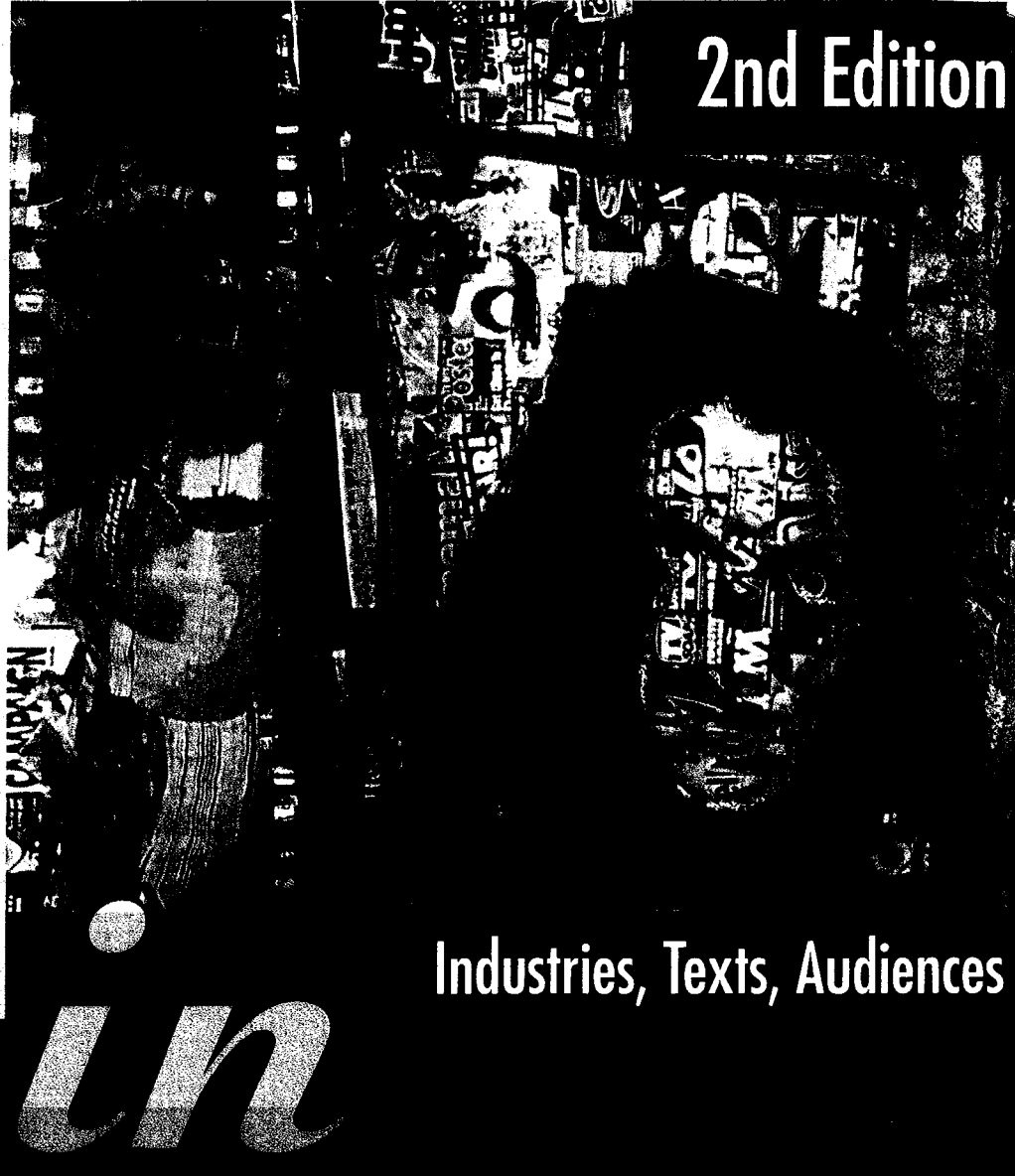THE

MEDIA

2nd Edition

Industries, Texts, Audiences

in

Australia

EDITED BY
STUART CUNNINGHAM AND GRAEME TURNER

Indigenous broadcasters have made a large contribution to community radio, and their achievements are very relevant for other specialist community radio groups as they consider how they might develop over the next decade.

Indigenous radio

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have been poorly represented by the mainstream media, and this has now been well documented in the academic literature (Meadows 1987; 1988; 1994; Ekkerking and Plater 1992; ABT 1992a; 1992b; Langton 1993; Molnar 1995a). Community radio, by comparison, has given indigenous people the opportunity to shape their own cultural and political agendas. Significantly, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have used community radio to re-establish networks electronically between indigenous groups, networks that had been broken and disrupted during the colonisation of Australia.

Radio's appeal for indigenous producers lies in its accessibility, smallness, localness, orality, and cost effectiveness. Indigenous development and self-determination depends on strong individual and collective identities. Indigenous produced radio can play a considerable role in this area through the reinforcement and regeneration of indigenous culture. Language broadcasting has been an important aspect of this, along with the fact that indigenous radio has been a major outlet for indigenous artists. Indigenous music, drama and comedy have all featured on radio, providing in some instances the only outlet for these activities. This in turn has stimulated the growth of indigenous arts. For example, Aboriginal music now has a considerable prominence in indigenous and non-indigenous communities because of its initial exposure on Aboriginal and Islander radio (Breen 1992b). Radio has in this way played not only a cultural role, but also a social and economic one.

Aborigines became involved in community radio in the 1970s, and the first indigenous radio program was broadcast on 5UV in 1972. By 1980, a small number of Aboriginal broadcasters were broadcasting on non-indigenous controlled community stations. The more politically progressive community stations, such as 2XXX, 3CR, Radio Skid Row and 4ZZZ, actively encouraged indigenous involvement as part of their programming mandate. By 1996 Aboriginal and Islander broadcasters were involved in five radio sectors (the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme

(BRACS), cor
increasing th
While cc
indigenous k
numerous pr
about commu
been rarely t
specialist (S l
which unfor
narrowcaster
only. These :
or progressi
their speciali
licence, on t
encourage th
stations did
earlier, have
Furtherm
ment usually
problem. So
difficult for i
ways: provid
to the midni
environment:
last problem
to broadcast
involved. In
would be to
ensuring ind
The Cent
first Aborigi
broadcasting
because succ
indigenous n
due to the eff
became avail
Aboriginal co
one high-pov

(BRACS), community radio, ABC, SBS and remote commercial radio), thus increasing the impact of indigenous radio broadcasting in Australia.

While community radio remains the most important radio sector for indigenous broadcasters, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have had numerous problems working with community radio stations. One of the myths about community radio is that it encourages open access. In practice, this has been rarely the case. Prior to 1992, public radio had two forms of licence— specialist (S licence) and community (C licence). This was a useful distinction which unfortunately has now been lost. Specialist stations, very much like narrowcasters, had a mandate to broadcast specific forms of programming only. These stations, whether they were ethnic stations, Aboriginal stations or progressive music stations, involved volunteers who were interested in their specialist programming. They were not general access stations. The C licence, on the other hand, had a mandate to serve a particular area and encourage the widest possible volunteer involvement. Some of the community stations did this well. However, the more conservative stations, referred to earlier, have 'gatekeeping' controls that make general access impossible.

Furthermore, even when access is guaranteed, non-indigenous management usually has control. At the progressive stations, this has been less of a problem. Some conservative community stations have made access very difficult for indigenous broadcasters, however. They do this in a number of ways: providing little training and resources; banishing indigenous programs to the midnight-to-dawn timeslot; seeking payment for airtime; and creating environments which are hostile to indigenous people. One solution to this last problem is to provide funding to enable indigenous broadcasting groups to broadcast from their own studio via a landline to the community station involved. In the longer term, though, the most appropriate development would be to increase the number of Aboriginal community stations, thus ensuring indigenous control and access.

The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), was the first Aboriginal group to receive a community radio licence. It started broadcasting on 8KIN-FM in 1985. Progress was slow for the rest of the 1980s, because successive federal governments have never formulated an adequate indigenous media policy (see Molnar 1995b). Then in the early 1990s, largely due to the efforts of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT), more licences became available for indigenous broadcasters. This resulted in four new Aboriginal community stations (Brisbane, Townsville, Perth, Kununurra), and one high-powered open narrowcasting licence (Port Augusta). The Top End

Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association also unofficially operates as an open narrowcaster, and is in the process of applying for a community licence as well. A number of other indigenous media associations are also preparing to apply for licences now that the ABA has completed its survey of broadcasting needs. In addition to this, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders broadcast on approximately 30 non-indigenous controlled community radio stations. For example, Koori Radio broadcasts for 30 hours a week via Radio Skid Row, and is one of the likely applicants for a community licence in Sydney.

Radio's popularity in remote areas of Australia received a considerable boost with the establishment of the BRACS. BRACS was conceived by the federal government, and involved the provision of radio and video production equipment to 80 remote Aboriginal communities so that they could produce and broadcast their own video and radio. The project started in 1988 and was completed in 1991. There are major deficiencies with BRACS including inadequate funds for training, staff and production (Molnar 1993). Its basic objective, however, is a good one because it gives production control to remote communities. The National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (NIMAA) has been designing a revitalisation package for BRACS in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the body responsible for funding indigenous broadcasting. The upgrading required is considerable, and past experience suggests that this will not happen quickly.

The launch of the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) on 25 January 1996 marked the beginning of another significant phase of development in indigenous community radio. NIRS is initially using programs from 18 indigenous broadcasting groups and distributing these via satellite to over 170 community stations (this includes the BRACS stations). The service received $3.5 million from the Keating Labor government as part of the former Prime Minister's Innovation Statement. Some of this funding will also be used to establish a National Indigenous News Network, and to examine the demand for indigenous-owned and operated telecommunications services in remote areas (NIMAA 1996, p 3). While the service has received initial funding from ATSIC and the CBF, more funds will be needed to link all indigenous broadcasting groups to the NIRS so that they can exchange programs. As well as having the potential to provide programs to all community stations in Australia, NIRS also hopes to make links with Maori stations in New Zealand, thus promoting regional indigenous perspectives.

Another indigenous initiative involves multimedia and on-line services.

NIMAA is activel about their plans utilising multime culturally appro When all these i broadcasting is ongoing problem major obstacles, broadcasters fro

NARROW

Throughout this most significant casting Services in providing ei service can appl availability of s 'specialist'. Narr particular areas high-power nar: able. By June narrowcasting either racing or is being used b the Federation lacks the neces is that a num information—f services. At th not operationa interested grou

FANSS has children's prog racing; other s information. accommodated

NIMAA is actively canvassing indigenous media groups around the country about their plans in these areas. The association is particularly interested in utilising multimedia technology and education through the development of culturally appropriate multimedia training and production environments. When all these initiatives are combined there is no doubt that indigenous broadcasting is on a much firmer footing than it was a decade ago. The ongoing problems with inadequate government policy and funding are still major obstacles, however, and will continue to prevent many indigenous broadcasters from reaching their potential.

NARROWCASTING

Throughout this chapter references have been made to narrowcasting. The most significant change to the licensing arrangements set out in the Broadcasting Services Act was the establishment of class licences. Groups interested in providing either an open narrowcasting or subscription narrowcasting service can apply for a Class Licence. The main requirement, apart from the availability of spectrum space, is that the content is narrowly defined as 'specialist'. Narrowcasting services are generally low power, and restricted to particular areas. It is possible to apply for a class licence to operate a high-power narrowcasting service, but there are far fewer frequencies available. By June 1995, the ABA had allocated 917 class licences for open narrowcasting radio services. The majority of these services were used for either racing or tourism. It is, however, impossible to say how each licence is being used because the ABA does not keep records of these services, and the Federation of Australian Narrowcasting and Subscription Services (FANSS) lacks the necessary resources to record all the service details. What is clear is that a number of the low power services are being used to network information—for example, one tourism network consisted of 19 narrowcasting services. At the same time, it would appear that a number of the services are not operational, and that some frequencies have been transferred to other interested groups.

FANSS has identified eight potential narrowcasting categories: education; children's programs (for example, Tiny Tots Radio, Bathurst); ethnic services; racing; other sport; specialist music; tourist information; and traffic advisory information. Spectrum scarcity means that all these interests cannot be accommodated, and FANSS is looking ahead to digital broadcasting to expand