The Meanings of "Multicultural" in Canada's 1991 Broadcasting Act

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ABSTRACT

Background Despite Canada's policies on multiculturalism, there continues to be a dearth of minorities on Canadian television screens, in part because the idea of multiculturalism has long been contested.

Analysis This article describes the term's competing meanings by examining the debates about Bill C-40, which became the Broadcasting Act, between its introduction in Parliament in October 1989 and its passage into law in February 1991.

Conclusions and implications These debates had three areas of focus: the former act's national unity clause, the expansion of ideas of multiculturalism, and the tools of implementation. Ultimately, the relevant clauses in the Broadcasting Act left the term "multicultural" open to such a wide range of interpretations that they could be implemented without effecting a meaningful change.

Keywords Multiculturalism; Broadcasting Act; Broadcasting policy; Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission

RÉSUMÉ

Contexte Malgré les politiques canadiennes de multiculturalisme, il y a peu de minorités à la télévision canadienne, en partie parce que l'idée de multiculturalisme est disputée.

Analyse Le présent article décrit les sens contradictoires du terme en se penchant sur les débats sur le projet de loi C-40, qui devint la La sur la radiodiffusion, entre octobre 1989 (quand il fut introduit dans la Chambre des communes) et février 1991 (quand il fut adopté).

Conclusion et implications Ces débats étaient axés sur trois thèmes : la clause sur l'unité nationale dans l'ancienne Loi, l'élargissement de l'idée de multiculturalisme, et les outils de la mise en œuvre de la politique multiculturelle. Cette analyse révèle que les clauses pertinentes de la Loi sur la radiodiffusion permettaient un si grand éventail d'interprétations qu'elles pouvaient être mises en œuvre sans effectuer de changement réel.

Mots clés Multiculturalisme; Loi sur la radiodiffusion; Politiques de la radiodiffusion; Société Radio-Canada; Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des télécommunications canadiennes

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Introduction: Multiculturalism and Canadian Television

The years between Québec's 1980 and 1995 referenda provide an especially interesting lens through which to examine the relationship between policy and cultural identity in Canada. The failure of the 1980 referendum prompted Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to carry through with his plans to patriate the constitution from Great Britain in 1982. That patriation—or more to the point, Québec's refusal to accept it—in turn prompted Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who took office in 1984, to negotiate with Québec to codify its place in Canada. Mulroney and his provincial counterparts negotiated the Meech Lake Accord, a series of proposed amendments to the Canadian constitution, in 1987 and then, after its failure, the Charlottetown Accord in 1992. By the time of the 1995 referendum, Canadian identity politics had grown considerably more complex in response to the focus on Quebeckers, First Nations people, minorities, and other Canadians who did not fit neatly in the French/English dichotomy and demanded that their voices be heard, too.

Against this backdrop, Canada's broadcast regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), implemented policies to respond to Canadians' concerns about how they were represented in radio and television. It was responding to a series of reports that highlighted broadcasters' failure to depict the country's diversity. In 1984, the Special Committee on Visible Minorities in Canadian Society (1984) wrote in its report to the House of Commons, "[W]e are so homogenized in the mass media that individuals and groups are usually presented as a single North American type. Canadians of southern and eastern European origins are under-represented … and visible minorities are practically invisible" (p. 94). In 1985, the CRTC (1985) implemented its "Broadcasting Policy Reflecting Canada's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity" which established criteria for licensing stations that targeted "culturally or racially distinct" groups, especially those that spoke languages other than French or English. A year later, the Task Force on Broadcasting Policy (1986), chaired by Gerald Caplan and Florian Sauvageau, noted that problems still remained: "Many cultural minority groups want more aggressive action," such as "entrench[ing] the principle of multiculturalism in legislation … Only in this way … will mainstream broadcasters be committed to multiculturalism" (p. 536). Finally, in 1991, Parliament passed a revised Broadcasting Act, which incorporated a number of clauses about the role of broadcasters, including the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), in reflecting Canada's multicultural makeup.

And yet, there continues to be a dearth of minorities in Canadian news and fiction. As one writer posted on the website of TVO, Ontario's educational broadcaster, Canadian television has a "diversity problem": "Whether by misrepresentation or omission, our television fictions have played a role in denying too many communities visibility" (Costello, 2016, para. 11). A range of studies, employing a range of methodological approaches (including analyses of workforce composition, program content, audience reception, and broadcasting policy) have revealed a series of interdependent factors, related to who produces shows, what they contain, and how audiences react to them, that perpetuate this problem.

To begin, minorities tend to be underrepresented at the level of production. At the CBC, for instance, only 9 percent of employees in 2015 were visible minorities, while 1.5 percent were Indigenous (CBC/Radio-Canada, 2015), although these statistics do represent a modest improvement over past years (see Yu, 2016a). Patterns in commercial media are similar (Yu, 2016b), although in the case of some specific stations, such as those affiliated with CTV in Calgary and Edmonton, minority employees make up as much as 25 percent of the workforce (Bell Media, 2016).

Directly or indirectly, this underrepresentation has an effect on the content of programs themselves. The most comprehensive content analysis of Canadian television, performed a decade and a half ago by the Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television (2003), revealed "*presence gaps* in all of the six English-language programming categories and three of the five French-language categories examined" (p. 12), meaning the percentage of visible minorities and Indigenous Canadians in different programs was less than the percentage of those groups in broader society. Recent analyses of specific programs, including *Da Kink in My Hair* and *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, confirm at a micro-level what this historical study suggested at a macro-level: "Multiculturalism is celebrated yet still reinforces the 'Other'" because whiteness remains "the normative yardstick" (Media Action Media, 2011, p. 8) against which characters are measured.

As a consequence, minority viewers do not identify with what they see on television: "Canadian mainstream English-language TV news does not necessarily offer racialized immigrant audiences a space through which to see themselves accurately reflected as part of Canada's rich social life beyond the celebration of ethnic events and festivals" (Mahtani, 2008, p. 656). This combination of factors is what prompted regulators to enact the policies listed above, but analysis of these policies reveals a further contradiction. They give minorities the ability to speak to their own communities, but not to majority communities (Yu, 2016a). When majority media outlets do seek out minority viewers, their interest is profit, resulting in a "one-way form of communication" (Yu, 2016b, p. 348) where minority viewers have access to majority news, but not vice versa.

What accounts for the ineffectiveness of these efforts? One problem relates to the ideas that underpin the policies the CRTC and Parliament have implemented. Although activists have favoured the term "multicultural," the CRTC, for instance, favoured "ethnic" in its 1985 policy, a framework that perpetuated an essentialist notion of ethnic identity (Roth, 1998). Another problem relates to implementation itself. In the case of the CRTC, the commission defines ethnic stations by the languages they use, but there has been little Canadian programming in languages other than French or English. And ethnic stations, especially in their early years, frequently had to share time with other stations that used the same frequency (Roth, 1998).

But another explanation is worth exploring. The term "multicultural" means too many things to too many people to be implemented as straightforward policy. It is 1) a demographic reality characterized by diversity, 2) a set of philosophies about how to manage that diversity, and 3) a series of policies that put these philosophies into practice (Kallen, 1982). In other words, it is, to borrow from W.B. Gallie (1962), an "essen-

tially contested concept" (p. 121): it evokes a range of relatively coherent yet contested ideas, for which no one single "correct" definition can be established. This is apparent in the rich literature on multiculturalism. Depending on whom you ask, the policies that have been implemented are representative of:

- A broader trend in Canada to emphasize identity and collective rights (Pal, 1993);
- An attempt "to institutionalise various forms of difference, thereby controlling access to power and simultaneously legitimating the power of the state" (Mackey, 2002, p. 50); or
- A form of mushy cultural relativism that allows Canadians to flatter themselves for being progressive and cosmopolitan (Cohen, 2007).

This article examines how members of Canada's House of Commons used the term "multicultural" (and its derivatives) during the debates about Bill C-40, which was tabled in October 1989 and became the Broadcasting Act in February 1991. The bill included clauses stating that the Canadian broadcasting system should "through its programming and the employment arising out of its operations ... 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 that the CBC should "reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada" (Canada, 1991).

Heeding Ira Wagman's (2010) call for a textured, contextual analysis of policy formation, this article focuses on two sources: debates in the House of Commons and the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture. (For a list of the debates analyzed, see the Appendix.) In the first instance, Members of Parliament (MPs) were acting in an official capacity, and their statements, when acted upon in votes, had an illocutionary value—they made things happen. Through their speech, MPs added amendments to a bill or finalized its form in preparation for its consideration by the senate. Participants in these debates were lawmakers, and there was a great deal of speech-making, but little back-and-forth exchange. The semantic development of "multicultural" was therefore relatively tidy, as MPs used their words to persuade others about how to vote. When they talked about policy, they concentrated on policy formation.

In contrast, during the standing committee, MPs reviewed cabinet appointments and quizzed cabinet members about communication and culture. Their statements did not have the same illocutionary force, but committee members had more freedom to explore ideas they would present later, in a more polished form, to the House of Commons. There was a wider range of participants, as the committee called witnesses to testify, and there was less speech-making and more back-and-forth exchange. Thus the semantic development of "multicultural" was more open-ended. When members of the committee (and the witnesses they called) talked about policy, they concentrated on policy implementation.

This article lays out a theory of meaning developed by the American semiotician Charles Peirce (1940). It then examines the meanings of "multicultural" that lawmakers drew upon in their debates, starting with Canada's 1971 policy on multiculturalism

and ending with the Caplan-Sauvageau report (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986). This discussion provides a context to understand the debates themselves, in which there were three areas of focus: 1) the unity clause that was part of the earlier Broadcasting Act, 2) the expansion of historical ideas of multiculturalism, and 3) the tools of implementation. The analysis reveals the effect of politics on the terms people used to describe Canada's diversity and the policies that followed. It also reveals one reason Canada's policies on multicultural broadcasting have not increased representation of minorities: the relevant clauses in the Broadcasting Act left the term "multicultural" open to such a wide range of competing definitions that they could be implemented without effecting a meaningful change.

Peirce's semiotics and the terms of Canadian diversity

Charles Peirce's semiotics provides both a theoretical framework and an analytical approach. A sign, according to Peirce (1940), is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (p. 99). Signs evoke "in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign," which Peirce calls the "interpretant" (p. 99). And because interpretants are also signs, signification takes the form of a chain of associations: a first sign evokes a second (its interpretant), which evokes a third (the interpretant's interpretant), and so on.

Peirce (1940) classifies signs by asking what makes something a sign (its "presentative" condition), how it relates to its referents (its "representative" condition), and what it reveals about its referents (its "interpretive" condition). He also classifies them as a function of their complexity. The simplest signs ("firsts") are unmediated and unreflexive; more complex signs ("seconds") are mediated, but not yet reflexive; the most complex signs ("thirds") are both mediated and reflexive, and they derive from convention, habit, or law. The simplest signs are ones where the presentative, representative, and interpretive conditions are all firsts, such as "a nebulous patch of color, seeing a blotch of red in an afterimage, hearing the wind blow through an old house, the musty smell while walking in a forest, the aftertaste from a deliciously exotic meal" (Liszka, 1994, p. 48). The most complex are ones where the three conditions are all thirds: the "paradigm case is that of an inference of an argument, which shows the connection between one set of propositions (the premises) and another (the conclusion)" (Liszka, 1994, p. 52). As a simple sign evokes an interpretant (which in turn evokes another and another and another), it becomes a building block for signs that are more complex. A nebulous patch of colour becomes the colour red, which people recognize in different contexts, and in certain contexts it takes on specific meanings: if people are driving and see a red light, for example, they know to stop. Or, in the case of multiculturalism, a nebulous impression of alterity becomes an awareness of cultural difference, which people recognize in different contexts, and in certain contexts it takes on specific meaning: if "multicultural" means X, then policy Y should be implemented.

These syllogisms are the key to the theoretical framework Peirce (1940) provides for this article. They also suggest an analytical approach: to describe them, one can start from the building blocks of simpler signs and trace the chains of associations they generate to arrive at the more complex. These associations are manifest in what

people say about multiculturalism, both as they react to others and as they anticipate how others will react to them. In the first case, people account in their own speech for how others talk about diversity, and in the second case, they choose their words to stave off objections they imagine others might have.

Thus, to make sense of the uses of "multicultural" in the debates about Bill C-40, it is useful to ask two sets of questions, one broad and one narrow. In a broad sense, what unspoken ideas about diversity and otherness shaped the words people used to frame cultural difference? In a narrow sense, what were the specific points of reference for MPs as they discussed multiculturalism in Canada's broadcasting industry?

Broadly speaking, the term "multicultural" has undergone an important shift since it was first introduced in 1971. At that time, it was based on a "logic of ethnicity" (Kymlicka, 2015, p. 17)—people's identities derived from the countries from which they or their forebears immigrated. Over time, it came to operate as a tool to fight discrimination.

This shift took place as Canada's immigration policies evolved and reshaped the country's demographic makeup. Prior to the 1960s, these policies, according to sociologist Alan Simmons (1999), were "based on an image of Canada as a promising 'European nation' in the New World" (p. 41). They favoured immigrants from Europe, and many Germans, Ukrainians, and other Europeans settled throughout Canada, especially in the Prairies and western provinces.

In 1963, Prime Minister Lester Pearson launched the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. The B&B Commission, part of Ottawa's response to Québec's growing separatist movement, had a mandate to "recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races" (Royal Commission, 1965, p. 151), referring to the French and the English populations. Non-Francophone and non-Anglophone Canadians felt marginalized by this focus, despite the mandate also given to the Royal Commission (1965) to "[take] into account the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada" (p. 151). They raised their concerns with the commission, which responded in Book IV of its report, *The Cultural Contributions of the Other Ethnic Groups* (Royal Commission, 1970).

In that book, the B&B Commission made a series of recommendations that addressed topics ranging from human rights and employment to education and media policy (Royal Commission, 1970). The government of Pierre Trudeau, who became prime minister in 1968, responded by implementing Canada's multiculturalism policy in 1971. It had four clauses, in which the federal government said it would "support all of Canada's cultures and will seek to assist … the development of those cultural groups which have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop, a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada," "assist members of all cultural groups to overcome barriers to full participation in Canadian society," "promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity," and "continue to assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada's official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society" (House of Commons, 1971, p. 8581). These clauses emphasized cultural expression (and, to a lesser degree, preservation)

and made expression a function of individual choice. They also reaffirmed the primacy of French and English.

But by the early 1970s, Canada's demographic makeup had begun to change. In 1962, Ottawa revised its immigration policy to focus on the skills workers could bring rather than their place of origin, as fewer immigrants came from Europe, where countries were in such need of workers that many had instituted guest worker programs. By the mid-1970s, after the new policy had been in effect long enough to have a noticeable impact, more than half of the immigrants coming to Canada were from Asia, Latin America, or Africa (Beaujot, 1999). They settled largely in cities, especially Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, where there was stiff competition for resources and where they faced obstacles in obtaining housing and employment (Balakrishnan & Hou, 1999). As a result, their principal concerns were increasingly instrumental and oriented toward collective action. Not coincidentally, the term "visible minority" entered the Canadian lexicon in the 1970s as a way to describe people of non-European origin (Karim, 1993). The term drew attention to the visible markers of culture, race, and ethnicity, such as skin colour and dress, which set immigrants apart and made them targets for discrimination.

Going beyond the 1971 policy, then, the Canadian government began to enact policies that addressed discrimination. For instance, the 1982 Constitution Act declared, among other things:

> 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, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. (Canada, 1982, sec. 15.1)

It also stipulated that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (part 1 of the Constitution Act) "shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians" (Canada, 1982, sec. 27). Similarly, the 1988 Multiculturalism Act (Canada, 1988) focused on the eradication of racism along with the preservation of language and culture. The idea that cultural expression should be encouraged and cultural traditions should be preserved did not disappear, but it was supplemented by a concern about combatting discrimination.

This dual emphasis was clear in broadcasting policy, too. In 1985, for instance, the CRTC, in reaction to the Special Committee on Visible Minorities in Canadian Society, enacted its "Broadcasting Policy Reflecting Canada's Linguistic and Cultural Diversity" (CRTC, 1985). But in contrast to the Multiculturalism Act, it favoured the term "ethnic" as a way to frame program categories, based on the language spoken and the intended audience.

What does this brief analysis reveal about the constellation of signs to which Members of Parliament were reacting as they debated Bill C-40? At its centre was the idea of identity, which in turn evoked ideas of alterity and belonging. These in turn evoked ideas of community (and its relationship to individuals), as well as place and visible markers of identity. These signs worked together to bring about a number of competing, complementary logics. According to one, if Canada wanted to protect and

promote diversity, it should promote cultural expression. According to another, to accomplish the same goal, it should institute policies to protect against discrimination.

In what tangible ways did this constellation shape debate about Bill C-40? How did those debates take these meanings into account? That is, how did they influence the arguments people made? And how did their arguments in turn shape the constellation of signs?

The 1968 Broadcasting Act, the Caplan-Sauvageau Report, and Bill C-40

Bill C-40, the purpose of which was to update the 1968 Broadcasting Act, had wide-ranging implications, and debates about it related to the cable industry, the CRTC, private television, technological convergence, Canadian content and ownership, and the threat of Americanization (see Masse, 1989; Spicer, 1990). But where multiculturalism was concerned, there was one dominant theme—national unity—and two specific points of reference. The first was the 1968 Broadcasting Act (Canada, 1968) itself, in particular its clause instructing the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to "contribute to the development of national unity and provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity" (sec. 2.g.iv). The second was the Caplan-Sauvageau report, which recommended, "The provision that the national service contribute to the development of national unity should be rescinded and replaced by a more socially oriented provision, for example, that the service contribute to the development of national consciousness" (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986, p. 285).

The connection between national unity and multiculturalism was two-fold. First, the Caplan-Sauvageau report (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986) made its recommendation based on the idea, according to Liberal communications critic Sheila Finestone, "that [the unity] clause might interfere with CBC's ability to ensure that its programming reflect and interpret … Canada's cultural, social, political, economic, linguistic and regional reality and diversity" (House of Commons, 1989, p. 5552).

Second, Parliament was debating Bill C-40 during the time the Meech Lake Accord was unravelling. Meech Lake would have allowed Québec to accept—finally—the patriated constitution. It would also have codified the relationship between Québec and the rest of Canada by recognizing Québec as a "distinct society." It needed ratification from all provinces by June 1990, and in the end, it failed when Manitoba and Newfoundland did not hold ratification votes. In the shadow of Meech Lake, many discussions about national unity were really discussions about Québec and English Canada.

What bearing did Meech Lake have on debates about Bill C-40? When MPs spoke about multiculturalism, they were speaking about groups that were neither French nor English. The Caplan-Sauvageau report, for instance, said, "Multicultural broadcasting includes, but is not restricted to, ethnic or ethno-cultural broadcasting by and for people who are neither aboriginal Canadians nor members of Canada's two official-language groups" (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986, p. 533). Members of Parliament made similar assertions, such as Liberal MP Ronald Duhamel, who broke Canadians down into these groups: "English, French, new Canadians and aboriginal peoples" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 52). Thus, when MPs spoke about national unity, which in the context of Meech Lake referred to

the relationship between Francophones and Anglophones, they had to find ways to incorporate non-Francophones and non-Anglophones. One such way was through the idea of multiculturalism.

The connection they made hinged on their understandings of culture. The Standing Committee on Communications and Culture frequently asked witnesses what they meant when they used the term. Keith Spicer, chair of the CRTC, and Patrick Watson, the chair-designate[1] of the CBC's Board of Directors, both gave common answers. According to Spicer, "What we are really talking about is every imaginable way of being Canadian … Culture for me refers to a people in general, and includes everything that makes up the soul of Canada in all its complexity, eccentricity and originality" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 41, official translation).[2] According to Watson, "culture is the varied expression of what makes a country" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 147, official translation). "Culture," in other words, meant at least three distinct things: it was 1) the set of ideas and beliefs members of a community shared, 2) the expression of those ideas and beliefs in broadcasting and elsewhere, and 3) the community itself.

This slippage—the way "culture" evoked more than one thing, without speakers having to specify what they meant—made it possible for MPs and policymakers to suggest ways to bring together groups that were "multicultural" (an equally slippery term) with French and English Canadians. According to Spicer, for instance:

> [T]here are three options for us in dealing with the new cultures that have come to Canada. One is assimilation, and nobody wants that. The other one is ghettoization, and I guess nobody wants that. What I believe in is an evolving mainstream, and I think we should seek integration of newcomers into this evolving mainstream and let the airwaves reflect that. (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 39)

Spicer's emphasis was on communities: those whose members had recently come to Canada could express their shared beliefs in television and radio in ways that allowed them to influence Canada's dominant, "mainstream" groups. In this respect, Spicer revealed the odd status of Canada's non-French, non-English communities. They were Canadian citizens, but still not quite Canadian, in that their task was to integrate by changing themselves to conform to French and English notions of Canadianness (although in so doing, they would trigger a reciprocal change on the part of French and English Canadians).

Over the course of the debates about Bill C-40, these ideas did not remain static or uncontested. The next three sections of this article describe the themes that characterized the debates and what they revealed about the meaning of "multiculturalism" and the implications of the CBC's multicultural mandate. The first related to the politics of the national unity clause. The second related to efforts to expand the meaning of "multicultural." And the third related to questions of policy implementation and the effect of different tools for increasing diversity on the Canadian airwaves.

Bill C-40 and national unity

The national unity clause was a bit like a Rorschach test for Members of Parliament—

their anxieties about it mirrored their anxieties about the Meech Lake Accord. In fact, before Bill C-40, "there was no apparent sign of a public interest … in the CBC's national unity mandate. It was strictly an affair of politicians" (Raboy, 1991, pp. 193–194). Indeed, the Meech Lake drama was intertwined with the Bill C-40 debates: it delayed debates about Bill C-40 by about a year, and after Meech Lake's failure, Liberals used it to attack Bill C-40, as Sheila Finestone did when confronting Communications Minister Marcel Masse: "Mr. Minister, you have taken very important and serious legislation and you have 'Meechified' it. You have balkanized the country. You have taken the broadcast bill and you have removed national unity" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1990c, p. 12).

Interpretations of the unity clause were consistent among the governing Conservatives. They contended it would turn the CBC (and especially Radio-Canada, its French-language network) into a propaganda arm for Ottawa. It would require journalists to abandon their professional norms of balance, for instance, by hindering their ability to present a separatist point of view. Interpretations were also consistent among Liberals, who thought the clause encouraged the production of a wide range of genres—not only news but also drama, comedy, and documentary—to tell Canada's stories, in all their diversity. It did not supersede journalistic norms, although it did ensure that stories about Canadian unity had their place.

The Conservative perspective followed the arguments laid out in the Caplan-Sauvageau report, according to which:

> The insistence that the national public broadcaster promote national unity … would appear to restrict rather than enhance [the CBC's] broad cultural mandate by placing a prior obligation on CBC journalists to practice in a certain way—as a propaganda service, a cynic might say. (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986, pp. 284–285)

Masse's comments when he introduced the bill during its second reading followed the same lines:

> Canada has decided to relieve the CBC of the obligation to promote Canadian unity and to substitute therefore the obligation to report on the cultural reality of this country. Unity can only come about as a result of a sense of shared identity. The role of our information media is to describe events, not to promote policy. (House of Commons, 1989, p. 5549)

In some instances, the CBC officials interviewed by the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture made similar statements. For instance, CBC president Gérard Veilleux said:

> National unity is a political objective and should be promoted, defended and articulated by political institutions. CBC is not a political institution, nor should it be. It should reflect the country and, if it does so and does it well, it will contribute indirectly to national unity by making every part of the country better known to each other part. (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1990b, p. 37)[3]

These perspectives grew out of an interpretation of federalism according to which Canada's constituent parts had different roles and concerns. It was consistent with Québec's desire—recognized in Meech Lake—to be recognized as distinct. Québec saw this recognition as reflective of its place in history and status as home to one of Canada's two founding peoples. Masse explained it in these terms: "There is no dogma about what federalism should be … There is the federalism of Georges-Étienne Cartier, and that of Brian Mulroney, which is a federalism that brings together rather than levels out" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1990c, p. 23, official translation). In contrast, Liberals saw Canadian federalism as a partnership between equals, where the unity clause promoted, as described by Finestone, "a sense of shared experience and greater understanding of tolerance and exchange" (House of Commons, 1989, p. 5552). In that light, Québec's desire to be recognized as a "distinct society" looked like a desire for special treatment, a threat that was exacerbated by the removal of the unity clause.

And, as mentioned above, whereas Conservatives spoke mostly of news, Liberals spoke of a wider range of genres. For instance, former broadcaster John Harvard, the Liberal MP from Winnipeg-St. James, said:

> I think we need more popular drama shows, more entertainment, and more variety shows to contribute to national unity. I say that because so often—and again I will talk about my part of Canada—western Canadians see Quebeckers in a controversial context. (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 123)

He was addressing Patrick Watson, who responded:

> It is part of the CBC's policy to increase popular drama and increase popular entertainment. There is no question in my mind that one of the most important reflections of a national experience that a national broadcaster can give its people is through drama. (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 124)

The difference between news and fictional programming was two-fold. First, the content was different. News focused on controversies because journalists saw them as newsworthy. Second, Harvard and Watson agreed that fictional programming allowed viewers to enter imaginatively into the lives of others. Watson gave the example of *Chautauqua Girl*, "a prairie story that not only told us about our past but exposed to the whole of this country a sensibility that could have existed only on the Prairies" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 124).

What did this discussion of French and English Canada reveal about the meaning of "multicultural"? Although the Caplan-Sauvageau report (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986) recommended removing the unity clause to ensure the representation of Canadian diversity, the French/English dichotomy not only remained but took focus away from questions of multiculturalism. The idea that "multicultural" meant not French and not English persisted. In that respect, efforts to broaden the meaning of "multiculturalism" were revealing, as the next section describes.

Efforts to broaden or restrict the scope of "multiculturalism"

The Meech Lake Accord failed in June 1990 when Elijah Harper, a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, prevented a vote in that chamber, and Newfoundland Premier Clyde Wells cancelled the vote in his province's House of Assembly. After its failure, Canadians' emotions were raw, as people tried to understand what happened, and to place blame.

In this context, Jim Karygiannis, the Liberal MP from Scarborough-Agincourt, addressed questions of unity by trying to expand notions of Canadianness. He was confronted by Len Gustafson, parliamentary secretary to Prime Minister Mulroney. The exchange, which is worth quoting at length, reveals the effect of those emotions on how speakers framed multiculturalism:

> Karygiannis: … I rise today to speak about an issue that is very important in the hearts of many Canadians. Unity. There are some of us who have chosen Canada and have come to this great country of ours by choice.
>
> Gustafson: They destroyed it.
>
> Karygiannis: My hon. colleague across the floor says we destroyed it. Well, I challenge him, because I came to this country 20 years ago to add to this country, and I certainly do not think that I came here to destroy it.
>
> Gustafson: Ask Wells.
>
> Karygiannis: Well, I do not have to ask Wells. I can ask my father when he made that choice to come to this great country of ours, and if you, sir, think that I do not have a place in here, then you are mistaken. In the year 2000, 50 per cent of the Canadian population will be something that is neither French … nor English. They will be from other minorities. They will be people from Europe, south Asia, and east Asia. (House of Commons, 1990b, p. 15811)

The frustration Gustafson felt as a member of the Conservative government and a supporter of Meech Lake is clear in his terse remarks to Karygiannis, especially as he tried to link Karygiannis to Wells, whom the media had portrayed as the villain in Meech Lake's failure (see Conway, 2011). His point-counterpoint strategy reflected the politics of the exchange, as he shut down each attempt by Karygiannis to expand notions of Canadianness.

But Karygiannis persisted by addressing ideas of Canadianness explicitly. Later in the exchange, he said, "We should not call them minorities. We should call them different ethnic Canadian components, because I am proud to be Canadian first and of different roots and different heritages" (House of Commons, 1990b, p. 15812). He called for elevating minorities' status to that of Canada's two main linguistic groups, and he linked demographic changes with the idea of unity:

> I am very proud to stand in the House and speak about unity. For those members who think that unity is something to take to task, I say to them that there are those of us, the late comers, who have been the soft targets up to now who are going to stand up and say to their faces: "No more." There are those of us, 50 per cent by the year 2000, who will be neither

> English [nor] French, who are going to say: "We want to keep this country united." There are those of us who will not opt for division. (House of Commons, 1990b, p. 15812)

Karygiannis finished his allotted time on a political note, one that echoed Liberal notions of federalism described above. If half of all Canadians would be neither French nor English by 2000, they would need a party to represent them. The Conservatives, he contended, would split the country by granting Québec special powers. Only the Liberals "will fight very hard to keep this country united" (House of Commons, 1990b, p. 15813) because only the Liberals emphasized equality among groups.

If Karygiannis's remarks tended to displace French and English as the hegemonic categories of Canadian identity, those of other MPs and policymakers did the opposite. Several proposed to use Québec as a lens through which to interpret Canadian diversity. The idea was that the CBC's approach to Québec could serve as a model for the CBC's approach to multiculturalism. Speaking of Al Johnson, president of the CBC during the 1980 Québec referendum, Keith Spicer said:

> I think he did a brilliant job for Canada by showing Quebeckers, who were wavering on the yes or no on the referendum, that this was a country worth staying with, a country that would protect the right of separatists to appear on the national state airwaves as much as the others. I think that was one of the best arguments ever given for Canada … In that sense, we have more and more immigrants of different backgrounds and continents, and obviously our broadcasting system must naturally reflect that. (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 46)

Conservative MP Jean-Pierre Hogue, who represented Outrement in Québec, made similar comments in an exchange with Patrick Watson (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989). He also used Québec as a lens for understanding other minority communities in Canada. In a discussion of First Nation cultural production, he suggested to John Kim Bell, the founder and president of the Canadian Native Arts Foundation, that Bell should focus on language preservation because of the vital link between "the preservation of the mother tongue and the economy":

> [C]ulture precedes economics; in other words, economic factors only come into play once the cultural base is there, meaning that they are predicated on a specific notion of culture, culture really being the root, so to speak, of a people or a cultural entity … I associate with your comments the need—and this is my personal interpretation—to give special emphasis to the mother tongue. (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1990b, pp. 22–23, official translation)

Bell rejected the suggestion because it implied that Native culture was static. Instead, he said,

> [I]n native society and in all society culture is constantly in a state of flux. Fifty years ago, as I said, there were no native civil servants. Are the native civil servants speaking their mother tongue, relating the policies of the Government of Canada? (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1990b, p. 23)

Likewise, Dawn Black, the New Democratic MP from New Westminster-Burnaby, said, "I am sort of troubled a bit by the analogy raised by Mr. Hogue … [because it] is a much more complex situation for native people" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1990b, p. 26).

These exchanges reveal two things. First, the idea that "multicultural" meant not French and not English, with its proximate origins in the Caplan-Sauvageau report (Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, 1986), was not one everyone took for granted or even accepted. Instead—and this is the second thing—it had to be actively maintained. Members of Parliament and policymakers could and did challenge it, and their statements were challenged in turn. The implication for Bill C-40 was that "multicultural" continued to be subordinated to the categories of French and English. What remained was to work out how CBC officials would implement the corporation's multicultural clause. The strategies they anticipated grew out of their restricted notion of multiculturalism.

"Representation" and the tools and strategies of policy implementation

When policymakers and broadcasting officials spoke of implementing the CBC's mandate, they spoke of specific tools (where much hinged on whether "representation" meant "standing in for" or "depicting") and the role of genre (where their discussion was in line with the one between Conservatives and Liberals about news, drama, and national unity).

Not surprisingly, the people who spoke most about implementation were those who were tasked with it at the CBC and the CRTC. In most cases, they spoke broadly of their plans but said little about specifics. Keith Spicer, for instance, hinted at ways the CRTC could "[reward] good performers" or impose "tougher sanctions" using "carrots and sticks of all kinds," although his emphasis was on "the private sector [because] the CBC does not really need this kind of encouragement usually" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 37). With respect to the CBC, Patrick Watson, responding to a question about how the network would meet its mandate despite large budget cuts, spoke of

> a process of consultation that has allowed the staff to tell the management how to fix [the CBC]. Now the management's job is to cost analyse each one of these proposals and to throw out the ones that appear nutty or in contradiction with the mandate of the CBC, because it is the management's responsibility to interpret the mandate. (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 120)

A further difficulty came from an inherent ambiguity in the term "representation." Consider statements by Liberal MP Ron Duhamel from Saint Boniface, directed at Gérard Veilleux:

> I know there is some sensitivity with respect to the issue that was raised responding to visible minorities, aboriginal peoples, and … I want you to understand and accept that there are some politicians who are really quite concerned that these under-represented groups need to be more fairly represented. (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1990b, p. 45)

Duhamel used the word "represent" to mean two distinct things: when he spoke of "under-represented groups," he was talking about how individuals could stand in for a group, but when he spoke of their needing to "be more fairly represented," he was also talking about depiction. Minority groups wanted to see images of themselves that were not based in stereotypes.

This ambiguity allowed CBC and CRTC officials a certain amount of play as they talked about multicultural television. Spicer, for instance, rejected the idea of representation as "standing in for" because it suggested something like a quota system: "There are no quotas or calculations that could help us to deal with this issue. … Personally, I am not very enthusiastic about quotas or mathematical formulas. I think they lead to other injustices and to glaring inefficiencies" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 61, official translation). Instead, he preferred to talk about depiction: "[W]e must make the broadcasting system reflect the multicultural nature of Canada. It is like holding up a mirror to the country" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 35). Or later, "What counts, above all, is a sense of justice, imagination and a readiness to make an effort to recruit people from other cultures" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 61, official translation).

In short, for Spicer, who spoke about representation more than any other official, what mattered was finding a way to "humanize the statistics" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 35), an idea that raised the question of how different genres influenced the "evolving mainstream": "For example, I would like to see some so-called immigrant sitcoms, native Canadian sitcoms … I think we are talking here about integrating our new Canadians into an evolving mainstream and making the mainstream reflect them" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 35).

The question of genre, described above in relation to the CBC's unity clause, was one many Members of Parliament raised, too. In some cases, they spoke broadly of Canadian productions in identity-formation. For Geoff Scott, a Conservative MP from Hamilton-Wentworth, it was a question of "[q]uality television that reflects what we are as Canadians or the way we are viewed around this world" (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1990c, p. 19).

In other cases, their argument was more specific. As debates about Bill C-40 drew to a close, for instance, Sheila Finestone said:

> News and information programs are indispensable in keeping us open-minded and informed about what is going on here and around the world. Stories, fiction and drama, deal with our past, our emotions, our dreams, our passions, our weaknesses and our strengths as people and as individuals while they form our thoughts and our attitudes toward the future. (House of Commons, 1990, p. 16228)

Her speech, however, hints at the challenges broadcasters faced in implementing the CBC's mandate. Her language was poetic, similar to that of Patrick Watson, who made similar comments a year and a half prior:

> [I]n terms of placing us in the modern age with all the threats to the environment, to social cohesion, to the spiritual challenge that comes out of this tremendously materialistic age that seems to have a great many of our people very confused about what constitutes the good life. Is it stuff you can spray under your arm to make you smell better, or is it in fact a knowledge of the beauty and the spiritual depth of your relationship with people, with the eternity, with the landscape? (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, 1989, p. 135)

Such high-minded rhetoric appealed to a sense of pride and identity many shared. In so doing, it allowed officials to answer questions from MPs without discussing the nuts-and-bolts details of implementation, where the eventual success or failure of the CBC's multicultural clause lay.

This description was not the only point of ambiguity. In fact, it was of a piece with the other forms of semiotic slippage described above—the multiple meanings of "culture" and "representation." These signs were the building blocks for more complex signs, as MPs and broadcast officials talked about the demographic realities of Canada's diversity, their philosophy for dealing with those realities, and ultimately their policies for putting their philosophies into practice. The slippage allowed MPs to craft a clause that did not prescribe concrete actions. In fact, it was arguably because it did not prescribe concrete actions—and because the multicultural clause was one of many in Bill-40—that the bill could become law.

Conclusion: "Multicultural" in the greater constellation of signs

In light of this analysis—the debate about national unity, the effort to expand ideas of multiculturalism, the discussion of tools related to genre—it is possible to map out the constellation of signs that included the terms "multicultural" and "multiculturalism" (see Figure 1). It looks something like this:

Figure 1: "Multicultural" in the greater constellation of signs
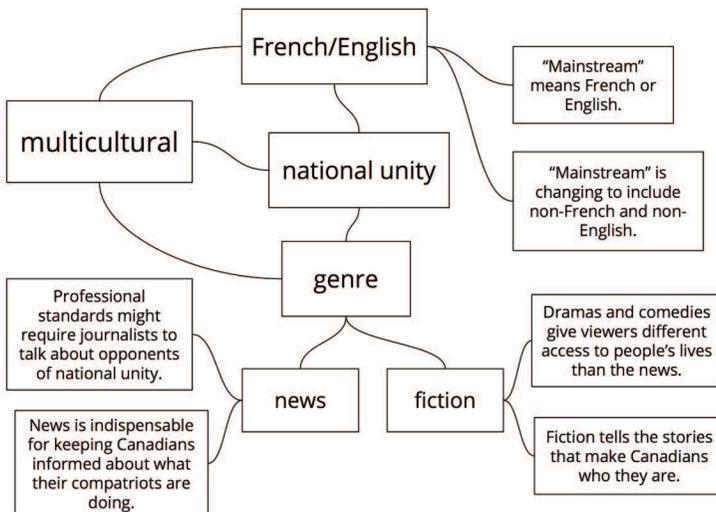
For participants in the debates about Bill C-40, discussions of multiculturalism were bound up in discussions of identity, national unity, and the uses of broadcasting. To evoke one part of the constellation was to evoke the others, in varying degrees depending on the context, as the lines between boxes indicate (see Figure 1). Ideas of multiculturalism prompted discussions of national unity, which in turn prompted discussions of language groups, or of genre, which in turn prompted discussions of multiculturalism.

The complex signs that shaped debate about Bill C-40 can be expressed as a series of competing syllogisms, which take the form of "on the one hand"/"on the other." For instance, on the one hand, if Canadians are to be able to talk to each other, broadcasters—especially the national broadcaster—cannot abandon ideas of national unity. On the other, if journalists want to uphold professional standards, they cannot privilege perspectives that favour national unity. Or again, on the one hand, if broadcasters want to encourage national unity, they should tell the stories of all Canadians, those who belong to the dominant language groups and those who do not. On the other, if they persist in dividing Canadians into categories such as "French or English" and "multicultural," they risk perpetuating the divisions those categories imply.

This analysis confirms something Marc Raboy (1991) observed about the Broadcasting Act shortly after it became law: "media systems, institutions, services, and policies evolve according to the political and economic agendas of the surrounding society and elites" (p. 194). But it also reveals one reason the CBC's multicultural mandate has not yielded concrete results: the clause left the term "multicultural" open and able to accommodate competing definitions. There was no resolution to the contradictions that inhered to the constellations of signs. Instead, these contradictions made passage of the bill possible because everyone could find something to agree with.

It also provides insight into the challenges policymakers will face in the future. Some categories absent from the constellation above have grown in importance, such as religion, which federal policymakers have often subsumed under the rubric of culture (Gaye & Kunz, 2009). Any attempt to update the 1991 Broadcasting Act, which is now older than the previous act was when it was replaced, will need to take these categories into account. Their relationship to Canadian diversity will no doubt be subject to a similar process of contestation and negotiation.

Notes

1. The 1991 Broadcasting Act created a Board of Directors for the CBC, of which Patrick Watson was the chair. But he assumed that role before the act became law and before his position officially existed. Hence the "designate" status of his title.

2. For the sake of readability, I quote the official translations of statements made in French, both in the Standing Committee and on the floor of the House of Commons.

3. In the context of the Meech Lake Accord, however, Francophone journalists still objected that Veilleux's statement threatened their ability to be impartial in their reporting about Canadian federalism and Québec nationalism or separatism (see Conway, 2011).

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Appendix: Timeline and list of debates analyzed

1. October 11, 1989: Keith Spicer (chair of the CRTC), Gérard Veilleux (president of the CBC), and Patrick Watson (chair-designate of the CBC Board) appear before the Standing Committee.

2. October 12, 1989: First reading of Bill C-40.

3. November 3, 1989: Second reading of Bill C-40 begins.

4. November 7, 1989: Marcel Masse (minister of communications) appears before the Standing Committee.

5. December 15, 1989: Second reading of Bill C-40 ends.

6. March 20, 1990: Fernand Bélisle (vice-chair of the CRTC) appears before the Standing Committee.

7. March 29, 1990: John Bell (president of the Canadian Native Arts Foundation) appears before the Standing Committee.

8. May 8, 1990: Gérard Veilleux appears before the Standing Committee.

9. May 29, 1990: Keith Spicer appears before the Standing Committee.

10. May 30, 1990: Marcel Masse appears before the Standing Committee.

11. October 31, 1990: Members propose and vote on amendments to Bill C-40.

12. November 1, 1990: Members propose and vote on amendments to Bill C-40.

13. November 27, 1990: Members propose and vote on amendments to Bill C-40.

14. November 29, 1990: Members propose and vote on amendments to Bill C-40.

15. December 3, 1990: Members propose and vote on amendments to Bill C-40.

16. December 4, 1990: Members propose and vote on amendments to Bill C-40.

17. December 4, 1990: Third reading of Bill C-40.

18. December 11, 1990: Gérard Veilleux appears before the Standing Committee.

19. February 1, 1991: Bill C-40 receives royal assent.