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Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Role of National Media Institutions in Creating Cultural Identity: A Historical Approach

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**CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION
AND THE ROLE OF NATIONAL MEDIA INSTITUTIONS
IN CREATING CULTURAL IDENTITY:
A HISTORICAL APPROACH**

Abstract

This paper focuses primarily on the third epoch of communications history in Canada, encompassing the main part of the 20th century, which is linked with the emergence and development of radio and television technologies. The aim of the paper is to present the institutional evolution of Canadian electronic media as well as the legal provisions enacted by the regulatory authorities in order to promote and preserve the national character of radio and television broadcasting in the country.

Résumé

Cet article se concentre principalement sur la troisième époque de l'histoire des communications au Canada, qui englobe la majeure partie du XX^e siècle, ce qui est lié à l'émergence et au développement des technologies de la radio et de la télévision. Le but de l'article est de présenter l'évolution institutionnelle des médias électroniques canadiens ainsi que les dispositions légales adoptées par les autorités réglementaires en vue de promouvoir et de préserver le caractère national de la diffusion radiophonique et télévisuelle dans le pays.

Defining public media and the functions they serve in national media systems can be a difficult task. In popular discourse, public broadcasters are usually associated with educational, cultural, and public affairs programming, providing an alternative to the uniform offer of commercial media while maintaining a tricky balance between submission to political authority and selling out the mission in chase of additional sources of income. The role

played by a public broadcaster depends however on many different factors, including the type of the media system in a given state (Hallin and Mancini 67-68), present economic conditions, historical circumstances, sometimes even physical features of an individual country.

As the old saying, whose authorship is attributed to Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon McKenzie King, states: "Canada is a place with too much geography and not enough history" (qtd. in Raboy 162). It can be argued that the difficult transformation from individual settlements spread in the wilderness of the northern part of the continent (Grabowski 46-47) to the modern, vivid society of Canada was made possible due to various inventions and developments in communication technology. Canada is thus a unique example of a nation whose very existence may be linked to consecutive technological revolutions and an excellent subject of studies on the social effects of scientific progress. John A. Irving distinguishes three main eras in the evolution of communications in Canada: "first, the French canoe culture, of which the economic base was the fur trade; second, the railroad culture, of which the economic base was the farm; and third, the electronic culture" (12). It is little wonder that the remarkable relationship between the development of the modern Canadian nation and the natural history of technology in the last three centuries or so has brought about the interest of media scholars and contributed to the birth of an original way of thinking about modern media: the Toronto school, associated with Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, among others (Vipond 76-81). A strong media system, it should be emphasized, is a valuable "soft power" asset of a nation, acting both as a powerful agent of domestic cultural integration (due to common values, symbols, and meanings) and as a "shop window" for other countries to admire and follow. According to Joseph S. Nye, soft power is exercised when "a country may obtain its preferred outcomes in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness" (Nye 5).

The beginnings

Guglielmo Marconi's invention of radio¹ was greeted with much enthusiasm by Canadians. One of the pioneers of the new medium was Reginald Fessenden of East Bolton in Quebec, known for the first audio broadcast delivered by radio waves on the Christmas day of 1906. While Fessenden's

¹ Marconi's claim to be the inventor of radio was contested by both Alexander Popov and Nicola Tesla; eventually, Tesla was posthumously declared the inventor of radio technology by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1943 (Redouté and Staeyert 3).

program did not attract many listeners (radio was not yet a widespread technology, so his audience was composed mainly of communication operators based on nearby naval units), it did show the potential of the new medium (Hempstead 636). Reginald Fessenden's broadcasting experiments were conducted in the United States but the radio technology was being developed on the Canadian soil as well: Marconi Wireless Company operated a pioneering station in Montreal since 1919 (Raymond 91-92). As Mary Vipond remarks, the radio market of the country was thriving already in the mid-twenties: "by 1923 Canada had over thirty stations in operation, by 1930 over sixty" (46).

The early development of electronic media in Canada took similar forms to what was going on in the United States at that time. Unlike the European countries, where domestic media landscapes were soon dominated by government-run entities², the U.S. radio system was based on the principle of the state's non-interference with the free initiatives of private entrepreneurs (commercial networks such as NBC and CBS dominated the airwaves in the late 1920s and their supremacy had been long sanctioned by consecutive acts of Congress)³. Canadian radio landscape was shaped by similar ideas and influenced in many ways by initiatives from the south of the border: "Throughout the 1920s, Canadian commercial radio developed essentially in the private sector, with stations operating in either English or French, some of them affiliated with the emerging networks in the United States, and all of them filling the air with a large proportion of American programming." (Raboy 163)

Meanwhile, the radio market of Canada was flooded with receivers: in the early 1931, one-third of Canadian households had radio equipment and this percentage rose each year – reaching almost full saturation by the 1950s (Vipond 47).

The first nationwide radio network in the country was owned and operated by the Canadian National Railway: cars were equipped with comfortable chairs and headphones for the use of passengers (Raymond 93), while a long, transcontinental chain of radio stations provided the signal. This early interplay of different means of communication seems to be symptomatic for Canada's complicated history of media use.

² A case in point would be the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), founded in 1922 as a private company but soon re-formed as a non-commercial, public entity established by a Royal Charter. Similar media strategies were adopted by other European national governments in the 1920s and 30s (Adamowski 64-67).

³ Much was written about the reasons of this difference. Ralph Engelman, in his comprehensive history of public broadcasting in the United States, lists the more egalitarian political culture and economic boom of the early 1920s as the main explanations for America's traditional inclination for commercial media (38).

Radio broadcasting in Canada was regulated by law earlier (already since 1905) than in the U.S., but the scope of government supervision over the stations was minimal: the only requirement was to obtain a license issued by the federal Department of Marine and Fisheries. The rationale behind these regulations was purely technical in nature and concerned issues of security and efficacy of communication. The content of broadcasts was not controlled by the government (Vipond 47-48).

The Aird Commission

Soon, however, it became clear that the unique cultural, political, and geographical conditions of Canada required an approach to the arrangement of electronic media that was different from American and European models. As Bruce Raymond wrote:

The Canadian broadcasting problem was not to be solved in (...) a single-minded way. Canada was not Great Britain with a relatively small area to cover and only one language to consider; nor was she the United States with a relatively large area to cover and a population to match (95).

The situation called for an original solution, tailored specifically for Canada, and so, in 1928, the national government established a Royal Commission whose task was to analyze the contemporary model of electronic media and propose possible improvements (it was not until 40 years later that a similar commission was mandated by the U.S. government; Kuś 37). Members of the Commission visited the country's stations and even travelled to the United States and Great Britain in order to study their respective media systems.

The recommendations of the Commission (commonly known as the Aird Commission, after its chairman, Sir John Aird) called for the Canadian broadcasting to be organized as a public service. The heart of the new system was supposed to be a national institution whose responsibilities would include producing and acquiring programs as well as owning and managing stations broadcasting in both English and French.⁴ According to the Commission's

⁴ Mike Gasher emphasizes the fact that the strength with which the Commission promoted the idea of a public service broadcasting institution was not a result of some outside pressure but rather a genuine belief in the project: "The submissions to the Aird Commission contain little evidence of broad public support for this option. In fact, of the 176 written and oral submissions on file with the National Archives of Canada, only 34 people said they favoured government ownership and control of radio. More interveners – 53 – favoured the private-enterprise option. Another 80 people either declared their neutrality on this issue or did not address it".

proposal, this publicly owned corporation would act as the regulatory authority for all broadcasting in Canada and eventually replace the existing private entities (Raboy 163). Funding for the new institutional structures was to be provided by increased license fees, limited advertising⁵ as well as government subsidies (Ingrassia). The main reason for this comprehensive change of media paradigm in the country was the unanimous conviction of the members of the Commission that “Canadian listeners (...) desired Canadian broadcasting” (Raymond 95). In their opinion, “at present the majority of programs heard are from sources outside of Canada. It has been emphasized to us that the continued reception of these has a tendency to mould the minds of young people in the home to ideals and opinions that are not Canadian.” (Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting 6)

The report of the Aird Commission was submitted to the national authorities in 1929. The document proved to be quite controversial however, mainly due to protests coming from private broadcasters and advertisers; it was only in 1932 that the Commission’s recommendations were finally implemented. Richard B. Bennett’s Conservative government established the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission, creating the central institution of the modern era of radio and television broadcasting in the country.

It should once again be noted that the very idea that the government should intervene in the free play of market forces in any of the media sectors was rather an exception than a norm in North America at that time. Canadian press and film industries, threatened as much as wireless broadcasting by their United States counterparts, received hardly any protection from the government in Ottawa. The rationale behind this important policy decision was offered by Prime Minister Bennett, according to whom:

(...) broadcasting was unique in its ability to facilitate nationwide communication. Whereas newspapers were local, magazines middle-class, and movies purely entertainment, radio could be used not only for entertainment but also for information and propaganda, reaching into the living rooms of all classes in all parts of the country. (Vipond 50)

Just like the railway in the 19th century, radio was seen as a strategic technology, vital for the future of nation. Foreign influence spreading over the

⁵ As Gasher puts it: “The Aird Report recommended the elimination of « direct advertising », by which it meant advertising messages which interrupt programs (...) While the Aird commissioners would have preferred no radio advertising at all, their report recommended Ottawa allow indirect advertising, « which properly handled has no very objectionable features, at the same time resulting in the collection of much revenue » (...) Indirect advertising bracketed programs with sponsors’ messages relegated to the periods preceding and following broadcasts.”

airwaves could prove to be – at least in the eyes of Canadian patriots – detrimental to the common cultural values and the sense of social unity.

This way of thinking about the possible effects of electronic media communication was not limited to Canada at that time. Governments of many countries around the world (especially in Europe) were strongly influenced by the so-called “hypodermic needle” theory, very popular in the 1920s and 30s. The “hypodermic needle” (known also as the “magic bullet”) model assumed that mass media messages impacted the audience in a very potent and uniform manner: there was basically no escape from the influence of all-powerful propaganda (Bryant, Thompson, and Finklea 37-38). This idea, constituting the core of what is called today the first period of studies on media effects (McQuail 449), was not based on systematic research but rather on simple observation of the explosion of popularity of radio technology at that time. While it was later made obsolete by future developments in the field, its impact on the creation of pioneering public media broadcasters can be only described as huge⁶.

The important difference between the original Aird plan and the solution adopted by the government under the Radio Broadcasting Act of 1932 was that the new law allowed commercial stations to remain on the air, in effect creating a dual model of public and private media operating on the same market. Such an arrangement, typical for many of today’s national media systems, was actually quite unusual in the 1930s. The U.S. model was purely commercial at that time, while the European electronic media landscapes were being rapidly and aggressively colonized by state authorities.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

The newly established institution of Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) struggled from the very beginning due to organizational issues and the lack of sufficient funding. It was unable to establish a truly nationwide network of publicly owned stations, so it entered into cooperation with private broadcasters from all around the country in order to achieve satisfactory signal coverage. In 1936, the CRBC was replaced in its many tasks by a new, more efficient public enterprise called the Canadian

⁶ In his book on the transformation of modern non-commercial broadcasters, Karol Jakubowicz recalled the justification for establishment of public media institutions, offered by European governments back in the interwar period: “Due to its unparalleled influence (...) and its capability of reaching an unlimited number of people, and its extraordinary abilities in the fields of information, propaganda, and culture, radio enjoys an exceptional position which demands a special status” (excerpt from the Belgian public radio law of 1930; qtd. in Jakubowicz 81).

Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The Aird Commission's idea of creating a "single system" of government-owned radio stations was however already defeated. Tensions between the CBC (acting in many ill-defined roles: as a competitor, regulator, and judge) and private broadcasters were to shape the landscape of Canadian electronic media for years to come (Vipond 49).

The CBC was given the responsibility of "linking together a country larger than the United States with the resources of a population scarcely larger than that of New York City" (Raymond 96). It was not a small feat, as both the adequate physical infrastructure and competent staff had to be secured in order for the whole institution to operate efficiently (many experienced specialists were already employed by commercial broadcasters). The opportunity for the first real test of the network presented itself soon: when Canada entered the military activities of World War II, radio was urgently needed to inform the public about the efforts of Canadian soldiers and inspire the society in times of peril. It can be argued that this task was fulfilled in a capable manner. As Mary Vipond puts it: "The 1940s and early 1950s were the golden age of Canadian radio, especially on the CBC. The demand for war news bolstered the CBC's news and information programming, and its audience" (49).

Meanwhile, a new commission was established in order to assess the Canadian society's cultural needs. This new entity, known as the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (or the Massey Commission, after its chairman, Vincent Massey), was created in 1949 with the assumption that "national traditions and national unity exist not only in the material sphere but in « the realm of ideas »"⁷ (Vipond 52). The Massey Commission assigned quite a lot of attention to broadcasting issues, devoting a key part of its report to mass media. While the commissioners praised the general institutional model of public radio in Canada, they criticized CBC for not exercising its regulatory duties effectively and found that "there is not much Canadian expression in Canadian commercial radio" (Raymond 98). The Massey Commission emphasized the significance of public service in media and forcibly rejected arguments presenting broadcasting as just another sector of industry. A commercial media system would – according to the report – inevitably lead to Americanization of the electronic media of Canada. The

⁷ A similar sentiment could be observed almost twenty years later in the United States, when President Lyndon B. Johnson, signing the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, said: "It announces to the world that our Nation wants more than just material wealth; our Nation wants more than a « chicken in every pot ». We in America have an appetite for excellence, too. While we work every day to produce new goods and to create new wealth, we want most of all to enrich man's spirit. That is the purpose of this act" ("Remarks of President"). "Chicken in every pot" was a reference to Herbert Hoover's slogan in the US presidential campaign of 1928.

findings of the Commission were all the more significant due to the timing of the report. Published in 1951, it became an important voice during the period of the formal introduction of television in Canada.

The television

The invention of television – the leading medium of the latter half of the 20th century – was not a result of a single genius’s work. As Albert Abramson puts it, it was “probably the first invention by committee, in the sense of resulting from the effort of hundreds of individuals widely separated in time and space, all prompted by the urge to produce a system of « seeing over the horizon »” (9). Among the first countries to establish a national TV system were Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. Those pioneering efforts were not always successful (and the development of television was halted for several years because of World War II), but in the latter part of the 1940s TV finally started to gain momentum as an innovative, exciting media technology. This was especially true in the case of the United States where the new medium spread “like a fire on the prairie” (Day 15-16). Although long-range distribution of TV signal is much more difficult than that of radio waves⁸, Canadian households near the country’s southern border were able to receive American programs. The local broadcasting infrastructure was, however, lacking: “By 1949 there were at least 3,600 television sets in Canada, but no Canadian stations” (Vipond 55).

After the Massey Commission report was published in 1951, CBC was finally given the task to introduce audio-visual broadcasting in Canada. The first bilingual French-English broadcasts were aired from Montreal (and a few days later – also from Toronto) in 1952, setting the way for the establishment of two national networks (Raboy 164). Those early years of Canadian television were essential in creating staple items in the CBC schedules – for both English and French language audiences. Shows dealing with public affairs and sports (such as the national cult classic “Hockey Night in Canada”) attracted large interest from the viewers from both groups. As it was the case with the radio, nationwide TV coverage was reached at a lower cost thanks to cooperation with external companies in creating networks of affiliate, privately-held stations. The financing mechanisms of the new medium were tweaked already in the first decade of TV broadcasting in Canada: the license

⁸ Radio broadcasting traditionally uses different wavelengths than television broadcasting. Medium and short wave audio transmissions benefit from the mechanism of the so-called ionospheric propagation in which the signal bounces back to the surface of Earth, spreading broadcasts for a much longer distance in a zigzag pattern. VHF and UHF waves used typically by TV go straight to outer space through the ionosphere without reflecting back to Earth so the effective range of television stations is much smaller (Boddy 26).

fee was eliminated from the system altogether and an annual subsidy from the Parliament became the key part of the CBC's budget.

By the late 1950s, television spread through the country, becoming the most popular pastime of Canadians. Some parts of the audience were, however, disappointed with the CBC offer, unable to compete with the vast plethora of programming options provided by American stations available to Canadian viewers in southern Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia (Vipond 56). The first comprehensive reform of the system took place in 1958, when a new institution, called the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG), was established, relieving the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation from its regulatory duties and effectively ending its clumsy dual role. The creation of BBG gave way for the introduction of commercial television: a new, private CTV network began operations in 1961. This new development profoundly changed the game; as Marc Raboy puts it: "public and private competition in television has been an important factor ever since" (164).

"Canadian Content"

From the very beginning, one of the most controversial issues concerning TV broadcasting in Canada was the amount of foreign programming carried by individual stations. Proximity to the world's largest television market and the lack of a language barrier (in case of the English-speaking parts of the country) made it possible for broadcasters to acquire attractive dramatic shows made in the United States for much less than the cost of producing them in Canada (popular American series were distributed in the so-called syndication model: "the network licence fee would pay less than the full production costs of the programme, and to recoup the deficit, the production company would hope to resell the episodes to the domestic and foreign syndication markets"; Boddy 30). For many broadcasters it was the only viable choice anyway. Eugene Hallman of the CBC observed (already in the 1960s): "Whatever we may think of the effect of American television on Canada, we should never forget that we are in no position to produce such material in volume for ourselves. Our resources are too limited in both money and skills" (123).

In order to combat the overdependence of local broadcasters on productions "made in the USA", the Canadian authorities introduced, over the years, several important measures. In 1960 already, the Board of Broadcast Governors issued new content guidelines, mandatory for all television stations (the so-called "CanCon" regulations). Under these rules, 55 per cent of all programs broadcast in a given four-week period had to be classified as "Canadian" in origin. The "Canadianness" of TV shows was however defined quite broadly: "it included programs from the Commonwealth and from French-speaking countries, as well

as « broadcasts of programs featuring special events outside Canada and of general interest to Canadians »” (Vipond 160).

The Board of Broadcast Governors was replaced in 1968 by the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC). In 1976, the CRTC assumed regulatory duties over telecommunication providers as well and its name was changed to Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (or *Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des télécommunications canadiennes* in French), keeping the same acronym.

Detailed regulations on the “Canadian content” in media broadcasts have evolved through the years, both expanding and reducing the scope of the original BBG rules. For example, specific provisions concerning the prime time shows were introduced in order to prevent TV stations from filling the overall content quotas of Canadian productions in less attractive timeslots while the averaging period was later extended. The early 2010 revision of the rules set the overall quota at 55% while the prime time limit was determined at 50% (Vipond 160). Still, it could be argued that the content regulation regime, though reasonably sound in theory, could be and had actually been abused by broadcasters (especially the commercial networks) inventing new and creative ways to bypass it. Another problem concerned the arbitrary character of the very definition of Canadian content used here, based mainly on the nationality of personnel involved in the making of a show and sometimes not associated with the “Canadian” characteristics of the output material in any significant way – it included, for example, broadcasts of the U.S. Major League Baseball’s World Series games, “even before there were any Canadian-based teams” (Vipond 160). It should also be noted that the Canadian quota system led inevitably to a situation in which broadcasters attempting to fulfil the regulatory content requirements were forced to focus on TV genres that were cheaper to produce locally (such as public affairs or reality shows). Dramatic programming tended to be still imported from the United States.

Canadian viewers themselves seem to prefer foreign programs over Canadian shows. In her 2011 monograph on Canadian media, Mary Vipond states that all the top fifteen TV broadcasts in the preceding October were produced in the United States – these were mainly hit sitcoms and serials such as “The Big Bang Theory” and “Grey’s Anatomy” as well as reality shows. All in all, foreign shows account for two thirds of viewing time in English-speaking Canada. Meanwhile, the French language seems to be still a powerful barrier against an American “TV invasion” in Quebec, with the numbers almost exactly reversed: “according to spring 2006 figures, about 68 per cent of francophone viewing was of Canadian programs and only 32 per cent « foreign »” (Vipond 59).

Due to recent changes in the electronic media landscape and a growing competition from unregulated online audio-visual channels, “CanCon” television quota system was significantly relaxed in March 2015 by the

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. The changes included eliminating the 55% daytime “CanCon” requirement for local stations altogether⁹ and uniformly determining the quotas for TV specialty channels at 35% (they ranged from 15% to 85% before the 2015 regulation). During weekday prime time hours, the former 50% quota of Canadian programming was, however, retained. Contrary to media speculations, no taxes were imposed on streaming services such as Netflix (CBC News).

Commenting on the amended regulations, the CTRC chairman Jean-Pierre Blais said: “Television quotas are an idea that is wholly anachronistic in the age of abundance and in a world of choice” (CBC News). This new development is an important modification of the previous “CanCon” strategy and perhaps a glimpse of the shape of things to come: in a diverse media market in which a viewer is only one click away from changing the channel in favour of online unregulated broadcasters, intentionally losing some of the regulatory control might be the only way of preserving the true goal of the regulation. The changes were met with strong opposition from the Canadian media industry, including Unifor – a trade union organization representing (among others) 13,000 radio and television employees.

Certain protective measures have been adopted in case of radio broadcasting as well. It was already in 1971, when the CRTC issued a set of content guidelines concerning wireless audio transmission. According to the new regulations, a fraction of all music works aired by the nation’s broadcasters had to be of Canadian origin. The exact required ratio of “Canadian” music has been modified several times, finally raising to 35% in January 1999, with some additional stipulations concerning individual timeslots (to prevent circumventing of the law’s provisions) and the language of song lyrics in case of Francophone stations (Vipond 62).

The musical content classification system employed by Canadian authorities is based on four technical criteria (widely known as the MAPL system).¹⁰ In CTRC’s words:

To qualify as Canadian content, a musical selection must generally fulfil at least two of the following conditions: M (music): the music is composed entirely by a Canadian, A (artist): the music is, or the lyrics are, performed principally by a

⁹ The CTRC took into consideration the actual operating patterns of Canadian broadcasters: “That’s a recognition that stations have sometimes been broadcasting the same program episodes many times over the course of a day, or even over years, simply to satisfy the old Cancon rule” (CBC News).

¹⁰ There are also some minor exceptions concerning, for example, instrumental pieces and archival (pre-1972) recordings.

Canadian, P (performance): the musical selection consists of a live performance that is recorded wholly in Canada, or performed wholly in Canada and broadcast live in Canada, L (lyrics): the lyrics are written entirely by a Canadian (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission).

The MAPL rules, while regularly protested by station operators (Vipond 62) and conservative think-tanks such as the Fraser Institute, are at the same time praised by the Canadian music industry: songwriter Stan Meissner, president of the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada, wrote in 2014:

I'm old enough to recall a time when the bulk of Canadian recordings on radio were merely covers of American or British songs. Local artists had to leave home to seek their fame and fortune and our airwaves were basically a mirror of the U.S., only worse. With the establishment of the Canadian Radio-television Commission (...) a few important things were declared regarding content and foreign ownership. (...) The results were nothing short of staggering. Canadian artists and bands started to gain great success through the '70s. By the '80s, things had exploded and Canada developed an incredibly vibrant music industry. (...) This built a foundation that acted as a springboard for hundreds of Canadian acts that have been able to achieve massive international success (Meissner).

This sentiment is seconded by Marcus Rogers of an indie Vancouver group Coal, who said: "Because of CanCon, Coal received the opportunity to have some exposure in Canada. Without CanCon, the broadcasters in Canada may not have played us. I don't think they play Canadian artists out of patriotism" (Tupper).

The Future

The role of public broadcasters in today's electronic media landscapes is rapidly changing. The paternalistic model, first championed by the British Broadcasting Corporation in the 1920s, cannot be maintained anymore in a world of numerous digital and online video channels, fiercely competing over the most valuable TV resource – the audience. According to Alicja Jaskiernia, there are two important factors that influence the position of public broadcasters nowadays (Jaskiernia 40-64): the digital revolution in broadcasting technology and the recent changes of media markets.

Transition to digital technology freed broadcasters from the limitations of traditional methods of signal propagation. While the often-used rationale for establishing national public media institutions assumed that radio airwaves, being a rare good, must serve the interests of the whole society, broadcasting in the era of an abundance of available channels must have inevitably led to

redefining of their mission. Media markets have also transformed significantly, due to several factors such as:

- a) internationalization and globalization (media operate more often beyond and independently of the political boundaries, a global culture of shared values and symbols, shaped by dominant and wealthy markets, is created),
- b) concentration of ownership (which leads to less significant programming choices as the same media formats are used by many broadcasters and the creation of powerful private conglomerates challenging the position of public media),
- c) the emergence of new media (revolutionizing patterns of content production and distribution as well as the social use of media),
- d) the fading of the influence of national authorities on public media (their content is shaped more and more often by market forces, without regard to the public “mission”, leading to a homogenous programming offer),
- e) changes in audience (the greater the abundance of individual TV channels is, the more fragmented the audience becomes: the ability of public media to create shared national meanings, values, and symbols is diminished).

Those new developments, while obviously being important challenges to the present model of the functioning of the CBC¹¹, could also prove to be a chance for the troubled public broadcaster. As Amit M. Schejter stated: “The information society is dawning upon all industrialized nations. It carries with it great promise, as well as an unknown social challenge” (158). In order to fulfil its social obligations, determined first in the Aird Commission report, the CBC must readjust its institutional and broadcasting model to this new situation. This of course requires adequate funding so that the public broadcaster can focus on new quality programming formats instead of simply trying to keep up with the Joneses of commercial media.

If the CBC proves to be able to make a graceful transition to the new digital world, its position as an agent of social improvement and national cultural cohesiveness may actually be strengthened. This would be a positive development for the whole Canadian media system too, since well-functioning public media institutions have been known to raise quality standards for other

¹¹ Marc Raboy wrote: “Where, in the nineteenth century, the railroad was central to the project of creating Canada, in the twentieth, broadcasting was essential to maintaining it. (In the twenty-first century, the information may result in a plethora of Canadas, or Canada-like states)” (162).

broadcasters (United Kingdom's electronic media market in which the BBC enjoys a strong position as a respected provider of high-quality content and a standard-bearer for journalistic and professional practices is often quoted as a proof that a well-funded and effectively managed public broadcaster is essential for a sound national media system). But first and foremost, it would be good for Canada. Common ideals, values, and meanings are no less important today than they were when the nation was born. In order to continue the path set by the Royal Commission in 1929, a redefinition of the CBC's core concepts and strategies will be however needed; as di Lampedusa once wrote: "if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change." (di Lampedusa 33)

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