International Communication Gazette

<http://gaz.sagepub.com/>

No longer 'the other': A reflection on diversity in Canadian fiction television

Lorna Roth, Leen d'Haenens and Thierry Le Brun
International Communication Gazette 2011 73: 380
DOI: 10.1177/1748048511405815

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://gaz.sagepub.com/content/73/5/380>

Published by:

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *International Communication Gazette* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://gaz.sagepub.com/content/73/5/380.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Aug 17, 2011

[What is This?](#)

No longer 'the other': A reflection on diversity in Canadian fiction television

the International
Communication Gazette
73(5) 380–399

© The Author(s) 2011

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1748048511405815

gaz.sagepub.com

Lorna Roth

Concordia University, Canada

Leen d'Haenens

Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium

Thierry Le Brun

Independent filmmaker, Canada

Abstract

Canada has played a leadership role in the development of multiculturalism and its use in ethnic and minority television broadcasting as an integrative tool for cultural and racial constituency groups. Canada has mainly opted to emphasize private ethnic broadcasting as the means by which to integrate minorities, along with the support of the public broadcasters' progressive initiatives. After historically differentiating and framing ethnic/multicultural research and programming initiatives in Canada, this article identifies some lessons and best practices that have emerged from this experience. Using policy analysis from a historical perspective, the authors analyse the enabling mechanisms and strengths, as well as the obstacles and failures that have been experienced in an effort to build an integrated, cohesive and transformative television system in which all members of society are recognized as having a right to both fair portrayal practices and employment opportunities.

Keywords

Canada, ethnic programming, intercultural television, multiculturalism, portrayal

Corresponding author:

Leen d'Haenens, Centre for Media Culture and Communication Technology, Catholic University of Leuven, Parkstraat 45, B-3000 Leuven, Belgium

Email: leen.dhaenens@soc.kuleuven.be

Introduction

Given the present context of globalization, societies are becoming more heterogeneous ethnically and racially and therefore more and more complex and diverse. As a result, different systems of values come into contact and, in spite of not always matching on all points, need to be made to connect if we are to achieve an 'inclusive' society. In addition, in Europe, it also needs to be emphasized that the increasing degree of 'difference' affects the identity of the multiple contiguous societies, as today they find it less obvious to cite the concept of the homogeneous nation-state than they did in the past. In Canada, a settler society, there have always been at least three constituency groups to deal with (First Peoples, peoples of British and French origin and more historically recent immigrant populations). Consequently, it has never developed the mythology of being a one-tiered society regarding its ethnic relations. In other words, Canadians have always been engaged in figuring out how to relate to the 'cross-cultural other' both on interpersonal and mediated levels. We realize that in European countries, the term 'multiculturalism' has lost much of its appeal in recent years, as in several EU countries we have observed a drastic change in public and political discourse. Nevertheless, we would still argue that the Canadian example creates opportunities for policy learning that should not be discarded too easily.

Canada is avant-garde in its thinking about and acting upon issues of inclusiveness and diversity, and its perceived importance of the role of media in the integration process. This article briefly sketches out Canadian policies around media and diversity. We point out the best practices that have emerged from this and then reflect on how these might be applied to other states in search of media strategies for integration.

This article emerged out of longitudinal, multi-method research conducted by the authors focusing on inclusivity and cultural and racial diversity. We wanted to share our individual insights about the range of ways that multicultural/multiracial media could be used to both reinforce and shift cultural and national identities in the current era of global migration. We wanted to know whether historical research can inform us about how media can best be utilized to sustain and encourage the coexistence and social cohesion of multiple constituency groups living in Canada.¹ We asked ourselves: To what extent has the experience of ethnic programming and multicultural broadcasting contributed to the opening up of society to intercultural contact and to what extent has it had minimal impact (if any) on the transformation of its civic culture? In other words: How can the support/promotion of intercultural discourse and governmental initiatives in mainstream and ethnocultural television contribute to cultural and social cohesion that would go beyond stagnant perspectives on multiculturalism? What media infrastructures and policy principles have been deployed in a multicultural/multiracial society, which have philosophically and pragmatically considered the benefits and liabilities of cultural diversity and its revision of interculturalism?

Multiculturalism, ethnic broadcasting, social cohesion and integration

Television can play supportive, although constrained, roles in addressing the challenge of social cohesion in a multicultural/multiracial society. In order for broadcast producers

to be able to contribute to the potential breaking down of stereotypes and the building up of cross-cultural constituency group relations in Canada, media policy planners and regulators have a broad and visionary role to play in the licensing and regulatory process. Planners face numerous questions: What kinds of programming infrastructures will they support, license and regulate? What are their explicit objectives in terms of using television as a media form for stimulating critical and open cross-cultural debates in Canadian society about issues that concern minority as well as mainstream audiences? What should be the proportion of programming that focuses on local, regional, national and international issues? In what languages should this programming be carried? From what countries should programming originate? How does one reconcile national or state content regulations with the exhibition of foreign programming? Furthermore, what would be the impact of each of these decisions on the potential to use television as a tool for cultural and linguistic integration into the infrastructures and social processes within the two societies? Finally, how could television be used to provoke virtual and actual cross-cultural dialogue to enable audience members to gain access to the larger trends and values shifting the grounds of sociocultural relations? To what extent can ethnic and multicultural/multiracial television structures and programming be used to bond a select number of viewers together in a segregated enclave and, alternatively, to what degree can it help audiences bridge their isolation by providing the information necessary to motivate their outreach to others who are unlike themselves? These are considerations that media planners should be grappling with as they sit down to consider decisions about ethnic and multicultural broadcasting in Canada.

Much has been debated about social cohesion in our and many other societies in the last decade. In his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), Robert Putnam shows how social capital, or the 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them', is the critical factor in the development of social cohesion (Putnam, 2000: 19). There are positive and negative aspects of social capital. On the negative side, 'social capital . . . can be directed toward malevolent, antisocial purposes, just like any other form of capital'. Examples of these include sectarianism, ethnocentrism and corruption (Putnam, 2000: 22). On the positive side, there is mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness. Putnam considers how forms of social capital differ in focus – they either look inward and 'tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups' or they look outward and 'encompass people across diverse social cleavages' (Putnam, 2000: 22). He labels the former 'bonding social capital' and the latter 'bridging forms of social capital' (Putnam, 2000: 22).

Canada has established a particular strategy for its public, private and community broadcasting systems where intra-cultural bonding is a most prominent characteristic and it has done this by targeting the majority of its programmes (linguistically and culturally) to the cultural communities which have produced the programming. Canadians have access to a mix of programming on public and private broadcasting channels – distinct ethnic channels, a fully-dedicated Aboriginal channel, a range of local and regional multicultural channels and nationally accessible specialty pay channels (Omni, Vision TV) delivering ethnic language programming and multicultural content. Although some are located on over-the-air distribution systems, 31 August 2011 marks their conversion

to digital service. With the exception of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, no national intercultural media services aimed at building bridges of understanding among the various constituency groups living in and co-creating their societies has been licensed by the CRTC and mandated to be picked up by all cable and satellite operators (Roth, 2005). Although the Canadian system tends deliberately in this direction, it, too, has much to learn about the power of the media to engage its viewers in debates about the important ways in which a cross-cultural audience can be constituted as a new foundation for the development of a more inclusive society in which members of all constituency groups have a stake in contributing to the improvement of national, regional and local social relations. Let us now show how Canada's official multiculturalism, its historical position and policy have supported a particular kind of politics of inclusion for its society.

History and perceptions of Canadian multiculturalism

In 1971, former Canadian prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau announced a policy of 'multiculturalism within a bilingual framework' (8 October 1971) as the outcome of a series of highly charged debates surrounding the submission of the reports of a Royal Commission Study on Bilingualism and Biculturalism during the 1960s (which hereafter is referred to as the 'B and B' Commission). Organized because of the growing dissatisfaction and friction between the English, the French and immigrant ethnic minorities, the B and B Commission had been mandated in 1963 by the Pearson government to examine the state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend 'the steps to be taken to develop an equal partnership between the two founding races, taking into account the contribution made by other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution' (Multiculturalism Canada, 1984: 8).

Initial deliberations about multiculturalism polarized the Canadian public. Reacting to the possibility of being relegated third-class citizens, spokespersons for the ethnocultural and racial communities, led by the Ukrainians of Alberta, demanded equal status to that of the 'founding fathers' (Kallen, 1982: 53). In their preliminary report (1965), the B and B commissioners outlined some of the reasons for the ethnic public's support of multiculturalism. Ethnic groups, the report stated, talked of their fears of being left out of the French and English dialogue, affirmed their sense of the historical importance of the 'third' force in the development of Canadian society and advocated a pluralistic, 'mosaic' approach to the construction of a multicultural society. Speaking of 'unity in diversity', they argued for 'the harmonious co-operation of all ethnic groups in the Canadian country as a whole' (B and B, 1965: 52). Few ethnic groups objected to multiculturalism as an idea. Those who did expressed concern about 'Balkanization' and repeatedly argued for the idea of 'One Canada' (B and B, 1965: 52–3). First Peoples absented themselves from this debate, considering themselves to be Canada's third Founding Nation and opting to pressure the federal government for a special status, different from that which the multicultural communities were seeking. They, therefore, have never been included under the category of multiculturalism and its various policies, practices and initiatives.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau supported multiculturalism, but was a strong believer in bilingualism, and not multilingualism, as an official policy. He argued that with a multicultural policy within a bilingual framework, Canada could become 'a special place, and a stronger place as well. We become less like others; we become less susceptible to cultural, social, or political envelopment by others' (Porter, 1987: 119). Robert Bourassa, Quebec's premier at the time, opposed multiculturalism, protesting that it would be divisive, that the demands of certain ethnic groups and the federal government's compromises in this regard would make the fundamental duality of the country even more troubled than it already was. Representative of those who opposed the policy, John Porter, author of *The Vertical Mosaic* (1965), argued against multiculturalism on the grounds that it would 'foster ethnic separation and possibly impede the development of national unity' (Kallen, 1982: 54).

Other opponents in the 1960s and 1970s claimed that multiculturalist policies endorsed and reinforced the 'age-old Colonial technique of divide and rule utilized by majority ethnic elites to guarantee and perpetuate their ascendancy' (Porter, 1987: 54). Multiculturalism as a policy, it was stated, symbolized the contradictions between rhetoric and the practical, daily treatment of ethnocultural and racial minorities. It was frequently purported to be a policy of containment and appeasement of the conflicting demands made by the non-English and the Quebecois. As such, it was feared it would become a technique of domination, legitimating the entrenched powers of the ruling Anglo elite when its superordinate, national position was threatened by both Quebec's claim to political power and the ethnic communities' growing numerical, economic and cultural strength (Kallen, 1982: 54-5).

Trudeau's compromise position, 'a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework', recognized that language and culture were divisible, thus opening up what had become an ongoing debate about how a state could achieve national unity within a federation of multiple languages and ethnocultures. The prime minister then proceeded to lobby for support from the House of Commons for the policy recommendations and obtained it. Although the new policy was not to be enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms until 1982 and the Multiculturalism Act in 1988, Canada became the first and only state in the world to have an explicit and formal framework to guide the national configuration of cultural and racial diversity. Trudeau considered this new policy 'the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians' (Porter, 1987: 118).

Thus, Trudeau emphasized the individual, rather than the collective, right to preserve one's ethnocultural identity as a voluntary outcome of deliberate choice. This notion of individual ethnic expressivity in the 1971 policy came under sharp criticism by Canadian scholars, especially in relation to the promotion of ethno-exotica (Bullivant, 1981; Peter, 1979). Bullivant criticized the expressive function of ethnicity as deflecting attention away from the instrumental side of political and economic survival through structural assimilation (Kallen, 1982). Peter argued that it would place ethnic groups in a position of contributing quaint customs and primordial identities to the Canadian mosaic, while simultaneously denying them access to political and economic opportunities (Kallen, 1982).² The 1971 policy did very little to encourage the collective communication rights that were to become embedded in ethnic, multilinguistic, multicultural and Aboriginal broadcasting policy in 1991.

The Canadian government's legislative approach to minorities and television

Coming back to Canada's multiculturalism policy, let us now look at its implementation in broadcasting matters. As already noted, the notion of 'multiculturalism' began circulating in Canada in 1971 and is commonly used in the following senses: as a government public policy and set of programmes; as a demographic reality in reference to an ethnically diverse society; as a political ideology of cultural pluralism underpinning the federal policy; and as a social movement in which ethnic, racial and immigrant groups aim to redefine the social order or society along multicultural lines (Canadian Ethnocultural Council, 2003: 23–4; Kallen, 1982: 51).

Implicit in the idea of multiculturalism and in ethnic broadcasting is the assumption that members of different ethnic and racial groups should (ideally) be able to communicate effectively with each other within a context of legal, sociocultural and political equality. It is assumed that ethnocultural and racial origin is visible and/or audible, that selected traditions can be preserved and expressed through dedicated projects and programming, that diversity can be explained to others in order to develop the kind of tolerance that a democratic pluralist population 'should' demonstrate and that employment of cultural and racial minorities in all aspects of the broadcasting industry will have some impact on portrayal practices.

To grasp the essence of the framework within which ethnic broadcasting has evolved, knowledge about the historical development of multiculturalism policies, out of which it emerged as a trajectory, is helpful. The stated objectives of multiculturalist policies include improved racial tolerance and the public acknowledgement of a culturally diverse and ideally pluralistic society. To achieve these goals, a broadcasting system in which there is 'fair' representation of the population in terms of ethnicity and race, both within media institutional administrations and as the subjects of normalized media texts, is publicly espoused by government policymakers and ethnic lobbyists. Embedded in this approach to fairness are three characteristic ideals:

... *access*: the opening up of all institutions, programs and activities to all constituency groups; *equity*: the equality of opportunity and removal of systemic bias; and *social cohesion*: an effort to facilitate participation and interaction of ethnic, religious and cultural communities in Canadian society. (Canadian Ethnocultural Council, 2003: 25)

To correspond to the federal government's three ideals, these claims have been inserted into the Canadian broadcasting system through the establishment of separate policies for ethnic (1985) and Aboriginal broadcasting undertakings (1983), each of which acknowledges the inherent distinctions between the two groups and the dominant (English and French) 'founding peoples' of the Canadian state.³ The 1991 Broadcasting Act enshrines multicultural/multiracial and Aboriginal broadcasting. It reads:

... the Canadian broadcasting system should:

(iii) through its programming and the employment opportunities arising out of its operations, 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. (Section 3 [1][d][iii], 4 June 1991)

The Act is both preceded and supported by other legislative instruments with similar intentions such as the multiculturalism policy of 1971, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), other supporting legislation (the Official Languages Act, the Citizenship Act and the Canadian Human Rights Act) and the Ethnic Broadcasting Policy (1985). All of these policy vehicles provide guidelines for the management of Canadian cultural and racial pluralism while at the same time circumscribing particular representations of 'otherness' and to a great extent influencing the Canadian publics' discourses, perceptions and political positions concerning cultural and racial diversity.

The words of Section 3 represent the legislation that summed up years and years of debate. They currently symbolize and embody the facilitative conditions for multicultural/racial and Aboriginal broadcasting development in Canada. They represent the federal government's political intervention into Canada's sociocultural and media market structures that have made entry for minorities a strategic challenge. This legislatively based policy established a foundation for the restructuring of the industry by strengthening employment equity and affirmative action programmes throughout the media, as well as encouraging improvements in portrayal practices. With these reflections as background, let us now turn to the actual policies that the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), Canada's broadcasting regulatory agency, designed and supported with regard to ethnic broadcasting and show how these have contributed to the ongoing debates about cultural diversity. To what degree are these policy versions over time merely an infrastructure with a formula to numerically account for percentages of a certain kind of programming content? Have these policies provided enough motivation for broadcasters to improve the quantity and quality of their diversity programming?

Can the implementation of the CRTC policies on cultural diversity be seen in any way to have the potential to act pedagogically as a teaching tool to increase tolerance and cross-cultural dialogical opportunities? In other words, are the policies merely tools of political correctness or of market correction? Can they also have impact as vehicles to stimulate an anti-racist/anti-ethnicist process of reflection and dialogue among Canada's constituency groups?

Historical snapshot of Canadian ethnic broadcasting

At the time of its passing in 1985, the *Broadcasting Policy Reflecting Canada's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity* was a uniquely Canadian initiative – the first of its kind to exist within the international community. The actual substance of the *Broadcasting Policy Reflecting Canada's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity* (1985) was intricate. It clearly defined ethnic programmes and stations, dividing them into five broad categories: 'Type A – a program in a language other than English, French, or native Canadian; Type B – a program in English or French that is specifically directed to culturally or racially distinct

groups whose first or common language is English or French; Type C – a program in English or in French that is specifically directed to any ethnic group other than in type B; Type D – a program of a bilingual mix (English or French plus type A) that is specifically directed to any ethnic group (such as French and Arabic, English and Italian, English and Punjabi); Type E – a program in French or in English that is directed to any ethnic group or to a mainstream audience and that depicts Canada's cultural diversity through services that are multicultural, educational, informational, cross-cultural or intercultural in nature' (CRTC, 1985: 11–12). In the minds of the commissioners, this would allow for programming in English or French that would facilitate the integration of ethnic groups into the mainstream and would reflect culturally or racially distinct groups to the population at large.

The Ethnic Broadcasting Policy underwent a review in 1998–9 in which it was decided that the 1985 framework was still relevant to the larger objectives of Canadian society (Public Notice CRTC 1999: 117). In its decision, the Commission concluded that the 1985 policy had led to a substantial increase in the diversity of the Canadian broadcasting system through the emergence of many new and valuable ethnic broadcasting stations. Furthermore, those consulted for this review commented on how programming from ethnic services positively contributed to their integration into Canadian society.

Consequently, only a minimum number of changes were recommended for the policy under review to make it more flexible. Canadian content requirements did not shift; nor did the requirement that 60 percent programming was to be ethnic in content. An emphasis on local and regional community issues and concerns were evident in terms of CRTC's desired content for all of the ethnic networks.

What did change was that the Commission required ethnic radio and television stations to produce half of their programming in third languages (other than English, French or Aboriginal languages) in order to reflect the linguistic diversity of the Canadian population. The notions of culture and heritage language were structured into the policy in terms of minimum and maximum percentages which, for administrative purposes, differentiated an ethnic from a conventional broadcasting undertaking by its supposed measurability of ethnic content and number of employees. This might have assisted bureaucrats in justifying multiculturalist policies as an integral part of the Canadian broadcasting infrastructure. However, having better numerical representation of minorities in the media does not in itself necessarily work at deep cognitive levels to change our attitudes and behaviours in relation to race and ethnicity in the Canadian population. Furthermore, given the perceived desire by minorities to market multiculturalism as a core feature of Canadian society, some of the outstanding programming challenges with ethnic television are still difficult to surmount given existing economic constraints in broadcasting. These have been taken up in debates and guidelines by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, the National Film Board, as well as in public and private industry initiatives targeted at building capacity, training programmes and other support vehicles.

Although current specialized ethnic services are far more sophisticated than they were initially, there remain several unresolved programming implementation problems, which still have to be addressed, and which have recurrently manifested as challenges. First, there are insufficient amounts of original high-quality ethnic-language programming

produced in Canada because there is very little funding available for such endeavours. This situation has not changed much over the years. A consequent response to these economic constraints has been a rise in the practice of brokerage. Brokerage refers to the purchase of blocks of radio and television time by independent ethnic producers who 'determine the program content and commercial messages and derive revenues from the advertising contained therein' (CRTC, 1985: 30–1). Brokerage is a problem for two reasons. According to CRTC regulations, all licensees are responsible for the content that is broadcast under their auspices. Should the licensee not be able to understand third-language programming, there is a question as to who will be responsible for potentially libellous statements. The Commission's response to this question is that a self-regulated industry code for programming brokerage be established. The other reason that brokerage structures are problematic pertains to the question of Canadian content quotas. Can international programming, for example, be considered Canadian if shown on an ethnic station? If it can, then is this not an expanded and somewhat distorted notion of what Canadian content is? For example, what is Canadian about Italian-language programming produced in Italy and imported for broadcasting purposes? This is still a problematic issue for ethnic broadcasters and for the CRTC, which has permitted the broadcasting of a limited amount of international programming (as a stopgap measure) until such time as a viable ethnic programme production industry takes hold in Canada.

The second issue about the organization of ethnic broadcasting resulting from the policy was that due to the scarcity of available analogue signals in ethnic market areas until the mid-1990s, the CRTC had chosen not to license single-language undertakings. This limited opportunity to address a linguistically homogeneous audience was theoretically and economically understandable to the broadcasters, but was problematic in practical application because it required that each potential regional licensee negotiate a fair and balanced ethnic representation of languages (and cultures) within each station. The necessary bargaining process involved in this organizational juggling act has often resulted in political conflicts and tense social relations. Ironically, the spin-off consequence of this forced sharing of air time may have improved cross-cultural relations at the stations, as the various ethnic communities were compelled to make compromises. However, no doubt it tended also to further fragment ethnic audiences who often only wanted to watch programming in their own mother tongues. In a short amount of time, digital compression technology enabled the multiplication of channels, and CRTC policy restrictions were no longer justifiable as a technical argument opposed to the licensing of individual ethnic television network services. Consequently, several single-language broadcasters have emerged and have been licensed. These target their programming to their own ethnic groups without the use of versioning; thereby, not paying much attention to those who do not understand their language.

But what about a national intercultural service? Wouldn't a service focused on the breaking of ethnic community borders and the building of cross-cultural bridges be more attuned to the integrative objectives of multiculturalism if it were delivered as a nationally mandated over-the-air channel? What promoters of multicultural television wanted at the time was a channel that would not be considered 'special' and 'different – dedicated to others'. They wanted a network that would be integral to the bundle of broadcasting services considered mainstream Canadian – not separated into

a specialty pay service that was unaffordable to most Canadians, for whom pay services were beyond their budgets in the early years of the 21st century. Until 31 August 2011, there were two parallel Canadian television broadcasting delivery systems: over-the-air and digital. On this date, all broadcasting services in Canada were transformed to the digital format. Until about 2008, under 10 percent of the Canadian population subscribed to digital services. This meant that specialty pay services had a rather small audience reach.

Reflections on a national multicultural service for Canada

In 1986, Dan Iannuzzi, a prominent Italian businessman, founder and publisher of the Toronto Italian newspaper *Corriere Canadese*, was granted a licence by the CRTC to operate a local multilingual ethnic television channel in Toronto, called Multilingual Television (MTV, CFMT-TV Toronto, channel 47). It was the first multilingual television channel in Canada and eventually distributed its programming to all of Ontario. Since that time, Iannuzzi began the application process for a national multicultural network that would be specifically targeted to cross-cultural audiences. He was granted a digital licence for this purpose in 2001 after his fourth try for an analogue licence. The CRTC consistently denied his applications with the rationale that his business plan wasn't strong enough, he had not planned for enough Canadian programming, or his plan did not provide exceptional value to conform to the tenets of the Broadcasting Act. Despite two dissenting opinions from Stuart Langford and Martha Wilson (two CRTC commissioners), the applications kept getting refused. In 2001, World Television Network/Le Réseau Télémonde Inc. was granted a digital licence, with the possibility of only reaching the 7 percent of the population who had digital service. In 2004, Dan Iannuzzi passed away, as did his analogue project for providing all Canadians with a multicultural, intercultural television service.

Martha Wilson (CRTC commissioner at the time) registered one of two dissenting opinions in the Final Decision. She saw the restriction to digital as a lost opportunity to 'provide an international context' and 'bridge programming' for Canada's multicultural audience. She affirmed: 'I believe that at this time in our country we need the kind of bridge programming proposed by WTM. Our country's demographics have changed dramatically in the last 10 years and there is very little programming aimed at a mainstream audience which attempts to provide an international context for this change or address the issues that this kind of change raises.' The other dissenter, Stuart Langford, would have accepted the application as he, too, looked at Canadian broadcasting in terms of globalization and national multiculturalism. Langford saw this kind of network as being a relevant tool in which to address cross-cultural audiences and to build understanding and inclusivity among the diverse groups in society. Canadians are still without such an analogue channel (CRTC, 2001).

At this point, it is interesting to compare the performance of ethnic broadcasting in Canada with that of the case of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). A unique and interesting initiative in the world, APTN has as part of its mandate the building of bridges across differences and the establishment of social, political, cultural and racial alignments across Canada. As a national television broadcasting network,

APTN is a hybrid between what has traditionally been defined as public and private service. It carries advertising as would a private service, yet addresses public issues to Canada's national publics, modelling itself after public service television. It is multilingual, multicultural and multiracial in character and content, production staff and management. It attempts to be local, regional, national and global. It does very little original production on its own, although that has increased over the years since its establishment in 1999, in particular in the area of news and public affairs. Mostly, it distributes acquired cultural programming to its (inter)national audience. The point that APTN has already integrated international programming and is considering the possibility of expanding to become an international First Peoples television network, comparable to that of CNN and BBC World Service, tells us of its global objective of international constituency group building across national borders. APTN does not easily fit into existing categories of public service broadcasting. But it does provide us with a new model for television operated by minority members from within a highly developed society. Its diverse linguistic and cultural programming aims to transform small Aboriginal communities into individual nations living within the settler state of Canada. In this way, its objective is that of bonding together Aboriginal nations from different regions across the country. On another level, though, the vision of its board of directors and staff is broader than this and focuses on APTN's bridging capabilities. By providing a range of innovative formats, by its use of English and French dubbing and subtitling, it is providing context, background and cross-cultural exposure of Aboriginal values to those who have power in mainstream Canadian society, but who often lack the knowledge about the range of values of the Aboriginal constituency group living among and beside them. This use of television as an outreach tool is a new prototype demonstrating how to use the medium for multiple purposes: entertainment, information, stimulus for dialogue *and* pedagogical intervention. This last objective is not as explicit as the former, but it is embedded within the overall goal of 'sharing First Peoples' stories with all Canadians', which is one of APTN's mottos (Roth, 2005).

Now that we have described the infrastructure of Canada's ethnic and Aboriginal broadcasting services, let us turn briefly to how mainstream media has fared with respect to inclusiveness, fair portrayal practices, presences and absences of minorities.

Ethnocultural diversity in Canadian mainstream media

Canadian mainstream media has its own challenges. Given that the Broadcasting Act defines the system as a single one, composed of public, private and community elements (Section 3), it was initially possible to use the text to argue that as long as there is cultural and racial diversity somewhere in the system, it is balanced. Consequently, with separate ethnic and Aboriginal components, this came to be the case quite frequently, but with increasing pressure from the ethnic and Aboriginal public, mainstream media would not be limited to a voluntary approach over the long-term. To address this issue, in 2001, the CRTC began to include:

... expectations in its broadcasting decisions that licensees file corporate plans on cultural diversity. Broadcasters are now required to develop strategies specific to their own

operations that detail the measure they are taking and procedures they will follow to ensure that they properly meet their ongoing responsibilities to reflect and portray cultural diversity. Broadcasters are also required to file annual reports with the Commission on their progress towards implementing their corporate plans.

In addition to the corporate plan responsibilities of individual broadcasters... the Commission called upon the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB)⁴ to create a task force consisting of industry and community representatives that would sponsor research, identify 'best practices,' and help define the issues and present practical means for ensuring the accurate reflection and portrayal by broadcasters of the diverse groups they serve. (CRTC, 2005: 1–2).

This research would provide baseline data that would allow for the measurement and comparison of portrayal and presence of minorities on television over the year. In 2003, Solutions Research Group Consultants Inc. of Toronto, as well as the Johnson & Buchan LLP group in Ottawa, were hired by the CAB to conduct this research on their behalf. Although the entire report is fascinating, for the purposes of this article, we limit our discussion to levels of representation of visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples in programme genres. Phase V of the research findings are laid out in their Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television. Here, they do a Benchmark Content Analysis which is rich in important detail. Their report is divided into English- and French-language programming on private television. Although they don't study ethnic programming and its infrastructure in Canada per se, the authors do pay close attention to the impact of the APTN as a major source of information about First Peoples when compared to their relative absence on mainstream television programming. It is important to note two points. First, this content analysis used data from the 2001 census as the statistical benchmark to measure the on-screen presence of visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples in French- and English-language television programming against their overall presence within the populations of Quebec, and the rest of Canada. At the time, it was the only data available. Consequently, there might be some minor shifts in findings were it to be redone today. The second notable point is that the benchmark used within the research to measure their on-screen representation is 8.0 percent for French-language and 19.3 percent for English-language programming respectively. The presence of visible minority group members, as well as that of Aboriginal peoples is well below the benchmark of 19.3 percent in all six programme areas.

As to the quantitative content analysis of French-language programming, the presence of visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples in three of the five categories fall below the benchmark of 8.0 percent. On an overall basis, the study finds that 'the largest gap in terms of onscreen presence in Canadian private Television programming is that of Aboriginal Peoples. In 10 of the 11 genres studied across two languages, the presence of Aboriginal Peoples is less than 1.0% of the total (less than one-third of their population proportion in Canada). Canadians of East and Southeast Asian origins (including Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean background) make up the single largest Visible Minority group in Canada (over 1.7 million people according to the 2001 Census of Canada). They are, however, significantly less likely to be represented onscreen compared to their significant population proportion. Black Canadians are significantly

more prominent than other Visible Minority groups in terms of onscreen presence, particularly in English-Language programs' (Solutions Research Group, 2003). This is likely due to the large number of US-imported programmes.

In its final summary of findings, three gaps stand out. These are the dearth of visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples in (1) expert roles in English-language news; (2) major roles in French-language news; and (3) primary roles in English-language drama. The report provides very useful details to be used in the planning for future improvements in representational and portrayal practices. However, most important to us is that it indicates in a concrete manner how very important are the existing ethnic and Aboriginal networks to the overall system. For example, without the APTN, there would be very little significant presence of the Aboriginal constituency group on Canadian television screens except for a few programmes. One is *North of 60*, which began in 1992 on the CBC and had a five-year run. It is currently in repeat mode in Canada and has been syndicated around the world. It focuses on life in a small northern Aboriginal village and provides viewers with a fairly realistic snapshot of daily relationship details among the characters, a range of realistic portrayals, as well as some stereotypes, and some fascinating stories about poverty, alcoholism, cultural preservation, conflict over land settlements and natural resources exploitation.

In more recent years, Canadian producers have established other television series that begin to address some of these gaps. *Moccasin Flats* originated on APTN in 2003 and has moved onto Showcase (the Canadian version of the US-based Showtime Network) also in repeat mode. It is an excellent three-year series about Aboriginal life in the Regina, Saskatchewan neighbourhood of the same name. It portrays life in the hood and doesn't hesitate to focus on lesbian and hooker stories, as well as those of addictions, abuse and suicide. It was the first Canadian Aboriginal dramatic television programme on mainstream television to be produced, written and acted by Aboriginal people. Another of the more recent programmes produced by the CBC that has become popular is *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. It is a comedy focusing on a small Muslim community located in a prairie town and attempts to show how engagement with people from other cultures and races makes bridging cultural differences possible. Meanwhile, the successful series has been across the world. There are several other programmes that have emerged on English- and French-language mainstream television (*Pure Laine*, 49th and *Main*, *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, for example), but there are not many, and some of them have been short-lived. *Pure Laine* may not be about the representation of ethnic diversity per se. It is more the author creating an alter ego who imagines himself being a newcomer in Quebec and looking at his home society from the standpoint of a Haitian husband, who acts as the narrator of the series, with a wife from Les Îles de la Madeleine and an adopted Chinese baby in his patchwork family. Let it suffice to say that the number of programming initiatives such as these can be counted on the fingers of two hands, at most, for the entire broadcasting system. As budgetary constraints impose their limits on broadcasters and producers, and as more and more takeovers occur in Canada, we will likely see even smaller investments in innovative series such as these in the future.

Looking behind the scenes: Remedials for a 'lack'

Let us now briefly look beyond the interculturality of the programme (or lack thereof) as a mere result. To do this, in particular, we have paid attention to the production process of Canadian homemade fiction. Therefore, we looked behind the drama creation scenes, asking programme makers working for both public and commercial broadcasters about the choices they tend to make when visualizing diversity on the television screen, as well as the rationales behind their casting decisions and storyline selections. Through these interviews with programme makers we wanted to find out which factors are influencing the ways in which ethnic diversity is being visualized in the production of homemade fiction series. And in what way do these genesis and casting factors play a role in the production process? During our field research, we discovered that the genesis of most of the initiatives was driven by a lack of representation of specific groups or types of relationships on television. In some instances, they were also meant to correct misrepresentations of certain groups on television. Two of the series airing in 2007, *North of Sixty* and *Moccasin Flats*, were driven by a lack of representation of contemporary Aboriginal people in fiction television series. Both of them were landmarks of sorts. Prior to *North of Sixty*:

... it had always been a matter of what Tom Jackson, one of our stars in *North of Sixty* called the beads and feather brigade. Whenever any of the small coteries of Aboriginal actors was called upon to be in movies or television in Canada, they were asked to stand around in beads, feathers and say things like *Big bird flies over great water*. They were sick of it. It was always costume drama and it had nothing to do with the reality of anybody's life ... there was a whole world of people whose stories had never ever been brought to the screen, ever dramatized. (Phone interview with Barbara Samuels, co-producer, *North of Sixty*, 2 August 2008)

While *North of Sixty* emerged from white, urban, southern writers looking for new writing challenges, *Moccasin Flats* emerged out of frustrations that two Aboriginal women (Jennifer Podemski and Laura Milliken) felt about the lack of representation and misrepresentation of Aboriginal people on television as well as about the lack of trained native people. They wanted to do drama but were facing enormous barriers, which led them to a strategy of capacity development: the so-called repREZentin' training programmes. They delivered two such programmes in Ontario and Fort Chippeweyan and hit the jackpot on the third one in downtown Regina in an area called Moccasin Flats. The short that they produced went to Sundance. Showcase got interested and asked for a series based on that initial short. They ended up doing three seasons; the first season fleshed out the short into several episodes. This whole adventure proved to be extremely difficult for Podemski and Milliken to make it in the fiction generating business:

... we have to take ownership of these productions and people like APTN should ... support the Aboriginal content creators a lot more because without that support we are never going to get there. So we need to continuously lobby on our behalf to make this happen and really give ourselves a profile in the industry before anyone is going to listen. (Phone interview with Laura Milliken, co-producer of *Moccasin Flats*, 28 February 2008)

When it came to methods of casting and recruitment of trainees, it was interesting to find out that the casting procedure of *Moccasin Flats* preceded the actual storyline building. This approach was very different from that of the other fiction series included in our study and tells us an interesting story about the kind of representation that is looked for. In *Moccasin Flats*, the producers first interviewed the potential actors at length about their lives, their concerns, their living conditions, etc. and recorded these interviews. Then the tapes were looked at, critically analysed, and on the basis of them the storylines were written. Hence, the story was based on truth and also contained other elements, messages that the producers wanted to convey. Just like Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, in the case of *Moccasin Flats*, the future characters meet their authors, who write about them and their lives. So this method of story construction does ensure, to some extent, a representation of the real world of the characters, a world that most Canadians never get to see. In contrast to this casting method, the scripts of *Degrassi High: The Next Generation* were written prior to the interviews with potential actors. In most cases, the ethnicity of the characters is not necessarily defined. The producers issued a casting call inviting actors from diverse ethnic backgrounds to perform a screen test. On the basis of their performances, actors were then slotted into roles. For instance, if a young actress from a Filipino background appeals to them, or a black actor for that matter, they decide what roles might be best for them. Once decided, they then tinker a little bit with the scripts. In other words, 'ethnic' actors are slotted into roles which are already predefined. That is why the scripts do not really reveal details about the ethnicity of the characters. This difference in casting methods raises the issue of what one wants to see achieved by the representation of ethnic diversity on the television screen.

This brings us to the fundamental issue of minority representation in Canada and the meaning of 'diversity' in this, complicating the debate even further. Two diverging opinions emerge on the depiction of diversity:

... some believe that equality is achieved when differences become irrelevant, thereby achieving a state of colour-blindness (e.g., like in the case of *Degrassi High: The Next Generation*), while others believe diversity is achieved when qualities are accounted for as different yet equal. In practice, this issue becomes particularly relevant because it affects the evaluation of the successful representation and portrayal of diversity. For the first group, an assimilationist model aimed at the normalization of ethnic differences would be the goal; for the second, it is important to illuminate ethnic and cultural differences in an effort to further the acceptance and understanding of diversity. (Solutions Research Group, 2003: Phase IA Background, 4)

Concluding reflections

We asked ourselves what integration/diversity policies, which by and large allow for similarities as well as dissimilarities, has Canada adopted? It has clear-cut expectations of 'newcomers' in terms of coping abilities, personal responsibility and active citizenship. What do the authorities offer in return and what are their motives? We wondered

to what extent the Canadian government has been successful as an inclusive society builder?

It became clear to us that ethnic broadcasting as it currently stands in Canada too often projects a static (often linguistically incomprehensible) snapshot image. This in and of itself is not a bad thing, but a moving image metaphor would do better to provoke a process in audiences to reach out to others – to reconcile value differences, to work on conflict resolution, to motivate us to go beyond our own interests. In effect, a dialogically based multicultural television service could help us build social capital beyond our own ethnic community borders and boundaries. Multicultural television has a role in building social cohesion in globalized societies that are becoming more fragmented by the day, as it is often the only medium through which intercultural engagement and alignment are exposed.

That the CRTC has not yet recognized this in its decisions is evidence that current commissioners need to develop a new imaginary about the role of television in stimulating and bridging cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. The research evidence that the CRTC has sought from the CAB is a positive move in the direction of engaging with broadcasters and their organizations around these issues. It is clear that the CRTC will no longer permit voluntary initiatives of private broadcasters to improve their employment and portrayal practices as an exclusive strategy to correct the imbalance in the system. They are making concrete demands to have broadcasters realize their promises and if they do not conform to their annual plans, the CRTC has the option of reducing the number of years for which their network licences will be renewed. This sanction is important as a compliance mechanism.

In our opinion, what Canadian screens need at this time are dialogical, intercultural and transcultural network services aimed at cross-cultural audiences. No longer is it sufficient to target one's own ethnic group as audience. The existing monologic approach is narrow, containing, (introverted) and interiorizing. Although Canadian First Peoples are not officially considered under the rubric of multicultural policies and practices (and have never wanted to give up their special status as the original peoples of North America), it might be wise at this time for the CRTC to carefully examine the APTN (licensed in 1999) as an exemplar of a network that has learned to use television to address and build identification with broad cross-cultural, (inter)national audiences. Applying the underlying principles of this strategy to the Commission's various deliberative processes for ethnic and multicultural licensee decisions might be one small way in which to begin to stimulate the construction of social cohesion across Canada. An approach in which diversity is seen as an integral part of programme quality management seems to be a fruitful way of looking at the matter. This entails taking into account staffing strategies, improving intercultural competences of the current staff, fostering ongoing communication with diverse audience groups, as well as polishing the overall image of the broadcasting organization.

From our research, it is clear that there is a critical gap between cultural diversity policy promises and performances in Canada. What strategies might be utilized to motivate changes in the attitudes and approaches that broadcasters take to cultural and racial diversity? One of the key shifts in thinking about diversity in a positive sense as a means of building cultural rapport and bridging gaps and differences is by discursively

constructing an associative link between ‘diversity’ and ‘quality’ programming. If ‘diverse’ programming were to be considered equivalent to ‘quality’ programming, and if it were to be regarded and rewarded as such by the public, by audiences, by production/exhibition staff, by actors and by policymakers, we would be moving in the right direction. Here, we are referring to a special ‘diversity = quality’ relationship in all aspects of the broadcasting system, such as portrayal, representational and employment practices, in all aspects of studio and field production, in pre- and post-production technical services, in front of and behind the cameras and mikes, in the policy-making process, in the administrative process such as in the selection of boards of directors, executive producers, marketers, and in each and every aspect of the industry. Who makes decisions about diversity at the highest of levels counts. Decisions made about diversity matter – we can choose either integrative or divisive programming around diversity. Who implements these decisions and what their values are matters very much as well.

If we do not want audiences to become consumed by the encompassing, but narrow, aesthetic of existing commercial television; if we want to develop a new and pervasive aesthetic around cultural and racial diversity within the broadcasting system; if we want to promote a multiplicity of perspectives, stories, cross-cultural standpoints and intercultural dynamics; then, this might be the moment to rethink our communication and cognitive strategies so that inclusiveness becomes embedded as the common and normative way of thinking about and appreciating ‘quality’ television programming.

Appendix A

Best practices, as identified in the CAB Report, involve:

- Industry commitment
- Application and measurement
- Corporate commitment and accountability
- Recruitment, hiring, retention
- Internship, mentoring and scholarships
- News and information programming
- Programming – acquired, independent and in-house production
- Community connections
- Internal communications
- External communications.

(From Cavanagh, 2004).

Appendix B

Best practices – some suggested incentives:

- Writers’ fellowships
- Directors’ fellowships
- Talent development – casting projects – colour-blind casting, capacity-building

- Hands-on experience with a mentor
- Tracking progress in diversity – setting and achieving targets
- Consistent support and follow-up is necessary for retention purposes.

(Solutions Research Group, 2003: Phase II Research).

Funding

This research received a small Faculty Research grant from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada.

Notes

1. The short historical section of this article is adapted from 'The delicate acts of "colour balancing"' (Roth, 1998).
2. While recognizing the psychological impact of the state's efforts to provoke acceptance of multiculturalism, it is important to note the possibility that multiculturalism programmes may degenerate into mere tokenism and ethnic folkloric activities (Kallen, 1982: 290). There are many examples of this, such as the increased public representation of ethnocultural and visible minorities in Canada Day and other national holiday celebrations or the way in which the Canadian government expresses its international distinctiveness by highlighting Aboriginal and ethnocultural symbolism at exhibition sites such as world fairs or the Epcot Centre in Florida. The visible and audible portrayal of ethnicity in public life does contribute to a sense of participation in society on the part of minority groups, but it does not improve their material conditions or their institutional/structural assimilation into the economy. One is tempted to question the concern with symbolic distribution which may, indeed, serve to distract us from more critical issues related to the distribution of material benefits (Kallen, 1982: 290). In substantive terms, multiculturalism policies have not yet fulfilled the promise of 'Equality Now' at the institutional level and seem less likely to do so in the future until the economy 'recovers'.
3. This article does not deal with Aboriginal communications in great detail. Even though the federal policy assumes inclusion of Aboriginal peoples under the rubric of multiculturalism on the basis of 'visible minority' status, we have chosen to restrict the article to ethnocultural and visible minority groups that are *not* Aboriginal because the two groups themselves draw a distinction in their claims and rights based on ancestral occupancy of Canadian territory. In the area of communications, the federal and provincial governments have both dealt with Aboriginal and ethnic broadcasting policies and practices as distinct and separate entities, but they have not talked much about the reasons behind this division. Thus, the rationale for 'special status' for Aboriginal peoples in the sphere of cultural expression is not well elaborated in existing policy literatures. One place where it is alluded to is in the Applebaum-Hébert Report of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee, which states: 'In the formulation of principles for cultural policy in general, and with special regard to cultural diversity in particular, it is important that no one group have privileges, priority or precedence over others. We have come to believe, however, that a special place in cultural policy should be reserved for peoples of Indian and Inuit ancestry. This should be so for several reasons. To begin with, the cultural traditions of the original peoples are uniquely rooted in this country, as compared with those more recently derived from other cultures. In the second place, the federal government has by treaty,

law and custom a special responsibility for the well being of these peoples. Finally, and most important of all, the original cultural traditions have a set of values and aesthetic standards which have not been easily accommodated within the usual structures and practices of federal cultural institutions' (Applebaum and Hébert, 1982: 11).

4. The Canadian Association of Broadcasters is a national group which represents Canada's private broadcasters including programming services, private television and radio stations, networks and specialty, and pay and pay-per-view TV services.

References

- Applebaum L and Hébert J (1982) *Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee: Summary of Briefs and Hearings*. Ottawa: Supply and Services.
- B and B (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism). (1965) *A Preliminary Report*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.
- B and B (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism). (1969) *Book 4: The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer.
- Broadcasting Act (1991, June 4; Can).
- Bullivant BM (1981) Multiculturalism: Pluralist orthodoxy or ethnic hegemony. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 13(2): 1–22.
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. (1982) Constitution Act (1982; Can).
- Canadian Ethnocultural Council and Stephen M Armstrong Consulting, Inc. (2003) Cultural policy initiatives for a multicultural Canada, in government of Canada. *Minister's Forum on Diversity and Culture: Background Papers*, 22–23 April, Ottawa: Government of Canada, 23–38.
- Cavanagh R (CONNECTUS Consulting Inc.) (2004) *Reflecting Canadian Best Practices for Cultural Diversity in Private Television: A Report by the Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television*. July. Ottawa: Canadian Association of Broadcasters.
- CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission). (1985) *A Broadcasting Policy Reflecting Canada's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*, 4 July. Ottawa: CRTC Public Notice 1985-139.
- CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission). (1986) *Decision CRTC 86-586*. Ottawa.
- CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission). (2001) *Decision CRTC 2001-757*. Ottawa.
- CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission). (2005) *Commission's Response to the Report of the Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television*. CRTC 2005-24. Ottawa.
- Kallen E (1982) Multiculturalism: ideology, policy and reality. *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17(1): 51–63.
- Multiculturalism Act (July 21, 1988; Can).
- Multiculturalism Canada. (1984) *Multiculturalism and the Government of Canada* [Le Multiculturalisme et le gouvernement du Canada]. Ottawa: Supply and Services.
- Peter K (1979) The myth of multiculturalism and other political fables. Unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Ethnic Studies Conference, Vancouver, BC, 11–13 October.
- Porter J (1965) *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Porter J (1987) *The Measure of Canadian Society: Education Equality and Opportunity*. Ottawa: Carleton University Press.
- Public Notice CRTC 1999: 117.
- Putnam R (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Roth L (1998) The delicate acts of 'colour balancing:' Multiculturalism and Canadian television broadcasting policies and practices. *Australian-Canadian Studies* Special Communication Issue 16(2): 65–82.
- Roth L (2005) *Something New in the Air: The Story of First Peoples Television Broadcasting in Canada*. Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press.
- Solutions Research Group Consultants, Inc. (2003) *Cultural Diversity on Television: Phase 1A – Background Research – Review of Academic Literature*. December. Available at: www.cab-acr.ca/english/social/diversity/taskforce/report.shtm