

# **Revitalising Indigenous Resistance and Dissent through Online Media**

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## **Abstract**

Indigenous peoples continue to experience exclusion from mediated mainstream public sphere debates. In Australia, recent government funding cuts suppress opportunities for Aboriginal resistance and dissent. Long-standing Aboriginal print media have ceased publication. Public broadcasters have cancelled Indigenous news services, and a 2014 Australian Federal Government Commission of Audit recommended culling the community broadcasting sector. This is in direct opposition to Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which stresses that all people have the right to “without interference...receive and impart information and ideas through any media”.

This paper considers how online media may overcome the silencing of dissenting Indigenous voices and broaden public sphere access and engagement. Drawing on interviews with Canadian and Australian traditional print journalists, bloggers and social media producers this paper investigates how online media circulate news and information to Indigenous communities and inject Aboriginal perspectives into public sphere debates. The paper interrogates the diversity of current Indigenous online media and considers whether access to online and mobile media technologies expands or inhibits democratic participation. How successfully Indigenous media producers have upskilled to meet the demands of multimedia platforms is discussed, along with unique challenges they face in relation to funding, responsibilities and community expectations. The investigation concludes that online media are facilitating a revitalisation of grassroots media production that counters the exclusion of Indigenous voices from democratic conversations. However, while they enhance the circulation of Indigenous perspectives and information, demand for multimedia delivery results in “two-speed” Indigenous public sphere processes.

**Keywords:** Indigenous, democracy, public sphere, online media, communication

## **Introduction**

The fair and equal access to democratic conversations are a cornerstone of democracy. Mass media provide the primary mechanism through which these conversations occur. However, mass media structures and processes often exclude minority groups such as Indigenous Canadians and Australians and prevent their participation in debates that may relate directly to their individual and community well-being. This paper considers how contemporary Indigenous media counter Indigenous peoples' exclusion from public sphere processes. It analyses the funding, editorial and legal challenges these media face. It also evaluates the internet and user-generated medias' potential to redress democratic inequalities and afford Indigenous media producers with greater access, control and power over communication processes and messages. Drawing on a series of interviews with Indigenous media producers across Canada and Australia, and an analysis of digital Indigenous media content this paper investigates the extent to which the internet and user-generated content are improving the access and diversity of Indigenous voices, within Indigenous and dominant public sphere debates. Overall, this paper argues online media are facilitating a revitalisation of grassroots media production that counters the exclusion of Indigenous voices from democratic conversations. However, while they enhance the circulation of Indigenous perspectives and information, demands for multimedia delivery results in 'two-speed' Indigenous public sphere processes.

## **Canvassing the Literature – Publics and Counter-Publics**

While it may be idealised and unachievable, it is a foundational goal that fair and equal democratic processes allow all citizens equal access to democratic conversations (Poole 1989; Garnham 2000; Fraser 1990). These conversations occur within the political or dominant public sphere which is the space between society and the State where citizens debate issues of concern in order to influence public opinion, public policy and decision-making (Gerhards & Schafer 2010; Fraser 1990). Habermas (1974: 49) wrote: "a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body." He has argued (1996: 359) the political public sphere is "a sounding board for problems that must be processed by the political system because they cannot be solved elsewhere." Mass media have historically provided the main communication channels through which the State informs the citizenry, and through which the citizenry's responses are circulated (Cottle 2000). However, both Castells (2008: 90) and Dahlgren (2015: 90) argue horizontal methods of communication, including face-to-face conversations, are essential components of the communication processes through which "nonstate actors influence people's minds and foster social change." The advent of the internet and user-generated media has, to at least a degree, usurped mass media's dominance and exclusivity (Bruns 2008). Dahlgren (2015: 22) considers the internet a "boon for civil society: [since] it permits and indeed promotes horizontal communication." Likewise, Castells (2008: 90) has identified emerging "global media and internet networks" as "the new global public sphere." The notion that the internet and user-generated media may provide greater and more equal access for non-state actors, including

Indigenous people, to democratic debates affording them more influence over policy provides an important foundation for this paper.

However, even within contemporary public spheres, access to democratic debates is not equal. Habermas's (1989) original public sphere theory was criticised because of its failure to recognise the existence of alternative public spheres (Fraser 1990; Eley 1999). Fraser (1990) argued subaltern counterpublics have always existed and that there has always been conflict between subaltern and dominant public spheres. She contends (1990) subordinated groups are denied equal access to societal debates within the dominant public sphere and are excluded, silenced, prevented or inhibited from communicating using their own voices, styles and norms. Subaltern counterpublic spheres counter this exclusion and provide spaces for subordinate groups in society to "invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn provide venues in which to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1990: 67). Subaltern counterpublics are "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment", "bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (Fraser 1990: 68). Stephenson (2000: 4) described the Bolivian Indigenous counterpublic sphere as "*an autonomous special or territorial arena* where oppositional cultural and political identities can be enacted and legitimated". She argues Indigenous counterpublic spheres are "arena[s] of oppositional consciousness" that locate:

...agency in indigenous peoples and challenges prevailing dehumanizing practices that would relegate them to the category of premodern Other. Moreover, the indigenous counterpublic sphere legitimizes the cultural right to difference and generates a forum for indigenous peoples to come together from different areas of the country in common interest. (Stephenson 2000: 3)

However, whether subaltern public spheres can generate change depends on their ability to influence public opinion and policymakers. Squires (1999) suggests the level and frequency at which ideas and information can cross public sphere boundaries dictates whether change can occur. And Husband (1998: 143) contends counter-public sphere effectiveness depends on their ability to privilege diverse interests and voices within "open channels of exchange." However, for Indigenous peoples, their "colonial past is not so distant and...is, in a certain way, present" (Delgado 1984: 78). The inability of "nation states and civil societies" to address this reality leads to a "clash of political interests" (Delgado 1984: 79). Indigenous peoples continue to "retrieve and decolonize" their histories and to resist (Delgado 1984: 80). Indigenous counterpublic spheres provide the arenas through which they can "seek to convince society as a whole of the validity of [Indigenous] claims, challenging existing structures of authority through political and theoretical critique" (Felski 1989: 168). The internet, as the new global public sphere, offers Indigenous peoples renewed opportunities to control communication channels and to influence public opinion using their own media.

Bruns (2008: 68-69) describes this emerging, new global public sphere as a "patchwork of overlapping public spheres centred around specific themes and communities", however, this patchwork of overlapping public spheres has always existed (Fraser 1990; Squires 1999, 2002;

Eley 1999; Avison & Meadows 2000; Burrows 2009). What has changed, as Bruns (2008) himself acknowledges, is the potentially-enhanced access subaltern public sphere constituents now have to dominant public sphere debates. In an expanding mediasphere, counterpublic constituents can control how, when and what messages are circulated, can use their own voices and can determine what communication tools and styles they will adopt.

Traditionally, journalists and editors who have operated as “orchestrators and moderators of public debate”, have dominated public sphere processes and created the “one-to-many mass media of the industrial age” (Bruns 2008: 67). However, Bruns (2008: 67) argues this one-to-many structure with its vertical information flows, has been replaced by user-generated media that open up public sphere discussions through their horizontal information flows. Using their own media, citizens can “conduct engaged and lively political discussion and deliberation away from the perceived spin of journalism’s punditariat” (Bruns 2008: 68). Citizens become active participants in political conversations rather than bystanders observing the manufactured perspectives of the political left and right (Bruns 2008: 68). Citizens can (to a greater degree) now control their interaction and moderate their contributions (Bruns 2008; Gerhards & Schafer 2010). Moreover, these changes are contributing to the emergence of a “vastly more multiperspectival debate” (Bruns 2008: 68). This paper considers how the online space has affected Indigenous media and their processes.

Counterpublic sphere constituents use culturally appropriate communication styles and techniques that facilitate debate, promote their own identity and challenge stereotypes. Milioni (2009: 419) in her analysis of independent Greek media within an alternative, counterpublic sphere found they exhibited some key functional characteristics. Characteristics she identified include: fostering of a political and competitive opposition to mainstream media, maintaining autonomy from “state control and formal political institutions”, adoption of a “non-hierarchical, non-professional and collective” news gathering operation using grassroots reporters, attempts to set the agenda and gain public attention for identified problems, inclusion of diverse sources who present “subjective and passionate descriptions of social reality”, and the “active...participation of its publics”. Milioni (2009: 419) argues these functions are used to “attain the maximum degree of ‘selfdetermination’ regarding the handling of information, bypassing the media and controlling the terms of their own representation in the public space.” This paper considers the evolving nature and communication structure of the global Indigenous public sphere, and how Canadian and Australian Indigenous media are used to communicate with publics, to breach public sphere boundaries and to contribute to global public sphere dialogues.

## **Research Design**

The primary research question considered in this paper evaluates to what extent Indigenous media producers are using digital media and how and why they are transitioning to use the online media environment. This paper particularly focuses on print and text-based media and draws on 18 in-depth, semi-structured, interviews with Indigenous media producers across

Canada and Australia and a textual analysis of online media content. This qualitative approach allows analysis and comparison of content produced while the interviews provide a deeper understanding of the media producers and their rationale and intent (Rubin & Rubin 2012). Interviews were coded manually and using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software to extract key themes emerging from the data. Nvivo Capture software was used to collect digital data such as website content, blog, Facebook and Twitter posts and comments. Nvivo Capture gathers both original posts from the primary user, and responses from their audience. Additionally, Nvivo Capture uses the member's Twitter contact information to map commenter's locations. These maps were used to provide indicative data about Indigenous Twitter users' global audience reach.

## **Connections Between Canada and Australia**

There are important differences between Canadian and Australian Indigenous peoples. Canada has three distinct Aboriginal groups: the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples (Government of Canada 2010a). From 1760, a series of constitutionally recognised treaties were negotiated between the Canadian Government and Aboriginal peoples (Government of Canada 2010b). Australia's Indigenous population comprises of two groups, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who originally included than 600 clans (Australian Government 2015). However, in contrast to the Canadian situation, no treaties have been negotiated. It took until 1992, for the Australian High Court to legally rule *terra nullius*<sup>1</sup> a fiction and established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' rights to claim their lands under common law (Broome 2010; Mazel and O'Neil 2007). Consequently, Canadian and Australian Indigenous peoples have very different cultural backgrounds, community structures and political and legal relationships with their respective governments. Nonetheless, they have much in common. Both countries share a history of colonisation, and there are parallels between the Australian and Canadian authorities' subsequent treatment of each country's First Nations peoples. Indigenous people in Canada and Australia existed under "discriminatory and genocidal regimes" that left them "transformed, displaced and marginalised" (Coombs 2006: 1-2). They "were considered inferior, scarcely human – their presence was ignored, treated as a minor inconvenience, walled off from view or physical intrusion, or made the subject of genocidal projects" (Bateman & Pilkington 2011: 1). The similarities between the two Indigenous populations continue and in 2011, only 4.3 per cent of Canadians identified as Aboriginal compared (Statistics Canada 2011) to 2.5 per cent of Australians who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ABS 2012a). Furthermore, both groups have a high percentage of young people. In Canada in 2011, the median age for the three Aboriginal groups was First Nations 26, Métis 31 and Inuit 23, compared to a median age of 41 in the non-Aboriginal Canadian population (Statistics Canada 2015). In Australia in 2011, the median age of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 21 compared to 37 for non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> *Terra Nullius* means a land that belongs to no one and is available to be claimed.

Both Canadian and Australian First Nation communities have had negative interactions with mainstream media. While mainstream media provide the primary mechanisms through which democratic debates take place with the aim of influencing public opinion and bringing about social change, both groups have experienced exclusion from mainstream media coverage that purports to cover issues specifically affecting them (Meadows 2001; Alia 2010). Canadian mainstream media have portrayed First Nation peoples as "outsider[s]" (Roth 2005: 14). Moreover, when mainstream media coverage does occur, it has been criticised for being sensationalist and for perpetuating racial stereotypes (Meadows 2001). Mainstream coverage includes few Indigenous voices apart from those the dominant group find palatable (Meadows & Oldham 1991; Burrows 2004). To counter these long-standing negative mainstream media traits, from the 19th century onwards Indigenous people have produced their own media in order to speak in their own voices, to ensure issues of concern to them are circulated in an attempt to have the perspectives they deem essential heard.

### **Silencing Indigenous Voices**

Despite Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights stressing that all people have the right to "without interference... receive and impart information and ideas through any media" (United Nations 1948), in Australia particularly, the range of traditional Indigenous media has narrowed over the last two years. In 2014, Australian Government funding to The Vibe group, which had operated since 1997, was cancelled (Kerin 2014). The Vibe group produced and managed *The Deadly Awards*, which were the annual Australian Indigenous Awards for achievement across a range of sectors. Vibe also produced *Vibe3on3* basketball and hip hop challenge. Vibe produced *InVibe* Magazine, *Deadly Sounds* radio, *Move It Mob Style* TV and the *deadlyvibe.com.au* website (Deadly Vibe Group 2014). All these mastheads and annual events disappeared upon the withdrawal of funding. Also in 2014, the New South Wales Land Council (NSWLC) cancelled publication of the *Tracker* magazine (Brereton 2014). The *Tracker* had a circulation of 30,000 as well as an online presence (A. McQuire, personal interview, 20 February 2015). Although NSWLC blamed funding pressures, *Tracker* journalist Amy McQuire said staff had experienced editorial pressure from the land council, and the *Tracker's* closure followed the publication of a disparaging story about the Abbott (conservative) Federal government. The broadcasting sector has also faced threats with an Abbott Federal Government Commission of Audit report recommending removal of government funding for the community broadcasting sector (Gough 2014). While the government did not implement this recommendation, the suggestion was a chilling moment for the 100 Australian Indigenous community radio stations. In 2015, Australia's second national Indigenous newspaper the *National Indigenous Times* went into voluntary receivership because of its inability to pay mounting legal costs relating to defamation and an unfair dismissal legal challenge (Terzon 2015). This publication has relaunched with new ownership in 2016 (NIT 2016). In 2011, Australia's Special Broadcasting Service, the SBS, absorbed the National Indigenous Television network. However in June 2015, following Federal Government funding cuts, the SBS decided to cancel the nightly national *NITV News* program (Robin 2015). *NITV News* was Australia's only daily national Indigenous-produced television news broadcast. Threats to Indigenous media demonstrate the importance of mechanisms that can provide

Indigenous people with independent media production opportunities. As the range of legacy forms of Indigenous media dwindle, new forms of media and expression are emerging to fill the gaps. However, these new forms of Indigenous media also fulfil a unique role and provide an outlet for emerging Indigenous voices.

### **Conceptualising an Evolving Indigenous Mediasphere**

This section provides a potted overview of the development and structure of the Indigenous mediasphere. Since the 19th century, Canadian and Australian First Nations people and communities have produced a wide-range of print media (Avison 1996; Burrows 2009). The first North American Aboriginal newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, was published in 1828 (Avison & Meadows 2000) with Australia's first Aboriginal publication, *The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle* appearing in 1836 (Burrows 2014). Within the contemporary Indigenous public sphere, the *Koori Mail*, the first and only surviving national Australian Indigenous print newspaper was first published in 1991. Both Canada and Australia have rich Indigenous broadcast sectors. Broadcasts of Aboriginal produced content began in North America in Alaska during the 1930s, with the first Canadian Aboriginal broadcasts occurring in the 1960s (Alia 2003: 37). In 1999, the national Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) was launched incorporating both domestic and international content (Roth 2005). Roth (2005: 24) explains the APTN took advantage of the increasing range of international, Indigenous content and adopted an "international perspective" with a "wide optic on aboriginal issues around the world." Alia (2010:72) has described Canada as "the world leader in Aboriginal broadcasting" with several hundred radio stations, eleven regional radio networks, and six television production outlets. Similarly, Australia has a well-developed Indigenous broadcasting sector. The first Aboriginal produced radio programming was broadcast in Adelaide and Townsville in 1972 (Australian Government 2010). Since then the sector has grown to include more than 130 Indigenous radio stations and in 1988, the commercially-funded Imparja Television began broadcasting. This was followed by the development of the federally-funded National Indigenous Television (NITV) in 2005. The community media sector provides a "major communication outlet for indigenous voices" (Meadows 2009: 516). However, the availability of the internet and online media and funding pressures have changed the structure of the Indigenous mediasphere.

The Indigenous mediasphere now includes overlapping sectors. The "traditional" sector includes traditional print media (magazines and newspapers) and the broadcast media (television and radio - commercial, public and community). And the "user-generated" sector includes digital content such as weblogs, news and information sites and online publications. The "user-generated" sector also incorporates Indigenous peoples' use of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google+, Tumblr and other social media sites. Indigenous people use all available user-generated media options to disseminate their individual and group perspectives. However, while there are two distinct sectors within the contemporary Indigenous mediasphere, the sectors overlap which reflects the global industry trend within news organisations to operate 'cross-platform.' Traditional Indigenous print media

producers now often duplicate their print newspapers in an online, digital format (or at least selected content) and some have opted to publish their content exclusively online. Traditional print publications may now also include audio and video content on their online site. Likewise, Indigenous broadcasters now upload print, audio and video content to their station websites. And traditional Indigenous media producers (print and broadcast), bloggers, and website producers all use various forms of social media, in addition to their primary communication method to connect with their audience. Consequently, the lines between traditional Indigenous media producers and user-generated content have converged, and the contemporary Indigenous public sphere is an increasingly complex space providing an arena for a diverse range of Indigenous communication styles, formats, voices, and perspectives.

### **Findings: The Effect of Online Production on Media Producers and Communities**

Funding pressures and audience expectations are driving the adoption of online and multimedia platforms and a faster news cycle. Vancouver Island's *Salish Sea Sentinel* editor Mark Kiemele (Personal communication, 23 July 2013) and Manitoba publication *The First Perspective* journalist Trevor Greyeyes (Personal communication, 10 August 2013) said their publications were now only delivered online. They said the decision to move their publications to an online-only format was a cost-saving measure but had led to community criticism since older community members may lack internet access and some preferred to receive a print version of their community newspaper. Vancouver Island *Ha-Shilth-Sa* editor Debora Steel (Personal communication, 23 July 2013; Nuuchah-Nulth Tribal Council 2015) said her organisation's newspaper was published in print and online. She said meeting the needs of digitally-savvy, younger community members who wanted faster, up-to-date news had motivated this decision. Both Canada and Australia have a growing number of online newspapers including Canada's *Intercontinental Cry* that uses a network of stringers to publish international Indigenous news (CWIS 2015) and Australia's *Black Nations Rising* (which replaces *Brisbane Blacks*) (WAR 2015). It is this adoption of faster, diverse online and social media, while maintaining traditional print publications, that risks the development of two-speed public sphere processes that exclude older members of communities.

Bloggers represent an important and growing user-generated sector of the Indigenous mediasphere. Blogs provide a voice for those who want to be heard but who cannot speak through mainstream media. Bloggers Eugenia Flynn with her *Black Thoughts Live Here* (Flynn 2015) and Celeste Liddle with her *Rantings of a Female Feminist* (Liddle 2015a) use blogs to circulate their perspectives on a range of contemporary topics and to counter stereotypes and challenge government policy. Blogs also provide access to minorities within the Indigenous community. Canada's Lisa Charleyboy uses her *Urban Native Girl* blog to provide positive messages for Indigenous youth. Her blog helped her to develop a strong media profile, and she now produces and edits the online *Urban Native Magazine* (Charleyboy 2015). In Australia, Celeste Liddle and Eugenia Flynn have been invited to publish in alternative publications including the popular and influential online publication *Crikey*, and both have been offered regular commentary spots with *The Guardian* online (Flynn n.d.; Flynn 2012; Flynn & Onus



2014; Flynn 2014; Liddle n.d.; Liddle 2014; Liddle 2015b). These opportunities provide access to a mainstream audience that was previously unavailable. Axel Bruns (2008) has argued the internet has provided mainstream media access and profiles for a range of alternative voices, and this is true within the Indigenous public sphere too.

Social media has further expanded the Indigenous mediasphere. Almost all the people interviewed for this study said Facebook was an essential aspect of Indigenous communication. Canada's *NationTalk* CEO Don Barraclough (personal communication, 1 August 2013) said Facebook encouraged First Nations people and leaders to use computers. Moreover, *Ha-Shilth-Sa's* Debora Steel (personal communication, 23 July 2013) said their Facebook page participation rivalled their newspapers print circulation. Indigenous journalists Trevor Greyeyes (personal communication, 10 August 2013) and Amy McQuire (personal communication, 20 February 2015) explained they use Facebook to find sources to interview and to connect with other journalists. Blogger and photographer Steven Rhall (personal communication, 1 June 2015) and writer Eugenia Flynn (personal communication, 4 June 2015) said it was essential for them to use social media to promote their work. And some media producers such as *Black Rainbow* founder Dameyon Bonson (personal communication, 12 February 2015) and *Wiradjuri News's* David Towney (personal communication, 21 May 2015) use Facebook to produce standalone news sites. Towney uses *Wiradjuri News* to share mainstream news stories he believes will be of interest to the Wiradjuri community. One story about the water being turned off to force 12,000 people to leave their community attracted 737 shares, 225 likes, and more than 40 comments. *Wiradjuri News* Facebook statistics show the site has clocked more than 100,000 views in one week (*Wiradjuri News* 2015). Given Australia's only surviving national newspaper, the *Koori Mail* has a circulation of 10,000 and a readership of 100,000 after 25 years of operation (*Koori Mail* 2015), *Wiradjuri News's* achievement is notable. Social media are an integral element in creating horizontal information flows and relationships between media producers, their peers, and audience. However, while the interactivity of online media enhances connectedness between media producers and their audiences, it also increases pressure on production staff who may have gone from producing one newspaper a week, a fortnight or a month, to regularly having to upload digital content and to managing a number of social media sites. None of the people interviewed had received any specific training in how to use software, apps or to manage social media. Bloggers, who may work in other jobs in addition to producing a blog, must maintain a social media presence to promote their writing effectively.

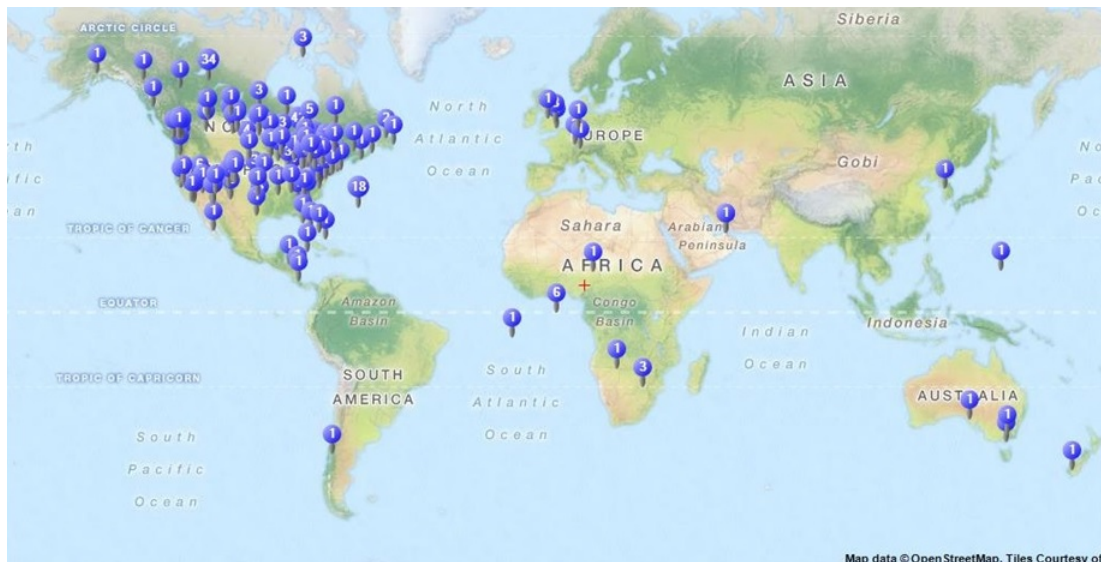
### **Case study one: *Two Row Times* (Canada)**

This *Two Row Times* case study demonstrates goals and challenges faced by Indigenous media producers and exemplifies the complexity of contemporary Indigenous media production practices. Jonathan Garlow founded the *Two Row Times* in Hagersville, Ontario in 2013, and it now has a print circulation of 23,000. The print newspaper is delivered to communities at no cost and content is shared on the *Two Row Times* website and through the online reader Issuu. *Two Row Times's* diverse social media profile and web presence are defining features. The

producers use all the major social media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram and more. The paper's target audience is the Six Nations of the Grand River, which includes all six Iroquois nations that number more than 25,000 members and is the largest First Nations band government in Canada. The paper is distributed throughout Ontario and Upstate New York (*Two Row Times*, 2015; Jim Windle, personal communication, 31 July 2013). In contrast to Vancouver Island's *Ha-Shilth-Sa* and *Salish Sea Sentinel*, the *Two Row Times* is an independent Indigenous newspaper and is not published on behalf of a tribal council or any other funding organisation. In 2013, Garlow explained his goal was "...to provide timely and relevant news and information to Native communities as well as to serve as a bridge between all nations by promoting and demonstrating the values of the Two Row Wampum" (Windle 2013).

To resolve the fledgling newspaper's financial challenges, the owners ran a crowd-funding appeal to raise CAD\$25,000 additional funding. The appeal achieved 16 per cent of its goal (CAD\$3899) (Indiegogo 2014). In the campaign video Nahnda Garlow, a *Two Row Times*, Arts & Culture columnist, highlighted the lack of "strong voice[s] in mainstream media" to "stand and speak the voice of the people." She stressed the *Two Row Times* was "Indigenous led" and was not "led by another institution that is dictating what is Indigenous or what is First Nations or is Aboriginal" (Indiegogo 2014). The Indiegogo campaign also explained they planned to use the funds to "hire Onkwehonwe journalists and correspondents, employ the distributors that keep more than 500 pickup locations stocked with papers, and to, of course, print the paper and keep our office running." Although the crowd-funding campaign enjoyed limited success, the *Two Row Times* is still published in print and digital format. The *Two Row Times* is clearly committed to maintaining autonomy and financial independence.

While Indigenous self-determination demands the right to be heard and acknowledgement and acceptance of their "world view" (Downing & Husband 2005: 127), a consideration of who is listening to their messages is an essential part of the communication process (Dreher 2009). While this Nvivo map (Figure 1) only plots the location of the *Two Row Times* 4337 Twitter followers, it does demonstrate that the newspaper's multimedia strategy is allowing the publication to reach their target North American audience and gives some indication of how many people are 'listening' – and where those readers are.



**Fig. 1 Two Row Times Twitter Followers**

## **Case Study 2 - *Indigenous X* (Australia)**

This *IndigenousX* case study documents the innovative media practices Indigenous people are employing to inject diversity into Indigenous public sphere processes. Luke Pearson founded *IndigenousX* in 2012. It is a rotating, curated, Twitter account that demonstrates the unique ways Indigenous communicators use social media. Each month, the *IndigenousX* baton passes to a different Indigenous user who can tweet to the account's more than 21,000 followers about an issue of concern to them and those followers can in turn retweet that information. Since 2012, more than 180 Indigenous Australians have shared their perspectives, knowledge and ideas relating to health, education, constitutional recognition, Aboriginal culture, closure of communities, meaningless rhetoric, reconciliation, music, Indigenous literature, sport and many other topics. It is highly unlikely that most of those 180 people would have been chosen by mainstream journalists to speak on these topics.

Apart from attracting a large Twitter following, *IndigenousX* now has a permanent blog spot on *The Guardian* online website that allows monthly contributors an extended opportunity to reach a broader, mainstream audience. Also, Pearson has facilitated two Indigenous people in Canada to replicate the *IndigenousX* process using the *IndigenousX* branding, and he hopes to find an Indigenous person in New Zealand and other countries to pick up the *IndigenousX* baton.

Despite its success, *IndigenousX* struggles financially. Pearson runs the media organisation on a shoestring and in 2015 launched a crowd-funding appeal for AU\$250,000 to bolster the financial resources he requires to sustain *IndigenousX's* production and to extend its reach. Pearson told The Walkley Foundation (2015), "We need more strong Indigenous media voices, and we need to make sure those voices reach far and wide, and with your support that's what we aim to achieve." The appeal attracted AU\$81,966 in funding. The Nvivo map below (Figure 2) demonstrates that *IndigenousX* has successfully attracted a global following that extends far

beyond Australia. *IndigenousX* has innovatively enhanced the diversity of voices participating in global Indigenous and dominant public sphere debates. Furthermore, in response to Dreher's (2009) question about who is listening to these voices, this map shows *IndigenousX* has attracted a global audience of listeners.



**Fig. 2 *IndigenousX* Twitter Followers**

## Discussion and Conclusion

These media are decolonisation tools. Davidson (2005: 109) has argued there is no such thing as “post-colonialism” for Australia’s Aboriginal peoples. Rather, he writes their experience is closer to the “decolonisation of the third world” (2005: 109). Similarly, Alfred (2009: 94) presents a universal view and explains most First Nations people live their lives “in a world of ideas imposed on them by others” and for decolonization to occur, First Nations people must:

add our voices to the narrative that is history, translate our understandings of history and justice, and bring the power of our wisdom to bear on the relationships we have with others. We cannot do this from a position of intellectual weakness.

Alfred (2009: 178) further argues those who can “shape ideas, translate, and create language will be essential to the process of decolonization...”. In 1963, Franz Fanon (p.2) described decolonization as a historical process between two “antagonistic forces” that aimed to “chang[e] the order of the world”. This process includes establishing “arenas of dignity” in which to create and live “oppositional cultures” (Cowlshaw 2014: 97). First Nations people in Canada and Australia use their media to communicate their oppositional views and to challenge, educate and inform.

Analysis of the broader, contemporary Indigenous mediasphere demonstrates Indigenous peoples are employing a wide mix of both traditional and user-generated media. This finding

confirms that as Bruns (2008) and Gerhards & Schafer (2010) have suggested has occurred within the dominant, global public sphere, access to the internet, and ability to produce, control and share user-generated media has enhanced the diversity of active Indigenous media voices within public sphere debates. The structural complexity of the Indigenous mediasphere now includes traditional print newspapers, broadcast media and a growing range of online publications, blogs and social media including Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, and Facebook. Indigenous communicators are employing a range of diverse, unique and innovative media communication styles. The downside to this expanding mediasphere is the pressure it places on Indigenous media producers, whether they produce traditional or user-generated content, in relation to workloads and funding. It also creates an environment in which there are two levels of public sphere processes. Older members of communities still want access to traditional forms of print media, but this may leave them excluded from the faster, more fluid public sphere debates taking place online through various forms of digital, social media and mobile technologies.

These digital and mobile media and technologies have facilitated access to democratic discussions for Indigenous communicators in Canada and Australia. Furthermore, in line with observations in the dominant public sphere (Bruns 2008; Dahlgren 2015; Castells 2008), Indigenous people are actively engaging in horizontal and two-way discussions and debates about issues that affect them. These horizontal information flows allow Indigenous media producers and their audiences, to debate, challenge and provide counter-discourses to government policy and practice and mass media representations of their communities. Indigenous participants can counter the mass media's exclusion of Indigenous voices and perspectives and control the circulation of messages, individual participation and challenge ideas and policy with which they support or disagree.

The internet and online media are facilitating dissemination of Indigenous perspectives towards mainstream publics. The control journalists, editors (even Indigenous media journalists and editors), politicians and government officials have had over who participates in democratic debates affecting Indigenous people has been eroded. By privileging a diverse range of voices and oscillating information across public sphere boundaries (Squires 1999; Husband 1998), writers such as Eugenia Flynn, Celeste Liddle, and Lisa Charleyboy have demonstrated the effectiveness of Indigenous public sphere processes. Through their blogs, they have gained access to both Indigenous and mainstream audiences. Indigenous media producers have adapted social media and online communication mediums for their own purposes and in their own styles. Pearson's *IndigenousX* is a unique and innovative concept that has generated a broad Indigenous and general audience and given a global voice to 180 Indigenous Australians on a range of topics. Similarly, Towney and Bonson have used Facebook to inform their audiences on topics of interest and concern to specific groups within the broader Indigenous community. As Bruns (2008: 76) contended in relation to "issue publics" the internet and online media have "...given rise to a new class of topical experts...whose knowledge may not be conventionally accredited, but who derive their authority through the community processes..." Individuals such as Bonson, Pearson, Towney and Liddle decide what content they will publish. Their audience determines what they will discuss and what content they engage with.

The audience determines whether the perspectives presented are of value or not. In turn, those who generate community interest have breached public sphere boundaries to gain access to mainstream media through sites such as *The Guardian*, and mainstream audiences through a range of alternative, online but not exclusively Indigenous, media. Roth (2005: 13-14) argued:

First Peoples self-development involves not only control over production and distribution of their own messages to their own communities but also the seeking of cross-cultural links and coalitions through program content considerations and through diffusion to populations outside of their immediate regional territories.

Online media and the internet provide opportunities to produce and distribute media content that they can share with their own local communities, broader global Indigenous peoples, and mainstream society. The willingness to adopt and adapt new forms of communication through which to interact, manipulate and challenge is not new. As far back as 1836, only 35 years after the British invaded their lands, Aboriginal people on Flinders Island, in Tasmania, Australia used letters and the first Aboriginal publication to communicate and manipulate their oppressors (Burrows 2014).

Analysis of online Indigenous media supports earlier counterpublic sphere research (Delgado 1984; Felski 1989; Fraser 1990; Squires 1999, 2002; Milioni 2002; Avison & Meadows 2000). Independent, Indigenous media are affording Canadian and Australian Indigenous people the freedom to formulate their own identities, to speak in their own voices and styles and to dictate how and when they communicate. Online media, both traditional and user-generated, are providing opportunities to challenge and resist stereotypical ideas circulated through mainstream media and to criticise and critique proposed government policy. For instance, Liddle (2015b) used her media profile to challenge notions that Indigenous women are “welfare ‘cash cows’”. Moreover, Towney curates discussions through *Wiradjuri News* that debate and challenge topics such as the closure of Aboriginal communities or domestic violence. Similarly, *IndigenousX* and Liddle’s (IndigenousX 2015) *Constitutional Recognition Survey* challenges government propaganda regarding constitutional recognition. Indigenous media, traditional, online and user-generated, are essential decolonising tools that place control over mediated information in the hands of their Indigenous producers. While it goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss whether Indigenous content and engagement results in policy change, the willingness, and ability of Indigenous media producers to use their media to challenge and indeed, make “tactical strikes into the dominant public sphere” (Squires 1999: 35) suggests Indigenous media producers have embraced the communication opportunities the internet and user-generated media present. However, the withdrawal of funding and shutting down of Indigenous voices shows Indigenous peoples’ right to engage with and produce their own media without interference is not yet a reality. Whether this growing range of Indigenous media is allowing Indigenous voices to be heard and can influence public opinion and policy is as yet unclear, but the internet and user-generated media are generating a resurgence in the production of independent Indigenous media.

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