Digital Songlines: the Use of Modern Communication Technology by an Aboriginal Community in Remote Australia[1]

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ABSTRACT   *In the mid-1980s the AUSSAT satellite brought television and radio to remote Australia for the first time. There was concern amongst Aboriginal communities that the imposition of mass media without consultation could result in permanent damage to culture and language. However, over the years, the Warlpiri people have adopted modern communication technology including radio, video making, locally produced television, and more recently on-line services. This paper examines why the Warlpiri have adopted modern communication technology and whether there have been social changes as a result. It also looks at the pioneering media work by the Pitjantjatjara people at Ernabella in the far north of South Australia.*

Keywords: Aborigines, indigenous, broadcasting, technological innovation, remote Australia, television, radio, satellites, Warlpiri people, Pitjantjatjara people.

Introduction

In July 1988 the launch of the AUSSAT satellite brought modern communication technology, including radio and television broadcasting, to remote Australia for the first time.

Not only would the satellite bring these services to remote European homesteads and settlements it would also provided the same services, without consultation, to traditional Aboriginal communities. Many of these Aboriginal communities had only been settled from a hunting and gathering lifestyle since the 1940s and 1950s and they were still preserving their unique languages, ceremonies and culture.

There were concerns in these communities, as well as among policy makers in Aboriginal Affairs, about the impact of satellite broadcasting on traditional cultures. This followed the experience of the Inuit in remote Canada where satellite television services had been introduced with no consultation. The result was that Inuit culture was severely affected with young people turning away from their language and adopting western ways in less than a year.[2]

Debbie Brisebois, the Executive Director of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, describes an Inuit woman who recalls watching 'All in the Family' (the US equivalent of the British comedy 'Til Death us do Part') for the first time:

> There was the father, obviously a stupid man, shouting at his children and his wife. He seemed to hate them. They were lying to him, they were treating him with

contempt, they were screaming back at him and then in the last five minutes everyone kissed and made up. We were always taught to treat our elders with respect. I was embarrassed for those people on TV. I know I always thought white people were weird. I wondered if that was really what people were like in the South.[3]

In 1988 Freda Glynn, one of the founding members of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, said:

TV is like an invasion. We have had grog, guns and disease, but we have been really fortunate that people outside the major communities have had no communication like radio and TV. Language and culture have been protected by neglect. Now they are not going to be. They need protection because TV will be going into those communities 24 hours a day in a foreign language—English. It only takes a few months and the kids start changing …[4]

Faye Ginsburg[5] argues that indigenous people are often the 'fourth world' who lie within a dominant culture. She sees them as facing a 'Faustian dilemma' between expressing their identity through the new technology and having their own culture and traditional knowledge threatened by that technology.

Two Aboriginal Communities, one at Yuendemu in the Northern Territory (the Warlpiri people) and the other at Ernabella in northern South Australia (the Pitjantjatjara people), were already producing video and radio services before the satellite services became available in 1985. The communities strongly lobbied for funding for their locally produced services, which were at the time being broadcast illegally on low powered equipment.

From 1983, with the new Hawke Labor Government in power, there was a new focus on self-determination in the area of Aboriginal policy making. Aboriginal bureaucrats, such as Charles Perkins and Eric Willmot, who were respectively the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), expressed concerns about the impact of European television and radio on remote Aboriginal communities.[6] Together with the Department of Communications, DAA commissioned a review of remote Aboriginal broadcasting and communications which was published in 1984 as 'Out of the Silent Land'.[7] In this publication they began to consider policy options that would allow the communities some control over the new satellite service. Recommendations from this report would ultimately lead to the introduction of the Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Service (BRACS).

I worked briefly in the Broadcasting Unit of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs during 1985. It was during this period that the early broadcasting experiments at Yuendumu and Ernabella were being promoted on behalf of the communities by the late Eric Michaels. Michaels was an anthropologist and communications specialist who had been employed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to research the impact of the new satellite services on these remote communities. The work carried out by Michaels, as well as his lobbying efforts on behalf of remote Aboriginal communities, was also integral to the introduction of BRACS.

Despite the initial concerns about the impact on traditional culture and language, over the years the Warlpiri have actively adopted modern communication technology including radio broadcasts, video making and more recently on-line services.

The Research Project

I embarked on this research project last year, as I was interested to see how remote Aboriginal broadcasting had fared over the 13 year period since it was first proposed. In the research, I sought to look at the development of indigenous broadcasting at Yuendemu, in particular, and to compare it with similar development in broadcasting at Ernabella in South Australia and developments in New Zealand and Canada. The intention was to examine if there were any parallels in media development which would support the following thesis questions:

- why the Warlpiri actively embraced the new communication technology;
- whether some forms of technology (for instance telecommunications, radio or television) were preferred over others;
- whether traditional culture/social practices have been damaged or enhanced by the new technology; and
- whether two-way communications between the white Australian community and Aboriginal communities has been enhanced.

There is considerable material about Aboriginal broadcasting in the excellent collections of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the National Library of Australia, including video recordings, but it was becoming evident at the design stage of this research that using the existing literature would not be sufficient. In particular, there was little recently available material that could provide any information about what was currently happening, if anything, in remote Aboriginal broadcasting.

So, in April and May 1999, I travelled to meet with the Warlpiri Media Association at Yuendemu in the Northern Territory and PY Media at Umuwa, near Ernabella, in South Australia. I also spent time in Alice Springs with the Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) and Imparja, the Aboriginal run company that is the licence holder for the central zone commercial television licence.

In total I interviewed 17 people (seven non- Aboriginal men, six non-Aboriginal women and four Aboriginal men) all of whom had worked until recently, or were still working, in Aboriginal media. The interviewees included co-ordinators of the BRACS services for the Warlpiri Media Association, for CAAMA and for PY Media at Umuwa near Ernabella. The non-Aboriginals interviewed were employed by Aboriginal media associations or land councils and were nominated as suitable people to be interviewed by those bodies. The questions covered in these open-ended interviews are listed in Appendix 1.

These interviews were intended to supplement the analysis of the available written material. I also visited New Zealand in October 1999 to examine the latest developments in Maori broadcasting.

Traditional Aboriginal Communication

In order to understand why Aboriginal broadcasting has been valued by the Warlpiri, it is useful to examine traditional communication patterns. Communication has always been a vital part of traditional Aboriginal culture. While Aboriginal culture was pre-literate and had no formal reading or writing, it did have its own cognitive style that relied strongly on symbols and was very visual.[8] However the Warlpiri had a complex system of symbols used in sandwriting and body painting. Munn,[9] in her major work on Warlpiri symbolism, 'Walbiri[10] Iconography', considered these symbols to be a precursor

of writing. The Warlpiri also used hand signals to communicate during hunting or in periods of mourning when silence was required.

With no written records, all the knowledge that the Warlpiri needed for everyday living: food sources, kinship relations and technology had to be remembered and ultimately passed on to the next generation. A complex symbolic system acted as a mnemonic, for example, linking landscape with myths and legends and constant repetition through ceremonies.

As each Warlpiri person grew older and passed through rites of passage, such as initiation ceremonies for men and marriage and childbirth for women, they were given access to more complex traditional knowledge. Michaels describes information as the basis of the Warlpiri economy:

> Aboriginal modes of communication are extensions of the oral and face-to-face nature of that society. These allowed, even required, that information be owned, a kind of intellectual property at the heart of what I understand the traditional Aboriginal economy to be about. Knowledge in the form of stories and songs is the prerogative of senior men and women (elders) and the rules governing transmission are highly regulated. Violating speaking constraints and rights here is treated as theft and recognised to be highly subversive of the traditional gerontocratic social structure.[11]

At the time of European invasion there were approximately 200 language groups throughout Australia that were not isolated from each other. Young men would travel on ceremonial visits, often taking message sticks, which would symbolically describe the reason for their visit.[12] There is evidence of the exchange of material goods such as stone axes and shells right across Australia[13] and also evidence of the exchange of intellectual property, such as ceremonies which followed traditional routes or 'songlines'. During the period of white invasion, groups who had not yet had contact with Europeans were aware of what was happening through wide communication networks and news could travel hundreds of kilometres very quickly.[14]

European colonisation had a major effect on Warlpiri communication; this was even though the Warlpiri lands were marginal for European use and contact up until the 1930s was restricted to a few pastoralists and miners. The Warlpiri had a reputation for resisting the European invasion. After the Coniston massacre of a Warlpiri clan by European settlers and police in 1928 in revenge for the murder of a dingo trapper, Warlpiri elders broke off any contact with Europeans and retreated to traditional lands.

The government settlement of the Warlpiri at Yuendemu occurred in 1946.[15] Warlpiri communications and their traditional songlines were severely affected by this forced settlement. The traditional patterns of moving off in bands to hunt and gather to return to a large group for ceremonies several times a year was broken down. Even the day-to-day movement of groups of men and women to hunt and gather was restricted. Fences prevented movement and therefore communication between groups[16] although there still appeared to be some free movement between the Yuendemu settlement and Warlpiri camps at the Mt Doreen, Mt Allan and Coniston cattlestations.[17]

The Warlpiri Interest in Media

Warlpiri interest in the media can best be described in three phases: an early interest up until the early 1980s; a second phase where the BRACS system, CAAMA radio and Imparja television came into operation; and the most recent phase where the Warlpiri have adopted the latest digital and on-line technology.

Aboriginal broadcasting did not suddenly happen at Yuendemu in the early 1980s, rather it was a continuation of the Warlpiri interest in modern media.

The Warlpiri had been the subjects of films and photographs after visits by anthropologists such as Baldwin Spencer[18] in the early 1900s. By the 1970s anthropologists and ethnographers were feeling uncomfortable about their role of recording the 'dying days' of traditional cultures and a new breed of ethnographic film makers were developing in the post-colonial era who wanted to work with indigenous people.[19]

There was an early experiment at Yuendemu in 1975 using video, which was funded by the Whitlam Government. However the betacam technology proved cumbersome and difficult to use in remote conditions. At Ernabella the male elders were actively using CB radio in the 1970s to communicate between communities and a number of communities in the central region had access to this CB network.[20]

It has been pointed out by Michael Rose[21] that the use of newspapers is often a forgotten area of Aboriginal media studies, but there was a history of newspaper reporting even in early colonial times. More recently the Koori mail, published out of Lismore, provides a national weekly of Aboriginal news. In the 1970s, a number of remote communities were producing local newsletters in language and containing traditional stories, community notices and health messages. These were usually developed in association with the local schools and written in both English and local languages to support bilingual literacy programs at the school. At Yuendemu *Junga Yimi* (or *Our Voice*) was produced by the Warlpiri Literature Production Centre, which later became the Warlpiri Media Association.[22]

In his fieldwork in 1985, Eric Michaels[23] describes the 'Aboriginal invention of television', arguing that the local communities had actually invented their own television and radio service, using domestic quality video and audio equipment to make programs that were then distributed physically throughout the local communities. At first these video and audio tapes were passed between communities and later low powered transmitters were used.

These first videos from Yuendumu covered a range of topics. Sporting events were always popular and some of the early Warlpiri Media Association videos were produced as a visual form of newsletter, with school children showing their paintings and community service announcements read out in local languages.[24] Cultural preservation was also a theme for these early videos with non-secret traditional ceremonies being recorded. After a number of ethnographic films being made of the Warlpiri as subjects, it is interesting to see the Warlpiri's own use of video. Ceremonies were videoed in real time without the tight editing and ongoing narrative of European-made ethnographic videos. Conversations between songs and dances were as important as the action. The landscape around the proceedings was recorded in wide shot with significant features focused on for a period before moving on.[25] Eric Michaels[26] also records the case where an old ethnographic film is used to revive a ceremony that had not been recorded for a while. The new ceremony was later videoed at the direction of the elders.

The early videos were also intended to set the historic record straight. One of the first videos produced by Francis Jupurrurla Kelly describes the Coniston Massacre in the 1920s of Warlpiri by the police after the murder of a local dingo trapper. A male descendent of the Warlpiri victims, accompanied by his young sons, describes the massacre from the Warlpiri viewpoint. He provides commentary in Warlpiri while walking through the landscape pointing out what had happened.[27] The style is remnis-

cent of the traditional sand stories of the Warlpiri where the ancestor in the story appears out of the earth and eventually disappears back into the earth again.

At Yuendemu, European videos were very popular for entertainment. The Warlpiri preferred the control they had in viewing commercial videos that they had ordered themselves rather than relying on European-run film nights where the large viewing audiences violated kinship rules causing stress. There were traditional patterns of reciprocity among family and kin groups in sharing the videos and more comfortable viewing patterns. Yet this hiring of videos was becoming expensive and, as the most popular videos were locally produced on domestic equipment by the community, it made economic sense to install some sort of broadcasting service.[28]

Phase Two: BRACS, CAAMA and Imparja TV

The Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Service (BRACS) provided the technology to enable remote Aboriginal Communities to over-ride the satellite TV and radio services either by turning off the service or by producing local radio or video programs which could be embedded into the satellite broadcasting system. This policy solution was first alluded to broadly in 'Out of the Silent Land' but the final design was very much driven by the Warlpiri Media Association model and Eric Michaels' lobbying on their behalf.

Basic BRACS systems for Ernabella and Yuendemu in 1985 were funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs as a pilot project. When the satellite service commenced in 1987, there was a roll out of equipment to 80 remote Aboriginal communities including upgraded equipment for Yuendemu. The equipment consisted of domestic quality video cameras and video playback machines and cassette audio recorders. There was an assumption by the policy makers that other communities would welcome and use the equipment in the same way as the communities at Ernabella and Yuendemu.[29] This concept of 'Aboriginalisation' makes assumptions that all Aboriginal communities have the same view and needs.

The roll out of equipment was done without consultation and with little information or training. Communities often had nowhere to store the new equipment. Many communities had other more pressing priorities such as health and housing and they considered the distribution of such expensive equipment an extravagance.[30]

The establishment of both the Warlpiri Media Association and PY Media gave the Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara influence on other indigenous broadcast media such as Imparja and CAAMA that were being established in the early 1980s.

The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) was formed in 1980 to protect the cultural interests of Aboriginal communities in broadcasting and was modelled on other Aboriginal organisations such as the land councils and legal services.[31] The Warlpiri Media Association and PY Media were founding shareholders in CAAMA together with other regional, Aboriginal media associations and land councils.

CAAMA established its own radio network 8KIN in 1985 broadcasting through satellite with some programs in language.[32] For the first time a radio station was being run for and by Aborigines. Sixty percent of its broadcasting time was in five Central Australian Aboriginal languages.[33] CAAMA had also been making independent videos on Aboriginal issues since 1983.[34]

Following the success of 8KIN, CAAMA took on an even more ambitious project by forming its own company and in 1985 making a bid for the remote commercial television licence for the central region.[35] The company was named Imparja, an Arrernte word for

footprint, and had shareholders from five Aboriginal land councils, CAAMA and PY Media from Ernabella and the Warlpiri Media Association.[36]

Imparja was granted a commercial licence in 1988 with the intention that 10% of programs should be for Aboriginal communities.[37] It continues to broadcast a successful commercial television service from Alice Springs to remote central Australia. It has been well received by local white communities for its broad mix of programming. Although there has been some criticism that it did not go far enough with its Aboriginal content,[38] it still broadcasts some programs in language and is an outlet for Aboriginal talent. For instance, the newsreaders are Aboriginal, as are many of the actors in advertisements. It is also a source of training and employment for Aboriginal people. Perhaps most importantly it has maintained an ethical policy for the advertising it accepts and still refuses to advertise alcohol as well as promoting positive campaigns for Aboriginal health.[39]

The new satellite services brought a range of media to the Warlpiri. ABC TV and radio, then Imparja TV, 8KIN, and their own BRACS video and radio service. BRACS radio over-rode the 8KIN service and BRACS TV was embedded into the ABC TV signal. In 1993 there was a further upgrade of BRACS equipment providing professional quality equipment.[40]

Phase Three: Future Developments—Digital Broadcasting and On-line Services

The Warlpiri continue to be innovators in media with their latest developments using digital and on-line technology. The Tanami Network, an on-line service, has been established to link remote communities at Yuendemu, Kintore, Wilowra, and Lajamanu restoring traditional communication patterns broken down by colonisation[41]. The Tanami Network has been running for a number of years and uses the satellite to carry out video conferencing between communities, including links to prisons so that prisoners can communicate with friends and relatives. It is an initiative funded by the Remote Telecommunications Information Fund, which arose from the first stage partial sale of Telstra.[42] It will soon link with the Outback Digital Network, which extends through the Kimberley Region and remote Queensland.

The Warlpiri Media Association studios have been upgraded to new digital radio and television equipment, including sound recording studios for local bands. There are also facilities for on-line services and local links through the Internet. The Warlpiri Media Association services a number of BRACS communities from Yuendemu covering an area 1200 km across. The service provides technical advice and training.[43]

The Warlpiri Media Association distributes its radio productions nationally through the National Indigenous Radio Service which is a centralised program exchange receiving programs by satellite, line feed or tape.[44] Currently they are seeking funding with other BRACS broadcasters to use the second Imparja satellite channel, now available due to the digital technology, for community television showing videos of meetings, ceremonies and sporting events, as well as locally produced programs. This has been supported by Imparja.[45]

Even more challenges lie ahead for remote Aboriginal communities with the introduction of new technology such as high definition television and datacasting. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) has recently made a submission to the Productivity Commission enquiry into broadcasting on behalf of Aboriginal broadcasters to establish Indigenous Media Australia, a national service covering television and radio.[46]

Research Findings

(A) *Why the Warlpiri Actively Embraced the New Technology*

Many of the reasons that the Warlpiri embraced the new media lie in the timing, the availability of suitable people and the need for improved communications.

Restoring traditional communications.   Colonisation had broken down the traditional communication patterns and the use of modern technology was a means to restore communication with other Aboriginal groups. Improved communication was an important component of the self-determination movement.

Aboriginal self-determination.   The interest in 'air rights'[47] was linked to other components of Aboriginal self-determination in the early 1980s such as land rights, the outstation movement and the use of other technology, such as four-wheel drives and two-way radios, which were required to ensure that the outstation movement worked effectively. While enthusiasm for the use of BRACS has waxed and waned a little at Yuendemu and Ernabella, there is a link with the need to communicate change. For instance, a current land claim for the Mount Doreen cattle station for the Warlpiri and mining negotiations for the Pitjantjatjara are reviving and increasing the use of the communication systems.[48]

The right people at the right time.   From the early 1970s the previous paternalistic attitudes have been changing and sympathetic Europeans have been actively working to help remote communities move towards autonomy. Many of these Europeans were schoolteachers; for example, it was the local schoolteacher who encouraged the first artwork at Papunya. Eric Michaels[49] was a catalyst in encouraging video use at Yuendemu, after he had visited Ernabella and observed early experiments by the Pitjantjatjara with Rex Guthrie.[50] Michaels was able to lend the equipment and teach the skills. He also later was instrumental in encouraging the policy makers to provide equipment grants. Prior to Michaels there were a number of other enthusiastic and sympathetic Europeans who were able to provide media services to the Warlpiri such as Philip and David Batty and Peter Toyne.

Suitable technology was available.   An early experiment with betacam in the 1970s was not successful, as the equipment was difficult to use.[51] Film cameras, reel-to-reel tapes and editing equipment were both expensive and difficult to use, especially in remote dusty conditions. Video cameras and cassette recorders made the technology easier to use when they became available in the 1980s. The recent roll out of digital equipment has further simplified matters as editing can be done on computers to broadcast quality. Digital cameras are also lighter to use and have advantages such as automatic focusing, a particular advantage where many local people have eye disease.[52]

Funding was available.   The initial grants for video making and radio from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1985 were from remaining funds at the end of the financial year.[53] Support from the Hawke Government and the Bicentenary fund in 1987/88 paid for the original roll out and there was Federal Government funding for the upgrade in 1993. The current funding for the recent digital upgrade was a result of the Telstra sale benefiting remote Australia. However funding has focused very much on providing the hardware rather than salaries for trainers and co-ordinators.[54] Ironically the success of funding has been that it has often been piecemeal and from a wide range of sources.

However, a central source for funding, if it ever eventuated, could be a risk as one source can easily be turned off.

The Warlpiri placed the new technology into existing cultural systems.   Rather than resist change, there is historical evidence that Aboriginal groups adopted European ways and technology, such as horse-riding, metal axes and firearms, with enthusiasm.[55] Change was often built upon existing traditional patterns as Gertrude Stotz[56] has pointed out in her PhD thesis on the Warlpiri's use of Toyotas. However Stotz goes on to describe some of the changes in traditional patterns imposed by vehicles, for example time and distance become condensed and the traditional gender balance of power may be subverted by male control of vehicles. Brisebois[57] considers that change and adaptation are an essential part of a hunting and gathering life, and she cites the Inuit of remote northern Canada adopting snowmobiles and rifles into their culture.

The Warlpiri also adopted the new technology as they were keen to maintain a powerful form of communication to promote their culture and it fitted into existing cultural patterns. The first two major videos made by the Warlpiri used traditional kinship patterns with one group producing the video and the other taking part, very much like the Warlpiri traditional fire ceremony where one clan would support the other clan who conducted the ceremony. The Warlpiri were making a political statement with these videos recounting their version of a massacre and preserving culture by recording a traditional fire ceremony. They also had control over the images, imposing restrictions on viewing, for instance after the death of someone in the video.[58]

When I was at Yuendemu someone had recently died and the sorry business was taking place. While no one was broadcasting at the time, as so many were caught up in ceremonial obligations, a radio service was still being provided as the signal had been switched to take 8KIN directly from Alice Springs.

The technology can be turned off.   One reason that the Warlpiri at Yuendemu were keen to take up the new satellite technology and insert their own programming through the BRACS service was that they wished to maintain control over television viewing as they had already done with video use. This only occurs on rare occasions and there have been two occasions in 1999 where it has been turned off: once for a community meeting on domestic violence and another when Imparja inadvertently broadcast secret sacred material.[59]

Practical implications such as employment opportunities.   Indigenous media services are an excellent training ground for employment. Many of the broadcasters and video makers are employed through the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme where Aboriginal Community Councils pool social security payments and pay it out as wages in return for community work.[60] CDEP employees learn Internet, radio and video skills as well as archiving and cataloguing. They also learn computer skills on editing equipment which, as it is visual, may be a more appropriate way for people with low literacy skills to learn to use computers than through word-processing.[61]

Music recording has been an important extension to indigenous broadcasting. The establishment of CAAMA in the 1980s provided studios for indigenous musicians to record their music for the first time. 8KIN and other stations gave them airplay. Now more mainstream stations, such as Triple J, provide airtime. Many Aboriginal bands, have had national and international success, even with a proportion of their songs being in language. The Warlpiri Media Association have just installed a new recording studio so that local bands do not have to travel to Alice Springs to record. Local musicians

featured in, and were used to provide music for, their new video production, Bush Mechanics.[62]

(B) *Are Some Forms of Technology (For Instance Telecommunications, Radio or Television) Preferred Over Others?*

Since the early days of broadcasting the Warlpiri, and the Pitjantjatjara, have made little differentiation between the type of media, switching from one to the other depending on the need. For instance, radio is useful as an information source and can broadcast in a variety of languages whereas video is used more to record ceremonies or sporting events.

Locally produced radio continues to be popular. At Yuendemu most houses have a radio as well as nearly all cars.[63] The Warlpiri Media Association used to have a loud speaker outside the studio and people could sit outside and listen, although this facility has recently broken.[64] The Warlpiri listen to CAAMA/8KIN but prefer ABC Radio as a source of news. Radio maintains contact between communities and those who are away. 'Greenbush', the prison program broadcast on 8KIN, is particularly popular (although broadcasts are not allowed in language so that prison authorities can monitor the program).[65] Radio is a technologically simpler medium than video for people to learn skills and it can provide more regular employment than video making which tends be more sporadic.[66]

While videos are not made as much as in the early days they are still produced and can give powerful messages such as the health education videos on AIDS and scabies. A video by PY Media on the needs of the elderly was far more effective than a written submission for more resources.[67]

There continues to be support from elders for producing videos of ceremonies to preserve culture. Sporting events are very popular and recorded locally. Programs on local and national AFL football and soccer are essential viewing. This may prove a problem for Imparja, which aggregated with Central TV from Queensland in April 1999 and lost the broadcasting rights for the AFL. Imparja may lose viewers and goodwill in remote communities both black and white.[68]

Generally the Warlpiri watch Imparja but also have an interest in ABC television news. At Yuendemu, they are taking SBS so that local programs can over-ride SBS's service and not interrupt the ABC.

Lack of telephone services still remains an issue. The original satellite service was meant to bring telephony to remote communities but the satellite telephone system proved too expensive. Telstra has now rolled out a terrestrial service (line of sight towers) but few homes have phones or they are cut off due to a lack of payment. There is only one public telephone at Yuendemu for the whole community. There is hope that the new Internet service could at least provide free local calls and an improved telephone service.[69]

(C) *Have Traditional Culture/Social Practices been Damaged or Enhanced by the New Technology?*

Warlpiri culture traditionally defines roles between men and women and the old and the young. At first glance it would seem that young adults, but not teenagers, are the broadcasters, however, they do not control the media as this control lies with elders.[70] The Warlpiri Media Association makes decisions on programming and its members are male and female elders in the community. Similar decisions are made by the Pitjantjatjara Council at Umuwa.[71]

Older people have adopted the use of new technology as it preserves culture by

telling traditional stories and using language. Old recordings/films have been used to revive ceremonies such as the Walpiri fire ceremony.[72] Elders in other remote communities, which have not previously used BRACS video, are now actively asking for cultural material to be recorded.[73]

Children are interested in videos. At Umuwa I observed two women elders bringing in a group of children to the video-editing suite where the children excitedly watched a recently edited video on local ceremonies which featured the children learning the dances and songs.

BRACS has done much to preserve culture, especially language. Nearly all programming is in the local languages. This is even more important as the bilingual education program is currently being reviewed by the Northern Territory Government.[74]

It must be admitted that the early concern over satellite broadcasting implied that Aboriginal culture was not strong enough to 'resist' the dominant European culture.[75] This view builds on the colonial paternalistic view which implied that Aborigines were childlike, easily influenced and unable to make their own decisions and it has strong parallels with the debate over who should control children's viewing. Warlpiri culture has proved itself strong enough not only to resist the onslaught of European culture but also to adapt to using the new media to strengthen their own culture.

(D) *Has Two Way Communications between the White Australian Community and Aboriginal Communities been Enhanced?*

Information is of great interest to communities who were disenfranchised prior to the arrival of broadcasting as they were often unable to see what was happening in the wider community through regular mainstream news services. This was especially true in that they could not observe what their elected representatives were doing or saying. A recent Federal Court case in Canberra on whether genocide is part of Australian law has been videoed for distribution back to remote communities.[76] However, a good indigenous controlled news and current affairs service on Aboriginal issues is still lacking. There is no electronic media equivalent of the national newspaper Koori Mail.

Community service announcements are regularly broadcast on radio and they are one major way to share news and information, including health education campaigns. Governments have used this facility to communicate with remote Aboriginal communities, with varying levels of success. In some cases campaigns have failed, as they have not consulted broadly enough.[77] The National Indigenous Radio Service sells radio time through their system and contracting one or more broadcasters to produce the advertisement or community announcement and translate it if necessary. This ensures that most of the advertisers money goes directly to the communities. Imparja selects the best of remote video recordings to broadcast on its half-hour BRACS program each Sunday morning. Video productions, such as 'Bush Mechanics'[78] produced in 1998, have been sold to the ABC and this program was broadcast as part of the National Indigenous Documentary Series in November 1999. It also won an Australian Film Institute award. Special events are recorded and rebroadcast through the network such as the NAIDOC Week events each July. An agreement has recently been made with the AFL to rebroadcast matches through the network.[79]

There is evidence that local Europeans in remote communities are recognising Aboriginal viewpoints as they listen to local radio programs.[80] Molnar[81] is of the view that indigenous produced media content 'gives non-indigenous Australians an insight into the diversity of indigenous culture and lifestyles missing in the mainstream media'.

Several Northern Territory tourist facilities were rebroadcasting 8KIN from the satellite in preference to mainstream services; one motel manager told me that it was because tourists preferred the music mix to that of the ABC.

A Comparison with Other Indigenous Media Services

Briefly, I would like to compare my findings in Australia with the development of indigenous media in New Zealand and Canada. The Canadian model of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) was influential on the original 'Out of the Silent Land' report and there has been an ongoing interchange of information between CAAMA and the IBC.[82]

In Canada, a BRACS-like system operated which commenced with community radio stations affiliated with the Native Communications Societies in the 1960s. The introduction of the satellite in 1983 led to a government policy to preserve languages and foster culture. The Television Northern Canada service receives $3million per annum in funds and had $10 million establishment costs. It broadcasts in 13 indigenous languages as well as English and French. While Australian Aboriginal broadcasters have been envious of its funding, TVNC lacks much of the local control of the BRACS system in Australia. In 1997, TVNC bid for a national Aboriginal network, the Aboriginal Peoples' Network, with the view to provide a service for indigenous people and also to inform non-Aboriginal Canadians.[83]

In New Zealand, Maori broadcasting has been funded through challenges to the Treaty of Waitangi on the grounds of protecting language and culture. Te Mangai Paho was established in 1995 as an agency to fund Maori broadcasting, television and music. There is a national radio service Radio Aotearoa, local stations run by the iwi (tribes) and an independent news service Mana Maori Media. An experiment in Maori Televison Aotearoa Television ceased after a political scandal.[84]

There are similarities between indigenous broadcasting in Australia and that in Canada and New Zealand. All have been driven by the need for self-determination by the indigenous people and the recognition of the importance of cultural and language maintenance. Canada and New Zealand both have specific policies for the preservation of culture and language and prescribed funding of these broadcasting systems. These have been driven, in the most part, by the legal requirements of treaties between the indigenous population and the colonisers, something that is lacking in Australia. Indigenous Australians have driven the broadcasting policy themselves and made considerable progress despite the lack of policy. This, however, is no excuse for not having a policy in place.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that the Warlpiri actively embraced the new communication technology for a number of reasons. Warlpiri media has done much to preserve culture, improve information flow, support health education campaigns, increase employment opportunities and provide entertainment. It is also flexible enough to fit in with Warlpiri traditions. The facility to ultimately turn the media off provides a reassuring control, although it is used rarely. There has also been an element of luck in the fact that it has continued to receive funding from a variety of sources over the years.

In response to the question about whether some forms of technology (for instance telecommunications, radio or television) were preferred over others, the Warlpiri have never really made a differentiation between the types of media, using the medium that

is most effective for their needs at the time. They have moved between audio and video as well as adopting music production and on-line media with enthusiasm. This is an interesting comparison with non-indigenous media owners and policy makers who are currently struggling with the recent complexities of convergence as the various forms of media (radio, television, and on line services) move toward each other. There also seems to be less specialisation in one medium possibly reflecting the many skills the Warlpiri have in traditional life where everyone participates in art, song, ceremony and hunting or gathering.

While the Warlpiri no longer live their original traditional lifestyle they have maintained strong links to traditional social structure, language and ceremony. Their traditional culture and social practices have been mainly enhanced by the new technology, which has helped restore, and possibly improve, traditional communications. Radio has contributed to the preservation and continuation of the use of language. Video has preserved many ceremonies that may otherwise have been under threat, in one case restoring a ceremony that had been partially forgotten.

The use of modern media could have undermined the social structure of Warlpiri society yet there is strong evidence that elders ultimately still control the broadcasting through the Warlpiri Media Association even though younger adults broadcast.

Two-way communications between the white Australian community and Aboriginal communities has been enhanced. The Warlpiri are influential as 'media proprietors' with shares in CAAMA and Imparja and also represented on the National Indigenous Media Association. Imparja and CAAMA now broadcast over a satellite footprint that covers all remote South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. The remote European community is exposed to some limited indigenous broadcasting though Imparja, especially its popular children's program *Yamba's Playtime* which is broadcast in English with indigenous presenters.

While they may have been pioneers, today Warlpiri are not alone as successful indigenous broadcasters. ATSIC's report 'Digital Dreaming: a National Review of Indigenous Media and Communications'[85] has found each year over 1000 hours of indigenous radio is broadcast. There are a total of 94 indigenous station licences—80 in remote communities and 10 in metropolitan and regional areas, one commercial and three specialty narrowcast. Currently there are 10 aspirant ones and up to 30 more coming up. Helen Molnar,[86] one of the authors of the report, concludes that indigenous media is not a specialist service for Aboriginal people but rather it is their mainstream media. She also argues that indigenous media provides a first level of service to indigenous communities—in their languages and about what is happening in their community. Indigenous media is even more important as indigenous people are invisible in the mainstream media or, if they are portrayed, their image is often negative.

The future of indigenous broadcasting, and in particular the Warlpiri Media Association, is more difficult to predict. Under the current Government it is unlikely to receive further funding for cultural purposes alone. However its role in health promotion could be a strong point.

Indigenous broadcasting is not a linear evolutionary model from oral tradition to print to electronic media. Rather Aboriginal communities have integrated the new technology into their traditional practices to re-establish some of their traditional communications or songlines and to establish a link with non-Aboriginal Australia. As Jim Remedio[87] Chairperson of the National Indigenous Media Association pointed out:

> Most important, is to provide the medium for the messenger, to pass on the voice
> of our people in our stories, in our songs, our images, now that technology has

caught up with our voice. This is something to remember; technology has finally caught up with what we've been saying all these years and it has enabled our story to be heard across the land, around our nation, all over the world. Until now our voices have been unheard in the wilderness and no-one was listening.

Appendix 1: The Following Questions were Covered in Unstructured Interviews

Q1. How would you describe yourself or your organisation?
Q2. Can you describe what you or your organisation does?
Q3. In your opinion has Aboriginal broadcasting been a success? If so why or if not why not?
Q4. In your view has broadcasting affected traditional culture?
Q5. Are men and women equally involved in Aboriginal broadcasting?
Q6. What links do you have with other organisations and who are they?

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