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TELEVISION BROADCASTING NORTH OF 60

by Lorna ROTH

The development of Canadian First Peoples' media policies, discourses, and practices is an important subject to examine toward the end of the twentieth century as aboriginal self-government comes closer to a negotiated consensus than ever before. First, there has been a restructuring of the Canadian broadcasting system to include aboriginal broadcasting as an integral element. Second, First Peoples' broadcasting lobbies have influenced the development of new mediating structures in Canada such as policy frameworks, a new broadcasting channel (Television Northern Canada), more open access arrangements with existing channels, and funding programs. Third, First Peoples' broadcasters have used television as an emancipatory tool. They see television as a vehicle for social and cultural action, for education, and for building national identity.

The use of media as a tool for self-empowerment in Canada is historically grounded within the approach of John Grierson, the first Commissioner of the National Film Board, and its now defunct Challenge for Change Program. It is within this tradition of using the media as a process tool rather than as an end product that First Peoples have set themselves the challenge of innovatively using broadcasting in an alternative fashion (Roncagliolo, 1991: 207), as a vehicle of transformation. Two kinds of transformations are the subject of First Peoples' television broadcasting history; first, the ways in which television has been used to reinforce indigenous languages and cultures and to build and promote stronger cultural and national identities; second, the negotiation of a national status for aboriginal broadcasting within Canadian legislation.

As television producers and broadcasting administrators have become leaders in Northern community and cultural life, their reshaping of the public media has enabled new forms of producer/community audience relationships to develop. These are different from those which generally exist within large metropolitan areas. Rooted as they have been in socio-cultural movements focused on broadcasting rights, First Peoples have turned to the networks of those organizing and receiving Northern and, more recently, Southern media to culturally, socially, and politically align their diverse communities with one another. Finally, given that Canada's Northern broadcasting infrastructure has been recognized, to date, as the most advanced aboriginal broadcasting system in the world, First Peoples' media initiatives, such as those described in this essay, can provide insights into the ways in which other Fourth

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World's communities might chart the courses of their broadcasting development. First Peoples' demand for government financial and regulatory support for native-controlled broadcasting and for fairer portrayal and employment practices has resulted in a new, more inclusive public discourse. In the last two decades, increased access to indigenous (and ethnic) voices in public broadcasting systems has helped to reformat the international image of Canada as a state which supports its multicultural and multiracial discourses. The potential and actual roles that indigenous and other minority group communications have played in the process of Canadian self-definition have become highly valued, as Marc Raboy (1990a: 8) has observed:

In Canada, a multiplicity of less-than-national, less empowered identity groups have struggled for recognition of their interests against the dominance of a one-dimensional Canada, and it is in fact their efforts that have maintained the Canadian difference against the overwhelming forces of continental integration in North America.

Through the opening up and management of (cross)cultural discursive spaces and mass-mediated public spheres in the North, First Peoples are combining the forces of post-modernity with their own particular cultures. This process has taken three decades and a dedicated commitment by First Peoples broadcasters and lobbyists. The result of their work has been the legal recognition and acceptance of aboriginal voices within the Canadian public and private broadcasting spheres, as integral participants in the developing fabric of a pluralistic community of communities – Canada.

I THE CANADIAN NORTH

The North as a general category has been geographically defined by Louis-Edmond Hamelin, a well-known Québécois geographer, as being North of the 60th latitude line. Hamelin divides the North into three categories or zones. The first is called the “Middle North”: the northern areas of the ten provinces, Labrador, and much of the Yukon where road access is possible (Hamelin, 1979: 332-3). Beyond the Middle North lies the “Far North”, which takes in “mainly the Northwest Territories and corresponds in part to the Arctic climate”, and the “Extreme North,” which consists of the “Northern part of the Arctic archipelago”.

Mythical notions of the North have made powerful inroads into the Canadian imagination. The symbolic North has been imagined and defined predominantly in

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2 Coined by Cree author George Manuel, founding president of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples:

The 4th [sic] World is the name given to indigenous peoples descended from a country's aboriginal population and who today are completely or partly deprived of their own territory and its riches. The peoples of the 4th World have only limited influence or none at all in the nation state [in which they are now encapsulated]. The peoples to whom we refer are the Indians of North and South America, the Inuit (Eskimos), the Sami people [of northern Scandinavia], the Australian aborigines [sic], as well as the various indigenous populations of Africa, Asia, and Oceana [sic](Churchill, 1992: 10).
terms of Southern interests. Since cross-cultural contact, notions of the North have been fabricated by non-natives who have talked about it, analyzed it, made statements about it, settled it, ruled it, authorized certain views of it, managed it, and even produced it for Southern and "exotic" tourist consumption.

Ideas and fictions about the North have shifted focus throughout history as various Southern-based institutions set up outpost organizations to enact mandates originating outside of the North (Valaskakis, 1979). Among these controlling agents/agencies have been the early explorers (from Frobisher's 1576 voyage onwards), the missionaries (from 1578 onwards), the whalers (beginning in the early part of the 15th century), the traders (from the 1880's), the North West Mounted Police followed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (since 1903), the military (US and Canadian) (from the 1940's), and finally externally-controlled broadcasting and telecommunications institutions (since the 1950's). Southern voyagers' descriptions of the North and its peoples have influenced the ways in which the idea of the North has been defined by and to populations in the South. Indeed, Hamelin and others have suggested that present-day texts still reveal an echo of Voltaire's opinion of the Northerner as "the miserable Canadian settler, squatting 'in the snow between the bear and the beaver'" (Hamelin, 1979: 1). These mediated ideas, in turn, have found their way back to the North and have had effects on Northern peoples' identities.

Images of the North have oscillated between that of the frozen wilderness, a resource-rich hinterland, and a hotly-defended cultural heartland. Part of this identity involves romancing the "Mysterious" North (Berton, 1954); part involves denigrating it. The North is often treated as a beautiful "paradise which has temporarily lost its charm" (Hamelin, 1984: 167). On the other hand, it is also characterized as "inhospitable – such beauty as is only to be experienced with the comfort of the best survival equipment" (Shields, 1991: 173). It is hard to be indifferent to the North, its peoples, and its media representations.

II FIRST PEOPLES' TELEVISION BROADCASTING HISTORY

A little less than two percent of the Canadian population, First Peoples have been historically located outside of the Canadian national project on many levels – territorially, socially, politically, economically, culturally. Having not had access to their own means of social definition and authority until the mid-seventies, First Peoples slipped easily into the position of being "subjects," not "citizens" of history and its mediated representations. Treated in an objectified manner, their absences and stereotypical portrayals in media in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century rendered First Peoples somewhat akin to landscape imagery. They were depicted as savages, or exotic representations of the ethnographic "Other".

First Peoples' energetic participation in the media as producers only systematically began after the Anik satellite commenced live broadcasting service in the North in 1973. They soon became aware of their apparent non-existence as living and
historically-evolving cultural communities. In recognizing this absence, they began to demand a presence in all aspects of media production and distribution. It was, therefore, only after the intrusion of Southern media into the North that they began to contest their exclusion from traditional Canadian social and historical narratives. They called for compensatory histories and anthropologies, ones which would fill in the gaps, highlight their experiences and perspectives, and which would transform them from being displayed as passive objects to being active subjects of history (NQIA, 1974; ITC, 1976).

Looking backward from the mid-1990's, it is apparent that First Peoples have achieved remarkable changes in their media status. One might recall that 1901 was a time in which Thomas Edison filmed several Inuit people running amongst plaster icebergs in temperatures of up to 90° Fahrenheit for the amusement of visitors at the Buffalo exhibition (Raymont, 1981: Magic in the Sky). Today, almost all of the 13 Northern regional Native Communications Societies produce 20 hours of radio and at least 4 hours of television weekly - from a native perspective. This, along with other Northern-theme programming, is distributed within the 13 Northern regions via Television Northern Canada, a Pan-Northern dedicated satellite service which commenced in 1992 and which broadcasts 100 hours of Northern-oriented programming per week to 94 Northern communities. In 1995, TVNC applied for permission from the CRTC (Canadian Radio Television & Telecommunications Commission) to be placed on the list of eligible channels to be picked up by cable operators in the South. In November of 1995, approval was granted, and recently several cable operators in the West have integrated TVNC in their signal packages. TVNC is also available on an off-air basis to those who own satellite dishes because its signal is not scrambled.

III PHASES OF NORTHERN FIRST PEOPLES' TELEVISION BROADCASTING

Northern indigenous broadcasting has moved through several organizational phases. At first, aboriginal Peoples had very little opportunity to represent themselves. This was followed by a second stage characterized by protests and attempts to seize control by bypassing or ignoring federal regulatory procedures. Emergent from this was a growth period in which they gained access to a fairly broad range of media vehicles and federally-sponsored projects (i.e. radio, television, and community video) for their self-representation. More recently, First Peoples have gone beyond portraying themselves to their immediate communities. They now represent themselves to other native and non-native audience members. For instance, First Nations broadcasting initiatives are using new satellite distribution arrangements to redefine technology-access and cultural relations among themselves and between several of the Native Communications Societies, provincial broadcasters, and CBC's Newsworld audiences.

3.1 Phase I – Early Northern Broadcasting: First Peoples’ Representations by Outsiders

When CBC public radio was transplanted into the North in 1958, it presented itself as a fairly open medium to which First Peoples turned for cultural information about their own lives in the North. Partly because of lower costs, and because the technology is simpler, the languages and content of radio were tailored to the information needs of listeners. Emphasis was on local and national news, weather, road and flying conditions, flood and fire warnings and personal messages, such as health reports on relatives who were hospitalized down South (Government of Canada, 1965: 190). Native staff were recruited and trained in radio production techniques, and quickly reached managerial positions within the CBC Northern Service. The presence of a thriving radio service in the North set the context for the arrival of television. Accustomed to listening to relevant messages that conformed to their information needs, Northern residents expected a television service which would do likewise.

The early demand for television in the North did not come from the permanent native population, whose basic information needs required other kinds of communication facilities: telephone, trail radio, and community radio in their native language were high on their priority lists (NQIA, 1974; ITC, 1976). Rather, television broadcasting facilities in the North were developed in settlements that were of military, economic or administrative significance to the South and were introduced for two dominant reasons: to stabilize transient Southern work forces in Northern mining towns and to visibly/audibly demonstrate Canadian sovereignty in the North. Local native populations were not consulted by the CBC in its decision to expand service. Indeed, the federal authorities bypassed First Peoples entirely because they did not yet constitute a formidable lobby group.

In 1967, the CBC introduced the “Frontier Coverage Package” (FCP) to seventeen Northern remote communities. The FCP was designed to be a temporary, pre-satellite television system, making use of reliable, inexpensive and easily-available videotape technology. It consisted of a “four-hour helical-scan videotape recorded in the South and bicycled on a one, two, three or four-week delay basis to various locations in the North for playback over local television transmitters” (CBC Northern Service, 1978a: 3). Programming for the Frontier Coverage Package consisted of a cross-selection of Southern programs, geared toward children’s, teens’ and adults’ presumed interests. Although the CBC approved native-content programming in principle, no financial accommodation was made for the inclusion of native-language programming. Nor were relevant Northern subjects given particular importance in the schedule.

The establishment of a domestic satellite policy for Canada in the late sixties (1968-1969) and the launching of Anik A-1 in 1972 precipitated a new phase in First Peoples development in the North. In 1973, the satellite became operational, bringing telephone service, live television, and radio broadcasting to the same seventeen

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4 No plans for the addition of FM radio service developed until 1974.
communities hitherto receiving the Frontier Coverage Package. In 1974, the Accelerated Coverage Plan was approved, carrying live television to all Northern and remote communities with a population of 500 or more. In most cases, these communities were anxious to receive programming. In some (Iqaluit in the Baffin region and in Northern Québec Inuit communities), there was reluctance, framed by discussions of the right to cultural privacy. Josepi Padlayat, then Communications Officer for the Northern Québec Inuit Association, for instance, protested the disruption to community priorities that would be brought by foreign Southern broadcasting (1974). Padlayat had become aware of communications research, documenting the negative impact of Southern programming on Inuit culture and felt that unless there was to be a first-service in the Inuktitut language, television would act as a potent factor in eroding the culture and language of his people.

Concurrent with this protest, Southern communications researchers began to undertake longitudinal media impact studies. The gathering of data was followed by open criticism of the federal government's use of Northern television programming as an "alien culture socialization agent" (Coldevin, 1977a: 34). Native community input in the broadcast decision-making process and in the production of relevant cultural and linguistic television programming were strongly recommended as a method for mediating the potentially overwhelming impact of Southern programming (Valaskakis, 1976; Coldevin, 1977a, 1977b; Caron, 1977; O'Connell, 1975; NQIA, 1974; ITC, 1976). The establishment of production, training, and resource centers in the North and the formal encouragement of a two-way communication flow were considered necessary steps toward this accomplishment by all interested parties preoccupied with television's impact (Valaskakis, 1976; Coldevin, 1977a, 1977b).

In the process of evaluating their communication needs, First Peoples (mostly the Inuit) came to recognize that the academic data generated about media effects on individuals and cultural communities would not provide enough fuel for desired changes within the broadcasting system. A means of engaging federal government policy-makers and bureaucrats in a critical dialogue would have to be found and initiated by First Peoples' representatives. "Bridge discourses," which would mediate the relations between the unilingual aboriginal communities and the federal government, would have to be developed.\(^5\) "Go-betweens" – First Peoples who could speak both their own and at least one of the official languages of Canada and/or non-native "interested parties" (activists, media researchers) who were acceptable to the native community leadership – would soon begin to play a valuable bridging role. They situated themselves "between" the two worlds, attempting to knit the disparate discourses of governmental regulatory policies and native cultural concerns together (Fraser, 1989: 11).

\(^5\) The term "bridge discourse" comes from the work of Nancy Fraser (1989).
3.2 Phase II – The Impact of Lobbies on Northern Television Development

Two Inuit organizations played critical roles in researching and publicizing Inuit and Northern communication needs. The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (Eskimo Brotherhood of Canada) and the Northern Québec Inuit Association worked persistently and systematically to alter federal government communications priorities in the North so that they would be more consistent with those of the Inuit themselves. Through legal and political channels, interventions at CBC/Bell Canada license application hearings at the CRTC, confrontations and negotiations with the CBC Northern Service, with the CBC’s corporate management, and through publications, they promoted a new vision of Northern broadcasting. As early debates about the potential social impact of satellite communications entered the public domain, efforts to broaden and improve understanding of media applications in the North took shape in a series of projects, experiments, and field tests using conventional and satellite technology: HF two-way radio, FM radio broadcasting, portable VTR, and 16 mm. and Super 8 film. These experiments were generally designed to test the technical and social parameters of community-oriented media usage and control patterns. They represented a strategic way to provide media services to the North and became the acceptable method of mediating the divergent policy goals of the federal government (including those of the CBC) and those of the First Peoples (Roth, 1983a, 1983b).

More recent Northern media projects have generally fallen into three broad categories: (1) Field tests and experiments to test the viability of new technologies and to explore alternative forms of communications for the North [for example, the Anik-B experimental projects – Inukshuk, Naalakvik – and other media interactive media projects which took place in the seventies and early eighties]; (2) Projects designed to mitigate the potential negative effects or influences of Southern programming on native cultures (NFB film support projects of the early 1970’s and a variety of community radio and television projects); and (3) Projects associated with the use of community media for organization and development purposes (community media projects) (Roth, 1983a, 1983b).

Media projects provided both the First Peoples and government sponsors with empirical data to substantiate their readiness to take on the personnel and technical management, technical and production operations, and financial accountability of full network operations. As Valaskakis and Roth observed some years ago, these projects were successful in training staff, in producing culturally-relevant, native-language programming, and in establishing the technical infrastructure to link several aboriginal communities laterally so that local residents could participate in inter-community discussions. Through federally-sponsored projects, Inuit have historically (re)constructed traditional folklore and heritage through programming which reclaims active use of native languages and promotes lived cultures ... The Northern native media project ... demonstrated their (First Peoples’) competence as broadcasters to funding agencies as they met the basic communications needs in their communities (Roth & Valaskakis, 1989: 225-6). Evidence of project successes documented the
point that First Peoples' broadcasting could be a legitimate undertaking and helped to chip away at government resistance toward Northern broadcasting subsidization through public funding.

3.3 Phase III – Policy-ing the North

During this period of experimentation up to the early eighties, the federal, provincial and territorial governments reacted to each new First Peoples' media challenge in an ad hoc manner. In 1980, a CRTC committee under the direction of the Vice-Chairman, Réal Thérien, undertook an extensive Northern and remote community consultation to assess possible options and establish a set of principles to govern the "fair" expansion of television and pay-TV services in the North. The resulting report, "The 1980's – A Decade of Diversity: Broadcasting Satellites and Pay-TV," laid out a comprehensive and supportive framework for the Northern Broadcasting Policy that was to be adopted in 1983. In 1981, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation was incorporated and licensed by the CRTC in recognition of their achievements and management potential as demonstrated in the interactive audio and video Inukshuk Anik-B satellite experiment (1978-1981). By 1982, the Applebaum-Hébert Cultural Policy Committee Report acknowledged that native peoples had gained a "special place in cultural policy" (Applebaum-Hébert, 1982: 11).

On March 10, 1983, after years of aboriginal lobbying and (in)formal consultations, the federal government announced a Northern Broadcasting Policy (NBP). This policy, the most important document in aboriginal communications development to date, elaborated five basic principles that established a significant measure of native participation in both media programming and the regulatory process:

1. Northern residents should be offered access to an increasing range of programming choices through the exploitation of technological opportunities.
2. Northern native people should have the opportunity to participate actively in the determination by the CRTC of the character, quantity, and priority of programming broadcast in predominantly native communities.
3. Northern native people should have fair access to northern broadcasting distribution systems to maintain and develop their cultures and languages.
4. Programming relevant to native concerns, including content originated by native people, should be produced for distribution on northern broadcasting services wherever native people form a significant proportion of the population in the service area.
5. Northern native representatives should be consulted regularly by government agencies engaged in establishing broadcasting policies which would affect their cultures (Federal Government News Release, 1983: 2).

The policy vehicle designed to operationalize the five principles was called the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP). Administered by the Department of the Secretary of State, Native Citizens Directorate (Canada), it was originally mandated to distribute Cdn$40.3 million over a four-year period to 13
regionally-based Native Communications Societies for long-term production goal of 20 hours of radio and 5 hours of television programming per week,6 "expected" to be transmitted by either the CBC Northern Service or Cancom (a Northern satellite distribution service). NNBAP funding was provided to produce programming which enhanced native culture and the use of native languages.

Two key aspects of previous public discussions were missing from the framework of the NNBAP which rendered the policy problematic in its initial implementation phases. These included the lack of a funding allocation to provide employment training and the assumption that CBC Northern Service and Cancom would positively embrace their new distribution "expectations" without hesitation. With respect to training, it was assumed that Canada Manpower and Employment would assume the responsibility of providing money on an annual basis. This might have been a realistic expectation during the first four years, but as time wore on, as personnel changed, and as cutbacks were instituted, negotiations for this and other funding requirements became overwhelmingly difficult. The issue of adequate funding to meet the criteria of the Program's objectives remains increasingly problematic as federal budget allocations for Northern First Peoples' broadcasting continue to decrease annually.

As far as carriage of programming was concerned, the antiquated Broadcasting Act of 1968 did not obligate the CBC to comply with the CRTC expectation of donating its satellite transponder for distribution of aboriginal broadcasting. Nor did Cancom have any legal obligation to comply with the CRTC's policy statement. As a result, native broadcasters had to rely on moral suasion and "amiable negotiations" for program and scheduling arrangements.

The question of First Peoples' access to broadcasting distribution facilities was as much a moral as a political and financial one for the two networks involved. From the perspectives of CBC Northern Service and Cancom, carriage on its services involved unappealing infrastructure, schedule, and cost modifications. In view of this harsh reality, enshrinement of aboriginal broadcasting in legislation became an imperative for First Peoples. Without it, funding for training and distribution arrangement issues would remain unstable, erratic, and might eventually disappear.

As a result of these dissatisfactions and imperatives, the Northern Broadcasting Policy has been modified several times. In 1986, an otherwise positive program evaluation, undertaken by Lougheed and Associates, identified further problems with its fuzzy notions of "native culture" and "native languages," as well as its initial lack of realistic

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6 These figures were conceived in a study of minority languages in Europe. It was determined that in order to preserve a lesser-used language - one spoken by less than one million people (Alcock & O'Brien, 1980: 1.122), it would be necessary to broadcast in it for a minimum of 40 hours of radio and 20-25 hours of television per week, at peak viewing hours (Alcock & O'Brien, 1980: 3.120). The Alcock & O'Brien study was one to which the federal government referred in the design of the NBP and NNBAP. Obviously, the Canadian government could not afford the costs involved in such an undertaking and, therefore, reduced the number of hours for native-language broadcasting production support on the assumption that it was better to fund a portion of this amount than nothing at all.
planning around questions of training, distribution, and programming costs (Lougheed and Associates, 1986). In 1989, the CRTC undertook a study (Smith and Associates, 1989) to clarify the definition of native cultural programming. This was also in response to several private radio station management complaints (Yellowknife and Whitehorse) that the publicly-subsidized native radio station in each of the respective towns was intruding on their audience niches by playing Bruce Springsteen and Heavy Metal music, as well as by advertising in the English language. First Peoples argued that they had just as much a right to call Bruce Springsteen music "theirs" as did the private, non-native stations, and that because of budgetary constraints, it was necessary to sell advertising in English as well as the native languages. This, in addition to the other problems of NNBAP, impelled the CRTC to clarify what constituted native cultural programming and to resolve the difficulties of Northern television programming distribution.

Before the Smith inquiry was completed in 1990, the Secretary of State imposed a severe budgetary cutback on native communications funding. Federally-subsidized native newspapers (financed under another program called the Native Communications Program) were cut 100 percent; NNBAP television and radio services were chopped by 16 percent. These cuts were sharply criticized and in significant contrast to the federal government’s attitude in the eighties when it had been fairly generous in its support of Northern aboriginal broadcasting. This was likely due to the impressive lobby efforts that Northern First Peoples had undertaken at the time.

There is some speculation that the cuts might also have had to do with the fact that in 1990, Elijah Harper, an aboriginal Member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, had refused to ratify and contributed to the defeat of the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord — the proposed new constitution for Canada. Furthermore, 1990 was the year in which a land conflict between the Mohawks of Kanehsatake and a neighbouring municipality, Oka, had begun to escalate into what would become a 78-day armed confrontation between the Mohawks, local and Québec provincial police, and the Canadian army. A native journalistic voice, documenting each of these mounting crises, would have added a very important perspective to the national debates surrounding these turning points in Canadian history. But because of financial cuts, First Peoples’ journalists could not afford the costs of on-site coverage. Was this distancing and silencing process a conscious strategy on the part of federal bureaucrats or was it just an incidental part of an ad hoc decision-making process? I do not suggest a conspiratorial theory here. What I am suggesting, though, is that it is important to place the budget cuts within the overall political context.

It is interesting to note that the fiscal cutbacks of 1990 were just as much of a surprise to those administering the NNBAP and the NCP as they were to the native broadcasters themselves. None of the evaluations undertaken to assess the quality of

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7 While in the Yukon in the summer of 1990, I interviewed a former federal bureaucrat who strongly
the Programs had ever suggested the possibility of terminating either of them. On the contrary, owing to their successes, independent evaluators had suggested fortifying them with increased budgets and a wider variety of services, if affordable.

Since the events of 1990, aboriginal peoples have commanded increased respect from federal circles. This respect, though evident in political relations, has not meant generous subsidization of media development. The effects of the cuts have been and continue to be fairly devastating. Native Communications Societies have had to lay off employees; the number of hours of production have been cut; programs have been canceled; production values have suffered in some cases. The disruption and damage caused to the relations of trust between the civil servants involved in the administration of native communications programs and the First Peoples have been immeasurable and can only be compared to the politicization effects that occurred around Chrétien's declaration of the White Paper on Indian Policy in 1969. The federally-instigated fracturing of its loyalty to what had become a commonly owned cultural and policy project reinforced an even stronger commitment on the part of First Peoples' broadcasters to figure out a way not only to diversify their funding sources, but also to expand their audiences in an effort to build both a political support group and an advertising base outside of their immediate regions.

While all of this was going on, the CRTC had been simultaneously collecting Comments on their Proposed Native Broadcasting Policy (Public Notice 1990-12), based on the results of the study undertaken by Smith & Associates, and were about to announce a new policy to the public. On September 20, 1990, toward the end of the Oka/(government) crisis, the CRTC released its Native Broadcasting Policy (Public Notice 1990-89) with a notable shift in title from what it had previously called the Northern Broadcasting Policy. Calling its new approach "flexible" and "minimalist," the Commission took into consideration the government budget cuts by relaxing its advertising restrictions on native stations as a way of augmenting their limited financial resources (CRTC Press Release, September 20, 1990). Borrowing from its Community Radio and its Broadcasting Policy Reflecting Canada's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity, the Commission clarified what it meant by an aboriginal broadcasting undertaking and native programming. It is one which is:

- owned and controlled by a non-profit organization whose board members are drawn from the aboriginal population of the region it serves. Its programming can be in any aboriginal language or in either or both of the two official languages, but should be specifically oriented to the aboriginal audience it is licensed to serve. It also has a distinct role in fostering the development of aboriginal cultures and, where possible, the preservation of ancestral languages.
- An aboriginal program is a program in any language directed specifically towards a distinct aboriginal audience, or a program about any aspect of the life, interests, or culture of Canada's native people (CRTC Press Release, 1990: 2).

believed that the decision to cut the budgets was made on the basis of bureaucratic and financial expediency rather than on concerted strategy.
In a community where there is more than just a native station, native broadcasters were given permission to advertise for up to an average of four minutes per hour each day with a maximum of six minutes in any given hour (CRTC Press Release, 1990). However, should the service be the sole broadcasting undertaking in a given community, all advertising restrictions were to be waived (CRTC Press Release, 1990: 1-2).

The Native Broadcasting Policy freed the notion of culture and language from its heritage containment framework and allowed for the potential development of programming based on other considerations. First Peoples were satisfied with the Native Broadcasting Policy in principle. But there were still several policy and program tasks left to achieve – the need to secure necessary program funding and the enshrinement of aboriginal communications rights within the Broadcasting Act. The former is still in danger of continuous erosion; the latter was accomplished in 1991, though representative aboriginal language rights are still not mentioned in the Act, to the disappointment of the First Peoples’ lobbyists.

Legislation prior to 1991 specified that “all Canadians are entitled to broadcasting service in English and French as public funds become available” (Broadcasting Act, 7 March 1968, 16 & 17 Eliz. 2, c. 25; S.2(e)) and that the national broadcasting service should “be extended to all parts of Canada, as public funds become available.” Native peoples had the right to receive programming in English and French, but not to broadcast.

Between 1968 and the passing of the present Broadcasting Act on June 4, 1991, the Northern broadcasting infrastructure has developed to include: thirteen regional Native Communications Societies in the North, CBC’s Northern Service, CBC’s Northern Quebec Service, several private radio stations in Yellowknife, Whitehorse, and Iqaluit, 117 First Peoples’ community radio stations across the country, and the TVNC dedicated Northern satellite transponder service. Aboriginal broadcasting is now addressed specifically in the Broadcasting Act, 1991, Section 3(i)(d)(iii), which states that -

(d) the Canadian broadcasting system should:  
(iii) through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operation, serve the needs and interests, and reflect the circumstances and aspirations of Canadian men, women and children, including equal rights, the linguistic duality and multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society...  

The recent changes in broadcasting legislation mark a turning point in Canada’s official recognition of collective over individual rights in broadcasting. The 1991 Broadcasting Act takes Canada’s existing commitment to equality rights inscribed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), the Multiculturalism Act, 1988, the Human Rights Act (1976-77) and the Employment Equity Act (1986) and applies it to
the broadcasting field. These Equality Rights include: the right to be and express multicultural and multiracial differences, the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability, and the right to equitable job opportunities.

In the native broadcasting policy case, the federal government has demonstrated at least two parallel and contradictory policy tracks – that of positively responding to the aboriginal demands for broadcasting, on one hand, and that of pulling cultural funding away from aboriginal peoples on the other.

More specifically, early in the 1980’s, the federal government had demonstrated its good will by financially supporting cultural broadcasting services within regions with significant aboriginal populations. On the other hand, by the 1990’s, native broadcasting systems were operating smoothly and were no longer as much a priority on the federal agenda as they had once been. There were other federal concerns of greater import to those in government, such as the Meech Lake constitutional discussions, and the political/national questions about First Nations’ expectations, costs, and roles within a new confederal system. Aboriginal peoples were also becoming more coherent about their demands for self-government; land claims treaties were in various stages of negotiations around the country. As communications became more sophisticated within native communities, First Peoples became more articulate about their demands on the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. They did not take the 1990 cuts sitting down and organized a national protest campaign as well as personal meetings with the Minister.

Ironically, it was the Minister himself who informed aboriginal broadcasters of what was needed – to build popular alliances in the non-native public and have them demonstrate to the government that they support native broadcasters and only then might the Minister listen to their and the native broadcasters’ messages. The challenge that the Minister laid out at a meeting with First Peoples’ broadcasters in March of 1990 was to be taken even more seriously than he expected. Indeed, activities with this goal in mind had already begun, under his eyes, in the late eighties, when one of the Native Communications Societies, Northern Native Broadcasting, Yukon had struck an arrangement with CBC’s NewsWorld for its half-hour program “Nedaa” to cross over the cultural and regional borderlines on a weekly basis, targeting an “imagined” Southern audience, interested in Northern First Nations issues and entertainment. Television Northern Canada was also in the works, preparing for their launch in 1992, with the eventual possibility of becoming a third national television service in the near future.
3.4 Phase IV – Emergent Trends in Northern First Peoples’ Television Broadcasting

The essence of broadcast technology is its capacity to cross great distances. In Canada, in the past, state communications policies and regulations have restricted the number of broadcast licenses and their audience reach because of competition over scarce resources. Government broadcasting policies and programs have supported native projects and licensed undertakings which were intended for local community or regional broadcasting only. In no case within any of the existing Northern broadcasting policies has there been an exception to this restrictive principle until 1988. This was the year in which the federal government allocated Cdn$10 million to a national consortium to research and begin organization of a Pan-Arctic satellite channel distribution service. There is still no nationally-received aboriginal broadcasting service. Television Northern Canada, subsidized by federal funding, serves its 94 target communities in the North exclusively. A national cross-cultural audience reach was unforeseen in official policies or funding formulae for Northern Broadcasting Services. This has been because local and regional priorities have taken precedence in the context of Northern cultural development objectives for the obvious reason that, until local and regional strategies are in place, national considerations would not be paramount.

Recently, several factors have shifted the 13 regional Native Communications Societies’ perceptions about the potential for national broadcasting. First, regional native audiences are fairly satisfied with their aboriginal services, as documented in the mandatory Native Communications Societies’ surveys every few years. Second, a multiplicity of channels are becoming available through more sophisticated technology offered by signal compression. Finally, having become aware that “the institutions and processes of public communication are themselves a central part of the political structure and process” (Garnham, 1986: 37), professional native broadcasters have realized that their audience reach has never depended on technologies available to them and control of access to technology depended on government financing, government Ministers and private capital investors. With new satellite technologies and increased pressure on the communications industry for multiplication of its services, it is no longer possible for politicians and regulators to argue that there are too few frequencies available to allow for an expansion of native broadcasting. Thus, because of technological flexibility, it is now feasible to consider that an undertaking of any size, if financially viable, may broadcast its service to any local and regional or nation-wide audience. The potential is there for First Peoples to develop trans-regional networks that could influence a wide range of native and non-native audience members.

Television Northern Canada, the vehicle that could fulfill this objective, is the North’s primary distribution system. Operationalized on January 21, 1992, it spans five time zones and covers an area of over 4.3 million square kilometers. Broadcasting a selection of television programs from seven Native Communications Societies, as well
as CBC Northern Service, Government of the Northwest Territories (N.W.T.), Yukon College, and Kativik School Board of Northern Québec. TVNC is an exemplar of Pan-Arctic cross-cultural broadcasting. Broadcasters, as well as audiences, can see and evaluate their own and others’ programs on a scheduled basis, thus having access to a variety of cultural productions originating from outside of their specific regions. The quality and range of program subjects carried by TVNC is impressive. Wrapped around with Broadcast News and weather reports supplied by Environment Canada, programs from each of the contributing Native Communications Societies and governmental entities cover cultural, political, social, and economic topics targeted at a diversity of age groups. National Film Board films are screened as are other acquired independent productions; documentary and children’s programming are distributed and local soap opera-like segments are popular. In the “most appreciated” category is the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation’s “Super Shamou” feature, which has become compelling viewing to youngsters and adults alike across the North. A blend of the South’s Superman and the North’s Magic Man, or Shaman, Super Shamou wears a cape, winks at the audience, and flies in the skies above Iqaluit on Baffin Island, overseeing the moral behaviour of the town’s residents. Like Clark Kent, he intervenes when he sees someone about to get into or make trouble for him or herself. The Super Shamou segments are fascinating broadcasting strips, showing a way in which Inuit broadcasters have indigenized a social “comic” narrative of North American popular culture— to make it more relevant and appealing to Northern aboriginal viewers.

In general, TVNC’s programs are fairly sophisticated from all of the contributing entities. Unfortunately, however, many remain accessible only to those who speak the program producers’ language. To directly address the issues of narrowcasting, there are tentative plans to subtitle native programs so that language will not remain a barrier to comprehension of content for TVNC’s network-wide audience and, eventually, for a Canadian national audience. Due to budgetary constraints, however, this option remains unaffordable at the moment, although steps in that direction are being carefully considered.

3.5 Cross-cultural Implications of TVNC

Television Northern Canada has already had the occasion to bring together an audience of native and non-native viewers that spans the Arctic. This fact, in itself, has enormous implications regarding the possibility of influencing the development of common public opinion trends. Moving South through carriage by provincial broadcasters, CBC Newsworld, and by cable operators will expand TVNC’s potential to become an active participant in national dialogues. In the future, should money become available, international Fourth World connections may further extend possibilities for TVNC to become a key opinion-maker on a more global scale.

I believe that the extension of TVNC into the South is motivated by First Peoples’ recognition that in order for them to maintain a stable presence within Canadian broadcasting and Canadian society, they must expand their influence by constructing
new social, political, and cultural alignments. They are aware that using media as a tool for identity and nation-building might not be adequately empowering if there is not also a venue through which to address issues of broader (Canada-wide) common interest to a wider audience. In the words of George Henry, one of the founders of Northern Native Broadcasting, Yukon and former President of Television Northern Canada:

We have to have the ability to give our messages a modern-day voice by our own people in order to promote and effect social change such as the misconceptions that Canadians have about the aboriginal people in terms of their languages, cultures, and customs. If you look at the last ten years, Indian people have been fighting to change the minds of the Canadian middle class or the middle ground. They’re not really dealing with the politicians. They’re not really dealing with the ethnic communities. They’re trying to change the views of the middle ground in Canadian society. They’ve carved out their allies and that’s where communications comes in. The more understanding and education you give people, the more tolerant a society you have (Personal interview with George Henry, August 7, 1990).

There are interesting and important, though yet unacknowledged, ramifications when minority broadcasters gain access to nation-wide audiences. Native Communications Societies’ audience reach beyond the range of its own cultural and linguistic communities, planners argue, may provide multiple opportunities to disseminate otherwise inaccessible information, while at the same time persuading, lobbying, electronically constituting regional/Pan-Arctic or national publics, and building cross-cultural bridges and social alignments.

Despite federal financial cutbacks, aboriginal broadcasters have the symbolic support necessary for the extension of their Northern broadcasting services beyond their immediate regions, i.e. the 1991 Broadcasting Act, Southern Audience Interventions during Northern license hearings. Presence within mainstream broadcasting menus in the South, as promised in the 1991 Broadcasting Act, will, no doubt, provide First Peoples’ broadcasters with the potential for influencing Southern-based public opinion about current and strategic aboriginal issues and decisions, but this will not be easily achieved, given the present financial climate.

Funding is clearly the key challenge. Ideas for fund-raising have included the development of a native broadcasting lottery, the creation of a fund based on a Southern cable service tax to subsidize Northern program production, the establishment of a Native Broadcasting Program Fund, such as that of Telefilm Canada (MacPherson & Campbell, 1993), and control over the establishment of the information highway services to the North. To date, none of these ideas have been approved or pilot-tested. Consequently, First Peoples’ television producers north of 60, deprived of secure long-term funding, must plan their futures on Canadian airwaves without much economic confidence.
IV THE SYMBOLIC DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE CANADIAN BROADCASTING SYSTEM

Gaining control over the production and distribution of their own cultural products through local and regional venues has involved First Peoples in negotiations with various levels of civil servants, cabinet ministers, and outsiders with common interests. As a consequence, indigenous peoples have introduced a level of cultural diversity and complexity to the bureaucratic process, unforeseen by most within the state apparatus. This has had the positive impact of assuring that governmental discourses on cultural and racial pluralism have actually been taken seriously and are reflected in the making and implementation of important decisions regarding native broadcasting.

The enshrinement of aboriginal broadcasting in the 1991 Broadcasting Act does not end this narrative. The Northern case goes beyond redress of imbalances and oppression to something like national self-determination. First Peoples are seeking a new place within the confederation of Canada. They are seeking a new social contract, a reconfiguration of power relations in Canadian society – a recognition that they, too, are founding nations.

Insofar as this manifests itself in communications spheres, it tells us that what First Peoples are essentially seeking is a national status, as opposed to a cultural status. In broadcasting, it has not been enough to enshrine communication rights in legislation, while leaving aboriginal broadcasters on the financial and political peripheries of Canadian society. First Peoples want to be integral to the national media scene. They want a Canada-wide (inclusive of the North and South) national aboriginal service, complementary to the French Radio Canada and the English CBC – a central and financially-stable presence on a nation-wide basis (MacPherson & Campbell, 1993).

What might a national First People’s channel mean in actual terms? For instance, would some view such a development as the institutionalization of “media reservations”\(^8\), or would it be viewed as a positive development on par with CBC French and English broadcasting of Radio Canada throughout the entire country? A great deal more thinking and research is needed on what it might mean for Fourth World frontier nations to achieve such a status in Canada and in other countries which “encompass” their peoples.

Seeking a national media status in broadcasting parallels First Peoples’ political movements in self-government, territorial and environmental rights, among others. It goes beyond a repairing mode of thinking, i.e. repairing the damages of colonialism, and represents a national self-affirmation. It calls for the recognition of First Peoples as national, not just cultural citizens.

\(^{1}\) This term was suggested by Thierry Le Brun.
References


