign company to provide a television service. Their previously cautious approach then appears to change suddenly as they leap into television. An examination of the decisions made to introduce television reveals a confusing picture of agreements being made, then reversed, and then adopted again. Two other common features are inadequate public consultation by the governments involved and the adoption of commercially-driven, rather than public service models. As a result, television has not brought about the anticipated benefits of

education and development in the Pacific, despite the rhetoric. The following case studies of PNG and Fiji’s decisions to adopt television illustrate this clearly.

Television in Papua New Guinea

Broadcast television for PNG had been mentioned as early as 1963 in a World Bank report:

> If television is able to do in the field of communication of knowledge and ideas the sort of work which the airplane has done in transport, then there is no reason why television should not be introduced in the Territory (cited in Hill 1982, p.25).

Over the next 20 years, the PNG administration — and then the independent PNG government — called for a number of studies on the introduction of television. The reports commissioned in the 1960s and 1970s endorsed the adoption of television but favoured government funded educational TV, arguing that PNG could not afford to establish a complete television service.

In 1982 the INTELSAT 4A satellite was repositioned over the Pacific making it possible for direct broadcasts of ABC television and QSTV (a remote commercial television station in Queensland) to be transmitted to PNG and other Pacific countries. PNG started to receive up to 17 hours of Australian television a day via satellite over which it had no control. The program listings for the ABC service were even printed in PNG's daily newspaper, the *Post Courier.* As a result of the interest in ABC TV and QSTV, an Australian company, Australian Microwave Systems, began selling equipment to Papua New Guineans so that they could receive the signals.

In 1983, a subsidiary of the Perth-based Parry Corporation, NBN-3 Newcastle, bought out a PNG video company with the aim of setting up PNG's first broadcast television station. The Parry Corporation then negotiated directly with the government for a licence, which it received in 1984. The Prime Minister during this period was Michael Somare. He was enthusiastic about television and felt that it could play a role in national development. He saw national television 'as a symbol of national maturity' and wanted to introduce it in time to celebrate the tenth anniversary of PNG's independence on 16 September 1985 (Horsfield 1990, p.156).

It has been claimed that Parry was granted the licence because it was obvious that 'people high up in government', including the Prime Minister, wanted the deal to go through (Horsfield *et al* 1988, p.6). A former deputy Prime Minister, Sir Ebia Olewale, was given a 10 percent share of the new company (NTN) in return for services rendered. As Horsfield notes (1990, p.158), Sir Ebia was a close friend of Somare's and a fellow founder of the Pangu Pati Party. At the same time, Somare compromised any potential bargaining power the government had to argue for Indigenous content by setting up a state negotiating team to negotiate directly with the Parry Corporation without any firm guidelines or expectations in place about the eventual service. PNG's existing legislation was inadequate as it had been drawn up in the 1950s and 1960s when television was 'seen as inferior to other media' (Madden and White 1987, p.55).

When the Nuigini Television Network (NTN) was issued with a licence in November 1984, this represented a complete abandonment of the public service developmental model of television that had been advocated in PNG since the sixties. As recently as 1980, the Minister for Public Utilities, Wiwa Korowi, had rejected broadcast television in these terms:

> We would be failing drastically in meeting the people's mandate if we allowed the introduction of television whilst a very large percentage of our people do not even have access to one or more of (the) basic needs (for food, water, shelter, clothing, education and health). I believe it is morally wrong, not only to consider television now but to even think