

Indigenous Perspectives on Globalization: Self-Determination Through Autonomous Media Creation

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Why is it important to look at issues which surround Indigenous peoples, globalization, and autonomy? What is an Indigenous perspective on globalization? Can Indigenous communities create local and mass media which promotes their autonomy and self-determination? And if so, what are the implications that this media creation holds in a globalized world? How is Indigenous media creation any different from mainstream media creation? These are important questions for understanding globalization and autonomy because within the current global reality it is a Western worldview, largely transmitted through local and mass media, which dominates and has some unsettling consequences for the entire planet.

Media creation today is more powerful than ever before because of the far-reaching influence of new technologies intricately connected to the forces of globalization. There have been astronomical advances in the area of satellite technology and telecommunications making the world seem smaller by enabling the citizens of the globe to communicate through various media on a level never before known. While these technological advances present new opportunities for Indigenous communities to build platforms for autonomous media representation, the realities of accessing significant telecommunications technology and airtime is the challenge.

For too long, Indigenous ways of knowing have been silenced, but today Indigenous peoples are making their views heard through autonomous media creation and sharing it with the world. The irruption of Indigenous knowledges in local and mass media creation deepens and enriches the ways in which we understand the world and also constitutes a form of resistance to this imbalance by reclaiming space for multiple forms of knowing. In the case of globalization and autonomy, Indigenous peoples can share a lot of insight since they have been resisting the forces of globalization while also asserting their autonomy and right to self-determination for over five hundred years.

Globalization itself is an ambiguous term that has a multiplicity of meanings to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. From one Indigenous perspective globalization is simply an extension of colonization and within this context might be referred to as "neo-liberal globalization." The goal of neo-liberal globalization remains to explore new geographic areas for the purpose of exploitation, domination, and profit. Indeed, this kind of globalization reflects the extensive power and domination of an all powerful, hegemonic value system imposed on other societies and cultures. It is a

systematic project of exploitation of land and people (resources) for financial profit. Environmental costs are never considered in this project because to the majority of settlers, land is viewed as empty and in need of labour in order for it to hold wealth. In this sense, globalization can be seen as the combination of technological developments combined with the interests of corporatism.

Since first contact with settler society, Indigenous peoples have witnessed the collapse and near extinction of diverse whale, fish, and animal populations; the total clear-cutting of traditional territories; massive pollution of land, air, and water; and an onslaught of forced assimilationist policies aimed at destroying entire Indigenous cultures. Neo-liberal globalization is not a new social reality for Indigenous peoples who have already experienced over five hundred years of hegemonic power over their cultures, but rather, is new to non-Indigenous societies who are now also faced with the degradation of their lifestyles in ecological, economic, and social terms, as exemplified by growing environmental problems, resource depletion, and increasing inequalities.

Any discussion of autonomous media creation and globalization should also begin with the realization that mainstream media production is not only an economic activity, but also a cultural process that seeks to introduce and extend the values, lifestyles, and interests of the most powerful groups. For example, the general expectation built into early mainstream electronic media was that minorities would wish to become like the majority in dress, language, and even, if possible, skin colour and hair style. Today this expectation has not shifted. In fact it has become larger because of the exponential growth of media technology and consumption. When access to new media forms is limited to passive consumption it is likely to continue the destruction of distinctiveness, Indigenous or otherwise. Neo-liberal globalization and the omnipresence of Western media has the power to displace, erode, or assimilate other cultures, contributing to a homogenization of Western culture and a lack of accurate, meaningful, and positive cultural representation of Indigenous realities.

It is important for Indigenous peoples to be in control of media representations of themselves. Settler society has imagined Indigenous people in a way that justifies the disregard of their rights and cultures by constructing Indigenous characters and stereotypes within popular culture and academic writing as "primitive" or "other." The consequence has been the construction of a distorted, incomplete, and too often, a fictional rendering of Indigenous experiences. This means the opportunity for Indigenous communities to be their own autonomous cultural producers is eroded, and dominant stereotypes about Indigenous communities are perpetuated. However, in the face of dominant global mass media forces is it even possible for communities outside the mainstream, Indigenous or otherwise, to engage media creation that promotes their autonomy and self-determination?

Indigenous media production is like a contemporary talking stick that creates space for diverse experiences, perspectives, and stories to be shared both within and between

communities at great distances. Combined with the forces of globalization, it presents a medium able to facilitate autonomous media representation that carries the potential to open up space for one to imagine different worldviews. Autonomous Indigenous media creation aimed at building alliances and creating support and space for self-determination is possible and it is one example of the historical and continual resistance of Indigenous peoples to colonial and hegemonic rule. For some Indigenous peoples, like the Secwepemc youth in British Columbia, Canada who are defending their traditional territory from the expansion of a ski resort owned by the Japanese Nippon Cable Corporation, and the Zapatistas of Chiapas who are also defending their territories from corporate expansion, autonomous media creation has also become a digital lifeline and a tool that ensures the outside world does not ignore, forget, or claim ignorance of the daily realities that face Indigenous peoples. For the newly established Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN), which is the first Canadian national broadcasting station whose mandate is to serve Indigenous communities, Indigenous culture and aesthetics are embedded in media creation in ways that resist, co-opt, and transform globalization.

My findings reveal that it is within Indigenous nations that we often find the best resistance against neo-liberal globalization and the hegemonic monoculture attached to it. Just "being" Indigenous makes us subversive, speaking, re-learning our languages, and maintaining our connection to the land and to our way of life. As Indigenous peoples, it is not our nation's Gross Domestic Product that we view as wealth, but rather, the strength of our languages, stories, and relationship to the land and animals. Our rights to self-determination; to our ancestral title over our territories, resources, and traditional knowledge; and to continue to be Indigenous are at the core of the struggle against neo-liberal globalization and are integral in maintaining our cultural and political identities. Autonomous media creation is one of the ways in which this resistance is taking place.

Ironically, from the perspective of media creation, globalization carries with it elements that might prove useful to subvert its colonizing tendencies. The global reach of telecommunication technologies has the potential to help facilitate "Earth Globalization"; space to share multiple ways of knowing on a global scale for the benefit of the entire planet's Creation. In this context Indigenous media creation is resisting, co-opting, and transforming globalization and building what the Zapatistas call "a world in which many worlds fit." For Indigenous communities this involves equipping ourselves with the skills and technology to tell and broadcast our stories to our communities and to the world in an attempt to challenge the dominant Eurocentric worldview.

Autonomous media creation can produce a platform for Indigenous communities to reflect, define, interpret, and to imagine where their community has been, where it currently is situated, and where they would like it to be. What emerges is the possibility of undermining the power of dominant media to impose its representations of who Indigenous peoples are, allowing new perceptions of self and other to be articulated. Although colonization has changed all Indigenous cultures forever, the power of imagination still continues in the minds of the people. It is only when Indigenous people

stop imagining their myths and history that their personal experience will reflect the loss of their culture. Through recognizing the power of imagination, contemporary *storytellers*, or media producers, discover that they are also story *creators* who recount and construct new accounts of myth and history. By combining their storytelling and media creation, they also contribute to a cultural vitalization that is representative and relevant to their communities. Powerful rippling effects are generated in which Indigenous communities, who are sharing stories globally, imagine together with non-Indigenous communities the world in which both live.

But will these new media projects embody the subversiveness necessary to transform neo-liberal globalization or will they get caught up in its hegemonic media values and aesthetics? It is my hope that autonomous Indigenous media creation will not produce a carbon copy of dominant media values, but will instead look inwards and create media that reflects our cultural values and aesthetics as well as the diversity of our voices. Networks such as APTN must strive to include a multiplicity of Indigenous experiences by hiring producers that represent the diversity of Indigenous communities. The greater access to media technology to which North American Indigenous communities have privilege must also be acknowledged by ensuring the voices of our Indigenous brothers and sisters throughout the globe are not left behind. Indigenous women, in all capacities of media production, must be at the forefront of this endeavour.

The range and creativity of Indigenous media production in Canada and throughout the globe is now undeniable. With large, successful Indigenous-led film festivals such as *The ImagineNATIVE Aboriginal Film and Media Arts Festival* firmly established and growing in Toronto, our stories continue our ancestors' resistance to the hegemonic dominant culture of colonialism-cum-globalization.

“INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, STRENGTHENING OUR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS THROUGH COMMUNICATION”

Declaration of the International Forum on Communication for the Development of Indigenous Peoples

Santa Cruz, (Bolivia), 13-15 September 2006

The International Forum on Indigenous Peoples' Communication and Development in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, was attended by representatives from indigenous peoples' organizations and institutions from Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Argentina and Bolivia, invited by Confederación Indígena de Bolivia (CIDOB), the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and FAO. Recognizing that Indigenous Peoples are agents of change and that, in various countries of America, especially in Bolivia, indigenous peoples are reordering the economic and social environment, we have identified the objective of “sharing visions, experiences and developing our own proposals for articulating initiatives and policies on indigenous peoples' communication and development”. Looking forward to the World Congress on Communication for Development, we recognize that:

Communication is a fundamental tool for the democratic and diverse construction of our societies, in particular for indigenous peoples' development. Therefore, the strengthening of identities is essential and intrinsic to all aspects of communication relating to development.

The use of innovative communication strategies has been a significant contributor to social change, despite the presence of various obstacles. Social inequality, in particular is a major challenge to the communication efforts of indigenous peoples.

The efforts, devotion and commitments of various indigenous communicators have been a great benefit to their organizations and towards greater democratization of communication in general, despite varying conditions and access to resources. These efforts have been made despite a lack of attention to public policies in support of this work in the creation of intercultural and diverse democracies.

The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (June, 2006) stresses the importance of communication by stating that indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media and have access to all technological resources without discrimination in addition to having access to all other non-indigenous forms of communication and dissemination (Article 16). In addition, the American Convention on Human Rights indicates that the right to expression may not be affected in indirect manners such as in the case of radio frequencies and other means.

The participants declare the following:

1. We reaffirm that communication is a fundamental element of the liberation, transformation and development of societies and for the enjoyment of Indigenous Peoples' rights.
2. We demand conditions that guarantee that indigenous peoples enjoy the right to communication and development. This is directly related to the equal access to all forms of media, communications and information resources and in closing the digital divide that disproportionately affects indigenous peoples.
3. We demand normative and regulatory frameworks that allow for the improved access to and use of radio frequencies to community media organizations, especially to indigenous community media organizations.
4. We propose the establishment of new forms of relationships based on respect and equality, between all actors involved in the indigenous peoples' communication and development, based on the principle of free, prior and informed consent.
5. We demand that specific attention be paid to the situation of dislocated, migrant and urban indigenous peoples and their communication needs.
6. We propose that indigenous peoples' experiences in the field of communication be highlighted and valued. It is essential to ensure an adequate balance between traditional forms and methods of communication and those derived from new technologies.
7. We demand the protection and strengthening of indigenous systems of knowledge and communication as a basis of intercultural relationships and the protection of the interests of indigenous peoples.
8. We call for goodwill and alliances to develop capacity building and exchange programmes in the field of communication for the development of indigenous peoples. Such programmes should be led by indigenous peoples' organizations and ensure the equal participation of women, taking advantage of all pedagogical resources and new technologies.
9. We demand the recognition and strengthening of Indigenous Peoples' self-determination and management of communications processes.
10. We request a significantly increased presence and space for community media and a greater presence of indigenous peoples in mass media.

11. We appeal to international development cooperation agencies, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and other actors to contribute in a meaningful manner to communication for the development of indigenous peoples, taking into account the recommendations from the World Summit for the Information Society relating to indigenous peoples and to incorporate the theme of Communication for the Development of Indigenous Peoples into the agenda of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

12. The participants of this International Forum on Communication and Development of Indigenous Peoples; representatives of indigenous communications organizations, cultural workers and representatives from international development agencies, are all committed to making a coordinated contribution to indigenous peoples' communication in a diverse and inclusive manner. Thus, we commit ourselves to following up on the conclusions, recommendations and agreements made at this International Forum.

The results of this International Forum shall be made available to Indigenous People's Organizations in Latin America, to the First World Congress on Communication for Development (Rome, 25-27 October, 2006) as well as to the media at large and to national and international audiences.

Santa Cruz, 15 September, 2006.