

# **Television, the Public Sphere, and the Miscasting of Minorities in a Multi-cultural Society**

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## **Introduction**

Television, in all its various genres, has emerged as the most influential of media in shaping public attitudes and conveying societal messages .It has replaced the print media as the primary source of information as well as being the primary source of entertainment and story telling. It also plays a vital role in shaping our attitudes and developing and fostering ideas relating to the creation of an “inclusive “society as envisaged by Canada’s *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* specifically Section 15 which states:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

## **The Problem**

Canadian Television, both public and private falls woefully short in upholding its responsibility to reflect the cultural diversity of Canadian society .As well the public institutions (the CBC, CRTC) charged with the responsibility of regulating and enforcing the legislation relating to these spaces, are not fulfilling their mandates and due to systemic reasons,<sup>1</sup> as well as a lack of consistency and inadequate resources allocated to achieving these goals, Canadian Television has failed to keep pace with the changes in society. This essay examines the implications and consequences this has for Canadian society.

## **Purpose of the Study**

It will explore the place and role of Television in Canada in the Public sphere, the arena for public discourse by its citizens, and its mandated role in reflecting Canada’s culturally diverse society. It will also examine the legislative framework for reflection of cultural diversity in Canadian institutions, and recent initiatives undertaken to reflect culturally diverse communities and racialized people both on and off camera, and in areas of decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> *Systemic discrimination* refers to unequal treatment based on system-wide policies and practices which have unintended consequences of discriminatory effects on disadvantaged groups and reproduce structures of discrimination and marginalization.

*Systemic Racism* in the Canadian context refers to social processes that tolerate, reproduce, and perpetuate judgments about racial categories that produce racial inequality in access to life opportunities and treatment. (Galabuzi.Canada’s Economic Apartheid. 2006)

## **Conceptual Framework**

This essay is informed by the theories of Jurgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Himani Bannerji, Augie Fleras, Jean Leonard Elliot, Catherine Murray, and articles by Haroon Siddiqui, John Doyle and Rita Deverell.

The essay locates the role Television, in the Public sphere, as originally described by Jurgen Habermas, and in later examinations of Habermas's theories by Nancy Fraser who states:

The idea of "the Public sphere" in Habermas's sense is a conceptual resource that... designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. The arena is conceptually distinct from the state: it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can be in principle be critical of the state. Thus the concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatus, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory.<sup>2</sup>

Habermas's ideal of a public sphere in which all citizens could engage in public discourse as equals by "bracketing" the social inequalities that exist in society was not realized in practice as according to Fraser:

Women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official political participation precisely on the basis of ascribed gender status, while plebian men were formerly excluded by property qualifications Moreover, in many cases women and men of color of all classes were excluded on racial grounds. ....

Fraser goes on to argue:

Public spheres are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion: in addition they are arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities. This means that participation is not simply a matter of being able to state propositional contents that are neutral with respect to form of expression. Rather... participation means being able to speak "in one's own voice" thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one's cultural identity through idiom and style.... In general we can conclude that the idea of an egalitarian, multicultural society makes sense only if we suppose a plurality of public arenas in which groups with diverse values and rhetoric's participate.<sup>3</sup>

## **Speaking in One's Own Voice**

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<sup>2</sup>Nancy Fraser Rethinking the Public Sphere .A contribution to the critique of Actually existing Democracy.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

The importance of being able to speak in “one’s own voice” is vital to the full participation of all people regardless of cultural, and socio economic background in a democratic society. In addition I will argue that due to the existence of systemic barriers created by a legacy of racism and exclusion and the particular economic realities of Television in Canada, access to these “arenas’ in an officially constituted Multicultural society such as Canada, by racialized people and communities, is severely limited.

Grace- Edward Galabuzi in his book *Canada’s Economic Apartheid* provides a rationale for why some groups are marginalized and excluded from participation in mainstream institutions.

Canada’s political and economic development was similar to that of other colonized societies in that it involved the subordination of indigenous peoples: the suppression of their civil, political, and cultural rights; and often the forced use of their labour to extract their natural resources. The historic development of the capitalist economy laid the foundation for the policies of slavery, marginalization, and socio economic exclusion of racialized immigrants. Historical structures of racial discrimination influenced the incorporation of racialized immigrants into the Canadian labour market, leading to a labour market stratified along racial lines.<sup>4</sup>

Himani Bannerji in her essay “The Dark side of the Nation” questions the commitment to the values of Multiculturalism by Canadian institutions and the issues that flow from this often ambivalent attitude to people who are not part of either the English or French communities.

The state and the visible minorities (the non-white people living in Canada) have a complex relationship with each other. There is a fundamental unease with how our otherness in relation to Canada is projected and objectified. We cannot be successfully ingested, or assimilated or made to vanish from where we are not wanted. We remain an ambiguous presence, our existence a question mark in the side of the nation, with the potential to disclose much about the political unconscious of Canada as an “imagined” community. Disclosures accumulate slowly, while we continue to live here as outsiders-insiders of a nation which offers a proudly multicultural profile to the International community.<sup>5</sup>

As well Bannerji has concerns about the language used to describe non-English and French communities and suggests descriptors such as “visible minority” and “minority communities” are problematic as they have the effect of maintaining historically racist attitudes towards these communities. She also puts forward the argument that how we see these social and economic interactions depends on” which side of the Nation we stand on” and often this is defined by the color of our skin, which for non white people, will

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<sup>4</sup> Grace-Edward Galabuzi. *Canada Economic Apartheid .The Social Exclusion of racialized groups in the new Century*. Canadian Scholars Press 2006

<sup>5</sup> Himani Bannerji “On the Dark side of the Nation. Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of ‘Canada,’” *Journal of Canadian Studies* (December 2008).

always mark them as different from the established English, French and European immigrant communities, who eventually blend in. These attitudes towards non-white people often result in forms of systemic racism that are hard to identify. She states:

The situation is one where racism in all its cultural and institutional variants has become so naturalized, so pervasive that it has become invisible or transparent to those who are not adversely affected by them. This is why terms such as “visible minority” can generate so spontaneously within the bureaucracy, and are not considered disturbing by most people acculturated to “Canada.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Historic reasons for exclusion**

Grace Edward Galbuzi outlines the underlying cause of this approach by mainstream institutions towards minorities:

While Canada embraces Globalization and romanticizes the idea of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, persistent expressions of xenophobia and structures of racial marginalization suggest a continuing political and cultural attachment to the idea of a White-settler society. Canada has always imagined itself as a white immigrant nation, ignoring both the Aboriginal reality and the racialized immigrant population. This unresolved tension is reflected not only in racially segregated institutions such as the labour market and the subsequent unequal outcomes, but also in the quality of citizenship to which racialized group members can aspire.<sup>7</sup>

This marginalization has had a direct effect on how the mainstream media and television in particular deals with the presence and participation of minority people. Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliot summarize this situation in their book *Engaging Diversity. Multiculturalism in Canada* (2002) as follows:

The media’s treatment of aboriginal people, people of colour, and immigrants is mixed at best and deplorable at worst (Fleras 1994; Henry and Tator 2000) Minority women and men are still being victimized by questionable coverage on television and in print. This miscasting seems to have fallen into a pattern: minorities have been trivialized as irrelevant or inferior, or demonized as a social menace and a threat to society, or scapegoated as problem people creating social problems, or ridiculed for being too different or not different enough or “projected through the prism of Eurocentric fears and fantasies, or subjected to double standards that lampoon minorities regardless of what they do or don’t do. Mainstream media continue to insult and caricaturize minority women and men through demeaning images and patronizing assessments influenced by the imperatives of free market capitalism.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Grace-Edward Galabuzi

The impact of these negative images cannot be measured precisely .We can say that this miscasting has “othered” minorities as not quite Canadian.(Fleras 2001)..... This miscasting of minorities in the media is not random or accidental. Nor is it something out of the ordinary-a departure from an otherwise inclusive norm. Rather it is deeply embedded in the media’s structures and processes....<sup>8</sup>

## **Definitions of Cultural Diversity**

The term “cultural diversity” has become an increasingly commonly used term that has a variety of meanings and applications depending on the context in which it is being used. Lillian Allen, an African Canadian Community activist, policy advisor and Artist, offers this perspective on the term.

My oral history of the term “diversity” in North America is that it was a strategy in the arsenal of tools we used in the fight for racial and cultural equality. The anti-racist struggle in the last hundred years has been a struggle rooted in the fight against colonialization and domination, a struggle that has provided the contemporary world with much of its value for freedom, self determination and equality. The positive concept of the term cultural diversity emerged out of this struggle: out of the civil rights movement and feminist and anti-racist movements. It was utilized as a unifying concept to bring together people of various national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It was used to draw attention to the unity in diversity, to indicate their shared struggles against racism and discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

Another definition of the word “Diversity” that is pertinent is the definition used by Dr Catherine Murray in her study of Cultural Diversity and Race in English Canadian TV Drama

For many, diversity is seen widely as a mixture of terms characterized by differences and similarities. Diversity evokes images of fixed and distinct cultures that persist in states of separate being. Individuals, in turn are slotted into these pre-existing cultural categories without much option or choice and outside of any historical or power context. However, diversity goes beyond hermetically sealed classifications. Instead, it entails relations between groups in contexts of unequal power, reflecting the signification of individuals into categories that are both contested and evolving. Any reading of diversity must go beyond the cultural and discursive to embrace political economy at the level of hierarchically constructive relationships.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Augie Fleras, Jean Leonard Elliot *Engaging Diversity Multiculturalism in Canada* Nelson Thompson Learning 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Lillian Allen. National Forum on Diversity and Culture Report May 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Dr Catharine Murray, “Silent on the Set: Cultural Diversity and Race in English Canadian TV Drama,” School of Communication, Simon Fraser University.

## **Development of Multi-Cultural Policy**

### *Legislative Framework*

It is generally accepted that an accurate reflection of all the diverse groups in society in our media is necessary for the healthy development of a civil society. Canada has led the way in institutionalizing notions of Multiculturalism and cultural diversity through its *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) and *The Canadian Multiculturalism Act* passed by Parliament in 1988.

The groundwork for the Multiculturalism Act was laid in 1971, when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced the federal Multiculturalism policy. This policy was an expansion of the idea that Canada was a plural nation, which was a result of intense lobbying by ethno-cultural groups during the public hearings of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

The Multiculturalism policy announced in 1971 set the framework for all future Government policies relating to ethno-cultural communities, particularly those dealing with the arts and cultural activities.

The Multicultural policy had four basic elements:

- Support for the development of ethno-cultural communities;
- Assistance towards insuring the full participation of Canadians of all backgrounds in Society;
- The promotion of intercultural appreciation and understanding; and
- Assistance to immigrants to enable them to acquire knowledge of one of the two official languages.

The adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) affirmed Canada's commitment to the values of Multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. Section 27 of the Charter states:

This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians...

While there were no directly stipulated cultural outcomes of section 27, it did reinforce individual and collective rights with respect to equity and cultural diversity.

Canada's Multiculturalism Policy was enshrined in Law under the *Multiculturalism Act* passed by Parliament in 1988. It was the first legislation of its kind in the world and has been emulated by other countries; most notably in post apartheid South Africa.

The Act stipulates that Government policy must amongst other things:

- (a) Recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage;
- (b) Recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future;
- (c) Promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation
- (d) Recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance their development;
- (e) Ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity.
- (g) Promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins;
- (h) Foster the recognition of the diverse cultures of Canadian society and promote the reflection and the evolving expressions of those cultures.

Each of the above can be applied directly to the development of an inclusive cultural policy for Film and Television. Paragraphs (g) and (h) offer more explicit direction. The Act also provides specific guidance to federal government institutions on how this can be done.

*The Employment Equity Act (1995)* Section 2 is also applicable to the issue of equitable representation of minorities in Film and Television in Canada. It states in part:

[Institutions] must achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in fulfillment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities.

The response of both Federal Cultural Departments and Agencies and private sector Film Production and Broadcasting institutions to the Multiculturalism Act and to the Employment equity Act has been generally inconsistent and indifferent. It has been articulated as a mandate and a corporate commitment but very few organizations have taken specific measures to ensure adherence to both the letter and the spirit of the law.

The issue of Cultural Diversity has recently become a key topic on the social/political agenda. This is due partly to the release of 2007 census statistics that show a dramatic rise in the visible minority population as well as the non-Anglo and Francophone population in Canada's major cities. Other reasons include the debate on "reasonable accommodation" mostly involving Muslim communities in Quebec, and issues involving Immigrant communities and high rates of crime in so called "ethnic enclaves" in Toronto.

Some of the highlights of the Census are:

- There has been a three-fold increase in the number of visible minorities in Canada's population since 1981: One in every five Canadians is from a visible minority group.
- Ontario has the highest proportion of foreign-born residents at 24% while British Columbia has 22%
- Among Canadian metropolitan areas, Vancouver and Toronto-at 36.95 and 36.8% respectively-have the largest proportion of visible minorities in their population
- In Toronto Ethnic and Racial minorities and Aboriginal groups compose more than 50% of the population

As well, increased lobbying by ethno- cultural groups for greater reflection of their communities as well as access to jobs in the industry both in front of and behind the camera has been a factor. Initiatives by the former Minister of Heritage Sheila Copps, including a National Forum on Diversity and Culture held in Ottawa in May 2003 has raised awareness of this issue of cultural diversity in the media, in both the minority communities and in mainstream consciousness as well.

A ruling by the *Canadian Radio and Television Commission* (CRTC) requiring Broadcasters to measure current performance and set targets and goals for cultural diversity representation is an attempt to encourage broadcasters to improve their performance in this area in this area. However without specific requirements and the resources required to adequately monitor and ensure compliance, gains appear to be insignificant.

Kaan Yigit, President of Solutions Research Communications Group, told the CRTC at a licence application hearing for CanadaOneTV ,an application for a digital channel focusing on broadcasting English language Drama with visible minority people in key creative positions, ownership, and executive management, "...to catch up to today's population bench marks for the whole of English Canada, for primary characters (on TV

programs), would take about 10 to 15 years. If you wanted to catch up to Toronto and Vancouver, it would take some 40 years plus.”

The application was subsequently denied by the CRTC primarily on the grounds that the CRTC believed that the present broadcasting system would make the changes necessary to provide on-screen and off-screen representation of minorities.

The requirement for CRTC to ensure that Canadian Media reflect the country’s ethno-cultural diversity is based in Canada’s Broadcasting Act subparagraph 3(d) (iii) which states:

The Canadian broadcasting system should [...] through it’s programming and the employment opportunities arising out of it’s 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 nature of Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society.

As Canada’s broadcasting regulator, the CRTC is charged with ensuring the implementation of the objectives included in the Broadcasting Act. Over the years it has implemented a variety of policy initiatives with respect to the reflection of cultural diversity.

In 1985 it established an ethnic Broadcasting Policy, under which commercial ethnic radio and television services are specifically licensed to serve culturally or racially distinct groups. Ethnic television stations were required to devote at least 60% of their schedule to ethnic programming, serve a broad range of ethnic communities in the stations coverage area and generally devote at least 50 % of their schedule to third language programming.

The new policy and regulatory framework was designed to provide clear and consistent guidelines for the development of a wide variety of new ethnic broadcasting services, including Radio, Television, specialty television services and pay television.

The CRTC updated the policy in 1999 and affirmed that the primary goal of its ethnic broadcasting policy should be to ensure access to ethnic programming by members of ethno-cultural groups to the greatest extent practicable.

### *The Canadian Reality*

In Canada the Film and Television industry attempts to give Canadians the opportunity to “talk to and understand each other, to gain insights into other cultures and provides a window on the world.” Canada’s history –as well as it’s cultural, ethnic, linguistic and

regional diversity- is reflected –with varying degrees of success- in films and television and contributes to a healthy national life.”<sup>11</sup>

As the most influential form of television in terms of shaping attitudes and conveying societal messages, as well as being the most popular, Television Drama, in all its various genres: dramatic series, Movies made for television, situation and sketch comedy shows, etc plays a vital role in a nations culture.

John Doyle, Television critic for Toronto’s Globe and Mail newspaper, and an advocate for Canadian made Drama having a central place in Canadian broadcasting, wrote in 2006:

This is Canada. And this country, like any other, is simply inauthentic if its stories are not reflected back to its people. That’s why Canadian publishing is subsidized, and Canadian Television is regulated. At the root of the original decades-old decision to support homegrown storytelling in print or on TV, there was a profound consensus about the need to keep story telling alive. That consensus still exists. Sustaining the living thread of storytelling is a necessary endeavour, like ensuring health care and safe drinking water. It is another aspect of literacy.<sup>12</sup>

The realities of financing Films and Television programs in general in Canada present an added challenge for Producers and Filmmakers from minority communities. Part of the problem is the high cost of production for film and Television product. While the costs have fallen in some areas due to advances in technology it is necessary, due primarily to the fact that Canada represents a relatively small market and the high cost of drama production, to finance production through a combination of broadcast license fees, investment from provincial and Federal funding agencies and a complex system of tax credits and support from private funding agencies and distributors.

Production values of programs produced by members of racialized communities dealing with themes reflecting stories of their own experiences, and that of their communities, need to be competitive with programming from the USA and Britain in order to reach mainstream audiences sought after by Television networks. Budgets for Drama productions range from \$300,000-\$500.000 per episode for a half hour series to a million for an hour. Made for Television movies cost from \$1.5 million upwards. As it is virtually impossible to recoup the cost of production from the domestic Canadian market, and sales to foreign markets are difficult, producers are reliant on support from Canadian Government funding sources, which are increasingly oversubscribed.

In a fiercely competitive market, producers from minority communities who have had limited opportunities to develop the production, financing and marketing skills are severely disadvantaged when it comes to competing with producers from mainstream communities.

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<sup>11</sup> Ministers Forum on Diversity and Culture Background Papers. Dept of Canadian Heritage 2003

<sup>12</sup> John Doyle. The Globe and Mail November 8 2006

The “Appropriation of voice” - the telling of stories by individuals who are not from the cultural group that the story being told about - is also a contentious issue in this discourse. Speaking at the Banff Television Festival symposium on Cultural Diversity, Senator Laurier LaPierre stated that Television programming must not just be for and about the cultural communities, it must also be ‘by’ members of those communities.

As a large part of the film and Television programming that is produced in Canada, is produced with public funds and is therefore mandated by government policy, the issue of who gets to tell the story and profit from it is a public policy issue that is a frequent topic of debate, particularly within racialized communities.

The issue of representation of members from culturally diverse communities and visible minority communities in particular, in the executive management positions which are responsible for commissioning programs in broadcasting organizations, will have to be addressed if any real change is to take place. These positions, known as the “gatekeepers” in the industry - those who can “green light” a project - are almost exclusively from mainstream communities.

Rita Deverell, an African Canadian writer, broadcaster and former television executive, stated in an editorial in *Playback* magazine:

If potential audiences are diverse, isn't it natural to assume that diverse TV personalities and programs will sell? Other industries get it. Why is that such a difficult concept for media companies to grasp? It all goes back to who is in control. But instead of fundamental change in terms of who has the power, media companies stir up a lot of activity around “diversity” - without changing anything.<sup>13</sup>

Deverell goes on to outline several “Diversity smokescreens” broadcasters use to avoid making any meaningful changes in the area of cultural diversity. These include the frequent use of the word “diversity” in its communications; appointing minorities to symbolic positions; undertaking “consultations” with minorities with no real outcomes; creating “training” programs with no jobs at the end of the training; and “cosmetic” on-screen hiring as opposed to hiring minorities in management positions

At the moment there is no quantitative research data available on the numbers of racialized people working at senior management levels in the industry. A comprehensive analysis of the industry is urgently required. However observational analysis indicates that there no visible minority individuals in executive management positions responsible for making decisions on the production of Dramatic or factual programming i.e. being in a position to “green light” a production, at any Broadcasting entity in Canada.

This has and will continue to have an effect on both the quantitative and qualitative, representation of cultural diversity on our Television screens. If one accepts the reasoning that people generally make decisions based on their own tastes and experience it is

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<sup>13</sup> Rita Deverell. *Playback Magazine* December 15 2008

unlikely that without having members of diverse communities in decision-making positions at the Senior Management level there will be any meaningful change in this situation in the short term.

The *Department of Canadian Heritage* is primarily responsible for developing and implementing policies for the Canadian Film and Television sector. Through its Film and Video Directorate it develops, implements and monitors policies, which are mostly delivered through portfolio agencies such as Telefilm Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) the National Film Board (NFB) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. (CBC).

Private Broadcasters such as the *Canadian Television Network (CTV)*, *Global Television and Rogers Television* and many specialty channels (*Showcase, Bravo, W, HGTV* etc) are governed by regulations of the Canadian Radio Television Commission who now require broadcasters to report on the reflection of cultural diversity in all aspects of their operations.

The Heritage Department commissioned the former head of Telefilm Canada, Francois Macerola, to undertake a major Review of Canadian content on Canadian Television. One of the major issues for filmmakers whose cultural Heritage is neither English or French is the definition of Canadian content as it applies to stories about subjects whose cultural origins are in countries other than Canada.

For instance, there is a debate as to whether works created by Canadian artists set in a foreign country, about non-Canadian subjects should be eligible for financial support from Canadian Cultural institutions and enjoy certain tax benefits accorded to “bona fide” Canadian production. (e.g. should a film by award winning Canadian Film Director Atom Egoyan, set in Armenia, his parents home country, be eligible for funding from Telefilm Canada and receive Federal and Provincial Tax credits when it is entirely shot in another country?)

The report which was released in August 2003, stated:

We do not believe that the Canadian content definition is the appropriate policy mechanism to attempt to achieve these cultural objectives...

While we strongly believe that Canadian screens should reflect diversity in all its forms-linguistic, cultural and regional-we are of the view that this can more effectively accomplished by funding agencies and broadcasters implementing special initiatives.

Both Public funding agencies and Broadcasters should consider implementing enabling mechanisms such as equity targets, targeted training and professional development, and special outreach programs. There is a need to increase

knowledge about the availability of cultural programs and facilitate networking among minority-community creators, producers and technicians.<sup>14</sup>

The CRTC under directives from the Heritage Department through the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) convened a Task Force on Cultural Diversity in 2005 which consisted of conventional, specialty and ethnic broadcasters, producers and community groups, who examined all aspects of this issue as it pertains to broadcasting in Canada. The report provides guiding principles for best practices and practical solutions for increasing cultural diversity in broadcasting. Community and Advocacy groups criticized the Task Force for not being representative of the diverse communities in Canada and not having a wide enough scope to its deliberations.

The report was intended to serve as an important benchmark in the development of initiatives to address the issues of cultural diversity on Television, and to provide guidelines for the establishment of a governing body to oversee adherence to best practices and monitor the industry's future progress.

As cultural diversity is a key underlying principle of the Broadcasting Act, a variety of policy tools have been put in place to implement its objectives, including the Ethnic Broadcasting Policy aimed at increasing the amount of "3rd language" broadcasters, whose primary audiences are first generation immigrants to Canada.

In addition to five existing analog ethnic specialty services, as of September 1 2001, the CRTC has approved over 50 ethnic digital pay and speciality services.

*The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)* is one of the primary publicly supported institutions mandated to reflect cultural diversity in Canada. For over 65 years the CBC has attempted to reflect the lives and preoccupations of Canadians to each other-in English, French, in eight Aboriginal Languages. It has as its major priorities, building bridges between communities, fostering understanding between cultures and promoting Canadian values of respect, tolerance and moderate viewpoints.

Over the years the CBC has attempted to achieve these goals through a variety of programs and training initiatives. In the early 1960's the popular comedy program "King of Kensington" was one of the first attempts to reflect in Prime Time Television Programming, the changing face of Canadian cities.

Other programs in the 70', and 80's such as "Street Legal" (a show about Lawyers in Toronto) through its story lines and some cast members attempted to do the same. Degross Junior High was also successful in entertaining Canadian Television audiences and reflecting the growing multi-cultural make up of Toronto.

The independently produced Drama Anthology series "Inside Stories" which showcased stories by writers from a wide range of ethno-cultural communities provided

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<sup>14</sup> *Canadian Content in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Film and Television Productions*. Heritage Canada 2003

opportunities for writers, directors and actors to develop professional skills and tell their stories to a Canadian and International audience.

The series “Drop the Beat” set in the world of Black Hip-Hop music in Toronto was aired on the CBC but was cancelled after two seasons. “Zed” a late evening youth oriented magazine show also featured independently produced short films by filmmakers from culturally diverse communities.

The popular comedy series “Little Mosque on the Prairie” has also created some opportunities for culturally diverse actors and writers and presented stories from a small town Muslim community on prime time television.

The CBC has through a number of training initiatives attempted to increase the visibility of minority journalists in its News and Current Affairs programming. The National Visible Minority Training Program for Journalists held in the mid-eighties was an attempt to develop journalists from several visible minority communities for CBC Television.

The on-screen presence of minorities has increased in the past few years, but the presence of minorities at Senior Management levels remain below acceptable standards, given their presence in the overall population

While the CBC has produced several programs specifically aimed at reflecting cultural diversity in Canada, and by including actors and performers from minority backgrounds in its mainstream programming, the question remains whether these programs will provide adequate and consistent opportunities in ratio to the resources available, and adequately reflect the overall presence of the culturally diverse communities in the population.

The situation is further complicated by the challenges of financing film and Television programs in Canada, due to the fact that there are limited resources available from Public funds, and that the Canadian market is not large enough to support the production of programming with production values Canadians have come to expect from US prime time Television programs .An initiative announced in May 2004 to develop a Daytime Serial that will reflect the diversity of Canada resulted in two pilot mini series being produced in Halifax and Vancouver and were aired in off prime hours. The national series was not produced.

*The National Film Board of Canada (NFB)* has been producing innovative and challenging documentaries and a limited amount of dramatic films for over 60 years. It has earned an International reputation for producing and distributing high quality, challenging documentaries and dramas on social and cultural issues. It has attempted to seek out and support voices from diverse cultural communities from across Canada, reflecting a diversity of perspectives.

It has undertaken several initiatives to ensure that its productions reflect, through its content and personnel, the growing diversity of Canadian society. The NFB has produced

and co-produced with Independent Filmmakers, several Documentaries, Dramas and animated films, which deal with multi-cultural issues, race relations, and issues affecting ethno-cultural minority communities.

The NFB has declared that reflecting cultural diversity is a major priority for the organization, which is financed by the Canadian taxpayer, through the Department of Canadian Heritage. The NFB's Cultural Diversity initiatives include; the establishment of a cultural diversity producer position in each of the regional studios; an Aboriginal Filmmaking program, a cultural diversity data base which includes freelancers, and craftspeople from under represented cultural communities; the English Programs Filmmaker Assistance program which devotes a portion of their budgets to under represented communities; and the Reel Diversity competition, designed for video Directors from visible minority groups only. The program, which started out as a Pilot program in Ontario, has now been expanded to a nation wide competition with 3 new films by visible minority Directors being produced by the NFB each year.

*Telefilm Canada* is a crown corporation financed by the Department of Canadian Heritage and returns from equity investments in films and Television programs. Its primary purpose is to support the Canadian Film and Television industry through a variety of programs including equity investments, development grants, distribution support etc. Films that qualify as Canadian content are also eligible for both Federal and Provincial Tax Credits, which assist Producers in financing their productions.

Telefilm's policy is to support projects that involve Canadians and subjects from all ethno-cultural origins. It also provides grants to film Festivals, symposia and workshops that showcase culturally diverse productions or that provide professional development from ethno-cultural communities. Telefilm is also mandated to ensure that those official language minority communities have access to support, by organizing workshops and meetings with broadcasters and other partners. In June 2003 Telefilm announced an Action Plan for minority filmmakers, which include initiatives for training and assistance in accessing decision makers in the Film and Television industry.

*The Aboriginal People Television Network (APTN)* was licensed in February 1999 to provide a much needed, positive window on Aboriginal life for all Canadians, whether living in the North or in the South. APTN has proven to be an important outlet for Aboriginal Filmmakers and Television producers for telling their stories to a National audience. This has resulted in the building of infrastructure in the Film and Television industry for Aboriginal people and training and development opportunities for emerging Aboriginal Film and Television artists.

As well, APTN has broadcast programs about other aboriginal communities in other parts of the world-programs that may have not had a broadcast in Canada were it not for the broadcast mandate of APTN.

*Vision TV* licensed by the CRTC to provide Religious programming to Canada's Faith communities was launched in 1989. Over the years it has broadcast a variety of programs

with multi-cultural themes, and has attempted to reflect the changing cultural makeup of Canada. It recently commissioned a 13-part sit-com “Lord Have Mercy” set in a Black evangelical church in downtown Toronto that featured a predominantly non-white cast and was produced and written by members from the community being portrayed. Vision, which is the only not for profit independent, National network in Canada, has through several initiatives, attempted to incorporate cultural diversity in its programming, both in front of and behind the camera

*Channel M:* In 2001, the CRTC issued a call for submissions for over the air television services that reflect and meet the needs of the multicultural, multilingual and multiracial population in Vancouver, which resulted in the launch of a new television station – Channel M - launched in June 2003. It was recently purchased by Rogers Broadcasting

*CFMT-TV/OMNI Television:* In Toronto, (which with the inclusion of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) represents almost 60% of the entire Television market of English speaking Canada,) CFMT-TV Canada’s first free over-air multicultural/ multilingual Television channel was licensed by the CRTC in 1979 and acquired by Rogers Broadcasting in 1986. Rogers has recently added a new Channel devoted to Multi-lingual broadcasting and re-branded itself as OMNI Television. (1 and 2). While the channels have provided local ethno-cultural community’s opportunities to produce programming aimed at their communities, the limited financial resources available for the production of local programs has resulted in very little production of any Drama or Variety style programming for, about or by the community. Therefore the programs have tended to be primarily studio based interview programs and some local news. With the licensing of Omni 2 the CRTC has required the broadcaster to invest \$15 million dollars over a five year period in independently produced programs in a variety of genres, which will result in the production of original programming produced for both the ethno-cultural and mainstream television audience.

*Toronto One:* A new over the air Television station owned by Craig Broadcasting - Toronto One - with a strong cultural diversity mandate - was launched in mid-September 2003. Given the population demographics of Toronto, producing programs that reflect the cultural diversity of the city was a licensing requirement by the CRTC.

Toronto One was the first Television station in Canada licensed by the CRTC, which had the reflection of the city’s cultural diversity as a major part of the stations application. The station had committed to spending approximately \$15 million dollars over the five years of the stations license, in a “New Voices” fund to be spent on the production of Drama and Documentary films by Filmmakers from visible minority communities. However, Craig broadcasting was sold to CHUM Ltd, which subsequently sold the station to Quebecor as CHUM already has a station in the Toronto market (CITY TV). The station has been re-branded as SUNTV. Subsequent to an appeal by the Channel to the CRTC to release it from their obligations set when they received their licence, due to financial reasons, which the CRTC granted, the commitments to independently produced Dramatic programs with a Diversity focus were cancelled.

*CITY-TV*, a local Toronto television station formerly owned by CHUM television, which now also owns similarly formatted stations in Ottawa and Vancouver, has since its inception in the early 70's attempted to reflect the city's increasingly ethnically diverse population, primarily through its reporting of local events but also through its on-camera personnel as well. One of the founders of *CITY-TV*, Moses Znaimer, himself an immigrant of Moroccan- Jewish heritage, has advocated for the increased reflection of cultural diversity in Television and has often stated his commitment to this at the station. The station has provided many opportunities for individuals from minority communities in the city to develop professional skills in Television Broadcasting.

The recent sale of *CITY TV* stations to Rogers Broadcasting may create some opportunities for producers from diverse communities as the CRTC requires 10% of the purchase price in any change of ownership to be spent on Canadian programming.

*Global Television*: As far as the private national Networks are concerned, *Global Television* has a Black focused sit com, "Da kink in my Hair" set in a Caribbean Canadian hair dressing salon. The series has a primarily black cast and the main creative positions are held by members of the Black community. It was renewed for a second season.

The question remains however, whether these initiatives are an adequate response to the current situation of extremely low levels of representation of minorities in Canadian broadcasting given the ethno-cultural demographics.

Despite CRTC regulations requiring broadcasters to adhere to the Broadcast Act and report on their cultural diversity initiatives, and statements of commitment to reflect cultural diversity in their programming by both Public and Private Broadcasters, there has been a considerable gap between the stated goals of these organizations and the reality.

While there have been some increases in the numbers of on air personnel in the news area, there has been, with the exception of a few notable exceptions (*CBC's Little Mosque on the Prairie*, *CanWestGlobal's "Da kink in my Hair"*) very little change in Canadian Dramatic programs that reflect the diversity of the country.

Awareness of this fact has been heightened recently by the release of Census figures showing a dramatic rise in the number of visible minorities in Canada's major urban centres, and the increasingly contentious politics around race and racial equity in all areas of employment and participation in Canadian society.

In an editorial for the *Toronto Star* (April 2001) Haroon Siddiqui, journalist and *Star* editorial writer, called on the CRTC and Media organizations to address the gap of the presence of diverse communities in Canada and their representation on network Television. He stated that the cause of the lack of adequate representation of cultural diversity on network television was due in large part to the increased convergence and concentration of ownership:

Canada has become increasingly multi-racial and multicoloured yet our media haven't.... These Canadians are not reflected on media payrolls. This is not to say that hiring should duplicate the population mix, but rather that it should run in rough proportion to the available talent, as in our quest for gender parity).<sup>15</sup>

On the issue of representation of cultural diversity on Canadian Television, Dr Catherine Murray of the School of Communication, Simon Fraser University in her August 2002 Study *Silent on the Set: Cultural Diversity and Race in English Canadian TV Drama* Stated:

While no government or industry organization (not even the CRTC or Multiculturalism Canada) regularly monitors the media for ethnic portrayals or diversity, it has sometimes been conjectured that over the past few years, people of colour have been given more screen time in Canadian Television. Such observations are usually drawn based on the news genre. Unfortunately outside of news narration, roles for visible minorities on screen are usually defined as stereotypical in academic literature in Canada. As [Augie] Fleras points out “the net effect of this stereotyping is that minorities are slotted or labelled as unusual or negative, and this “foreignness” precludes their full acceptance as normal and fully contributing members of society.”<sup>16</sup>

Fleras in the aforementioned book (p 410) states that ethnic minorities are usually depicted by the mass media (and especially television) in the following four different ways

- (1) Invisible and irrelevant.
- (2) Models for race-role stereotyping,
- (3) Social problems and
- (4) Tokens for entertainment and decoration.

On the issue of portrayal of cultural diversity on specifically English Canadian TV Drama, the most popular genre of television programming, the study made several important recommendations:

- Training seminars for majority and minority screenwriters, producers, directors, actors and equity seeking groups are critically needed to debate and clarify standards in ethnic portrayal and boundaries to creative liberty. Standards are not inimical to creative freedom. Understanding them may even advance the quality of creative depiction of diversity. More scripts taking creative risks are needed in increasing the share of voice for minorities and presenting them as rich contributors to Canada's cultural diversity.

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<sup>15</sup> Haroon Siddiqui, *Toronto Star* Editorial April 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Cited from A.Fleras, *Please adjust your Set: Media and Minorities in a Multicultural Society*. 1995.

- Regular monitoring of the portrayal of racial diversity on Canadian Television is needed by an independent organization, involving multiple stakeholders.
- Policy focus has to shift to marketing and promotion of creative opportunities for visible minority actors, writers and producers. Inventive ways to enhance other marketing infrastructure are needed, including entertainment criticism in print, and other venues to overcome some of the barriers.

In 2003 the CRTC required *CTV, Global and TVA (Quebec)* networks to submit in their upcoming license renewal applications, detailed plans that include specific commitments relating to reflection of diversity in programming as they relate to on-screen presence and portrayal of cultural diversity, in programming that is both produced in-house and licensed from independent producers. Explicit requirements are set out for News programming. In particular, the portrayal and presence of cultural minorities in all stages of the production and acquisition of non-news programming is to be fostered.

Development officers responsible for casting must make a concerted effort to hire visible minority actors in leading and recurring roles, and scripts should avoid stereotypical representation. Programming from independent producers should reflect the presence and accurate portrayal of visible minorities.(CRTC 2001c and CRTC 2001d) These requirements will also apply to all new applications for Television licenses and renewals.

However measures for the monitoring and enforcement of any specific requirements that the CRTC may impose as part of the conditions of license for broadcasters in this area seem to be lacking. It remains to be seen if any of these measures will be adequate to the overall need for systemic changes and if there will be a consistency of approach.

*A National Forum on Canadian Media, Race, And Cultural Diversity in the 21st Century*, organized by CRAR (Centre for Research Action On Race Relations and FAVEM Filmmakers Association of Visible and Ethnic Minorities) concluded amongst other things that:

- That the most acute area of exclusion is in the commercial sector of film and Television production is in dramatic production (feature films, movies of the week, dramatic series, mini-series etc.) as opposed to the documentary or auteur driven film usually funded by the Canada Council and/or National Film Board of Canada.
- Producers of colour encounter strong resistance to their themes and subject matter from Canadian distributors and broadcasters, who picked up their projects only after they received international attention.
- That the most acute areas of exclusion are in key creative and administrative positions as producers, writers and directors. There are very low numbers of producers and filmmakers of colour who access Telefilm

and other Production funding. That the absence of producers is significant in that producers generate the stories, which are made into films. From an industry standpoint, increasing the numbers of producers of colour across the country is the most effective way to promote racial equity in film and television and to allow Canada's visible minorities to see themselves reflected on Canadian screens

- Those initiatives that promote racial/cultural equity will not make up for lack of experience or talent. But it will address systemic discrimination, such as the perceptions among Canadian distributors, broadcasters and producers that "black will not sell," that racial /cultural product is disadvantaged by the "cultural contexting" of "gatekeepers," i.e. Commissioning editors, readers and project evaluators.

However, a major challenge to attempting to achieve these goals is the overriding pressure on television networks to increase ratings and profits.

As Dr. J David Black Professor of Communications at Wilfred Laurier University stated in the Study: *Silent on the Set; Cultural Diversity and Race in English Canadian TV Drama*:

Human difference is exciting, challenging, and sometimes terrifying. Privately owned media, outside the CBC, are largely concerned to create a comfortable environment in which advertisers can talk to potential customers. The "buying mood" they seek to establish is not compatible with messages that ask tough questions about white privilege, systemic racism, or more profoundly, about human difference and how we can co-exist on a crowded, complex planet.

## **Conclusions**

The issue of the representation of cultural diversity has become a public policy issue and one that the general public is becoming increasingly aware of.

However, to this point there has not been the development of infrastructures of professional associations and lobby groups with the kind of sustainability required to monitor and demand specific measures be imposed and enforced. Public Policy Advocacy groups such as the *Urban Alliance on Race Relations*, the *Centre for Research on Race Relations (CRARR)* and *The New Canada Institute* and other emerging associations have made various representations to the government and Regulatory agencies over the years.

*CRARR* has formed a National Advocacy group to lobby for cultural diversity in all aspects of Media and the recently formed *Canadian Diversity Media Association (CDMA)* of Producers and other film and television professionals is lobbying for specific

measures in this area. These groups however are limited in their activities by inadequate funding and infrastructure to effectively advocate for change in a consistent basis.

There needs to be strong support for issues of representation, inclusion and employment equity in Television Broadcasting by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, whose Department is responsible for the development and enforcement of public policy in this area. It can be argued, with the recognition of the new demographic realities and the need to respond to the changing market opportunities created by these realities, broadcasters and the regulatory agencies will have to respond with measures that will create new and meaningful opportunities for writers, directors, actors and producers from culturally diverse communities.

However the economic realities of the Canadian Television industry, which is reliant primarily on imported US programming for its profits, a portion of which they are required to spend on indigenous Canadian programming by CRTC regulation, makes the television industry significantly less responsive to demographic changes than other industries such as Banking and the Retail industry, who must cater directly to new customers for their survival.

The possibility of further much needed changes is also threatened by the recent economic downturn, which has resulted in a hiring freeze at all the networks and which given past histories in this area, will likely result in the suspension of several initiatives that would have increased the involvement of racialized groups in this key sector of society.

The steep drop in advertising revenue along with the impact of the Internet on viewing patterns and revenue for conventional television networks has already caused the private broadcasting sector to appeal to the CRTC for a reduction in their commitments. It's possible however that the increase of viewers for Internet based programming may provide opportunities for racialized people to create opportunities for themselves that have alluded them in conventional media outlets due to entrenched power structures and systemic barriers. The problem still remains and likely will for the immediate future, of the high cost of production for dramatic forms of television storytelling that can compete for primetime audiences with high production value programming available primarily from the United States

In the absence of specific regulatory requirements to increase representation in front of and behind the camera in the present Television framework, and adequate mechanisms to monitor progress, as well as the fact that there are no advocacy organizations with the resources necessary to engage the regulatory /political process, very little meaningful progress will be made.

Without equitable access to the resources and opportunities in this key sector of society, minorities cannot participate fully in public discourses on subjects vital to their existence or fully participate as citizens “ using their own voices”, or see themselves reflected in the important public arenas and institutions that makeup our increasingly diverse society.

While there have undoubtedly been some improvements in the level of representation of racialized minorities in Television News programming in the past decade, the level of representation compared to overall population is still very low. Unfortunately in the area of television Drama-the most watched and influential in terms of societal messaging-there has been extremely little consistent progress. There is a strong feeling by members of minority communities working in film and television Dramatic storytelling genres, as articulated in a recent article entitled “*The Diversity Report Card*” by Toronto based Journalist Allan Tong in *Montage Magazine*, (September 2008) that there is all too frequently a “one step forward, two steps back” situation that has existed for too long, and is not likely to change, unless there is a recognition by politicians and regulators that a real problem exists in this area and specific measures are put in place to address it.

Without a firm commitment by the Government and its Regulatory agencies to have clearly defined goals and commitments by the public and private sector broadcasters in reflecting cultural diversity in front of and behind the camera, and if the systemic problems in hiring are not addressed, minorities will continue to be marginalized and represented only in tokenistic ways in mainstream film and television media and the changes needed to allow full participation will be extremely slow in coming.

It can be argued that the private broadcasters are simply acting in the way they should-attempting to maximize their profits in a complex and industrial environment, while playing by the rules set by the Federal regulator-the CRTC- while trying to fulfill their obligations as responsible corporate citizens as best as they can.

Their primary goal after all is to make money for their stockholders and survive in an increasingly competitive environment. They must adhere to the rules set by the CRTC or risk losing their licenses. They lobby hard for rules that will give them advantages, but ultimately it is the CRTC that sets the rules based on their interpretations of the Broadcast Act.

The CBC is also governed by rules set by the CRTC but as the Public Broadcaster it has its own mandate set out by Parliament, concerning issues of representation and National Identity. Given the economic realities of broadcasting in Canada outlined earlier in this essay, and the challenging position the CBC is in because of major cuts to its funding, surviving, and attempting to fulfill its mandates relating to cultural diversity, while competing for market share in order to maintain its levels of activity, is an increasingly challenging exercise. The people who are responsible for its management are by necessity primarily focused on the day-to-day emergencies and on issues of survival.

The responsibility for ensuring that the CBC fulfills its responsibilities with regards to cultural diversity, rest with the CBC’s Board of Directors, and ultimately with Parliament.

A risk, apart from its moral and ethical implications, of broadcasters and the regulator not fulfilling its mandates with regards to the accurate reflection of the diversity of Canadian society in all aspects of its operations, is that Canadian society will not have the

benefit of the rich diversity of voices and perspectives that exist in the racialized communities which could contribute to the process of nation building and the forming of national identity. This marginalization and exclusion will result in loss of a sense of belonging and ultimately disassociation from mainstream Canadian culture. This has important implications for the future of Canada as a Nation given the current trends in population growth and Immigration.

The recent public debate about Canada's Multi-cultural policies in light of the alleged terrorist plot by a small group of Canadian Muslim fundamentalists, as well as increasing crime in several marginalized communities, has put an additional spotlight on issues involving the representation of racialized communities in our public institutions, and particularly in the media. Addressing the implications for Canadian institutions and society in general of this situation, Grace Edward Galabuzi states

Persistent income and employment inequality, economic and social segregation, and political marginalization imply a looming crisis of social instability and political legitimacy for Canadian society. Social inequality exacerbates social instability and economic decline, and may even lead to violence as key institutions in society lose legitimacy in the affected communities.<sup>17</sup>

With the rapidly changing demographics, the challenging economic outlook and the potential for societal dysfunction, it is becoming increasingly important that members of minority communities have access to opportunities to fully participate in all aspects of society and see themselves reflected in all aspects of life in Canada.

There are also other practical reasons for the government to act decisively on these issues:

Combined, racialized population growth and the growth in racialized productivity represent an important source of social and economic vitality and security for an increasingly aging Canadian population. The sustainment of programs such as the Canada Pension Plan, health care, and a host of social services, not to mention economic growth, rests increasingly on this population. A general awareness of this reality is essential, along with the necessary political commitment to implementing effective remedies for the social exclusion of racialized groups. Because of the threat this crisis represents to Canadian society, Canada's political, economic, and social leaders need to engage it with the same zeal they have brought to the recurring constitutional crisis... For now it is imperative that governments and key institutions in Canadian society assume the responsibility of undertaking a comprehensive, multifaceted response founded on an anti-racist plan of action.<sup>18</sup>

It is inevitable changes will come. Hopefully there will emerge a uniquely Canadian approach to reflecting the changes in Canadian society on our Film and Television

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<sup>17</sup> Grace Edward Galabuzi, *Canada's Economic Apartheid*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

screens and other areas of discourse that are part of the Public sphere. The key question is, how long will it take to implement these changes, and will the pace and the level of change be adequate for what is required for the development of a healthy, progressive and equitable society in Canada.