

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION, VOL 25, NO 3 (2000)

Speaking and Hearing: Aboriginal Newspapers and the Public Sphere in Canada and Australia

Shannon Avison

Michael Meadows

Abstract: Disenfranchised Aboriginal people in both Canada and Australia have had a long struggle to gain access to democratic institutions like the media. Aboriginal newspapers since the late nineteenth century in Australia, and early twentieth century in Canada, have played a crucial role in the symbolic reclamation of space for an Aboriginal public sphere. In this paper, we suggest that a combination of social and political events, along with particular policy environments, enabled the formation of Aboriginal public spheres through access to media technologies-in this case, the press. While broadcasting and multimedia may dominate the popular imaginary, it was print technology which set up the framework on which the emerging Aboriginal communications industry is built.

Résumé: Les autochtones non affranchis tant au Canada qu'en Australie ont mené une longue lutte pour avoir accès à des institutions démocratiques comme les médias. Les journaux autochtones, depuis la fin du dix-neuvième siècle en Australie et le début du vingtième siècle au Canada, ont joué un rôle crucial dans la réclamation symbolique de l'espace nécessaire pour une sphère publique autochtone. Dans cet article, nous suggérons qu'une combinaison d'événements sociaux et politiques, ainsi que des politiques particulières, ont rendu possible la formation de sphères publiques autochtones en permettant aux autochtones l'accès à des technologies médiatiques-dans ce cas, la presse. Bien que ce soient la radiodiffusion et les multimédias qui prédominent dans l'imaginaire populaire, ce sont les technologies de presse qui sont à la base de l'industrie émergente de la communication autochtone.

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal communication systems existed on the North American and Australian continents for tens of thousands of years before white invasion. As the power and influence of non-Aboriginal media has transformed the wider public sphere, Aboriginal people have continued to seek access to their own media for political, educational, and cultural reasons. This pattern of development of Aboriginal media worldwide has been influenced by the recognition of the possibility of using media as tools for cultural and political intervention-allowing the dispossessed to "speak as well as hear" (Girard, 1992, p. 2). This is driven by several impulses-combating stereotypes, addressing information gaps in non-Aboriginal society, and reinforcing community cultures. These responses by Aboriginal people have grown out of a commitment to the disparate communities in which they live.

While in one sense this process exists at the periphery of mainstream conceptions of the public sphere, we suggest the implications are far more profound. We argue that rather than adopting the idea of a single, all-encompassing public sphere, that instead we need to think in terms of a series of parallel and overlapping public spheres-spaces where participants with similar cultural backgrounds engage in activities concerning issues and interests of importance to them. In this way, they articulate their own discursive styles and formulate their own positions on issues that are then brought to a wider public sphere where they are able to interact "across lines of cultural diversity" (Fraser, 1993, p. 13). Behind much of the impetus for the development of Aboriginal media production is the fear of further cultural and language shifts because of the influence of mainstream media-symbolic of broader public sphere activity. Alien radio or television broadcasts for Aboriginal people in Australia and Canada represent a double-edged sword-constituting both a threat to and an information source for communities (Langton, 1993; Meadows, 1995b). Strategies initiated by Aboriginal communities to overcome the negative elements include varied forms of technical and cultural control, and production (Schmidt, 1993). In this sense, media technologies might be seen as a community cultural resource enabling public sphere activity rather than a harbinger of cultural imperialism (Meadows, 1994, 1995a). In this discussion, we consider the response by Aboriginal print media in Canada and Australia to an often hostile cultural environment and suggest how this has contributed to a re-conceptualizing of the notion of the public sphere (Habermas, 1974). Similarly, in her work with the independent press in Australia, Forde (1997, 1998) argues that journalism in that sector represents a crucial activity that extends contemporary ideas of the public sphere and democracy. Indigenous perceptions of racism in mainstream media-essentially a failure by the public sphere to account for Aboriginal cultural needs-have led to the development of alternative media systems and alternative public spheres.

Although this article focuses on newspapers, Aboriginal engagement with communication extends far beyond print technology. The explosion of broadcasting and use of the Internet by Indigenous peoples around the world is evidence of that (Molnar & Meadows, in press). Across Canada, there are numerous magazines produced by Aboriginal people, sometimes by the same organizations that also produce radio and television programs. Some, like *Aboriginal Voices*, have taken on a key advocacy role in publishing profiles of Aboriginal artists, along with critical discussion of the Aboriginal production environment and related policy issues. Although the Aboriginal print media sector in Australia has a long history-starting in 1836-it remains small, largely because of a lack of support and encouragement from public sphere institutions.

Ang (1990) reminds us that audience reception has deeply political and cultural implications so it should not be surprising to find that

Aboriginal audiences and communities have rejected what they perceive as a misrepresentation of their concerns and issues. Aboriginal people's voices remain suppressed in news coverage of events in which they are deeply implicated. Investigations of mainstream media coverage of Indigenous issues in Australia and Canada reveal Aboriginal voices are still vastly outnumbered by non-Indigenous sources (Meadows, 1993, 1999, 2000). Indigenous people's response has manifested itself in various ways-including the adoption of print technology. Indigenous agency has been an important element which has enabled Aboriginal people to gain access to a wide range of media technologies and to appropriate them for their own cultural purposes (Meadows, 1994; 1995a). This article focuses on print and newspapers in particular-the first modern media technology with which Aboriginal people engaged. It is a sector often overlooked by those who are quite naturally drawn to the more popular world of broadcasting and digital production (Rose, 1996).

THE CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF PRINT TECHNOLOGY

The Indigenous peoples of North America and Australia used graphic representations for many thousands of years before the introduction of writing, including, more recently, the use of pictorial calendars (in 1800) by the Ojibway and the Dakota (Goody, 1987). Aboriginal Australians still use iconography in paintings. Inuktitut and Cree existed as languages without a written form until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when missionaries introduced a syllabic script into remote northern regions. Cree was not taught as a spoken and written form in schools until 1970 (Bennett, 1988). Similarly, the first Australian policy move to recognize the value of Aboriginal languages did not occur until the election of the Whitlam Labor government in 1972 (Schmidt, 1993). The relatively recent non-Indigenous recognition of the value of Aboriginal languages and the very nature of oral cultures perhaps helps to explain why media which privilege speech and "real time" forms of representation, like broadcasting, are preferred by Indigenous communities. But the Aboriginal print media fulfill a crucial role in public sphere activity.

Within 50 years of Johan Gutenberg's invention of printing in the 1450s, the technology had moved into printers' workshops all over Europe. The rise of the press in eighteenth-century Amsterdam-from the monthly gazette to the weekly, and eventually the daily paper-provided Europeans with their first newspapers (Eisenstein, 1983). In North America and Australia, Aboriginal communities' first regular use of print technology came in 1828 and 1836 respectively. Goody (1986, 1987) suggests that the introduction of writing into such oral cultures tends to create a new class of literates with non-literates filling the lower positions. He argues that print technologies effectively have "governed the form and language of the discourse" where they have intervened (Goody, 1986, p. 99). The shift to writing, in a general sense, is able to extend the control of time and space away from the limits of the local-a particular feature of many oral cultures. The written word also drives moves towards a more formal concept of evidence and by association, notions of truth. The written word in the form of a story, narrative, or myth, for example, acquires a truth value possessed by no oral version (Goody, 1986, 1987).

Although the manifestation of such changes in oral cultures represents a profound re-ordering of social structures, Feldman (1988) suggests that we should be wary of approaches to literacy which see it as a precondition for critical thinking, for example. She theorizes that it is *genre*-as a form of discourse, a "whole form of organisation"-that influences the way people think. Thus, discourse may be written or spoken. Feldman (1988) concludes that "genre scaffolds or makes possible...a certain kind of thinking about thinking. It's not material to it whether it's written or oral. What's crucial is the organisation" (p. 6). This raises the notion of the existence of many "literacies" and "oralities" which are socially or culturally determined. It suggests, too, that individual cultures might determine how to appropriate technologies which *in themselves* cannot transform those cultures (Bruner, 1988; Cayley, 1988).

While there is undoubtedly some impact by various forms of media on oral cultures, the nature of that impact remains problematic. The level of literacy in many Aboriginal communities in Canada and Australia at the time of print and electronic media interventions was minimal and remains low. So how, then, have these oral societies negotiated access to print media technologies? One way of understanding this is to consider the concept of the public sphere and how Aboriginal communities effectively have reconstituted this notion in accordance with their own community social relations.

HABERMAS AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Jürgen Habermas' treatise on the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989, originally published in 1962) and subsequent discussion around the notion of the public sphere (1974, 1992) provide a useful framework for us in this work-in-progress on the development of the idea of an Aboriginal public sphere. It is useful in that it focuses attention on the role of historical sites of discursive activity-such as Aboriginal newspapers-in the democratization of societies. Although Habermas' later writings (1974) provide more concise accounts, the *Structural Transformation* is especially helpful because it uses the historical accounts of emerging democracies to develop theoretical elements. These in turn give concrete examples of public spheres in various stages of emergence (and decline) and thus can be compared with the evolution of other historically situated public spheres-including the Aboriginal public spheres in Canada and Australia.

A critical element of Habermas' notion of the public sphere is in the relationship he sees between a shift in the role of the mass media from centres of rational-critical discursive activity to commercialized vehicles for advertising and public relations, along with the decline of the liberal public sphere in the nineteenth century. In later writings, Habermas (1974) describes the public sphere as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (p. 29). This model of the public sphere was developed with acknowledgment of a strict separation between the public and private realms of society. But for Habermas (1974), unrestricted access to the public sphere is a defining characteristic with the role of the mass media central in this process. Garnham (1986), for one, sees the strength of this model in its stress on the "materiality" of public spaces where public opinion takes shape (p.

40). This is a key point on which we base our argument here.

The decline of the liberal public sphere was hastened with a shift from the press being a forum for rational critical debate for private citizens assembled to form "a public," to a privately owned and controlled institution that could be manipulated by publishers. For Habermas (1989), this came about with the collapse of the barrier between editorial and advertising. Despite its flaws and critics, enlisting such ideas incorporated in the public sphere model does offer ways of re-conceptualizing the limits of democracy (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991; Calhoun, 1992). Much of our argument here relies on the work of Nancy Fraser in doing just this. Fraser's feminist critique of Habermas' model-which excludes women, "plebian" men, and all people of colour-nevertheless prompts a rethinking rather than a rejection of his ideas.

For Fraser (1993), the important theoretical task is to "render visible the ways in which societal inequality infects formally exclusive existing public spheres and taints discursive interactions with them" (p. 13). Her reconceived public sphere model theorizes each public sphere as providing a space where participants with similar cultural backgrounds can engage in discussions about issues and interests important to them, using their own discursive styles-and genres-and formulating their positions on various issues. It is then that these are brought to the wider public sphere in which "members of different more limited publics talk across lines of cultural diversity" (p. 7).

The next step, according to Fraser (1993), is to challenge Habermas' earlier conception of the public sphere as a single entity and to propose the existence and operation of multiple public spheres where members of society who are subordinated or ignored-"subaltern counterpublics"-are able to deliberate amongst themselves (p. 14). Habermas arrived at a conclusion closer to Fraser's in his later writings (Habermas, 1974). Hartley & McKee (2000) reach a similar conclusion in their discussion of an Indigenous public sphere as a "highly mediated public `space' for developing notions of Indigeneity and putting them to work" in relation to journalism practices in reporting Indigenous affairs (p. viii). However, their conception seems to be more a case of how Indigenousness is made within the broader public sphere. We are concerned with how Indigenous people "make themselves" within their own public sphere and the implications that flow from this.

THE ABORIGINAL PUBLIC SPHERE

As we have outlined, Habermas' broad characterization of the liberal bourgeois public sphere has undergone considerable critique since its inception. The Aboriginal public sphere should not be understood in terms of a non-dominant variant of the broader public sphere. Although it develops in close proximity to and with a great deal of influence from mainstream society, it should be seen as a discrete formation that develops in a unique context. It is the product of contestation with the mainstream public sphere. While it operates within a dominant context, it is its "Aboriginalness" that is its defining characteristic. Extending Fraser's (1993) notion of the existence of multiple public spheres, we suggest that Aboriginal public spheres can be seen as providing opportunities for people who are regularly subordinated and ignored by mainstream public sphere processes. They enable Aboriginal people to deliberate together, to develop their own counter-discourses, and to interpret their own identities and experiences. This highlights the importance of seeing the notion of Aboriginality, or identity formation, as a dynamic process which takes place through dialogue (Langton, 1993).

The Aboriginal public sphere, then, might be defined in various ways: as sites of discursive activity like political meetings and newspaper production; as the processes of public opinion; and as a conceptual focusing on analysis of the phenomenon of the public sphere. Aboriginal public spheres are frames to be understood as existing on a variety of levels: clan, community/reserve, provincial/territorial, regional, urban, national, and international. They are also constituted, in some measure, by mainstream media. The Aboriginal public sphere is the site where Aboriginal people find the information and resources they need to deliberate regarding issues of concern to them. In keeping with Habermas' principle of publicity, it is accessible to all citizens and, ideally, it is a space where the views of participants are judged on their acceptability and "reasonability" to the Aboriginal community, rather than on the social status of a journalistic source making an argument. This is essentially an "authorising" process (O'Regan, 1990, p. 68; Ginsburg, 1991; 1993). Storytelling, art and music, and even silence are important ways in which people make their positions known. An ideal Aboriginal public sphere accommodates these communicative styles.

The Aboriginal public sphere is a space that can accommodate non-mainstream discursive styles and non-traditional perspectives. It is a site where collective self-determination can take place. The ideal Aboriginal public sphere promotes the realization of social equality as a basis for ensuring that self-determination includes all community members, especially less powerful constituencies like women and children. Finally, the Aboriginal public sphere ideally engages in public dialogue where cultural values, political aspirations, and social concerns of its participants are introduced into larger public spheres where they might influence discussions there (Avison, 1996).

Arguably, some "traditional" Aboriginal public spheres conform more closely to the public sphere principles set out by Habermas than does the bourgeois society he used as his ideal type. Notions of the public spheres in Aboriginal societies in Australia and Canada tended to centre on small, clan-based groups. Johansen (1991) explains how the Cherokee "usually split their villages when they became too large to permit each adult a voice in council" (p. 58). Similarly, when communities grew too large in the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation in northern Ontario, people were sent out to start satellite settlements (Johansen, 1991). In Australia, clan groups were most often between 30 and 50 in number, perhaps enabling more effective operation of decision-making processes and public sphere debate.

Along with the physical size of communities, the values and institutions of these oral societies-through practices such as gift exchange and sharing, for example-played a key role in enabling public sphere activity. As with the dynamic notion of identity, the nature of

"traditional" Aboriginal public spheres has waxed and waned according to the nature and extent of the dialogue with non-Aboriginal society. We suggest that many traditional Aboriginal public spheres went into decline following European contact as a result of communities being marginalized and disenfranchised through their lack of access to information, and the control and management of their lives by successive governments in Australia and Canada. The enforced gathering of Aboriginal people into settlements and missions played an important part in this (Dyck, 1991; Frideres, 1988; Kidd, 1997).

In the following overview of Aboriginal media in Canada and Australia, we examine the rise of newspapers as mediated public spheres. We examine the problematic role of cultural policy and whether it was developed only to support a non-political Aboriginal public sphere that was, after Habermas, "feudalized" by private and public institutions.

ABORIGINAL NEWSPAPERS: CANADA

The print media in North America grew from a system of communication covering most of the continent before white contact, 500 years ago. Then, Indian runners (sometimes young women) or tribal messengers were officially recognized by the entrenched governing systems as carriers of information (Henry, 1981). The system began to break down as European settlement encroached more and more on Indian land. A political resurgence began in the United States with the first edition of the *Cherokee Phoenix* on February 21, 1828. It was doubly significant in that the *Phoenix* was a bilingual newspaper, published in English and Cherokee. Arising from political, educational, and religious needs, the paper used the 86-character syllabic alphabet created by a Cherokee silversmith, Sequoyah (Danky & Hady, 1984; Henry, 1981; Murphy, 1982). In Canada, a Methodist missionary in the 1840s (Petroni, 1990) introduced a similar syllabic script to the Cree.

This new-found literacy achieved by Aboriginal people in North America attracted varied responses. The United States government responded to publication of the *Cherokee Phoenix* by moving the Cherokee from their tribal lands to North Dakota and smashing their printing presses (Bennett, 1988). Around 150 years later, newspapers publishing in their own languages have taken on extraordinary significance for the Cree-Ojibway of northern Ontario. As Harrington (1985) observes, "*The Wawatay News* is so important to the northern people that it is probably the most read piece of literature that is produced in syllabics, next to the Bible" (p. 12).

Mainstream media mis-representation of Aboriginal people in Canada has compelled them to turn to their own media where they can "define their own identities and legitimise their values and goals" (Raudsepp, 1984, p. 10). Their mission, like their counterparts south of the border, is to provide the context so often missing in the dominant non-Indian press (Murphy, 1983; Weston, 1996). The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs' records in Ottawa reveal around 40 Native publications before 1970, all published by "government agencies or other non-Native groups." Since then, around 90 Native-produced publications have appeared in Canada, coinciding with a trend towards self-determination (Raudsepp, 1984).

A landmark publication in the long tradition of Aboriginal newspaper publishing in Canada began with production of the *Native Voice* in December 1946-85 years after the Arctic's Greenlandic language newspaper, *Atuagagdliutit* ("*Something offered for reading*"), was started by southern Greenland's district commissioner (National Aboriginal Communications Society, 1987; Stenbaek, 1992). The *Native Voice* was still being published 50 years later in 1996. The Native Brotherhood of British Columbia produced 7,000 copies of the first edition and sent them to the B.C. tribes and to Indian and non-Indian organizations across Canada (*Native Voice*, 1947). In its first editorial, the newspaper set out its approach and purpose, heavy with public sphere rhetoric:

Our views are undenominational [*sic*] and non-political and all are welcome to use the freedom of the press within the pages of the NATIVE VOICE....The NATIVE VOICE, while invading the privileged sanctuary of the press, heretofore not occupied by our people, does not find it necessary to apologise for its efforts which will be a long awaited stimulant leading toward a better way of life for all the Native people of Canada. News and views will be presented in our own way, catering always to the Native people, still, broad enough to realise that all people are human and are inclined to err, and with this thought in mind we would appreciate any comments from all races. (*Native Voice*, 1947, p. 1)

The producer of the *Native Voice*, the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, was formed in 1931. Over the next few years, other Aboriginal organizations emerged: the first provincial Metis organization in Saskatchewan in 1937; the Indian Association of Canada in 1939; the Union of Saskatchewan Indians and the Union of Ontario Indians in 1946; and the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood in the late 1940s (Frideres, 1988). These organizations and many others which followed acted as communication centres for their communities. Between May 1960 and May 1963, four issues of the *Indian Outlook* were published by the Federation (formerly Union) of Saskatchewan Indians. The fourth edition, with a print run of 8,000 copies, was a mimeographed letter-sized news bulletin with no pictures or advertising. During 1963, the federal government's Centennial Commission provided Native groups with around \$150,000 for such projects. Administration of funding was transferred to the Department of the Secretary of State in 1966 (Department of Secretary of State, 1967).

Federal government support for the production of Cree-language programs on commercial radio in Alberta in 1968 was expanded with the creation of the Alberta Native Communications Society and publication of a monthly newspaper, *Native People*. From 1983, it was published as the *AMMSA newsletter*. It changed its name to *Windspeaker* in 1986 and was still publishing in 1998. In the same year in southern Alberta, the Communications Society of Indian News Media launched the *Kainai News*. The growth of Aboriginal newspapers took a huge leap following the release in 1969 of a White Paper on Indian Policy. The Indian leadership universally condemned it. Although it was formally withdrawn in June 1970, it had reinforced for Aboriginal people the national scope of the colonial experience. But it had also provoked Aboriginal people into identifying their cultural, political, and social commonalities. In the wake of the White Paper, the *Micmac News* was one of the first new papers to emerge, although an earlier, short-lived version had been published in

Nova Scotia in 1932, and again in 1965-66 (*Micmac News*, 1990). Other newspapers, some short-lived, which began at this time included *Calumet* (1968), *New Breed* (1969), *Agenutamagen* (1971), *Brotherhood Report/Native Press* (1971), *Kinatuinamot Ilengajuk* (1972), *Ontario Native Examiner* (1972), *Ajemoon* (1973), and *Wawatay News* (1974). These newspapers experienced mixed fortunes with some surviving for a year or two and others having greater success. The *Saskatchewan Indian*, for example, claimed a readership of more than 30,000 in 1971 but had reached its peak circulation of 10,000 copies by the late 1980s (Doug Cuthand, Editor of the *Saskatchewan Indian* from 1970 to 1990, personal communication, 1995).

CULTURAL POLICY INFLUENCES

The federal government established the Native Communications Program in 1973 (\$600,000) which funded Aboriginal newspapers and other media. However, the program was set up to fund only non-political societies organized to operate at arm's length from political organizations. Funding eligibility criteria demanded that societies had to be registered as voluntary organizations, that they were to be operated by Native people, and that they aimed to serve Native people in the appropriate province or territory (Lougheed & Associates, 1986). By 1983-84, the Department of the Secretary of State was allocating around \$3 million to Native communications societies (Raudsepp, 1984). A program evaluation in 1986 revealed that the combined circulation of Aboriginal newspapers had increased from 27,000 in 1982-83 to 46,000 in 1985-86 (Lougheed & Associates, 1986). Federal funding continued on a temporary basis-being extended for periods from 12 months to three years-until 1990, when it was suddenly eliminated. The shockwaves rebounded through the mainstream and Aboriginal media alike.

Windspeaker (March 2, 1990) devoted 14 pages to the budget cuts, leading with the headline, "Budget 'racist' charges AFN [Assembly of First Nations]: violence could follow, hints Erasmus." The CBC television program *Focus North* explained to viewers that the amount of money cut from the budget of the Yukon's only Native magazine, *Dan Sha*, was \$155,000-slightly more than the hourly cost (\$125,000) of funding Canada's involvement in the Gulf War (CBC, 1991). Just 5 of the 12 newspapers and magazines funded under the Native Communications Program have survived: *Windspeaker* (Alberta), *Saskatchewan Indian* (Saskatchewan), *Wawatay News* (Ontario), *Tusaayaksat* (Inuvik, Northwest Territories), and *Kahtou* (Vancouver).

The Native Communications Program in Canada represented a consolidation of the prior ad hoc funding of projects and organizations. The program also represented a consolidation of efforts to control and manipulate Aboriginal newspapers through program criteria, funding formulae, and systems of accountability developed and implemented with little or no input from publishing societies. The subsequent shift to a commercial model-with the conception of readership shifting from citizen to consumer-marked the "feudalisation" of the Aboriginal public sphere by the marketplace (Avison, 1996, p. 196). As we have outlined here, seven regional Aboriginal publications are no longer published, representing a loss not only of the newspapers as sites for regional discussion and public opinion formation, but also the loss of voices in the national Aboriginal public sphere. Thus, the Aboriginal public sphere has become unbalanced, with public opinion formulated and disseminated by those remaining.

ABORIGINAL NEWSPAPERS: AUSTRALIA

On the other side of the world, the first regular publication written by Aboriginal people in Australia to emerge was *The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle*. Interestingly, it appeared just eight years after its North American equivalent, the *Cherokee Phoenix* (Langton & Kirkpatrick, 1979). It lasted just over 12 months from its first edition in September, 1836. *Abo Call: The voice of Aborigines* was possibly the first "advancement movement" newsletter to be published and it ran for six months from April, 1938. As Langton & Kirkpatrick (1979) observed, "These [advancement newsletters] contain the views of Aborigines on their social and political situation, views which were rarely reported elsewhere" (p. 122). As with Indigenous publications in Canada, Aboriginal newspapers and newsletters in Australia sometimes appeared irregularly or were short-lived. Some did so because they were subsumed in other journals.

From the two early publications of the nineteenth century, few details exist of any others until the 1950s when just three titles have been identified-*Council for Aboriginal Rights Bulletin* (1955); *Westralian Aborigine* (1957); and the *Aborigines Advancement League Newsletter* (1959). As with the emerging communication societies in Canada at the time, there were many small, community-based publications like newsletters, which spread the word within Aboriginal communities for many years. Some used local Aboriginal languages and became an important cultural resources for the language "renaissance" which occurred (and is still occurring in some areas) as a result of the homelands and outstation movement in the Northern Territory and north Queensland in the late 1970s-a movement that saw many family and clan groups leaving community reserves set up under non-Aboriginal administration. This return to a more traditional clan-based existence may represent a re-ordering of the "traditional" Aboriginal public sphere. The emergence of land rights as a national political movement in the 1960s led to the setting-up of regional groups to co-ordinate land claim activities. Again, the parallels with political and social movements in Canada and the U.S. are striking. The land council newsletters became a major cultural resource, as Langton & Kirkpatrick (1979) observed: "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" (p. 120).

The number of such publications increased dramatically during the land rights protests of the late 1960s and 1970s and have continued since (Langton & Kirkpatrick, 1979). Active Aboriginal resistance to white invasion continued for more than 100 years, since the arrival of the First Fleet on January 26, 1788. But in the 1930s, tactics changed from direct confrontation to more peaceful protest-meetings, marches, and petitions (Lippman, 1981). Lippman (1981) identifies protests on the 150th anniversary of white settlement by Aboriginal people in Sydney in 1938 as the first modern Aboriginal demonstration. She acknowledges that it is difficult to accurately

locate the beginning of the land rights movement in Australia; however, activity attracting media attention increased substantially in the 1960s. Reynolds (1987) attributes anti-slavery moves by British parliamentarian Thomas Fowell Buxton in 1828 as the beginning of the land rights movement. But it was in the 1960s when the Yirrkala people petitioned the House of Representatives for their rights to veto mining on the Gove Peninsula and the Gurindjis left Wave Hill station in protest over their exploitation, supported by *Kooris* in the south (Edgar, 1980; Lippman, 1981; Miller, 1992).

More direct political confrontation continued throughout the 1970s. An Aboriginal tent embassy was set up on the lawns of the Federal Parliament in Canberra on January 26, 1972, and dismantled by police five months later. In that same year, the new Labor federal government moved to introduce land rights legislation to cover claims in the Northern Territory. The Bill was eventually introduced into the House of Representatives in 1977 by the succeeding Liberal government of Malcolm Fraser (Edgar, 1980; Lippman, 1981). Miller argues (1992) that the black movement in Australia in the 1970s became a "*Koori*" movement—a cultural transition which represented an ideological break with the past. (Terms such as *Koori*, *Murri*, *Nunga*, and *Yolgnu* are names used regionally by Aboriginal people to describe themselves.)

But it was the direct threat of what some termed "a second invasion" by non-Aboriginal broadcast media that set the printing presses 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). Langton makes the important point here that this demand has been expressed at "every major film and media conference during the last twenty years" and she insists that it is essential for Aboriginal people to control the *means* of production for any meaningful change to take place (p. 10).

News sheets—some regular, other less so—appeared particularly in the early 1980s in response to talk of launching Australia's own domestic 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 Department of Aboriginal Affairs in the 1970s-80s, like *Identity* (1971), *N.T. Aboriginal Newsletter*, *ADC News*, *Koorier*, *Aboriginal Quarterly*, *N.A.C. Newsletter*, *Duran-duran* (1970), *Australian Kurier*, and *Aboriginal Newsletter* (Langton & Kirkpatrick, 1979; Wagner-Pitz, 1984). Langton & Kirkpatrick (1979) suggest that the subject matter of the Aboriginal 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" (p. 120).

One example is the regular publication by the North Queensland Land Rights Committee, *N.Q. Messagstick*, which appeared regularly from the mid-1970s. It was published from December 1975 until about 1986. The monthly newspaper, *Land Rights News*, based in the Northern Territory, began publishing in 1976 as a newsletter produced by the Northern Land Council in Darwin. It turned tabloid in 1980 and continues today as a major, regular national Aboriginal newspaper. Also first appearing in the mid-1980s, the Brisbane-based *Black Nation*, edited by Ross Watson, raised Aboriginal community concerns surrounding the 1988 Bicentenary and Expo.

The 1990s has seen a resurgence in Aboriginal newspapers led by the successful Lismore-based monthly, the *Koori Mail*, which began publishing in mid-1991. The newspaper has become self-sufficient after paying back a start-up loan from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. The *Koori Mail* is a national resource, carrying a large amount 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 organizations 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 (URL: <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 have 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*. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission has funded some newspaper production over the past five years but it is on an ad hoc basis. While broadcasting remains the focus of much research and federal government policy activity, the Aboriginal print media sector, too, plays a significant role in the Aboriginal public sphere. Like Aboriginal broadcasting, the print sector provides its readership with a first level of service on issues relating to Aboriginal affairs. The mainstream print media sector in Australia is one of the world's most concentrated with two organizations—News Limited (Rupert Murdoch) and Fairfax—controlling more than 90% of newspapers across the country. While individual journalists, committed to Aboriginal affairs' coverage, have produced some excellent stories from within both organizations, the general trend of news coverage of Aboriginal affairs in Australia continues to be largely stereotypical and negative. There has been little change in the low level of use of Aboriginal sources in stories about Aboriginal affairs in the past 20 years (Hippocrates & Meadows, 1996; Meadows, Hippocrates, & van Vuuren, 1997). Canadian journalists' reporting practices suggest a similar approach—one study of *The Globe and Mail's* coverage of the signing of a treaty by the Canadian government and the Nisga'a in 1998 revealed a striking similarity to Australian journalism practices in the low level of Aboriginal sourcing used. In both countries, case studies revealed Aboriginal people were used as sources about 20% of the time in coverage of Indigenous issues (Meadows, 1999).

CULTURAL POLICY INFLUENCES

Unlike the Native press in Canada, Aboriginal newspapers have not benefited from an established funding program which might have encouraged a larger number of titles to emerge and to continue to contribute to the creation of an Aboriginal public sphere. Rather, the cultural policy context in Australia has been to apply an ad hoc approach to funding all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media. This, in itself, produces a discourse of containment and control: to this day, some media organizations must apply for funding at six monthly intervals. The paperwork required to access funds from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission is daunting, especially for community organizations who rely on volunteers. Key personnel change regularly making it difficult for remote Aboriginal community workers to make lasting, meaningful links with key bureaucrats.

Despite this, the three prominent newspapers—*Land Rights News*, the *Koori Mail*, and *Land Rights Queensland*—seem likely to sustain publication for some time to come. This is largely because they have strong community support and are seen as important community cultural resources (Meadows, 1994). Of these three, only *Land Rights News* has a publication record approaching the most successful of the Aboriginal newspapers in Canada. A review of the Indigenous media sector in Australia had just been completed at the time of writing and it was unclear how its many recommendations would influence further sector development.

What is clear is that without a dedicated funding program like the Canadian Northern Native Broadcast Access Program or even the Native Communication Program, there seems little likelihood that the Aboriginal print media sector in Australia will expand greatly. Despite a greater ease of access to print technologies such as desktop publishing, the costs of sustaining a weekly or monthly newspaper remain high with printing and distribution costs prohibitive for most small producers. There is a great desire by Indigenous media workers in Australia to move away from a reliance on government funding for the reasons outlined and in the light of the experiences of Aboriginal newspapers in Canada in 1990. In the past two years, there has been a renewed political attack on Indigenous organizations with demands for even greater accountability. This, too, acts to contain and control Aboriginal public sphere activity.

While self-sufficiency is obviously an important aim for Aboriginal newspaper publishers, how this might be achieved remains problematic. Raboy (1991) reminds us of "the unequal relations built into the major communication systems" and the problems this creates for the operation of democracy and the public sphere (p. 161). He argues strongly for the explicit role of the state in the sociocultural arena in re-allocating resources to support non-commercial alternative media. Aboriginal print media in Australia, like its counterpart in Canada, cannot compete in a highly concentrated press sector in which even well-backed non-Aboriginal corporations have failed to establish new newspapers. But despite the commercial barriers to entry, the existing Aboriginal newspapers have made, and continue to make, a significant contribution to ways in which the public sphere is formulated. They also play a major role in shaping the Aboriginal public sphere.

CONCLUSION

Aboriginal people in both Canada and Australia were disenfranchised and subordinated until the 1960s, when they won the right to vote in federal elections. Until this time, they had not even symbolic access to democratic institutions like the media. Within this context, publication of *The Aboriginal* in 1836 in Australia and the *Native Voice* in Canada in the 1940s had both regional and national significance. Each provided a forum for Aboriginal people to contribute to public debates and public sphere activity. In a very real sense, the newspapers offered a powerful symbolic reclamation of public sphere "space." The impetus of the assimilationist Canadian White Paper on Indian Policy in 1969 acted as a catalyst for growth in the Aboriginal print media. By 1973, there were at least 10 regional newspapers published by provincial and territorial organizations representing Indian, Metis, and Inuit (Avison, 1996). Across the Pacific, the emergence of land rights' struggles and protests of the 1960s and 1970s had a similar catalytic effect. We suggest that a combination of social and political events, along with particular policy environments, enabled the formation of Aboriginal public spheres through access to media technologies—in this case, the press. While broadcasting and multimedia may dominate the popular imaginary, it was print technology which set the ball rolling.

At the centre of democratic life are the public spheres in which private citizens learn about and comment on issues that concern them. These discursive activities take place in varied settings—classrooms, associations, unions, community meetings, and in provincial and national arenas. While most citizens of Canada and Australia take access to these spaces for granted, a great many "other" citizens are systematically excluded. The advent of mass democracy and mass media has seen Canada and Australia become societies of multiple-connected public spheres. These spheres evolve in unique social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. The emergence of Aboriginal newspapers in Canada and Australia has contributed significantly to this process and, in doing so, has expanded the existing spectrum of public opinion in both countries.

Although the idea to adopt newspapers as part of communication programs was initiated by Aboriginal people in Canada and Australia, development of the print sectors did not take place with the same degree of spontaneity as did creation of newspapers in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. Crucially, Aboriginal people have had to operate in a broader public sphere much more open to interference and manipulation by external forces such as cultural policy regimes. In Canada, the elimination of the Native Communications Program funding in 1990—and in Australia, the lack of a dedicated funding program altogether—has forced a shift to commercial models which have impacted adversely on Aboriginal public sphere activity. But perhaps not all is lost. As Raboy (1991) suggests, in liberal democracies, "where the policy making process is still at least partly in the public political arena...the policy arena...can be said to constitute a new public sphere of communication" (p. 171). In Australia, at least, this had a practical outcome with the first public acknowledgment of the *existence* of an Indigenous media sector by a 2000 Productivity Commission report on broadcasting. It is a

salutory reminder that none of the publications we have alluded to here have been given to Aboriginal people. Each has emerged as the result of a struggle and it seems highly unlikely that they will be easily abandoned. The struggle, of course, is far from over.

The continuing circulation of these publications historically contributes to the development of a national Aboriginal public sphere by enabling the circulation of information regarding common experiences and issues. They provide sites for public opinion formation; sites where citizens can engage in collective efforts to bring their issues to the dominant public sphere; and sites where Aboriginal people can attempt to influence the policies of various governments through the pressure of public opinion. Aboriginal newspapers, along with other media, represent important cultural resources which provide their respective communities with a first level of service. Roth & Valaskakis (1989) have suggested that the nature of broadcasting within Aboriginal communities might indicate "how to electronically recuperate public discourse and reconstitute public space in ways that will bear upon the future of...society" (p. 233). We suggest that Aboriginal newspapers in Canada and Australia have played-and continue to play-a crucial role in the shifting formation of the Aboriginal public sphere.

REFERENCES

- Ang, Ien. (1990). Culture and communication: Towards an ethnographic critique of media consumption in the transnational media system. *European Journal of Communication*, 5(2-3), 239-260.
- Avison, Shannon. (1996). *Aboriginal newspapers: Their contribution to the emergence of an alternative public sphere in Canada*. Unpublished master's thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, QC.
- Bennett, Ann. (1988, February 1). Literacy: The medium and the message. *Ideas*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
- Bruner, Jerome. (1988, February 1). Literacy: The medium and the message. *Ideas*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
- Calhoun, Craig. (1992). *Habermas and the public sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). (1991, March 4). *Focus north*.
- Cayley, David. (1988, February 1). Literacy: The medium and the message. *Ideas*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
- Dahlgren, Peter, & Sparks, Colin. (Eds.). (1991). *Communication and citizenship: Journalism and the public sphere in the new media age*. New York: Routledge.
- Danky, James P., & Hady, Maureen E. (1984). *Native American periodicals and newspapers 1828-1982: Bibliography, publishing record and holdings*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Department of Secretary of State. (1967). *Annual report*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services.
- Dyck, Noel. (1991). *What is the Indian problem: Tutelage and resistance in Canadian Indian administration*. St. John's, NF: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- Edgar, Donald. (1980). *Introduction to Australian society*. Sydney: Prentice-Hall.
- Eisenstein, Elizabeth L. (1983). *The printing revolution in early modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feldman, Carol. (1988, February 1). Literacy: The medium and the message. *Ideas*. Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
- Forde, Susan. (1997, July-December). A descriptive look at the public role of Australian independent alternative press. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 3, 118-130.
- Forde, Susan. (1998). The development of the alternative press in Australia. *Media International Australia*, 87, 114-133.
- Fraser, Nancy. (1993). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In B. Robbins (Ed.), *The phantom public sphere* (pp. 1-32). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Frideres, James. S. (1988). *Native peoples in Canada: Contemporary conflicts*. Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall Canada.
- Garnham, Nicholas. (1986). The media and the public sphere. In P. Golding, G. Murdock, & P. Sellinger (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Mass communications and the political process*. New York: Leicester University Press.
- Ginsburg, Faye. (1991). Indigenous media: Faustian contract or global village? *Cultural Anthropology*, 6(1), 92-112.
- Ginsburg, Faye. (1993). Aboriginal media and the Australian imaginary. *Public Culture*, 5(3), 557-578.
- Girard, Bruce. (1992). *A passion for radio: Radio waves and community*. Montreal: Black Rose.
- Goody, Jack. (1986). *The logic of writing and the organisation of society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goody, Jack. (1987). *The interface between the oral and the written*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Habermas, Jürgen. (1974). The public sphere: An encyclopedia article. *New German Critique*, 3, 29-35.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. (1992). Further reflections on the public sphere. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 421-461). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Harrington, Peter. (1985, February-March). A milestone in broadcasting. *The Native Canadian*, pp. 12-13.
- Hartley, John, & McKee, Alan. (2000). *The indigenous public sphere: The reporting and reception of Aboriginal issues in the Australian media*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Henry, Jeannette. (1981). Introduction. In J. E. Murphy & S. M. Murphy (Eds.), *Let my people know: American Indian journalism, 1828-1978*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Hippocrates, Cratis, & Meadows, Michael. (1996). *Race reporter: A report on an investigation into the media and the representation of race relations*. Brisbane: Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission.
- Johansen, Bruce E. (1991). Native American roots for freedom of expression as a form of liberty. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 15(2), 48-69.
- Kidd, Rosalind. (1997). *The way we civilise*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.
- Langton, Marcia. (1993). "Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television": An essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things. Sydney: Australian Film Commission.
- Langton, Marcia, & Kirkpatrick, Brownlee. (1979). A listing of Aboriginal publications. *Aboriginal History*, 3(2), 120-127.
- Lippmann, Lorna. (1981). *Generations of resistance: The Aboriginal struggle for justice*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.
- Lougheed & Associates. (1986). Report on the Native Communications Program and the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program. Ottawa: Program Evaluation Directorate of the Secretary of State.
- Meadows, Michael. (1993). *The way people want to talk: Media representation and Indigenous media responses in Australia and Canada*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia.
- Meadows, Michael. (1994). The way people want to talk: Indigenous media production in Australia and Canada. *Media Information Australia*, 3, 64-73.
- Meadows, Michael. (1995a). Ideas from the bush: Indigenous media in Australia and Canada. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 20(2), 197-212.
- Meadows, Michael. (1995b). Voice blo mipla all ilan man: Torres Strait Islanders' struggle for television access. In J. Craik, J. James Bailey, & A. Moran (Eds.), *Public voices, private interests: Australia's media* (pp. 179-198). Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Meadows, Michael. (1999). A 10-point plan and a treaty. *Queensland Review*, 6(1), 50-76.
- Meadows, Michael. (2000) *Voices in the wilderness: Indigenous Australians and the news media*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Meadows, Michael, with Hippocrates, Cratis, & van Vuuren, Kitty. (1997). Targeting the media: Comparing television and print coverage of Indigenous affairs. *Australian Journalism Review*, 19(2), 73-87.
- Micmac News*. (1990). *Micmac News*, 46.
- Miller, Jim. (1992). The Awakening. In T. Jagtenberg & P. D'Alton (Eds.), *Four dimensional social space* (pp. 486-490). Sydney: Harper.
- Molnar, Helen, & Meadows, Michael. (in press). *Songlines to satellites: Indigenous communication in Australia, the South Pacific and Canada*. Leichhardt: Pluto Press.
- Murphy, Sharon. (1982). Women in Native American journalism. In J. P. Danky & M. E. Hady (Eds.), *Native American press in Wisconsin and the nation* (pp. 65-69). Proceedings of the conference on the Native American Press in Wisconsin and the Nation, April 22-23. Madison: University of Wisconsin Library School.
- Murphy, Sharon. (1983). Native print journalism in the United States: Dreams and realities. *Anthropologica*, 25(1), 23-35.
- National Aboriginal Communications Society. (1987). *Retrospective: Twenty years of Aboriginal communications in Canada*. Ottawa: National Aboriginal Communications Society.
- Native Voice*. (1947). *Native Voice*, 1(2). Vancouver: Native Brotherhood of British Columbia.
- O'Regan, Tom. (1990). TV as cultural technology: The work of Eric Michaels. *Continuum*, 3(2), 53-98.

- Petrone, Penny. (1990). *Native literature in Canada: From oral tradition to the present*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Productivity Commission. (2000, March 3). *Broadcasting: Inquiry report*. Report No. 11. Canberra: Ausinfo.
- Raboy, Marc. (1991). Communication and the new world order: Strategies for democratisation. In N. Thede & A. Ambrosi (Eds.), *Video the changing world* (pp. 160-175). Montreal: Black Rose.
- Raudsepp, Enn. (1984). The Native press in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 12(1), 11-23.
- Reynolds, Henry. (1987). *Frontier*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Rose, Michael. (1996). *For the record: 160 years of Aboriginal print journalism*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Roth, Lorna, & Valaskakis, Gail. (1989). Aboriginal broadcasting in Canada: A case study in democratisation. In M. Raboy & P. Bruck (Eds.), *Communication for and against democracy* (pp. 221-234). Montreal: Black Rose.
- Schmidt, Annette. (1993). *The loss of Australia's Aboriginal language heritage*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Stenbaek, Marianne A. (1992). Mass media in Greenland: The politics of survival. In S. Riggins (Ed.), *Ethnic minority media: An international perspective* (pp. 44-62). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Wagner-Pitz, Benno. (1984). *Zur organisierten Kommunikation der australischen Ureinwohner unter Besonderer Berücksichtigung der Presse*. Unpublished master's thesis, Ruhr University, Bochum, FRG.
- Weston, Mary Ann. (1996). *Native Americans in the news: Images of Indians in the twentieth century press*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.