

Indigenous media boundaries: Reconsidering the binary of indigeneity and settler state

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Abstract

This paper draws attention to the ways in which mainstream approaches to the study of indigenous media assume that the key determinants of indigeneity are ongoing minority status and encapsulation by a larger settler state in a postcolonial context. This assumption is queried in terms of the problems of defining and circumscribing the concept of indigeneity and “indigenous people”. Its widespread acceptance is argued to derive from the fact that while key studies of indigenous media have focused on communities which share the characteristics of minority status and encapsulation, they have not taken account of other indigenous groups whose experience of colonisation did not involve major settlement by the colonising power, and who therefore never became a minority in their own region. The paper reviews how the emphasis on minority status and opposition to a non-indigenous mainstream culture has influenced the use of indigenous media as a means of asserting and nurturing traditional community values and cultural identity among several encapsulated indigenous communities. This localised adversarial situation, however, does not appear to take sufficient account of the extent to which those community values are starkly at variance with the value systems underscoring global communications technology, and of how the predominance of global consumer culture is not only inflecting how indigenous identities are defined, but also how young people respond to the representation of traditional community values in indigenous media products. The situation which has evolved in the small Mediterranean island of Malta is presented as a case study of how ancestral intra-group rivalries and discord can become institutionalised in the indigenous media system, and, given the wide availability of alternative global media, end up undermining community cohesion and indigenous identity rather than nurturing them.

Keywords:

Indigeneity, settler society, minority status, identity, postcolonial, encapsulation, community, intra-group rivalry, media globalisation, consumerism, Malta, Australian Aboriginal media, Māori media

Defining indigenous media

Scholarly discussions of indigenous media frequently define indigenous communities, peoples and nations along the lines set out in José Martínez Cobo’s influential 1986 description as “those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them” (as cited in Gigoux and Samson, 2010, p. 289). On this basis, indigenous

media are often distinguished from “multicultural media” and the media produced by and for minority groups who came to various countries as immigrants, slaves, or “guest workers” (Ginsburg, 2002). Discussions of indigenous media thus generally focus on indigenous groups who live as a minority within a historically colonial nation-state dominated by an originally European settler society, as is the case, for example, with Māori, Australian Aboriginal, Native American and Inuit societies. These are societies which have had to struggle against the biases (not always unconscious) and institutionalized racisms inherent in national media systems that generally target the majority population (Glynn & Tyson, 2007, p. 207). This paper considers how some of the key qualities which are habitually claimed to characterise indigenous media products from different parts of the world are often based on an unquestioning acceptance of this definition and on its underlying assumption that ongoing minority status and encapsulation by a larger settler state in a postcolonial context are key determinants of indigeneity and, by implication, of indigenous media. It argues that a broader definition could encourage a more critical evaluation of the evolving characteristics of global indigenous media by allowing for comparative studies of the media experiences of other indigenous communities which, though they share many of the characteristics identified in the Cobo definition, have not become a minority in their territories because their colonisation did not involve major settlement by the colonising power.

Academic discussions of the meaning and applications of the term “indigenous people” frequently acknowledge its problematic nature. Attempts to refine the meaning of the term frequently follow the Cobo definition by suggesting “first-come, non-dominance, cultural difference, and self-ascription” as key criteria, but all these criteria have also been argued to have their problems (Barnard, 2006, p. 1). Lee (2006), for instance, has noted that “the famous Cobo definition [...] will not work in all parts of the world” because it fails to take account of regions like South Africa and South East Asia, where “those claiming to be indigenous are encapsulated, not by European settler states, but by agrarian politics in which the dominant ethnicity situates itself in one or another of the Great Traditions from which the indigenes are excluded” (p. 458-459). For some anthropologists, the very idea of an “indigenous people” is an essentialist romantic fiction because it relies “on obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision” (Kuper, 2003, p. 395). Others see it as an exclusively political construct, denoting a claim to legitimate political goals for a category of peoples whose identity we recognise “when we see it”, despite the possible definitional problems that the concept creates (Barnard, 2006, p. 7). “The indigenous” has also been described as not so much a category as a field of discourse which encompasses a competition between rival contents and ontologies, positive and negative evaluations. In this view, because “indigenous peoples’ self-ascription has an address: their colonisers, who respond to it”, the field of indigeneity is “inseparable from the politics of territorial expropriation” and is as much a matter of settler imposition as of native self-ascription (Wolfe, 2006, p. 26).

Even as a political and legal construct, the term is recognised as problematic. As noted by the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1996, the guidelines that modern international legal experts consider relevant to understanding the term “indigenous” are anything but definitive or comprehensive (Wilson & Stewart, 2008, p.14). The UN’s 2008 Development Group Guidelines on Indigenous People’s Issues stress that “the international community has not adopted a definition of indigenous peoples and the prevailing view today is that no formal universal definition is necessary

for the recognition and protection of their rights” (United Nations Development Group, 2008, p. 8). Among the existing attempts to outline the characteristics of indigenous peoples which the UN’s guidelines list as relevant to the understanding of the concept of “indigenous” are self-identification as a distinct collectivity (described as a fundamental criterion) and “an experience of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination, *whether or not these conditions persist*” (United Nations Development Group, 2008, italics added). The phrase “whether or not these conditions persist” is worth highlighting here because it draws attention to the experiences of other indigenous communities which share (or used to share) most of the characteristics of indigeneity identified by Cobo and the UN but whose colonisation and subjugation did not turn them into a minority in their own region. This was often the case with communities who went through a form of colonisation which did not involve major settlement by the colonising power, and who thus have continued to constitute the majority of their now independent nation-states. Many of these groups have moved from a position of colonial subjugation to self-government and as a result have had control of their media systems over a longer period than is the case with indigenous groups which are still encapsulated by settler or other states. Because these groups’ identities are not still so caught up in political, legal and definitional competition with an encapsulating settler state, the development of their media systems has allowed for other aspects of tradition, community values and indigeneity to become manifest. The media landscape which has evolved in the small Mediterranean island of Malta provides an interesting illustration of how this important difference has given rise to the institutionalisation of an indigenous media system which is dominated by competition and rivalries over group identities, not in opposition to other prevailing settler societies (since these are not there) but against other groups within the indigenous community itself. Since most of these rivalries are rooted in traditional community practices and belief systems, the media situation which has developed in this community can be argued to raise challenging questions about the frequently romanticised notion that global indigenous media practices are holistically unified by ancestral community values and affirmative identity politics.

To this end, this paper starts with a consideration of the key characteristics of indigenous media systems and products as these have been defined and discussed by academic approaches which focus on encapsulated indigenous communities that remain a minority within their nation state. It then draws attention to some of the problems associated with indigenous identity and community values in an increasingly globalised media landscape and considers the case of Malta as an example of how some of these problems have influenced the media system in a politically independent postcolonial community whose history and practices reflect striking variations from those of minority indigenous communities still living within broader nation-states.

Cultural encapsulation, identity and community values

The emphasis on ongoing minority status (numerically and in terms of power) and encapsulation by a larger settler state as key determinants of indigeneity is well reflected in what is perhaps the most widespread understanding of indigenous media productions – i.e. that they are the work of minority

group activists who use Western media technologies in order to counter dominant media misrepresentations of indigenous people by documenting indigenous cultural traditions from an indigenous perspective, and in the process articulate indigenous cultural identities and futures. In this sense, indigenous media making is usually perceived as a key aspect of a larger project concerned with the retrieval, revival and regeneration of cultural identity and traditional community values in response to the historical decline of those qualities because of the encapsulating or marginalising influence of dominant settler societies. Indigenous media are thus seen as powerful arenas of cultural production, in that they simultaneously work towards challenging and changing the assumptions informing the visual and aural landscapes of mainstream media, while also providing innovative contexts and practices through which new forms of indigenous solidarity, empowerment, identity, and community are created (Dowell, 2006, p. 376).

One important aspect of these positions is an emphasis on the crucial role played by indigenous media in balancing or counteracting the more mainstream value systems and worldviews of the prevailing settler societies. Indigenous media practitioners from a range of encapsulated cultural communities thus frequently stress both the importance and the challenges of appropriating new media technologies in order to give their younger generations hope and cultural pride through a stronger connection with their community, ancestry and heritage. Zacharias Kunuk's community-based Inuit production company Igloodik Isuma, for instance, sees itself as using media technologies to get back in contact with "four thousand years of oral history silenced by fifty years of priests, schools, and cable TV" (Kunuk, 2002, p. 13) and as "pioneer[ing] the use of video and TV to give new life to our past and to show youth that a living past means a living future" (as cited in Ginsburg, 2003, p. 828). Indigenous media producers often describe their work as having to compete against the popular appeal of mainstream media products, as well as needing to learn from and adapt some of the techniques which make these products popular. This mission is seen as particularly important because young people coming from minority groups often appear to be overawed by more mainstream perspectives and lifestyles, with consequent confusions of identity. As one Australian Aboriginal radio broadcaster put it:

Today hunting is mostly done on Nintendo video games and they're talking like New York rappers. Can our culture or our language or our morals and ethics survive? Are our leaders aware of this very loud invasion that is staring us in the face? Are we in a position, if not to stem the tide, at least to come to a compromise and still maintain our culture and identity in this very multiracial community which is Australia? Those are some of the questions which we as media, Indigenous media, are faced with today. (Hartley & McKee, 2000, p. 177)

Aboriginal Australian communities responded to the arrival of satellite television in the 1980s by appropriating the new technology as a means of facilitating the preservation and renewal of cultural traditions (Michaels, 1994; Parks, 2005), and "putting them to work for remembering, imagining, connecting, and becoming-in-relation to the Ancestral" (Deger, 2006, p. xx). Jennifer Deger (2006, p. 75) has recorded how members of the Aboriginal Yolngu community of northern Australia saw young people's enthusiastic endorsement of mainstream Western videos and music as making them "forget who they are" and blind and deaf to their own culture and traditions. Like other indigenous media makers working in other parts of the world, the Yolngu realised that advances in media

technologies and global communications have created a situation where the only way tradition can be revitalised is through an informed use of those very technologies. “Just as media can produce perceptual blockages leading to blindness or forgetting,” Deger was told, “so too it can be used to open eyes, ears, hearts and minds” (p. 76). The challenge was to use mainstream Western technology in terms that were not dictated by Western imaginations. Māori television producer Tainui Stephens similarly describes himself and his colleagues as “the inheritors of a magnificent story-telling tradition”, following in the lines of tribal orators who “interpreted the world they knew and observed, for the benefit of other people” (Stephens, 2004, p. 107).

Indigenous media have been the focus of political activism because of the crucial role they are understood to play in transforming social consciousness, particularly because of their importance in preserving and reviving the often endangered languages of encapsulated indigenous communities. The links between language, cultural identity and postcolonial political activism are perhaps most powerfully illustrated in the way Māori radio and television were successfully introduced as New Zealand’s national indigenous broadcasters with the clear intention of playing a major role in promoting, normalizing and revitalising Māori language, culture and custom. The demand for Māori radio and television was largely driven by a desire to counteract the erosion of the Māori language, which had been “brought to the very brink of extinction, more than anything else by the influence of monolingual broadcasting” (Fox, 1993, p. 132). Māori radio was introduced as a result of many years of sustained activism, protest and legal challenges against a national radio network (first set up in 1926) and individual private stations which for many years “operated as if Maori culture, including the language, either did not exist or were irrelevant to New Zealand society” (Browne, 1996, p. 155). The gradual introduction of Māori programmes appropriately informed by Māori values and perspectives on the national radio network, as well as the establishment of separate Māori radio stations over the period 1989 to 1994, took place in the face of strong and persistent conservative opposition. That opposition inevitably also played an important role in how these media outlets defined themselves. Similarly, the introduction of Māori Television in 2004 has been seen as forming part of a strategy of decolonisation which seeks to critique and interrupt the hegemony of New Zealand settler society by affirming an indigenous form of social agency from within the mediated public sphere – “a practice of incorporation that poses a counter discourse to prevailing national orthodoxies” (Smith, 2006, p. 28). In similar ways, the Welsh-language television broadcaster Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C) was born out of political protest, “a testament to the capacity of individuals to work in cultural groups both to contest their own cultural erosion and, more positively, to develop a media institution that may speak to that community in its own tongue” (McElroy, 2008, p. 233). In both these examples, the media’s role in preserving and enhancing the indigenous language was recognised as crucial in protecting and fostering cultural identity and traditional community values in opposition to the institutionalised biases of national media systems primarily targeted at an encapsulating non-indigenous majority population.

Faustian bargains and media globalisation

Powerful and effective as these uses of indigenous media among encapsulated communities have been, it is worth remembering that the process of revitalising indigenous languages, cultural traditions and identities by recreating and re-inscribing them through mainstream Western technologies also means that they inevitably get modified. Cultures are, of course, of their nature constantly evolving since there is no such thing as an essential or pristine cultural identity. But there have been dramatic developments in the method, direction and rate at which indigenous community values and cultural identities are evolving in response to developments in new media technology and the thrust of globalisation more generally. Faye Ginsburg (1991) famously described this situation as involving a “Faustian bargain”, in that, by using new technologies for cultural self-assertion, indigenous film, video-makers and broadcasters are also spreading a technology that might ultimately foster their own disintegration. Indigenous media thus also need to be seen as not only working as counterbalances to mainstream (settler) cultural values but also as inevitably forming part of a larger global process in which local cultures (indigenous or otherwise) are not so much being replaced by global media culture as getting inflected by being made to co-exist with it. The local and the global have become deeply intertwined, paradoxically reinforcing as they symbiotically transform each other (Grixti, 2006). In this sense, the preservation and revitalisation of communal identities among indigenous cultures are inextricably entwined with the realities of globalisation and the complex transnational constructions of what Appadurai (1990) calls “imaginary landscapes”. By embracing, adapting and indigenising new communications technologies, the best examples of global indigenous media are not simply preserving the lessons and wisdom of ancestors; they are also actively choosing to forge new imaginary landscapes.

The ways in which these imaginary landscapes get forged is influenced by the current realities of global communications and commerce as well as by indigenous belief systems and traditional community values. There are a number of intrinsic problems and contradictions underlying this situation. In global Western media, consumerism draws on and nourishes rampant individualism, which is a prized value of Western societies. In contrast, many indigenous societies place value instead on the collectivity (family, community, the village, the tribe) rather than the individual. Their media productions are motivated by a desire to enhance this collectivity rather than nurturing, rewarding or frustrating individuals who want to be richer, more beautiful, more successful, more cool, or more admired than other members of the same society. The underlying value systems and political and ethical motivations are quite different. Zygmunt Bauman (2005) describes the criteria which drive and underscore postmodern consumer cultures as motivated by the imperatives of transience, or what he memorably calls the *fluidity* or *liquidity* which characterizes the consumer market’s propagation of “rapid circulation, a shorter distance from use to waste and waste disposal, and the immediate replacement of goods that are no longer profitable” (p. 59). As Bauman points out, a consumer market catering for long-term needs, not to mention eternity, would be a contradiction in terms. As a result, the thrust of the international commercial media marketplace is to subordinate ancestral values and cultural difference to the demand for instant consumption, instant gratification and instant profit. This means that tradition and difference become attributes to be traded, and that they are required to “legitimise themselves in terms of market value (and their *current* market value, to be sure) or perish” (p.59). This is in very marked contrast to the motivations

informing the work of indigenous media makers concerned with fostering and preserving language, tradition and ancestral custom, with using “visual, poetic and oral imagery [...] to transfer intergenerational memories from elder to community” (Cache Collective, 2008, p. 85). Bauman’s (2005) metaphor of “liquidity” and the (Western) associations of flowing impermanence and superficiality which he brings to it are also starkly different from the ways in which the shimmering and flowing surfaces of sacred waters are viewed as a conduit to spiritual experience and deeper understanding in Australian Aboriginal art. From Bauman’s (2000) European (materialist) perspective, liquids are anything but timeless or durable because they “do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it” (p. 2). From a Yolngu Aboriginal perspective, however, the shimmering and dappled luminescence of flowing water can create abstract and aesthetically engaging effects that provide the possibility of an experience of the Ancestral. Viewed from this different cultural perspective, solidity is not a prerequisite of durability or enduring value. As Deger (2006) puts it, “in Yolngu hands, photographs, audio recordings, video, and radio generate mimetic ripples that reach beyond the ‘everyday’ time and space, amplifying an invisible yet sensuously encompassing intersubjective field of unity” (p. 215).

In other words, the emerging imaginary landscapes being forged through global indigenous media draw on underlying world views and value systems which are intrinsically contradictory. Further, because the predominance of global consumer culture has turned the international commercial media marketplace into a “global mall” where an “ethnic-food-court approach creates a One-World placelessness” (Klein, 2000, p. 117), there is also a danger that the cultural differences informing indigenous media-making can become neutralised through incorporation into the global marketplace as aestheticised attributes to be traded. This risk is of course endemic to the fact that all contemporary cultures are to some extent hybrid, and hybridity, as Kraidy (1999) points out, is “a zone of symbolic ferment where power relations are surreptitiously re-inscribed” (p. 460). The re-inscription of power relations and the meeting of conflicting value systems can also give rise to the types of risks identified by Ruth McElroy (2008) in her discussion of indigenous media projects which are “deeply imbricated in broader political projects” (p. 235): that indigenous media can become agents for maintaining cultural essentialism and for propagating cultural exclusions and national exclusivity. The preservation of shared commonality within an indigenous community or nation is thus usually paralleled by a strong sense of cultural and linguistic discontinuity with respect to outsider-groups or nations, so that the construction of a collective identity “generally involves active strategies of inclusion and exclusion whereby the boundaries of a given collectivity are policed” (Schlesinger, 1994, p. 27). As an inevitable characteristic of community groupings and protocols, the policing of boundaries can often lead to complex social and moral dilemmas when indigenous broadcasting becomes institutionalised. Some of the lessons and risks involved here are well captured in the ways patterns of indigenous media production and news reporting have been influenced by long-established community and village life orientations in the traditional and highly politicised context of the small Mediterranean island of Malta.

Traditional community allegiances and their discontents

Malta's very long history of subjugation and colonisation (most recently as a British colony from 1800 to 1964) has left a profound imprint on the island's cultural identity as well as on the evolution of its indigenous media. The Maltese people are similar to other indigenous communities as identified in the Cobo and UN definitions in that they are a self-identified collectivity "having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories". They have also experienced a very long history of "subjugation, marginalisation, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination" through colonisation and domination by a long line of foreign powers. As is the case with many other indigenous communities, Maltese national and cultural identity has frequently been a site of contestation and ambivalence (see Mitchell, 2002), not only because of the island's small size, colonial history and geographical proximity to Italy and the European mainland, but also because of the influence of foreign media and the increasing impact of globalisation. Malta is, however, also significantly different from other encapsulated indigenous communities in that, because its most recent colonisation (by Britain) did not involve major settlement by the colonising power, the Maltese indigenous population still constitutes, and always did constitute, the majority of its now independent nation state. Though British colonial rule and its military and naval presence in Malta left a strong imprint on Maltese culture and national identity, it did not involve major long-term settlement by British nationals. It did, however, create a situation where the majority population became second-rate citizens in their own land, in that the colonising power's personnel and their families often had exclusive access and use of land and other facilities which were not available to the locals. At the same time, however, there was a great deal of both official and social interaction between the British and the Maltese: intermarriage and lifelong friendships were common, English gradually established itself as the island's second language, and a number of British cultural customs also became part of Maltese everyday life. But, especially since the achievement of independence in 1964, the indigenous population's ongoing majority status in its own region (however small) has meant that the definition, nurturing and maintenance of Maltese national, linguistic and cultural identity has not been as dominated by the need to oppose or counteract the type of external threats to cultural survival and community values which characterise indigenous communities that are an encapsulated minority in a larger nation-state. The end of Malta's colonial era in the 1960s sparked a period of intellectual and artistic renaissance, along with a questing for self-understanding, roots, and identity. "Academics, artists, philosophers, musicians, writers, historians, scientists and linguists were all exploring what it meant to be Maltese," and ancient local landmarks like the Neolithic temples "were employed as symbols of an essentially Maltese identity" (Rountree, 2002, p. 37). In this sense, Maltese indigenous identity was not constantly being defined in opposition to a prevailing non-indigenous culture, and as a consequence (because there was no "common enemy", as it were), ancestral intra-group rivalries and discord also became more visible. These characteristics have, in the case of Malta, led to complex developments when they became institutionalised as part of the national broadcasting system, as evidenced when the national television and radio networks became a focus of intense local political antagonisms, controversy and at times violent community conflict when they were nationalised and turned into a mouthpiece for the then ruling Labour party in the 1970s and 80s (see Sammut, 2007).

With a population of just over 400,000 living in a total area of 316 square kilometres, Malta is one of the oldest and most densely populated countries in the world. Because of its distinctive features as a small island community with its own language, a long history of foreign domination, small-scale economic conditions and limited audience reach, the media system which has evolved in Malta is a complex mixture of staunch insularity and global village orientations. The Maltese are keen users of all forms of communications technologies, through which they have access to an increasingly broad range of both local and foreign transmissions. Indigenous media products (in Maltese and English) to a large extent dominate the Maltese media landscape with a lively and flourishing range of newspapers, radio and television stations – in 2009 there were four daily and eleven weekly Maltese newspapers and magazines as well as eight TV stations and thirteen radio stations broadcasting on the national frequency (Borg, 2009, p. 21, 26). Though these outlets are becoming increasingly influenced by commercialisation, their historical origins and distinctly local cultural biases also mean that they are markedly different in a number of significant ways from other indigenous media systems as well as from the mainstream European or Anglo-American models with which they rub shoulders and also frequently emulate.

Underscoring the distinctly indigenous orientation and flavour of the Maltese media landscape are the very old and deeply ingrained dependences on kinship and community networks which have created a situation where patronage and rivalry dominate the social and political landscapes. Politics and political debates in Malta are conducted in a uniquely passionate and colourful fashion – one which the Dutch anthropologist Jeremy Boissevain (1965) influentially compared to the patterns of patronage and rivalry which traditionally characterised village allegiances to patrons and saints. This is also reflected in the way the local media situation has evolved. In a country which has traditionally been staunchly Roman Catholic in its beliefs and customs, the discourse of indigenous broadcasting and media production is dominated by politics and religion. Non profit advocacy broadcasting and journalism are deeply engrained in indigenous Maltese media practice – as is indeed the case in a number of other Mediterranean societies (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004) – but these also coexist with public and commercial set-ups.

When local broadcasting became available to private companies with deregulation in 1991, the country's major political parties and the Catholic Church were the first to be granted licences. As a result, Malta is now the only European democracy in which large segments of the broadcasting and print media are owned and controlled by the two main political parties and by the Catholic Church. State-sponsored public service radio and television stations as well as commercial broadcasters are carefully monitored by the local Broadcasting Authority, which has considerable supervisory and regulatory powers. There is, however, precious little control on how the officially partisan radio and television stations use their privately owned media outlets to propagate biased party political viewpoints with the aim of preserving and revitalising partisan identities and communities. As a result, dichotomous world views framed within party-political lines tend to dominate the media system, particularly before general elections, with a consequent reinforcement of community divisions and a dampening of aspirations for national cohesion and consensual decisions (Sammut, 2009, p. 96). The traditional institutional constraints that have made the Maltese media system the idiosyncratic mixture that it is today have led to many journalistic excesses, and news reports and broadcasting more generally often focus on the preservation and revitalisation of exclusively

partisan communities. Through news and current affairs programmes which interpret social reality on behalf of their listeners, partisan radio and TV have become what Sammut (2007) calls “the main shrines where party pilgrims gather to discuss missions and revere relics” (p. 213). In this case, indigenous broadcasting does indeed play a major role in extending cohesion and a sense of belonging, but only at party level. The essentialising exclusivity of such forms of belonging has also been highly divisive and detrimental at broader national and inter-community levels.

This situation has ironically helped to alienate many young people from their own indigenous roots and traditions. Research into how indigenous youth in Malta forge their personal and cultural identities in relation to their local and global media experiences (Grixti, 2004, 2006) reflects wide dissatisfaction among young people with the extent to which local media have become oppressively polarised along party political lines. Most of the young people interviewed in these studies reported that they always change radio and TV channels to avoid local political debates and discussions. Given the plethora of alternative international media available to them, it is perhaps not surprising that many of these young people have come to associate being young, forward-looking, modern, technologically advanced and enlightened with being in tune with what comes from more mainstream Western societies – or more specifically, with what comes from Western Europe, Britain and the United States, particularly through the media. Being “old fashioned” and backward tends to be linked with an inability to move beyond the more obviously indigenous and traditional. Many of the young people interviewed in these surveys expressed impatience with “the old ways of doing things”, insisting that greater openness to new ideas, and especially to ideas coming from more technologically advanced cultures, was essential to their country’s and their own further development (Grixti, 2004, p. 154-159). Though they often remained fiercely proud of their country’s history, many made a point of distancing themselves from what they considered the “traditional” Maltese way of life. One young man insisted that he was “Maltese by nationality, but not Maltese by culture”, and another made a point of distancing himself from what he described as the “traditional” or “typical Maltese attitude” because he believed himself to be more in tune with what he saw as “the European attitude to things” (Grixti, 2006, p. 111-112). There is a curious process of self identification and identity formation reflected in these statements. All identity construction, as Kennedy and Danks (2001) put it, “requires the summoning of difference, the relativisation of the self as against the ‘other’ imagined as separate, outside – and perhaps also as marginal, inferior and dangerous” (p. 3). What seems to be happening with young people like these is that it is the traditional and indigenous which have been designated as the “other”. They appear to be choosing to nurture cultural (and linguistic) discontinuity with their own inherited environment in favour of commonality with the foreign. It is perhaps not surprising that such alignments often lead to disappointment and identity confusion.

This paper has argued that broadening the ambit of the meaning and applications of the terms “indigenous media” beyond the binaries of indigeneity and settler state can lead to a better understanding not only of the complex global challenges facing indigenous communities and media systems, but also of what can happen when indigenous identities and media systems cease to define themselves in constant opposition to a prevailing settler society. The evolution of the local media system in Malta has been offered as a striking example of how, when indigenous media systems become heavily influenced by traditional community rivalries, they can end up undermining and

possibly even negating the nurturing and maintenance of indigenous values and rooted cultural identity. This is particularly pronounced because indigenous media systems function within a broader international media marketplace characterised by the widespread availability of an increasing range of global media outlets propagating alternative cultural perspectives, values and imaginary landscapes.

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