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Media analysis

Mabo case was an important challenge to the concept of land ownership Australia that recognized the rights of the Meriam people. Media played a significant role by giving coverage to the case throughout the time it was under the High Court's review. The review period constituted of eighteen months starting from June 1992 and ending in December 1993. The role of media is assessed for two reasons. First, to capture the initial responses and proceedings of the Mabo case. Second, taking responsibility for informing the public about the case. Extensive media reporting was crucial at that time for providing in-depth views on the social, political and economic aspects to the Australians. The evaluation of the media’s role depicts that it could either present the prevailing sentiments or transform masses opinion regarding Mabo’s decision. Media has been the primary source of information of the Australian public. Print media and television played a dominant role in shaping the opinions of Australian population regarding the rights of indigenous people (Waller & McCallum 2018).

Mabo case is important because it resulted in the recognition of the rights of Aboriginals and Torre Strait Islander. The decision accepted the belonging of minority populations to the Australian land. High Court's decision approved land ownership rights to the Aboriginals and Torre Strait Islanders under the Native Title Act 1993. Australian parliament did not entitle land ownerships aboriginals or Islanders until 1992. These people were considered as nullius that means ‘land belonging to no one.' Minorities couldn’t claim ownership to the lands they were living. It was easy for the Australian people to rip them of their homes or places (Dodson 2016). The traditions were unfair and caused miseries to the aboriginals. They were recognized as indigenous people, and the laws acted against them. Mabo case involved the fight of Torre Islander, Eddie Koiki Mabo who fought for claiming connection of indigenous people to Australian land. He wanted to provide equal land ownership rights to his people. After a consistent fight of ten years, Mabo succeeded in changing the tradition of nullius. In 1992 High Court’s decision on Mabo resulted in the formation of Native Title Act (1993). The title established a framework for recognizing the aboriginals and Torre Strait Islanders as people having rights to certain lands due to their cultural belonging. This law was the acceptance of minority customs and tradition by giving them rights to ownership. The case still holds significance for the minority population because today Native Title has been accepted over one million square kilometers. This makes approximately 15% of the Australian land and water. The Act has been a major driver for the security of these people appear in 629 registered indigenous Land Use Agreements. These agreements give right to the indigenous people for using the lands, water, and resources (Gray 1997).

Type of media prevalent at the time of Mabo case included print media and television. Australians rely on these two platforms for keeping themselves aware of social, economic and political happenings. This is among one of the most celebrated events in the media history of Australia. The purpose of media is to share real news with the audience as “real news gives facts and information that can be investigated and verified as either correct or incorrect” (Crate 2017). The media portrayed that Mabo was an essential step for the national development. It focused on confronting the traditional practice of taking lands from the indigenous populations. This was an important historical case regarding colonization and settled land in Australia. Media has a critical role in shaping the broader culture by providing an effective platform for the indigenous people (Meyers & Mugambwa 1993) coverage of the Mabo case allowed Australians to see the impacts of nullius. This was an active medium for recognizing the place of aboriginals and Torre Strait Islanders in a sophisticated manner. The studies depict that the media and television in the 1960s believed in giving the civil rights to indigenous people. Representation of a ten-year case on the television and print media threatened the age-old laws of denying lands to the minority populations. It is also stated that, “the campaign for Indigenous rights was one important movement in the decade of social revolution throughout the world, which played out on the streets and the small screen in living rooms throughout Australia, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa" (Waller & McCallum 2018).

In the historical Mabo case, the media had the role of educating the community, and it catalyzed social change. Media considered it as one of the significant improvements for the Aboriginals and Torre Strait Islanders. Evidence suggests that the media has attempted to inform indigenous about the practical implications of the Native Title Act. Crain's post mentioned, “before the Mabo decision in 1992, Aboriginal people had no rights to traditional lands except those given by government under limited legislation. Since the Mabo decision, Aboriginal people have not been greedily grabbing land. The Mabo decision will only benefit those Aborigines who can prove a continual association with the land claimed” (Dodson 2016). The purpose of this post was to inform the indigenous populations that they needed to prove their associations with their lands for gaining land ownership. The media played independent function as it explained the pros and cons of the title act (Meyers & Mugambwa 1993).

Media releases about the events linked to the Mabo’s decision prove their keep interest in educating the audience about the rights of indigenous people. All hearings of the case were presented in the media for the purpose of updating the public about Mabo's progress. The coverage revealed that the media justified its role by showing the struggles of Mabo. This provided awareness to the citizens about feelings of indigenous feeling and what they feel about their place in Australia. The West Australian mentioned in its 1992 news article, “a high-court ruling yesterday giving land rights to the people of Murray Island in the Torre Strait could have a big impact on WA claims” (The West Australian 1992). The part played by print media indicates that it didn't intend to keep the public ill-informed. Newspapers identified the vitality of the landmark case and associated it with the welfare of the indigenous populations. This had profound impacts on transforming the views of Australians towards the rights of Aboriginals and Islanders. The newspaper adopted a neutral approach for presenting the proceedings of the case. It informed the public that, "the majority ruling by six of the seven full bench members, welcomed by Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Robert Tickner, also ties the land rights to the power of Queensland government" (The West Australian 1992). The news article appreciated the decision of the court and informed the public about the possible outcomes.

The role of the print media was not limited to the transmission of information related to the case, but it also attempted to influence the mindsets of the people. To present a realistic picture of Mabo's case, print media covered the impact of the case on Mabo's family. The West Australian presented the views of Mabo’s family, “Maleta Mabo said yesterday, it was sad the decision couldn’t be made before he died” (The West Australian 1992). The purpose of recording Mabo's daughter's comments was to show how indigenous people think about the decision. The newspaper informed the public that the decision must be taken earlier because delays ruined lives of many Islanders. There is strong bonding between media and indigenous community's struggles for freedom. The dominant narrative coverage was to capture Mabo's claims and his fight for land ownership rights (Goggin 2015).

Although television has the power of influencing thoughts and mindsets of the viewers print media remains equally important in molding the opinions of masses regarding land ownership rights of the indigenous populations. Print media had assessed the implications of the Mabo case and considered it as an effective measure for the betterment of aboriginals and Islanders. The West Australian stated, “aboriginal people would no longer have to fight legal arguments about their entitlements to land” (The West Australian 1992). The text from The West Australian Newspaper depicts that it encouraged the court’s decision and related it with improved conditions of the indigenous people. The media attempted to define the realistic implications of the case and educated people about the conditions. The newspaper provided awareness that the entitlements will demand evidence from the minority populations. This reveals that the media did not conceal facts or difficulties that aboriginals or Islanders were about to experience in the process of gaining land entitlement (Goggin 2015).

The Australian media reconstructed itself by fully recognizing the indigenous people and their claims. The narratives were created for promoting unity and acceptance of Aboriginals (Hartley 2004). The message set forth by the television or print media in the public sphere carried the power of influencing recipients. Media reporting thus had contributed to the transformed attitudes of the Australian citizens that increased the likelihood of a decision's acceptance. The Age mentioned, “the High Court victory will work its own miracle on the pride and self-esteem of the Murray Island people” (The Age 1993). The newspaper also evoked emotional appeal by transmitting the broader themes of the decision. The media explained that the decision of land ownership was linked to the pride and self-esteem of the indigenous people. This educated the public about the miseries endured by aboriginals and Islanders since history. The print media had attempted to provide clear details on the history of the Mabo case. The Age in its 1993 news article ‘Mabo Decision a Victory Over White Arrogance’ wrote the history of the struggles of indigenous people by mentioning, "Mr. Justice Blackburn dismissed a claim by three aboriginal brothers from the Gove Peninsula that their land had been unlawfully invaded by miners and by the Commonwealth Government” (The Age 1993). The facts included by the newspaper depicts that it had taken a neutral role in informing the Australian public about the complexities faced by the indigenous people before Native Title. Such stories were based on real facts and used for proving awareness of the masses regarding the need for land ownership laws (Hartley 2004).

The significant of media is also visible in its role of critically examining the contents of the case and future challenges. This provided better insights to the public about the possible threats becoming apparent after the High Court’s decision. The Australian mentioned, “but in the long history of dispossession and the power of governments to extinguish native title, will the decision make any difference in practice” (The Australian 1992). The newspaper challenged the state by questioning if they would be able to succeed in providing justice to the indigenous populations or not. The purpose was to build pressure on the state for changing the age-old unfair practice of depriving minorities of their lands. Public narrative shared by the media had the aim of raising awareness about the need for implementing the Native Title Act. This leads to two main causes: first, it transforms the attitudes of the public by accepting indigenous rights. Second it continues to pressurize the state to comply with the conditions of the act (Gray 1997).

The overall analysis of the media's role in the historical Mabo case depicts that it focused on highlighting the social issue that was in favor of the indigenous people of Australia. It paved ways for transforming the attitudes of the general public towards the acceptance of their rights to land ownership. Media had a central part in deploying White-Australia’s cherished value ‘fair-go’ that enabled the public to support Mabo’s fight. The leading newspapers had captured the entire story of Mabo that helped in raising sympathy among the white Australians. The full coverage of the case with factual information reveals that the media didn't conceal the reality. It managed to keep them updated about the court proceedings and established emotional appeal that can be viewed as support for the Mabo and Islanders. Media qualified as a vital contributor to changing landscapes of the indigenous and non-indigenous relations. The media promoted Australia's belief in equality and fairness through narrative conventions and sharing stories of aboriginals and Torre Strait Islanders. As newspapers didn't discourage the Court's decision of native title, it exhibits its positive role in Mabo's journey. It is also among one of the most celebrated events in the media history of Australia.

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