
Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart’s edited collection on indigenous media is a long-awaited contribution to the field. The editors have brought together essays that detail the wide variety of media, traditional and new, used by indigenous groups. The sixteen essays in this collection also have a broad scope, spanning discussions of indigenous groups from several Latin American countries as well as from Scandinavia, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, Canada, Russia, Wales, and Burma. The essays are organized into four sections. The first reflects upon indigenous media content, aesthetics, and formal style. The second focuses on media as tools of indigenous activism and advocacy. The third examines media as expressions of cultural identity and community, and the final section includes examples of digital and interactive media.

This book is a refreshing combination of research by scholars who are knowledgeable and well-published in the field, coupled with work by relatively new scholars, practitioners or activists who have direct experience with indigenous media groups. Interestingly, the academic contributors to the book are almost evenly divided between researchers in media studies or anthropology. The result is a genuinely interdisciplinary analysis of indigenous media that draws on approaches and methodologies from both areas.

This collection emerged from workshops and roundtable presentations at the Society for Media and Cinema Studies conferences in 2003 (Minneapolis) and 2004 (Atlanta). The editors remark on the recent explosion of new research into indigenous media, just as the organization and practice of indigenous media has itself transformed under the conditions of globalization and digitalization. The editors’ objective was to create a collection that represents the international diversity of indigenous media texts and practices while reflecting the interdisciplinary approaches that characterize its study. In their introductory essay, they trace the technological, social, and cultural factors that generated the conditions under which indigenous media first emerged, and they explicitly link this emergence with global movements for indigenous rights. As they explain, the emergence of indigenous activism was organized around concepts of the “Fourth World” and internal colonialism within settler societies in the latter third of the twentieth century. According to Wilson and Stewart, the growth of “international indigenism” (p.9) throughout various UN bodies and initiatives is tied to a call for globalization from below and is also inextricably linked to a process of self-identification and self-determination by indigenous peoples. The editors also spend considerable time introducing the complexities of global debates about who should count as indigenous peoples and, by extension, what qualifies as indigenous sovereignty and who may be identified as indigenous nations.

While this historical context is somewhat relevant to the essays that follow, the editors missed a valuable opportunity to more fully articulate a model of indigenous media that covers the vast terrain between early forms of ethnographic documentary with indigenous participation to the completely autonomous and digital forms of indigenous media production that prevail today. Such a model would not only have provided a conceptual framework for the various indigenous media practices described in the essays, but would have more clearly defined the focus of the book.

The editors and many of the authors in this collection clearly align themselves with decolonizing movements and cultural activism within indigenous communities that con-
tributes to the creation and control of autonomous media. As advocates for indigenous rights, the contributors to this volume share a common perspective that indigenous media enable both cultural persistence and political resistance in the many different sociopolitical contexts that are surveyed.

The essays in the first section undertake a close reading of indigenous media texts, the kind of “embedded aesthetic” (Ginsburg 1994) and representational practices that distinguish them from mainstream or majority media content and from other types of alternative, oppositional, and minority media. These first four chapters concentrate exclusively on examples of film and video. Salazar and Cordova describe how the production and circulation of indigenous video evolved in several Latin American countries, culminating in the creation of the Latin American Council of Indigenous Film and Communication. These authors suggest the maturation of indigenous film and video in Latin America has produced a kind of “imperfect media” (p. 50), media that give more attention to process, finding new visual languages, or forming new relationships between media, media producers, and indigenous communities than they do the technical or formal attributes of the finished product. Gauthier’s examination of Maori filmmaking in New Zealand and Hearne’s discussion of animated children’s films by indigenous North Americans reveal the variety of visual forms and practices in these different contexts. These authors also illuminate how indigenous film and video share the aspiration to encode indigenous cultures and experiences, not simply as fixed traditions and languages, but as living and dynamic practices that mediate the exchange between producer and audience (p. 91).

The second section purports to examine the role of media in indigenous people’s cultural and political struggles, but the organizing principle is not always clear. Chapters that examine Burmese print and video production, the Chiapas Media Project/Promedios, and indigenous radio in Colombia are included along with Buddle’s essay on Aboriginal women’s radio programming in Canada. The definition of “political struggle” is rather broad and somewhat contradictory in these essays and it elides important distinctions between state-sponsored political violence, active suppression of indigenous dissent, and internal conflicts within indigenous organisations. Some careful editing in this section might have eliminated repetitions between the two chapters on Central and South American examples. At the same time, the editors might have clarified the differences between the indigenous media experience in Canada, where it is federally funded and widely accessible on APTN and through regional and local Aboriginal broadcasters, and the case in Burma or Chiapas, where media freedom is much less likely to be protected for indigenous or minority populations.

The third section includes essays on community-based video in Oaxaca, Mexico; Sami media in northern Scandinavia; Chukchi broadcasting and journalism in post-Soviet Russia; and Welsh-language broadcasting in the UK. These chapters contribute important perspectives on indigenous media in the European context, since most readers will not be familiar with these communities or their cultural and political histories. The discussion of indigenous media outside the settler societies of North and South America, Australia, and New Zealand adds a genuinely global dimension to this book. The fourth and final section includes three essays on indigenous people’s use of digital and interactive media, with examples from Brazil, Australia, Canada, and the U.S. Faulhaber and Forline document the creation of a CD-Rom by the Ticuna people of northern Brazil as an accompaniment to or commentary on ethnographic artifacts in a museum collection. Though the CD-Rom already seems to be an artifact itself, the authors have focussed on the processes by which indigenous cultural knowledge can be inscribed in digital formats and circulated beyond
the community as a form of cultural communication with the outside world. Similarly, in their respective chapters, Christie and Ginsburg take up the larger questions of how indigenous knowledge might be produced, managed, and circulated within digital and online media. As a preeminent scholar of indigenous media, Ginsburg questions the notion of a “digital divide” for its underlying assumption that minority and indigenous populations, marginalized from the network society, must somehow struggle to catch up with the corporatized mainstream. Instead, Ginsburg looks at three very different cases to argue that, “Indigenous producers and cultural activists are creating innovative work, not only in the substance and form of their productions, but also in the social relations they are creating through this practice, that can change the ways we understand media and its relationship to the circulation of culture more generally in the twenty-first century.” (p. 304)

The essays collected in *Global Indigenous Media* provide us with the most current and substantive portrait of contemporary indigenous media available. If this anthology has one overarching flaw, it is perhaps that the reader is overwhelmed by the amount of detail and the repetitions that occur between several of the essays. The book might have benefited from a clearer organizational structure to link the chapters more coherently. Further, the selection criteria are not made explicit, leaving the collection’s rather heavy concentration of essays on Mexican and Latin American indigenous media unexplained. There are relatively few cases from the U.S. and Canada, where indigenous media are equally, if not more, widely, developed. Most notable in its omission is the inclusion of any recent research on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network in Canada, a global first with a highly significant role in acquiring and distributing new indigenous film and video production from Canada and around the world. At the same time, the essays on Wales and Burma make somewhat ambiguous claims to be analyzing instances of indigenous media. The evidence provided in the case of Sianel Pedwar Cymru in Wales might have led to its categorization as minority-language media or regional media, and Burmese minority media might have been better understood as examples of oppositional media under a totalitarian regime. In both these essays, and in the introduction to the collection, the validity and application of the term “indigenous media” needs to be more fully elaborated and justified. The editors could have taken more time to situate the disparate, local experiences of indigenous media within the national and regional contexts touched upon in the book. In this manner, the vast range of practices and texts associated with indigenous media might have been made more comprehensible to the reader not immediately familiar with the topic.

**Reference**


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