



Post Colonial Formations: Nations, Policy, Culture Conference

Is It Premature To Claim "Post-...?"

Organised by the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, *Post Colonial Formations* was held at Griffith University, Brisbane, from 7-10 July 1993.

The program was put together by national committees from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In his opening address Conference Director Tony Bennett explained that the idea for the conference germinated at the first major Cultural Studies conference, held at the University of Illinois, USA in 1990, where the Canadian, Australian and New Zealand delegates felt that their concerns were very different to those of the North American academics, who have a different perspective on issues such as the globalisation of the media.

In this context, Bennett urged the conference delegates not to get too bogged down in definitions of post colonialism. Yet many of the academics involved in the conference seemed to overlook a question which would seem essential to any discussion of post colonialism. In this, the Year of Indigenous Peoples, is the description "post" premature?

Academic debate centred on such questions as whether the notion of cultural imperialism is passé in an environment of globalisation and transnationalism which challenges the concept of "nation" itself. The argument was that a post imperialist/post colonial position shows the complexity of the market in a way which is ignored by a simplistic cultural imperialist line. Indigenous speakers from Canada, New Zealand, Africa and Australia, however, spoke from the perspective of colonised peoples who continue to struggle with the inequities flowing from co-habitation with their colonisers. Their comments and perspective seemed to be heeded mainly by other indigenous delegates, while the majority continued to argue the abstract theories pertaining to 'post-'.

Attendance at the conference was very high, and the extensive program was extremely well organised. Delegates from many countries had to choose between as many as five strands of discussions running simultaneously, which often proved very difficult. These strands were organised thematically into categories such as *First Peoples and Government; Broadcasting and Communication; Cultural Policies, Feminism, Nation Post-Coloniality and Multiculturalism*.

The broadcasting and communications strand was dominated by discussions of indigenous peoples' media initiatives, deregulation and local content quotas in an era of media globalisation. It emerged from papers by Michael Meadows (QUT) and Helen Molnar (Swinburne) that, of the three host countries, Australia had a particularly poor record in terms of government support for Aboriginal broadcasting initiatives. It was claimed, for example, that Australia has no Aboriginal media policy.

Pointing out that funding of Aboriginal broadcasting has always been 'ad hoc', Molnar stressed the need for consistency and suggested that a minimum figure of \$30 million per year should be allocated for Aboriginal media. The 150 Aboriginal media associations, five Aboriginal community radio stations, and over 80 BRACS stations, have all been established since the first Aboriginal broadcast on radio 5UV in 1972. A tragic outcome of the inconsistency of government support is that the pioneering Warlpiri Media Association, on which Eric Michaels' study *The Aboriginal Invention of Television* was based, has not received any infrastructure funding, and has recently ceased broadcasting.

Meadows described the Tanami Desert Network, another groundbreaking Aboriginal media initiative. A video-conferencing arrangement has been set up between Yuendumu and

three other communities, which allows for Aboriginal controlled networking, interactivity, fax and telephone, via satellite. The network is used for family and ceremonial contact as well as delivery of adult education, health diagnosis and international art sales.

Can Local Culture Survive?

Another important question which emerged from the conference included the future of 'local' culture - should/can it be protected? Avril Bell, from New Zealand, expressed concern that NZ has no local content quotas and no requirements to broadcast news and current affairs or to meet any public service objectives for its two State-owned, but privately managed broadcasters. TV3, the NZ commercial channel, has just been bought by a consortium of Westpac, NBC and main shareholder Canwest. TV3 had local content requirements for the first three years of operation, but never actually reached these quotas. The highest level of local content reached was 35%. While the head of Canwest has stated a commitment to local content, the quota has in fact lapsed. Bell points out that what is called 'deregulation' is really privatisation and market liberalisation.

Rangasamy Karthigesu from Penang, Malaysia, described how Malaysia and Singapore have responded to media globalisation by banning the satellite dish for domestic use. In both countries satellite services will be allowed only in international tourist hotels in the form of a government controlled selection from what different services offer. "The government plays a strong censorial role", he said. □

Lois Randall