



Cultural Diversity and Public Policy—is There a Role for Anthropologists?

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artillery officers applied what they learned to political trajectories.

The ones forging new social spaces – one hesitates to say ‘institutions’ – are the denizens of the diaspora. Freed of at least some traditional constraints, and emboldened by their skills and knowledge from other domains, they venture openly into fields such as religion and culture which have been surrounded by formidable barriers of traditional learning that authorized and legitimized interpretation, even comment. These still do, but not alone or uncontested as new men try their hands, mobilize their intellectual techniques, claim authority and the legitimacies of their skills. This is heady stuff, and because they so obviously enjoy it, Evelyn Early (1995) called them ‘cybarites’, because they also obviously embrace it. Like Anderson’s creole nationalists of early modernity, these new creoles of late modernity share this experience less with the worlds of home than with the freely floating post-industrial workforce of which they are more immediately, if less consciously, a part (and often trying to be).

The denizens did not create this social-cultural space; they enjoy it and re-create themselves on it practically by using and exploring its properties and thereby joining its practices with their own. Often in pursuit of something else, they create something else again as evanescent and pre-institutional now as ethnolinguistic ‘nation’ was in the 16th and 17th centuries. These are emergent, not accomplished phenomena. The point is that the process is not unprecedented, and its significances may be other than both gurus and critics project from more particular, local understandings of the technologies themselves.

Here, peripheries such as diaspora populations or the Middle East itself may illuminate the centre. Certainly the impact of the Internet has been greater for peripheries than in the centres, and they certainly bear being brought into the comparison. One comparison addresses visions of

technological utopias filled with knowledge workers having limitless access to information and to each other. But among the first casualties in the extensions of cyberspace among Middle Easterners may be liberal, humanist traditions of Islamic and Arab high culture – not because those do not translate to the new medium or are inaccessible to new barbarians, although their guardians, like their counterparts in the West, would have it so. Instead, these traditions, and their social metamessages about what is ‘cultural’, are tied to the media – to institutions – of print and literary culture that are simply bypassed in new media and by new people with new skills and claims to authority.

In these and in like quarters elsewhere, liberal disappointment, scepticism and rejection of cybarite enthusiasm for new information orders grow because liberalism is tied to a different regime of knowledge, authority and legitimation — namely, print, from high literature to journalism. Information is *always* socially organized, and usually in non-obvious ways so that values get built into techniques of knowledge and what authorizes those techniques. For liberal humanists, that can be a literary culture with its system of authority and standards of legitimacy. Clifford Stoll, a one-time computer evangelist, identified precisely these connections in a recent New York Times interview:

...information has utility, timeliness, accuracy, a pedigree. Information, I can trust. But the data coming across America Online, or CompuServe or whatever, nobody stands behind it. Is the author a medical doctor or some bozo? I don’t know, and they’re behind a screen name anyway. It might be an 11-year old girl or a 70-year old wizened philosopher. What’s missing is anyone who will say hey, this is no good. Editors serve as barometers of quality, and most of an editor’s time is spent saying no. Another thing missing from the information highway way is professional reporters who are paid to post to it. (Wald, 1995: E7)

All of which in turn should alert us to

how cybarite enthusiasms themselves are signs *of* — before they are signs *to* — the Information Superhighway’s openings for new people and modes of authority. □

Jon Anderson

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conferences

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND PUBLIC POLICY – IS THERE A ROLE FOR ANTHROPOLOGISTS?

To mark the United Nations International Year for Tolerance, and coinciding with both the 50th anniversary of the founding of the UN and 50 years of post-war migration to Australia, the Australian and New South Wales governments and the Australian Multi-cultural Foundation recently hosted what was billed as the world’s first ‘Global Cultural Diversity Conference’, a lavish and highly publicized affair held in Sydney dur-

ing 26-28 April 1995, at a cost of some A\$2 million.

A wide range of topics featured among the roughly 75 papers delivered, including the nowadays almost obligatory discussion of the relationship between the local and the global, and of international capitalism, but also topics related to migration and refugee issues, multiculturalism (particularly the Australian variety), the construction of

identity, and the ways in which cultural diversity impinges on things like education and language policies, the arts, gender issues, and urban problems. The position and the rights of indigenous peoples were the subject of some spirited presentations, often relating to local issues such as the current Australian policy of ‘reconciliation’ with Aboriginal people.

These sorts of topics are of interest and

concern to many anthropologists, who were conspicuous by their absence. Of the approximately one thousand delegates from fifty countries in attendance, perhaps only half a dozen were anthropologists, and only a single paper was given by an anthropologist, Marcia Langton, in her capacity as Chair of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Studies Council.

Those who attended the conference were primarily policy makers and bureaucrats – with a sprinkling of academics and representatives of community organisations (including indigenous and immigrant communities). Much of the talk was what one delegate, Pat O’Shane (Aboriginal spokeswoman and Chancellor of the University of New England) labelled ‘slick and superficial’. But underneath the rhetoric lurked some important challenges and gritty problems – such as changing ideas about the nation and national sovereignty, how to develop immigration policies that produce an inclusive rather than a divided society, and the future of local cultures. For example, a number of speakers noted that the world’s languages are rapidly disappearing or becoming moribund, including the great majority of Australian Aboriginal languages. Others, such as O’Shane herself, felt that cultural diversity was being destroyed by transglobal capitalism, and that little was being done to try and secure cultural and human rights in a global sense.

The future of Australian multiculturalism was the subject of a number of papers. There was much political rhetoric here but also some realism. For example, newly elected NSW premier Bob Carr provided a much needed corrective to the often cited image of Australia as ‘a successful multicultural society’ which combined tolerance with equity, by pointing out that there was a real danger of the development of ‘an ethnic underclass’. Half a million people in Australia, he said, were unable to speak English or spoke it very poorly, which severely disadvantaged them in their life chances and militated against national unity. Funding for English Second Language teaching was inadequate. Unemployment among people of non-English speaking background was 14%, as opposed to the overall average of 9.7%, and in some migrant groups it was double this or more – 33% among Lebanese born, 31.5% among Vietnamese. Migrants were poorly represented in the public service and in the police force. A number of other speakers expressed reservations about the impact and the future of multiculturalism, and Aboriginal delegates made it clear that multiculturalism had failed to meet the needs of indigenous people or to ensure their basic human rights. The Aboriginal voice at the conference was loud and sophisticated, and one could not help feeling that a wider representation of indigenous people from

other parts of the world, as well as from ethnic communities within Australia, might have produced a very different event.

The role of the media in perpetuating racist or ethnic stereotypes and in the construction of the other was often raised. In Australia, Marcia Langton argued, it is primarily through the popular media that most Australians ‘know’ Aboriginal people. The Australian media also came in for criticism for failing to reflect, address or otherwise engage with the country’s cultural diversity, a point also made by Federal Immigration Minister Nick Bolkus, and one often noted in the Australian academic literature by media analysts. But as is often the case, it seemed to be taken for granted that the media has this enormous power to shape perceptions. The argument that the media reflect or interact with social reality; that writers, advertisers and TV producers speak to readers and viewers in terms which they understand and identify with, was not made.

When the media were not being bashed it was the USA’s turn because of its alleged cultural imperialism and the threat that the internationalisation of American culture poses to the world and to cultural diversity. Echoing a common sentiment, local writer Philip Adams argued that America produces a ‘cuckoo culture’ – it throws the others out of the nest. Anthropological debate around this assertion would have been informative, as indicated by Langton’s observation that the globalization of certain aspects of Aboriginal culture, notably art, has served to strengthen rather than weaken Aboriginality, apart from generating A\$40 million in foreign exchange annually. There was also a suggestion that the revolution in communications would encourage rather than militate against cultural diversity worldwide.

Given the nature of the conference the absence of anthropologists seems to require explanation. Certainly, it was not primarily an academic conference. Most of the delegates were employees of the Australian state or federal governments, or of quasi-government bodies. Most of those from outside Australia were also government employees, or associated with organisations such as UNESCO, the ILO, etc. Many of the keynote addresses were given by political figures – UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali and Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating opened the event, and other keynote or plenary session speakers included Thabo Mbeki (South Africa’s Executive Deputy President), Gareth Evans (Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs), Sheila Finestone (Canadian Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women), Donald Payne (USA Congressman and Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus), Federico Mayor (Director General, UNESCO) and other high ranking government and UN officials. Business and trade interests were also strongly

represented. However, a number of papers were given by academics, or by individuals working with organisations associated with indigenous peoples, community organisations, and so on. One would have thought, in a society where social scientists have had much influence on social policy, that anthropologists concerned with the sorts of issues discussed at the conference would be present and make their presence felt. Alas, this was not so.

In fact, a number of anthropologists have made major contributions to discussion of ethnic diversity in Australia. The late Jean Martin – whose 1954 PhD was based on participant observation among East European refugees and supervised by S F Nadel – was a key figure in the formulation of multicultural policy. Gill Bottomley’s PhD (1973), supervised by Chandra Jayawardena, offered a detailed and influential critique of assimilationist policy, based on fieldwork among Greek Australians. The first university courses on the subject of migration and ethnicity were offered in the early 1970s by anthropologists. In the last two decades dozens of anthropologists have written extensively about ethnicity in Australia, despite a certain lack of interest from established departments. Many of these scholars now work in departments of sociology or in combined departments of anthropology and sociology, but even they have a surprisingly low profile in official discourses. One reason for this is the political centrality of immigration and a correspondingly heavy emphasis on policy, where much of the anthropological work is apparently seen as too complicated to be useful. Another reason is that the establishment of centres of Ethnic/Multicultural Studies or Cultural Studies has fragmented the field and discouraged interaction with established disciplines. These centres usually operate on short term, mostly government, funding on the basis of rapid response research. In the last decade, economic and political imperatives have also overshadowed what anthropologists would regard as important cultural considerations. Not surprisingly, some anthropologists have been openly critical of these developments or at least unwilling to participate in uncritical celebration of multiculturalism (for example, during the 1988 Bicentenary of European settlement). They have also raised awkward questions about representation – i.e. how and by whom are people being represented? Such issues were rarely examined at the conference.

A notable feature of the conference was that it failed to get to grips with the human rights needs of indigenous and minority peoples or to address issues such as the cultural genocide taking place in many parts of the world as part of the process of domination and exploitation of such groups. Is this a further clue to the absence of

anthropologists? Could meaningful debate on such issues be expected at a conference organised by government, at least partly as a political and publicity exercise, and at which the host government could be expected to be wary of treading on sensitive neighbours' toes? For example, the Indonesian occupation and domination of East Timor was hardly likely to be discussed in the presence of a senior Indonesian government official (Mr Jonathan Paparak) and with the Malaysian premier Dr Mahathir (re-elected to power while the conference was on) taking an increasingly anti-Western stance. Nor could one expect much debate about the fate of the Bougainvilleans in the presence of the business and trade interests which were represented at the conference (four of the nineteen sessions were dominated by discussion of economic issues, with paper titles such as 'Diversity Pays: The Competitive Advantages of a Culturally Diverse Management Team' and 'When East Meets West in the Workplace').

Perhaps local anthropologists were wary of being seen to be involved in an event which seemed to link cultural diversity with economic gain. Australian politicians have stressed the economic benefits of

multiculturalism in the sense of facilitating trade and business ties, particularly with Asia, and a number of speakers at the conference, representing business and trade interests, pursued this line. Yet the Aboriginal delegates present drew attention, for example, to the 'mining' (by organisations such as Qantas) of Aboriginal culture as a marketing tool, and the opportunity to debate examples such as this in terms of Mbeki's perceptive comments on the relationship between difference and domination in society (i.e. between cultural domination on the one hand, and political and economic domination, on the other) was somehow lost. The makings for this kind of discussion were there also in presentations on Maori and Pakeha relationships in New Zealand, politics and constitutional change in Fiji, and native title in Canada and Australia – all delivered in a session on 'Human Rights and the Political Participation of Indigenous Peoples' which, despite excellent papers, failed to engender any meaningful debate or conclusion.

There was scope, too, for interesting comparisons on the question of 'reconciliation', currently a buzz word in both Australia and South Africa. Mbeki

indicated that reconciliation in South Africa had to be linked to a transformation in the way in which society handled difference, to a departure from the 'criminal mismanagement' of diversity under apartheid, to an era where all role players, no matter what their size, played a part in determining the future of the country. This sort of observation would have dovetailed well with discussions of reconciliation with Aboriginal people in Australia, the desirability of seats in the federal parliament reserved for Aborigines, and other aspects of Aboriginal 'self-determination' (an unfortunate phrase – it was a key term in the construction of the apartheid ideology).

In the end one is left with a concern that anthropologists were marginalized at this forum, or that they deliberately stayed away. Both of these possibilities raise serious questions about the nature of the anthropological endeavour and its relationship with the world of economic and public policy. □

Patrick McAllister (Rhodes University, Grahamstown) and Gillian Bottomley (Macquarie University, Sydney).

GENDER AND THE SEXES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Association of Southeast Asian Studies in the United Kingdom (ASEASUK) held its fifteenth annual conference at Durham Castle (aka University College, University of Durham) on 29-31 March, on the theme Gender and the Sexes in Southeast Asia. The convenors were Bill Wilder (Anthropology, Durham) and Laura Summers (South-East Asian Studies, Hull). Of 20 papers submitted 16 were presented. On Thursday, before and after the grand Conference Dinner, participants heard, respectively, a concert by members of the Durham University Gamelan Group and a reading by Saraswati Sunindyo of some of her own poems reflecting on Indonesia today. Participants also had the opportunity to attend the meetings of the Southeast Asia Library Group (SEALG), held on Wednesday, and to visit the University's Oriental Museum as well as other sights in Durham City.

Insofar as lines can be drawn in a cross-disciplinary conference, the papers were about evenly divided between the social anthropological and those from other relevant disciplines – literature, sociology, politics, geography. About half the papers were 'village-focused' and about half 'nation-focused'. A particular aim of the conference was to examine the gender continuum, rather than one gender. It was gratifying to see how far this aim had been achieved. Perspectives ranged from a critique of Lévi-Strauss's notion of the 'circulation of women', and the masculine bias in approaches to unilineal descent, to the genderedness of development, nationalism and emotions. Proof that gender permeates thought and action was seen in

papers on gender manifestations in domestic space, the development process, the media, performances and sexuality.

Cynthia Chou (IIAS, Leiden) and Jean Morrison (Sheffield) dealt in their papers with two 'peripheral' peoples, the boat-dwelling Orang Laut of Riau and the coast-dwelling Bajau of Sabah, and with the incorporation of these peoples into their respective nations (Indonesia and Malaysia) as Malays, together with a 'modern' and Islamized notion of gender. Carol Davis (Hull) and Enid Nelson (Uppsala) described two peoples of highland Sumatra – the Minangkabau and the Rejang. Each in their own way operate a dual gender system: the Minangkabau in their myth and ceremonies are able to see themselves as both male and female centred, or even as non-gendered; the Rejang present three kinds of gendered trance behaviour – *kesebut* (female), and *kuda kepang* and *silat* (male), using as languages Rejang, Javanese/silent, Malay/gibberish which correspond to their respective role-orientations in contemporary south Sumatra.

Next were two papers on economics and ritual culture in modern Bali. Ayami Nakatani (Oxford) examined cloth production 1930-1990 in east-central Bali. Far from disappearing, hand weaving continues to flourish and now provides a significant income for villagers. Originally however, cloth production was 'women's work'; there is now a steady growth of young male participation and a corresponding erosion of the traditional taboo on male cloth weaving. Diarmid O'Neill (Kent), in distinctly Joycean

audiovisual style, gave an action replay of one day's cockfighting in a village of farmers and painters near Gyaniar. Needless to say, Balinese cockfighting is exclusively male, and women express unqualified distaste for it, though covertly. The men's obsession with cockfighting is embedded in a seamless interplay of gaming, gambling, ritual (cockfighting is a kind of 'blood sacrifice' *macaru*), wealth-creation (by a few expert organizers), socializing, dreaming and emoting (well shown in slides).

The papers by Janet Carsten (Edinburgh) and Philip Thomas (LSE/Sussex) studied gender symbols in houses and village space in Malay and Malagasy villages respectively. Carsten, in line with analysts such as Errington (in *Power and difference*, 1990), noted the refractoriness of the gender phenomenon in Austronesia (Island Southeast Asia), how boundaries in a Malay fishing village, for example, can appear both fixed and fluid according to time and place. Thomas's paper on a rice-growing village in southeast Madagascar showed its remarkable similarity to Southeast Asia in local concepts of house form and house space. Thomas rejected Rosaldo's 1974 hypothesis, that the sexes are always dichotomized, in the light of his data which suggest that in the Temanambondro world the 'domestic' domain expresses a union, an eternal couple.

Signe Howell (Oslo) and Bill Wilder (Durham) looked at problems of the visibility of gender. In her research on the Lio people of Flores, Howell experienced the ethnographer's nightmare – important data informants didn't think important enough to report, in the Lio case a