

Valerie Alia, **The New Media Nation: Indigenous Peoples and Global Communication**, New York: Bergham Books, 2010, 270 pp, \$69.58 (hardcover).

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*The New Media Nation: Indigenous Peoples and Global Communication* explores the living systems of self-produced media used to “re-present”, “re-vision” and “re-make” indigenous identities within the mix of modern mediascapes. The content draws largely from a Canadian perspective; however, there is extensive coverage of the global scope of the new media nation. Print, radio and television news media as well as such artistic endeavors as photography and film are chronicled. The entries are encyclopedic and the multiple forms of resistance inspiring, yet the impetus for the resistance is only implied. Others have focused on the conditions that led to dire poverty, alienation, extreme oppression and abandonment by the state; Alia focuses instead on the moments of resistance and the tipping point for change. Outlining the many struggles here would do neither the book nor the movement’s justice, but Alia has produced an inclusive and important resource documenting the remaking of indigenous representation. The reader gets the feeling that if media were the tool for indigenous resistance, networking, mobilization or maintaining culture and language, that movement has been incorporated within these pages.



Alia makes it clear that the appropriation of the airways and the re-visualizing of indigenous image through media happen organically. Modern indigenization of media is not a static, one-size-fits-all approach, but a mosaic of multiple voices. She describes the new media nation as an outlaw nation. Participants are Robin Hood-like figures, “operating in the peoples’ interest. If not literally ‘stealing from the rich’ they most certainly are ‘giving to the poor’—to those disadvantaged by governments, corporations, and more generally, by economic and environmental circumstance” (Alia, 2010, p. 109). They are guerrillas and rebels, the alternative town criers who begin underground and become legitimate. The new media nation has humble beginnings, but strong convictions and determination. The new media nation is cultural survival led by those who face stolen identity and sometimes life-or-death situations with every expansion into the mainstream.

The book’s title is also the name of the revolution: The new media nation is cultural action, the making and remaking of identities. Its home is in the contact zones where old traditions flow into new technologies, where news outlets simultaneously restore and create space to promote or maintain languages, culture and common interests. Change is organic, not anomalous, and media leaders are at once guerillas and legitimate. Alia describes the new media nation as one result of what George Manuel (1974), a member of the Shuswap (Secwepemc), Neskonalith First Nation of British Columbia, Canada, called the Fourth World movement. Framing the Fourth World not as a place, but as a global highway, “the Fourth World is not . . . a destination. It is the right to travel freely, not only on our own road but in our own vehicles” (see Said in Alia, 2010, pp. 13–14.) People of the Fourth World cannot be contained within

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national or state borders. This is indigenized modernity, a rewriting of the story through a network of resistance. Despite the resiliency and determination of the new media nation, there are "Pathways and Obstacles," the title of Chapter 2, that persist. Alia writes:

The urgency of [the new media nations'] development can be understood not only by the suppression of political activities and cultural practices, but by the rampant misrepresentation of indigenous people in the dominant media. Whether benignly ignorant or aggressively racist, such misrepresentation does considerable damage. (Alia, 2010, p. 32)

For example, in 2002, when Queen Elizabeth II visited the capital city of Nunavut, Iqaluit, "in a startling mix of half truths and total misinformation" (ibid.), reporters described the warm welcome she received from "Inuit Indians," and displayed many pictures of "Baffin Island." Not only did the journalist misidentify the place, but they also misidentified and misrepresented the people as well. "Inuit Indians" do not exist (ibid). Failing to mention Nunavut or to correctly identify the name of the people whose land they were visiting, the article was insulting and reflected the blatant carelessness of the journalist. It is clear that the language of colonization persists, that "de-colonization was not the termination of imperial relationships but merely the extending of a geopolitical web which has been spinning since the Renaissance" (ibid). Thousands of readers are influenced by such misrepresentations and falsifications of Canada's Arctic. "However unintentional, such carelessness borders on racism; such mistakes tend to be made about minority people in faraway places" (ibid). This draws attention to the importance of the new media nation.

As described by Alia, government polices across the globe are instrumental in either providing support for or determination against the new media nation. Despite the current conservative government's refusal to sign the United Nations' Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Canada has for the most part embraced language and minority rights through communication. The National Film Board, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Aboriginal Communications Societies and Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, among other organizations, have reflected support of multiculturalism and remote communities, enabling an array of projects, experiments and services. A chapter titled "Lessons from Canada" provides detailed analysis of Canada's policy and programming, which have provided a model for the world. Although this chapter discusses many examples of media dedicated for positive social change, it would have been interesting to compare Canada with Australia or New Zealand, which have similar political and social climates, to distinguish between the effects of certain policies. The Canadian focus is appreciated by the Canadian scholar, but comparisons are helpful in drawing out the contextual variables. It is also interesting to note that despite Canada's apparent enthusiasm for indigenous media, First Nations, Inuit and Metis still live on the margins of society in more poverty, with more health problems and a lower standard of living, than the average Canadian. Also, the average Canadian is still unaware of the new media nation. But the very fact that indigenous communities have their own programming and content is testament to "the new media [having] the power to penetrate more deeply into a receiving culture than any previous manifestations of western culture" (See Said in Alia, 2010, p. 33).

In the introduction, "How I Came to Be Here," Alia describes her entry into the new media by highlighting her position as an American researcher, an outsider of Eastern European descent, and as an observer, advocate and activist with several indigenous media organizations and projects. Since 1990, Alia has been documenting, uncovering, participating in, listening to and observing the entrance of indigenous media to the world stage. She writes: "It is with great respect and admiration that I have watched the emergence of The New Media Nation" (ibid., p. 4). Though it concentrates on the many instances of indigenous media, her book could also be read as a multifaceted ethnography that richly describes her experience and provides a space to explore inspiring resistance to an increasingly globally homogenized mediascape.

Alia has crafted an accessible book for many audiences. It is easy to read; includes critical theory that is relevant, applicable and understandable; and flows through the many points of entry for indigenous people into the new media nation. It would be interesting to see a different medium, perhaps film, used to express the scholarly work in this book, with participation from the various indigenous groups Alia has worked with over the last 20 years. This draws attention to the book's double identity: aptly applying cultural theory to practice and contributing to the promoting and solidifying of networks of indigenous resistance through communication. The book is scholarly, yet it also reveals the depth and span of networks created by the new media nation that can be enhanced through awareness. "The New Media Nation" is brave and hopeful. As a document of the many instances of indigenous media, it captures events, experiences and testimony. It is also innately reflective of a network of global resistance, linking many indigenous groups' affirmation of identity through the new media. By comparing uses of media across the globe, the text captures the new media nation's contradictions, messy identities, fracturing and incongruity as well as the junctures, reconciliations and coming together of alliances. The reader gets a sense of the issues that unite and of the ones that divide; the examples of positive outcome and the obstacles that need to be overcome. Although the focus is on how technology is adapted for change, the emphasis is on the use and message conveyed. Communication technology is only a tool; the ways people use it, the signs and codes they use, are what count.

### References

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