Roundtable on Cultural Diversity in the Toronto Screen Media Production Industry

Report and Action Plan

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Executive summary

On December 9, 2011, national and international media leaders, scholars, practitioners and stakeholders met in Toronto to address the challenges and opportunities facing visible minority screen media producers in the Canadian media industry. The roundtable was convened to address the persistent economic marginalization of visible minority screen media producers in the English-language Canadian screen media industry.

Considerable gaps exist between stated policies with regards to Canadian multiculturalism and the reality of inclusion and cultural diversity representation in the production of film and mainstream television programming. Consequently, the screen entertainment available to Canadians does not represent Canada's cultural diversity. The range of economic opportunities available to visible minority producers is much narrower than the range of opportunities available to others.

The extremely low level of inclusion of visible minority producers in the film and television production industry is due to systematic barriers which are described in the report. Employment equity legislation does not provide a direct remedy to economic marginalization of visible minorities in the screen production industry because most of the economic relationships are based on contracting, not on salaried employment. Third language or "ethnic channels" which are aimed at specific ethno-cultural groups, produce very little original programming, particularly in the area of drama, including comedy and variety shows.

The objective of cultural diversity on and off screen in the broadcasting industry is not being vigorously pursued. Despite many "diversity initiatives" by broadcasters and governmental agencies, progress has been unacceptably slow. While several conferences and symposia have addressed this issue in the past 30 years, it is generally felt that little consistent or meaningful progress has been achieved in the inclusion of visible minorities in front of and behind the camera, especially among senior decision makers in the industry, and among independent producers.

The Roundtable's action plan reminds Canadians of the centrality of the diversity principle within the broader rationale and purpose of media policy:

- The diversity principle is central within the broader rationale and purpose of media policy.
    - *The social role of broadcasting policy should be shifted away from supporting cultural nationalism and a uniform Canadian identity and toward promoting understanding and dialogue in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-racial society.*

- Canadian media policy must embracing specific diversity goals.

- A key goal of media policy must be to enable the production and dissemination of programs featuring genuine cultural diversity themes and stories in popular genres such as scripted primetime drama.
- Diversity reporting must be taken seriously and employers must be held accountable for hiring decisions and on-screen representations.
- In addition to employment equity, a policy goal must be to develop equitable economic opportunities among freelance and independent producers.

- Diversity of voices must be strengthened within the policy arena.
  - There needs to be a clear push to create a conversation about cultural diversity in the Canadian media that is separate from the conversation about media ownership diversity.
  - Actions must be taken to revitalize conversations with the national labour unions and guilds in the media sector to put diversity back on the agenda and coordinate actions together.
  - Visible minority media producers need a permanent, professional umbrella organization that can provide a voice, services, and strong, ongoing evidence-based policy advocacy. They should seek benefit monies for this purpose.
  - Canadian third language television services should be required, by condition of license, to commission and broadcast original Canadian content.

- Given the upcoming appointments of two new CRTC commissioners, *a campaign should be formed to ensure racial diversity among CRTC commission appointments in 2012.*

- Public broadcasters have special responsibilities and challenges regarding diversity. *We call on the CBC to exercise leadership on the diversity issue. Our message is that we value the CBC, and we want it to be one that all Canadians recognize. While the CBC has a stated Diversity policy, there need to be specific targets and transparent implementation practices put in place.*

- We recommend the establishment of *a new category 1 diversity channel to create new opportunities for visible minority media producers.*

- We recommend that *the use of film & television tax production incentives and quotas to improve economic opportunities for minority-owned production companies be considered.*

- We believe that Canadian screen media producers must look beyond the regulated domestic media sector.
  - *We recommend that an economic roundtable be convened to explore ways to expand the expertise and networks of the culturally diverse media production community to improve their access to opportunities around the world.*

Introduction

On December 9, 2011, national and international media leaders, scholars, practitioners and stakeholders met in Toronto to address the challenges and opportunities facing visible minority screen media producers in the Canadian media industry. The roundtable was a follow-up to the CERIS-supported research project "Access to Economic Opportunities in Canadian Screen-based Media by Persons from Racialized Communities and New Immigrant Groups: the case of media producers in the GTA region" by Ryerson University's Charles Davis, Jeremy Shtern, and Paul de Silva. A keynote presentation was delivered by the British producer, media executive and cultural diversity activist Parminder Vir. The roundtable was convened to address the persistent economic marginalization of visible minority screen media producers in the English-language Canadian screen media industry.

The issue of media diversity is a critical one as Canada's demographics are undergoing radical transformation. It is estimated that visible minorities will make up 32% of Canadian society by 2031, and well over 60% of the population of the Toronto region. Research shows, however, that despite the social, economic and cultural benefits of a diverse media, racialized persons are persistently absent in Canadian media both on and off screen (see appended bibliography). Most attention has focused on the relatively infrequent on-screen roles for racial minorities in Canadian screen media; where these roles do occur, they tend to be secondary roles, often reinforcing stereotypical images (Media Action, 2011).

In contrast, this Roundtable addressed the issue of the disproportionately low participation of visible minorities in behind-the-camera labour in the independent media production sector. Research currently undertaken by Ryerson University researchers is investigating pathways to economic viability for racialized screen-based media producers in the Canadian English-language screen media industry. The core questions posed by the research and the Roundtable are: what are the creative and economic barriers to entry and employment faced by minority screen producers, and what can be done to open up opportunities for visible minorities in Canada's English-language screen production industry? Our ultimate goal is to hasten the achievement of equitable representation of visible minorities in the Canadian independent media production sector.

Racial and cultural diversity in the media is important for political, civic, and economic reasons. Canadian media represents a growing and powerful economic and cultural sector of the economy, but the lack of diversity in this sector undermines its integrity. On-screen representation plays a part in

shaping the aspirations of youth and newcomers, and contributes to social cohesion. Yet even in our publicly-supported and publicly-mandated broadcast industry, minority media professionals face a host of unique structural and cultural obstacles that affect the economic viability of their endeavors, and ultimately the stories and images that are seen on Canadian screens.

A key issue that arose quickly at the Roundtable was the recognition that previous advocacy work on diversity has done little to improve the economic opportunities for minority groups in the media production industry. Many participants reported feeling frustrated at the lack of progress. The absence of progress and resulting frustration among racialized persons in the Canadian screen media industry has led to the dispersal and fragmentation of efforts that weakens advocacy voices. However, the participants demonstrated passion and resolve in working together to re-ignite the dialogue. They identified several common areas of opportunities for further action in areas such as media policy, advocacy, and international business development. We believe gatherings like this one are critical to mobilizing action on the issues of media diversity and building momentum toward creating lasting change.

While the question of diversity in Canadian media is undoubtedly complex, reforms are needed in order to achieve social justice in the workplace,

justify the spending of public dollars on production and broadcast licensing, create a globally competitive industry, accurately reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary Canada, and fulfill the legislative mandates contained in the Broadcast Act, the Multiculturalism Act, the Employment Equity Act, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Roundtable Structure & Overview

The Roundtable was designed as a high-level, solutions-oriented workshop that would be part of an ongoing dialogue on diversity in media. Participants and stakeholders from the film and television industry were invited to come together for an intensive and intimate day of high-level speakers, dialogue and small group deliberations. Participants represented a cross-section of film and television industry stakeholders, including producers, government regulators, training institutions, broadcasters, scholars, researchers, and non-governmental advocacy organizations working in media diversity. Approximately sixty participants attended the full day session. It was hoped that the roundtable would provide an environment in which we could begin the new conversations that can move us forward.

The first half of the day centred around a keynote dialogue and expert presentations on the latest research on diversity in Canadian media. The afternoon was dedicated to the development of an action plan and a slate of recommendations. In small, facilitated break-out sessions, participants shared their personal and professional experiences and contributed ideas and recommendations for future actions. They were asked specifically to identify 1) what challenges they faced as racialized producers or in their businesses, and 2) what are the opportunities for increasing economic opportunities and access to media for visible minority producers?

The Roundtable was convened under the "Chatham House Rule" which states, in part, that "participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed." Accordingly, throughout this report we do not attribute comments or ideas to any individual, unless expressly so authorized.

Keynote Talk: Parminder Vir

We were delighted to have Britain's Parminder Vir, O.B.E., as a special guest and keynote speaker at the Roundtable. Parminder was awarded the Order of the British Empire for her contributions in developing important initiatives in the area of diversity broadcasting. As a filmmaker of award winning documentary and drama productions, executive producer, and broadcast executive, she broke new ground in British broadcasting and has been a tireless advocate for diversity and inclusion in British society for over thirty years.

She was a founder of the Cultural Diversity Network (CDN) which has played a vital role in increasing opportunities for racialized minorities in screen based media in the U.K. She currently sits on several boards connected with the film and television industry in Britain and is developing new business opportunities for film producers from emerging markets thorough her company PVL Media, which facilitates companies and institutions in Media, Creative Industries and Education Sector**s** in doing business with the Emerging Markets (Africa, Asia, Latin America and Middle East), and in assisting them in developing their international business initiatives.

Parminder's perspectives and experiences in the British film and television industry, her passion for telling stories on screen and for social justice issues involving the inclusion of racialized minorities in this arena, as well as her recent business development ventures in the global marketplace, provided an extremely stimulating beginning to the day's discussions. Her comments and reflections during the workshops and

Plenary session and in subsequent discussions with the Roundtable organizers, provided us with invaluable insights and recommendations for a path forward in addressing the issue of equitable representation of racialized minorities in front of behind the camera in Canada.

System Failure: a Homogenous Industry

Culturally diverse Canadians are very much under-represented in the media industry, especially in the leadership and gatekeeper positions. The study *DiverseCity Counts 3: a Snapshot of Diversity in the Greater Toronto Area* by Ryerson's Diversity Institute reviewed visible minority representation among media decision makers in the GTA and found that only 4.8% of senior executive positions were held by visible minorities. Seventy percent of the media companies located in the GTA have *no* visible minorities among their top executives. Five out of seven management boards had no visible minority representation. Over eighty percent of the executive groups studied had *no* visible minorities. Representation in senior leadership (3.6%) and on media boards (6%) is extremely low.

This low degree of inclusion of visible minorities in the Canadian media industry also persists in other key occupations; for example, only about 4% of screenwriters are visible minorities (Davis et al., 2012). We also note the poor representation of visible minorities on the key media regulatory agency, the Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), which conspicuously lacks adequate representation from visible minorities. Overall, the Canadian media industries are still dominated by white men.

A significant obstacle to addressing questions of diversity lies in the fact that many persons in the industry believe that success in screen media production careers is determined solely by individual effort and merit, not by systemic factors, suggesting that while Hollywood and other places may be affected by prejudice and discrimination, Canadian society and the Canadian screen industry is not. Yet many also acknowledge that discrimination is rampant in screen industries due to the pigeonholing and stereotyping of creative talent, and the paucity of opportunities to represent diversity on Canadian film and television screens. In a recent study of Canadian English-language screenwriters (Davis et al., 2012), screenwriters were asked to consider the issue of race and racial discrimination in their careers as writers. Many respondents expressed a belief that writers are selected according to their sociodemographic characteristics, and that this constitutes discrimination. Overall, 38% of the respondents believed they had been discriminated

against because of gender, age, sexuality, race/ethnicity, disability, or some combination of attributes.

The lived experiences of diverse producers and several empirical studies show us that the barriers faced by racial and cultural minorities are very real. The independent media workforce is primarily based on networks among freelancers and small firms, and decreasingly on salaried employment. Therefore employment equity remedies do not directly affect this sector. The marketplace for opportunities is as much social as it is economic. Everyone in the independent production sector and in the specialized creative occupations (directors, screenwriters, etc.) knows that networking and 'who you know' are critical to obtaining work opportunities, but they also have to maintain the narrative that reputation is entirely based on talent. Producers and specialized creative workers in this sector face enormous pressures to see their careers in purely meritocratic terms and to not 'make excuses' when things do not go as hoped. Visible minority producers face the double bind of having to confront systemic barriers and then, potentially being ostracized if they call attention to them. The resulting lack of a dialogue about these issues contributes to sense that that racial barriers simply don't exist in Canadian media industries.

From the regulatory perspective, the CRTC responds to advocacy from Canada's media stakeholders. Absent such pressure, the CRTC rarely intervenes. The current regulatory framework regarding cultural diversity centres on ill-defined requirements for employment and on-screen diversity reporting among broadcasters, with practically no accountability and few remedial measures aimed at compliance. The CRTC is not seen to behave proactively in the diversity issue area, this increases tensions.

While racialized and culturally diverse media professionals have created several fora and professional organizations, they do not enjoy the same political visibility as other marginalized groups in the diversity issue area, notably women. In other words, culturally diverse media producers do not constitute an organized stakeholder group in the Canadian media system. Given that the English language screen-media production industry is a relatively small world, in which individuals thrive or fail based largely on their reputations and networks of contacts, the reticence of individual visible minority media professionals to organize, mobilize and rock the boat through lobbying and activism is understandable, especially for those who are enjoying success under current conditions.

The denial of structural and cultural barriers is a critical problem for diversity advocacy work. If the issue is difficult to talk about outside of the diversity community, then finding solutions becomes nearly impossible. While the

marginalization of visible minorities in the screen production industry is in and of itself deeply troubling given its implications for Canadian society, we should not underestimate the discouraging message it sends to the visible minority communities specifically. Even though visible minorities are increasingly entering the screen media production industry, just as many leave again when they see a lack of opportunity for themselves. This is partly because they do not see themselves reflected through role models in the industry.

The low level of diversity in Canadian screen media comes after decades of advocacy on the issue. The glacial pace of change has produced an environment of mistrust of mainstream media and specifically of media leadership and industry privilege. Roundtable participants were generally frustrated at the lack of diversity among gatekeepers and were often pessimistic that the desire to change was sincerely felt by the mainstream media. Many felt that diversity had been used by media leaders as a 'flavour of the week' issue, or used as a career stepping stone. Some studies have found that executives are often aware of diversity issues, but that this awareness doesn't result in meaningful action. Experts have addressed the bias for people to want to work with people like themselves. In large companies this translates into a kind of institutional cloning where white male leaders tend towards developing talent and

succession pipelines that are filled with talent much like themselves - white and male. In other words, the Canadian media industry has become a system that is better at mirroring itself than the communities and audiences it serves. As a result, Canadian media organizations are poorly placed to capture and develop the best talent and creative content to compete globally and nationally for audiences.

While there is a long way to go, there have been some changes for the better in recent years. Some participants have noticed a decrease in institutional racism over the past decades, and see better opportunities in general for racialized media producers. However, a glass ceiling definitely is perceived to exist at the most senior levels of the industry. At executive levels decisions are made about content, air time, and creative priorities. Some participants called for more research into the racialized division of labour in the media industry to see whether culturally diverse workers are being funnelled into specific roles, and away from content determining positions. Within the independent film and television production sector, minority-owned content producers face a daunting challenge in achieving economic viability due to the problems of pigeonholing, few opportunities to produce Canadian drama, and even fewer opportunities to produce Canadian drama with the urban or youth orientation that would be most conducive to including racialized minorities on and behind the screen as

part of normal operations. While third-language ethnic channels serve a useful purpose, their production of original content is minimal. These channels mainly import cultural content from elsewhere. They provide few opportunities for ethnic media producers to earn income from original content production or develop capabilities that will permit competition in mainstream film or television.

Networks of Exclusion

One of the major areas of consensus among the breakout groups was that the media production system as it exists now is not working as intended for diverse artists and content producers. They were frustrated at hearing the common excuse that visible minority media production talent is hard to find. They invariably mentioned feeling bogged down by the processes of the system, unable to access its gatekeepers, finding it nearly impossible to build a sustainable career. As mentioned earlier, economic opportunities in the media production industry are embedded in social networks. Networks assist some people in accessing media gatekeepers and help them get their stories told, while excluding others. Over time, economic advantage accumulates for those who enjoy more access than others. Understanding how these racialized networks operate in Canadian media to

influence how the industry selects which stories end up on screen is critical to illuminating a key barrier for cultural minorities.

Networks operate in complex ways within and between visible minority communities as well. Culturally diverse filmmakers are themselves diverse, and they belong to multiple networks within networks, particularly where diverse communities have set up their own media outlets outside of the mainstream. Aboriginal communities in remote locations find it more difficult to network with mainstream media, but may have robust local networks of creators and producers. Representatives from mainstream media commented that they felt excluded from racially diverse networks and found it challenging to locate diverse talent. Finding ways to connect these two networks may be a point for future dialogue.

The media production system is set up to reward opportunities based on past work and proven success, and is reluctant to take risks on new talent. A vicious cycle is born, in which few opportunities exist for visible minority producers and creative workers, which in turn makes it harder for them to break in and find economic opportunities. A visible minority actor for example may find it more difficult to obtain the needed union accreditation because there are fewer roles and less screen time available. Visible minority writers, directors or producers may find it hard to

get their content green-lit because they are steered into making 'diverse' content rather than mainstream stories. Many participants called for gatekeepers and funding bodies to examine their current systems and find ways to increase the opportunities for diverse producers and creative workers.

The Economics of Diversity

The Business Case

In Canada we are accustomed to hearing moral and social justice rationales for the importance of a diverse media. While those arguments are still as valid as ever, it is becoming increasingly common to hear about the business case for diversity. There are now several case studies of global media institutions that have been able to increase audience share, employee loyalty and advertising revenue by taking diversity seriously and incorporating broad based company-wide strategies. Participants heard specifically about Carlton television in the UK, which was missing out on ethnic audiences. Because its programming was not relevant, cultural communities turned to channels based in 'home countries' broadcast via satellite networks. Carlton was able to improve audience share by recruiting and reaching out to ethnic producers and creating relevant programming. Closer

to home, a report by the Ryerson Diversity Institute highlights the case of CBC Radio's "Metro Morning" show that was able to reach the top of the broadcast ratings for the first time by incorporating more diverse stories and presenters. Research is now providing us with a growing body of evidence that diversity in the workplace is very good for the bottom line.

Diversity is one of the drivers of creative and product innovation in the creative industries. The business case for diversity in Canadian media contends that that diversity in the production sector and in all levels of occupations results in more diverse content that will resonate more strongly with Canadian audiences and contribute to the growth of domestic market share for programming. Culturally diverse content is also a way for Canadian producers to open the doors to international markets, and increase the global competitiveness of the industry. This

could not be truer in a sector where consumers have more choices than ever regarding platforms and content. The more choices audiences have, the more a media product must be relevant to get their attention.

"Build businesses, not lifestyles."

Inspired by an economic approach to diversity, there were calls among participants for the dialogue to focus explicitly on how to develop economic opportunities for racialized minorities in the media industry. This was one of the major themes of Parminder Vir's keynote talk. Ms. Vir strongly encouraged her Canadian colleagues to prioritize economic goals of sustainability, profitability and demand creation over more intrinsic artistic and creative objectives. "Build businesses, not lifestyles", she put it succinctly.

Proposals were made for a future roundtable on economic opportunities for visible minorities in the Canadian screen industry, and for organized skills development initiatives aimed at helping diverse producers take advantage of global markets. A significant area of economic opportunity for culturally diverse screen content producers was seen to be emerging markets outside of Canada. The global media market is no longer entirely dominated by North America and Europe. Enormous economic and creative opportunities exist in emerging film markets in China, India and Africa for example. Nollywood

in Nigeria is the world's third largest film production industry. Many African media sectors are experiencing double digit growth. A strong case was made in the discussions around Ms. Vir's proposal that the focus today should be on empowering visible minority individuals and entrepreneurs to expand internationally by helping them to develop the business and creative skillsets required for success in emerging markets.

Ms. Vir suggested that visible minority producers should look to circumvent the glass ceiling in the media industry by pitching projects and business opportunities to visible minority business leaders and entrepreneurs in other sectors. Information technology, banking and engineering for example have all emerged as far more open to minorities in gatekeeping roles. Experience from the UK, India and elsewhere was cited to make the point that such wealthy, well-connected minority individuals can function as both investors in and powerful champions for minority-led media ventures.

Obstacles: Content and Leadership

While the business case for diversity in the screen media is gaining ground, critical obstacles still remain. Many participants felt that the mainstream media are not doing an adequate job of reflecting Canada as a contemporary

and diverse society. They questioned the relevance of mainstream media and 'Canadian content' to culturally and racially diverse communities. The long history of lack of progress may mean that mainstream media outlets need to work harder to engage and 'win back' visible minority content producers, who wonder if their professional and creative efforts are better spent elsewhere.

Part of the solution for mainstream media to engage culturally diverse audiences, producers, and creators is to encourage the production of content that moves beyond stereotypes of various Canadian cultural communities. Diversity in media shapes public perceptions of the norms of citizenship, leadership, authority, and social belonging, so accurate media representation is a key to achieving the anticipated business and cultural benefits. Representations of culturally diverse Canadians are often shallow, take up less screen time, and fall into easy stereotypes (Fleras, 2011). Content and casting have to move beyond easy and simplistic representations (black criminal, Asian shopkeeper) and a focus on 'counting heads' to creating content that is relevant and compelling. To do this, businesses need to accurately understand cultural diversity. Participants at the roundtable expressed frustration with cultural communities being seen as one homogenous 'brown' group, pointing instead to the rich diversity within and between different ethnic groups. For example, the

Canadian aboriginal community is comprised of hundreds of culturally distinct nations. The histories and experiences between black, Asian, Latino and other groups are also equally varied. Research shows that in the media workplace, barriers vary between ethnic groups based on the differences between stereotypes, cultures, and the group's social status in society. Participants recommended seeing diversity as an inclusive and diverse continuum, where the variations within and between ethnic groups are acknowledged, but that diversity also be understood as a way to connect and create opportunities among cultural groups, racial groups, as well as between genders, sexualities, language and ability communities.

"I'm told over and over again that I'm disadvantaged. They tell me that what I do only applies to brown people. I want to be shot out of the same cannon as all other artists."

Many in the group were also mindful of the potential for unintended consequences that can arise from self-identifying with a cultural group, or by encouraging the issue of diversity. While visible minority content producers hunger for a less homogenous, more inclusive approach to cultural diversity, they do not wish to be solely defined in terms of cultural affiliation or race. They see their diverse backgrounds as an asset - not an excuse - and simply want

the same chance to compete alongside all other producers and creative workers.

"I want to see more people like me at the table."

The labour force is the other side of the coin when it comes to creating relevant Canadian screen-content.   While the number of visible minority workers in media is low overall, the representation worsens the higher the position. Participants broadly called for more economic opportunities for culturally diverse creators, and expressed the need to work towards greater diversity in senior leadership and gatekeeping positions. Studies have linked diversity on the creative team with increased diversity on screen. Diverse senior leaders provide critical role models that help build the talent pipeline and helps attract and retain the best talent. Suggestions included advocacy work, encouraging diversity audits at media companies, and several policy initiatives that will be discussed below.

Advocacy & Policy

Moving from dialogue to action

"we talk and we talk...and keep hitting our heads against the brick wall."

There was a shared concern among participants that diversity advocacy lacked a sustained and coordinated platform, and that dialogue on diversity seemed to only produce more dialogue rather than actions or results. The diversity advocacy community also appears to have fragmented into many smaller organizations and individuals whose efforts are collectively uncoordinated. This presents the community with one of its most significant challenges.

There are several reasons for the lack of sustained and coordinated efforts on increasing diversity. To begin with, the distinct lack of real progress creates enormous frustration and burnout among advocates who eventually give up and move on to other things. The instability of a media career is another factor that undermines political actions. Advocacy work is costly and labour-intensive, particularly when it comes to policy advocacy regarding regulators or preparing interventions to the CRTC. High costs, complex processes, and a lack of progress take advocates out of

the game. Several participants mentioned that they felt there was a political cost to publicly advocating for diversity and that current governments were unsympathetic to diversity issues. They feared that the current environment meant that speaking up could jeopardize their funding and put their jobs at risk.

Despite these risks, there was a strong desire among participants to create a long-term strategy that would build on the legacy of previous diversity efforts. There were many conversations and suggestions relating to the form a unified movement could take so that it could ally with agencies around the globe, and focus on significant actions and policy interventions. No existing organization appeared able to take on this mantle. One suggestion was to form a new group inspired by the UK's renowned Cultural Diversity Network (CDN). In 2000 the CDN was established to advocate in favour of racial diversity in media. It was formed at a moment when minority media producers in the UK were frustrated because they felt they lacked equal access to mainstream media outlets. The CDN was formed with the express support of all major media broadcasters who signed on to effect a series of practical goals. Today the CDN has become the Creative Diversity Network and is now an institution that promotes an expanded definition of diversity that

encompasses race, gender, sexuality and ability. Canada has never had such a network and there was some discussion about whether a similar initiative could work here. On this point there was not an immediate consensus. Some felt that the time for institutions was in the past, preferring instead to leave aside the domestic media market and focus on accessing markets outside of Canada. Others found value in forming an organization that could specifically address concerns in Canada and speak to the mainstream media and the Canadian audience.

Policy Challenges & Opportunities

There is a regulated and unregulated media sector in Canada – and since the roundtable focused primarily on the regulated sector, there was a healthy discussion about the role media policy and sector regulation plays in media diversity. In Canada the existence of the independent sector is due specifically to a policy measures that require certain broadcast distribution units to outsource production of Canadian media content, and also require broadcasters to reserve air time for Canadian media content. Thanks to these policy measures, Canada has a few hundred smaller to medium sized independent media production companies and many more micro-businesses. These companies are the core of the Canadian content industry, and they rely on the protected market provided by government regulation.

The backbone of Canadian television regulation is the Broadcasting Act. In it there are specific provisions that mandate the media to reflect the multiracial make up of Canada. It is one of the basic contentions of the group that the mandate contained in the Canadian Broadcasting Act for our broadcasting system to reflect the multiracial nature of Canadian society is not being met. In previous years the CRTC created a policy to document diversity on screen and required broadcasters to file annual diversity reports that would outline their results on employment and on-screen representation. CRTC found very low representation of visible minorities in broadcaster employment and on screen, in particular with aboriginal peoples. Out of these efforts a task force was formed and a set of best practices was produced. However, since the closing of the CAB a few years ago, the annual industry-wide diversity audits are no longer prepared. While external monitoring of diversity practices can take place via the reports that broadcasters file with the CRTC, our examination of these reports shows the absence of clearly established definitions of what activities contribute meaningfully to diversity, and lack of clarity regarding the thresholds that must be met in order to ensure that various organizations have lived up to their diversity requirements. Not surprisingly in this environment,

monitoring and enforcement of diversity standards are largely ad hoc, and there is little evidence of effective contributions to solutions.

The year 2012 presents the media diversity community with several critical opportunities. It has been 5 years since the 2007 CRTC proceeding on "Diversity of Voices" and it seems likely that the CRTC will be holding a planned follow-up review of their cultural diversity policy soon. It is an ideal time to make submissions and advocate for actions from the CRTC. Experts on the CRTC recommended solution focused, evidence based advocacy and research be presented to the tribunal. They also noted that many of the current commissioners are new to the question of diversity, and will have to be educated. There were some suggestions that perhaps the CRTC could be proactive on this front and consult with the industry so that commissioners are informed going into the tribunal. The other significant opportunity is that there will be two appointments in 2012 for new commissioners. This is an opportunity to improve the representativeness of the CRTC by appointing visible members from visible minority communities.

An important area for policy investigation concerns equity of non-employment economic opportunities for visible minority media producers. As most of the jobs in the independent production sector are contract based, equity employment regulations do not apply to them. Some participant suggested the idea of 'set-asides' or quotas that favour minority-owned media companies, or tying current tax incentives to diversity representation.

Recommendations & Action Plan

Roundtable participants drafted an agenda, containing recommendations and several specific actions.

On recalling the centrality of the diversity principle within the broader rationale and purpose of media policy:

- The Canadian mainstream media are not doing enough to leverage our unique and diverse pool of storytellers. Tapping into diverse stories and communities will speak more broadly to Canadians and increase the global competitiveness of the industry as a whole. The social role of broadcasting policy should be shifted away from supporting cultural nationalism and a uniform Canadian identity and toward promoting understanding and dialogue in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-racial society. This would include explicit support for exploration of oft-neglected divisive themes (stories about structural racism and marginalization, barriers to assimilation, the complex nature of hybrid identities etc.) alongside themes of unity.

On the diversity goals of media policy:

A key goal of media diversity policy should be to enable the production and dissemination of programs featuring genuine cultural diversity themes and stories in popular genres such as scripted primetime drama.

- The requirements on mainstream Canadian broadcasters regarding employment equity and on-screen representation must be clearly defined and enforced. Diversity reporting must be taken seriously and employers must be held accountable for hiring decisions and on-screen representations. Mechanisms to ensure compliance in programming as well as creative, staffing and economic decision-making must be made stronger, more explicit and be subject to real enforcement.

- In addition to employment equity, a policy goal must be to develop equitable representation among freelance and independent producers. A more diverse leadership and workforce in Canada's media industries, including in the largely freelance independent production sector, must be seen as a requirement in creating a media system that reflects contemporary Canada.

On the need to strengthen the diversity of voices within the policy arena:

- Actions must be taken to revitalize conversations with the national labour unions and guilds in the media sector to put diversity back on the agenda and coordinate actions together.

- The diversity advocacy community has become fragmented. Lessons can be learned from efforts being made in other sectors and in ethnic media, and alliances should be formed to strengthen media advocacy efforts regarding cultural diversity.

- Visible minority media producers need a permanent, professional umbrella organization that can provide a voice, services, and strong, ongoing evidence-based policy advocacy. We recommend that they seek benefits monies for this purpose.

- CRTC diversity hearings are to take place in 2012. We emphasize that ownership concentration is not the only diversity issue. We encourage all those who care about diversity on and off-screen in media to get make their voices heard. There needs to be a clear push to create a conversation about cultural diversity in the Canadian media that is separate from the conversation about media ownership diversity. This did not happen in 2007.

On the diversity responsibilities of third-language broadcasters:

- Canadian third language television services should be required, by condition of license, to commission and broadcast original Canadian content, thereby contributing to telling the stories of Canadians cultural communities and developing the capacity of those communities to tell their stories.

On cultural diversity in the CRTC:

- Given the upcoming appointments of two new CRTC commissioners, a campaign should be formed to ensure racial diversity among CRTC commission appointments in 2012.

On the special responsibilities and challenges of public broadcasters:

- CBC license renewal hearings are scheduled for 2012. We recommend that a campaign be formed calling on the CBC to exercise leadership on the diversity issue. Our message is that we value the CBC, and we want it to be one that all Canadians recognize. While the CBC has a stated Diversity policy, there need to be specific targets and transparent implementation practices put in place.

On specific policy measures to improve diversity in Canadian English-language screen media:

- Timing appears to be ideal for a group to apply for a CRTC license for a new category 1 diversity channel to create new opportunities for visible minority media producers. A CRTC license for a Category A channel with a specific mandate for broadcasting original prime time Canadian dramatic programming created by visible minority media producers should be given serious consideration by the CRTC and industry stakeholders.

- The use of film & television tax production incentives to improve economic opportunities for minority-owned production companies should be considered. For example, consider a system of quotas for sourcing media content from minority-owned production firms.

On looking beyond the regulated domestic media sector:

- Canadian screen media producers have become too dependent on the regulated sectors of the media industry. Culturally diverse producers are well positioned to take advantage and leverage opportunities in emerging markets outside of Canada. We recommend an economic roundtable be convened to explore ways to expand the expertise and networks of the culturally diverse media production community to improve their access to opportunities around the world.

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