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Locking Out the Mother Corp: Nationalism and Popular Imaginings of Public Service Broadcasting in the Print News Media

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Abstract: Early promoters of public service broadcasting (PSB) in Canada emphasized its democratic and nationalist merit. Of these twin pillars, only nationalism appears to still be standing. In this article, the author surveys the vision of PSB that emerged in the national English language print media during the 2005 CBC/Radio Canada lockout and suggests that our peculiar brand of multicultural nationalism (which underestimates the divisions within civil society) has subsumed democratic values. Yet, she argues democratic principles particularly those of access, participation, and publicness are critically important to defending the relevance of PSB in the current environment of seemingly endless media choices and borderless technology.

Résumé : Les premiers promoteurs de la radiotélédiffusion de service public au Canada mettaient l'accent sur ses mérites démocratique et nationaliste. Aujourd'hui, de ces deux piliers, il semble que le mérite nationaliste soit le seul qui tienne bon. Dans cet article, l'auteur analyse la vision de la radiotélédiffusion de service public que l'on retrouve dans la presse écrite nationale de langue anglaise au cours du lock out de CBC/Radio Canada en 2005 et elle suggère que notre type spécifique de nationalisme multiculturel (qui sous estime les divisions de la société civile) a englobé les valeurs démocratiques. Toutefois, l'auteur affirme que ces principes démocratiques en particulier ceux d'accessibilité, de participation et de valeurs publiques sont extrêmement importants lorsqu'il s'agit de défendre la pertinence de la radiotélédiffusion de service public dans le contexte actuel de soi disant choix infinis de médias et de technologies sans frontières.

Keywords: Broadcasting (public); Discourse analysis; Multiculturalism

In the summer of 2005, management at CBC/Radio-Canada locked out 5,500 employees—virtually everyone involved in producing, airing, and scheduling its

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TV and radio shows outside of Québec and Moncton, New Brunswick. The lock-out, which began August 15 and ended seven weeks and one day later on October 3, stemmed from a demand for greater flexibility in hiring contract workers. Although it was an archetypal labour dispute of late capitalism—resolved when the Canadian Media Guild agreed to a 9.5% cap on management’s definition of contract work in return for mechanisms to convert long-serving contract workers into full-time staff—the public discourse surrounding it quickly waded into matters of public policy. On August 22, a *Globe and Mail* editorial proposed that the lockout provides “a good opportunity to start a conversation . . . that could lead to a vision of a better public network.”

And converse we did. At water coolers, on the Web, in Parliament, and in the news media, people mulled over the mandate and rationale for both CBC/Radio-Canada and public-service broadcasting (PSB) as a whole. Not only did the lock-out generate an unusually high level of press (especially for a labour dispute), it also drew out the pundits in significant numbers, as evidenced by the ratio of column to news stories, particularly in the *Globe and Mail*. That conversation, of course, didn’t begin or end with the lockout: It has its roots in the earliest days of Canadian broadcasting and continues through to the present, in the heritage minister’s recent call for a review of CBC’s mandate, William Neville’s June 2006 *Public Policy Forum* report “Whither the CBC?” as well as in editorials trouncing CBC management’s decision to kick Peter Mansbridge and *The National* back one hour last summer to accommodate a U.S. knockoff of *American Idol*. Yet the “vision of a better public network” that emerges among all the brouhaha is arguably one-sided: of the twin pillars upon which support for PSB has traditionally rested in this country—democracy and nationalism—only the latter appears to still be standing. Moreover, that nationalist discourse, I suggest, relies upon and promotes a narrow conception of the public sphere. I draw upon the work of political theorists Himani Bannerji and Nandita Sharma to show how, framed within a long-standing tradition of multiculturalism, the nationalist vision of PSB on offer ultimately contributes to the depoliticization of the structural divisions within Canadian society. As a result, rather than challenging hegemonic ideas and practices as a media strong in democratic values might, PSB ends up reproducing them.

In this article I survey and assess that discourse as it was carried out in the pages of Canada’s English-speaking national print news media during the lock-out and its immediate aftermath, paying special attention to the rationale (nationalist and/or democratic) offered in support of PSB. My interest in the popular discourse surrounding what is arguably Canada’s most significant cultural institution stems from a Gramscian perspective that identifies civil society as the site in which the ideas of the dominant classes are discussed, debated, and, for the most part, reproduced. Clearly public-policy discourse as it is articulated within state institutions, governance practices, and scholarly research is important to understanding the reproduction of hegemonic ideas and values as well as is the neo-liberal context of fiscal retrenchment of the welfare state more generally. Yet the points of intersection between state and civil society discourse, though worthy of further research, are beyond the scope of this article.

Rather, my focus is on the media and its particular representation of civil society discourse. Since the 1950s, as Patrick Wilcken argues in his study of intellectuals and the Gulf War, the mass media has made “their presence felt as *the* institution of public criticism” (to the extent that public intellectuals now depend upon—rather than make use of—the media to generalize their views, 1995, p. 47). Although efforts to trace the directional “flow of influence” among mass media, public opinion, and public policy have netted inconclusive results, there is little doubt that the media comprise a crucial chink in the chain (Seaver, 1997). Moreover, as recent research into health policy and public opinion demonstrates, the print news media are authoritative and influential players in the transmission of ideas and criticism (Brown & Walsh-Childers, 1994; Thorson, 2006). Thus, while my focus on the CBC lockout coverage in specific newspapers and news-magazines trains an admittedly narrow lens onto the popular discourse around PSB, these sources are nonetheless well deserving of scrutiny.

Insofar as the voices of the intellectual (and socio-economic) elite are over-represented in their pages, Canada’s national print media are, of course, more likely to affirm than challenge hegemonic ideas. Still, the notion of a monolithic media industry that straightforwardly reproduces the ruling ideas of the day is now widely recognized for the caricature it is. Media in late capitalist liberal democracies, while deeply implicated in upholding the prevailing set of power relations, nonetheless offer a forum through which dominant ideas can be—and regularly are—challenged (McChesney, 2000). They can, therefore, be legitimately studied as indicative of a broader popular discourse—an arena in which we may reasonably expect to locate the emergence of new ideas, even if they are often crowded out by the reassertion of convention.

One important idea to emerge in the press in recent years, and the idea that ends up shaping much of the discourse around PSB during the lockout, is that the cultural necessity for PSB in Canada has passed. The country no longer requires a national media outlet like the CBC to promote Canadian unity, in part because technological advances represented by the Internet and satellite TV and radio have drastically reduced the obstacles to communicating with one another across vast spaces. I’m interested in *the response to that argument* from those who believe PSB still has some culturally relevant role to play. And the results of my survey suggest that the popular discourse supportive of PSB has shifted decisively over the long term. Although the vision of PSB as represented by the English-Canadian print news media today is tightly identified with nationalist sentiments, the democratic mission of public broadcasting appears to be only vaguely understood or valued.¹ Meanwhile, the rare challenges to a nationalist viewpoint in the print news media I reviewed issued only from those arguing to dismantle the service.

I discuss below the possibility that these results reflect the tendency for our peculiarly multicultural brand of nationalism to subsume and/or obfuscate the democratic principle of accessibility. Whatever the explanation, however, the overwhelming association of PSB with nationalism leaves little room to explore *the tension between democratic and nationalist values* noted by certain political and media theorists. Rather, PSB is framed entirely within a nationalist discourse

invoking a highly restrictive notion of the public sphere that systematically papers over deeper structural divisions within Canadian society, while its full democratic potential—that is, its power to *challenge* rather than reproduce hegemonic ideas—is missing from the public discourse. Although this state of affairs may well be indicative of the failure of the print news media to pick up on the substantial scholarly and public-policy literature on the democratic mission of PSB, it also arguably reflects the failure of that literature to penetrate the popular discourse, at the level of the media and beyond. Indeed, the gap between official policy discourse and what gets argued in the print media suggests that strong democratic values of access, participation, and publicness (all of which I expand upon below) have (or are deemed to have) little resonance among the reading public. The proof? The cultural and socio-economic elite whose voices tend to dominate in the print news media do not invoke them even for rhetorical purposes. Yet, unfortunately, it is precisely such democratic values that could restore the relevance of PSB in a digital age that purports to satisfy all media needs and desires through the market.

Because it is central to my analysis of press coverage of the CBC/Radio-Canada lockout, I first elaborate on the tensions between nationalism and democracy, and review the principles underlying the democratic model of PSB before turning to the results of the survey.

Nationalism and the democratic potential of PSB

Since the Trudeau era, Canadian nationalism has adopted a specifically anti-racist progressive veneer that tends to obscure the problems it poses for democracy. The policy of official multiculturalism is popularly understood as a means of acknowledging, expressing, and celebrating cultural difference (a move away from the dominant WASP culture grounded in Canada's origins as a White settler society). But as Himani Bannerji argues in her book *The Dark Side of the Nation* (2000), whatever its democratic appeal, official multiculturalism has, in fact, helped push aside real political and economic differences on the one hand, while reproducing an essentialized (and thus racist) understanding of cultural difference on the other. Introduced in a period of increased immigration from non-European countries and heightened Québécois and First Nations militancy, the policy, she argues, was an effective strategy for diffusing tensions insofar as it reduced political and economic demands to matters of cultural diversity. But even as “a discourse of nation, community and diversity began to be cobbled together” in the 1980s, writes Bannerji (2000, p. 44), White settler society values remained firmly entrenched in the “national imaginary of ‘Canada’ ” (2000, p. 10). Because official multiculturalism “rests on posing ‘Canadian culture’ against ‘multicultures,’ an element of whiteness quietly enters into cultural definitions, marking the difference between a core cultural group and other groups who are represented as cultural fragments” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 10).²

While Bannerji focuses on the racism experienced by immigrants (those with landed or permanent resident status), Nandita Sharma points out that the majority of people arriving in Canada from other countries in the past quarter century have not come as immigrants but as “foreign migrant workers” (2006, p. 18).

The contours of this differential citizenship status are set by guest worker and immigration legislation and constitute a form of legal discrimination. Underpinning and legitimizing this discrimination is a nationalist ideology and sentiment based on the privileged association of a common set of traditions with a defined geographical space (e.g., nation-state). Sharma argues that cultural integrity—rather than racial purity—is the goal of nationalism in the liberal democracies of late capitalism.³ Even “a ‘respect for diversity,’ ” she adds, is intended “to secure the proper functioning of society as a *singular body* . . . in the image of Self-defined rulers. In such rhetoric, the nation is thought to be able to simply transcend conflict through a respect and celebration of difference without the eradication of any differentials in power and wealth and with no transformation at a systemic level.” It is the kind of diversity, she continues, “that enables those in positions of power over Others to tolerate people who have been differentiated. Yet . . . when those in positions of power are asked to be tolerant, their power to be intolerant is not taken away from them. It is, in fact, reasserted by the very request to have them not exercise it. In this regard, respect for diversity does not eclipse the social organization of difference but becomes a contemporary form of reproducing hierarchal social relations and recentring the White national subject” (2006, p. 28, emphasis added).

Neither Bannerji nor Sharma is suggesting that cultural diversity should not be acknowledged or expressed (although they both challenge the cultural fundamentalism typically informing such a notion). Rather, they argue that enshrining cultural diversity within a hegemonic nationalist ideology—emphasizing *diversity* over real *difference*, and culture over political economy—ultimately depoliticizes our conception of the public sphere. That is, the multicultural nationalist perspective abstracts from actual social relations of privilege and power, thus reducing “diversity” to cultural traits (e.g., restaurants, clothing, TV and radio shows, annual festivals). Rather than emphasizing the *connectivity* of people within the public sphere—the fact that they participate in a common set of social relations (albeit in highly differentiated positions of power) and thus must *politically* manage their obligations and responsibilities vis-à-vis one another—the concept of diversity treats the public as a collection of individuals and/or groups, with distinct, quasi-private goals, bearing no necessary relation to each other. If we accept Bannerji’s and Sharma’s reasoning, nationalism and democracy are not simply incompatible values. Multicultural nationalism, thus abstracted from the political, is, in fact, *anti* democratic—central to the hegemonic project of repressing, not celebrating, political differences and tensions on the one hand, and of creating a privileged—though differentiated—sense of belonging for those who by virtue of a shared set of traditions and/or a certain legal status are recognized as Canadians.

It is not only political theorists who share these concerns. Within the scholarly literature on PSB, Marc Raboy questions the nationalist agenda of the Canadian system from a perspective that recalls the postmodern critique of subjectivity. In the introductory chapter to his edited volume *Public Broadcasting for the 21st Century*, Raboy observes, “Identity today is increasingly multifaceted, and national identity is a particularly contested issue in many countries, even

among some of the most politically stable.” Assuming a common identity, then, is misguided—utopian even. In order for PSB “to speak to the real concerns of its public, it has to rethink its approach to one of its most cherished objectives: the cementing of national unity” (Raboy, 1996, pp. 2-3). This is all the more urgent, he suggests, in a commercial-broadcasting context characterized by an ever-expanding channel capacity and borderless technology that can, and does, cater to that fragmentation (albeit for a price). Understood from either Bannerji and Sharma’s socio-structural, anti-racist perspective or Raboy’s more postmodern critique, the close-knit association of public broadcasting and nationalism is ripe for reconsideration.

Raboy responds to this challenge by stressing the democratic mandate of PSB. While commercial broadcasters relate to the public as clients or consumers, he writes, “the role of public broadcasting is to address people as citizens” (1996, p. 9). But this raises an obvious question: What do citizens need from a public broadcaster if not a sense of national identity? Here Raboy draws on John Ellis’ vision of PSB as “a space in which ‘the emerging culture of multiple identities can negotiate its antagonisms.’” Such a project of cultural and social development (based in a democratic ethos of accessibility to the airways) is not compatible with the current practice of assuming or, as Raboy writes, “imposing” a national identity by simply airing various (multicultural) voices. Rather, Raboy’s vision of PSB is more active, putting in place the means to explore “new possibilities for consensus” (Raboy, 1996, p. 8) or perhaps (and he does not mention this, but if we take Bannerji and Sharma seriously, it needs to be admitted) the possibility that consensus is not attainable.

Although Raboy’s model of PSB would provide an alternative to both the market and the state, it does not write the state out completely. He suggests that the broadcasting industry as a whole be put in the hands of an independent, accountable public agency—but one that is organized along more participatory democratic principles than the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) consulting with representative user councils, for example. (Cook & Ruggles, 1992, endorse these same principles.) The agency would strive to meet consumer *and* citizen goals by ensuring broadcasting is program driven (as opposed to policy and/or profit driven). Raboy’s model allows for private-sector involvement, but he conceptualizes this as secondary to public-sector provisioning. That is, he turns the tables on the current system and sees the private sector picking up the slack for public-sector failures.

In a similar vein, Glenda Balas, writing about the U.S. broadcasting system, offers a model in which PSB “is perceived as a vehicle by which private individuals become public citizens who seek to advance the common good through action” (2003, p. 126). She too emphasizes accessibility, calling on public TV to “wire the barrio”—a clear reference to the role community radio plays in Latin American countries in providing alternative, sometimes oppositional, arenas of culture and politics. (After the 2002 presidential coup in Venezuela, for instance, while the state-owned and private media reported that president Hugo Chavez had resigned, alternative media and local community radio in the barrios revealed he was, in fact, being held captive by the army, thereby spurring on massive

demonstrations in Caracas resulting in Chavez's release and reinstatement.) Balas too calls for something more than simply *representing* cultural diversity. She wants PSB to take on "an explicitly public mission" by empowering people (including children) to undertake creative projects through access to portable video and cable stations, for example. "I envision," she writes, "children who gain a sense of self-worth by producing videos set to their own music and Hispanics who articulate the politics of the border through the *corrido*"—projects, in other words, "originating from a sense of publicness" (2003, pp. 129-130). Balas also endorses James Curran's suggestion that PSB organize "outlets for private enterprise, social markets, and professional and civic sectors around a core of general-interest TV channels." Such a system would permit for "a range of voices and experiences, often in tension with one another . . . [and] facilitate public debate over causes of and social solutions for injustice" (thus acknowledging and addressing difference as well as diversity, to invoke Bannerji's terminology). It would produce and distribute "programs for specific audiences, and employ interactive media to develop a broad-based national [and, one might add, international] conversation" (2003, p. 132). As with Raboy, Balas' vision eschews imposing a blueprint on PSB content. Rather, it stresses the institution's organizational premises, specifically opening up the airways through the wide distribution of broadcasting technology.

These are just two democratic models on offer—neither of which invoke or presuppose nationalist values. Although their features may well be familiar to readers and appear in policy documents at the legislative and regulatory levels (see Cook & Ruggles, 1992, for instance, on how the concept of "balance" has served to advance—and undermine—the democratic goals of PSB and Canadian media policy more generally), such democratic values of accessibility are definitively *not* part of the popular public discourse around PSB as represented in the national print news media. Within civil society, as the next section of this article indicates, nationalism remains the strong value of PSB. Indeed, only rarely is the nationalist mandate explicitly excluded from the vision of those whose voices make it into the national media. And then it is only those who question the relevance and value of public broadcasting in the current juncture—that is, people who do not support the principle of PSB today—who challenge the nationalist vision.

The appeal to democratic values, on the other hand, is surprisingly weak, despite the fact that such an appeal could provide a robust defense of PSB's relevance today. That is, upholding the principles of accessibility, participation, and publicness (by which I mean media that acts as a forum for reflecting and negotiating the real differences among individuals who, as Bannerji and Sharma suggest, participate in a common set of social relations, obligations, and responsibilities, albeit in ways that reflect their differentiated positions of power and status) with respect to PSB would address one of the most pressing issues of the modern polis, as noted by Carl Boggs in his book *The End of Politics* (2000): the tendency of the commercial mass media to consistently and systematically narrow the sphere of public discourse.

Context and methodology

My survey focuses on the discussion of PSB in the national print news media dur-

ing the CBC lockout in 2005. Although necessarily limited, it nonetheless sheds valuable light on the popular discourse surrounding public broadcasting in this country. The discussion began as a response to the *Globe's* call for a national conversation on the vision of PSB during the lockout. If commentators were frequently critical of the CBC itself, they overwhelmingly voiced support for the idea of public broadcasting. Still, the beleaguered state of the sector today, coupled with a media environment of multinational corporate ownership and borderless technology, lent a certain force to those who argued to drastically reduce or dismantle PSB completely. By mid-September, *Globe* arts columnist Kate Taylor noted, "For a month now, the dispute has given CBC critics across the political spectrum a nice big platform from which to attack" (2005, September 14). Indeed, the seven weeks were marked by three high-profile developments that broadly framed the discussion:

A Decima poll taken four to seven days after the lockout began, in which 10% of respondents said the lockout was a major inconvenience; another 27% called it a minor inconvenience; and 61% claimed they were not inconvenienced at all (Bailey, 2005, August 29).

Conservative Senator Marjory LeBreton's letter to the *Hill Times*, in which she wrote: "As far as I'm concerned, I hope it takes months to settle the CBC lockout The thought of going through a national election campaign inconveniencing those Liberal and NDP supporters who rely on the CBC is truly something to look forward to" (2005, September 12).

Patrick Watson's op-ed piece in the *Globe*, in which the former CBC chairman called for the public broadcaster to be shut down and its service tendered out to bidders (2005, September 22).⁴

Weighing in on the issue in the national print news media were some who clearly questioned the nationalist mandate. Intriguingly, however, it was consumers of the media who offered the most forceful and pointed criticisms. "I can understand the past need for the taxpayer-funded CBC to help unite geographically divided Canadians, but satellite television and the Internet make that purpose redundant," suggested Toronto resident Susan Bennett in response to the *macleans.ca* question of the week, "How has the CBC lockout affected you?" She added, "Most of the CBC-produced programs I catch glimpses of seem to be about, by, for, and feature our white past rather than our multicultural present" (2005, August 29). Meanwhile, *Globe and Mail* reader Greg Nareby attacked the "patronizing and unsupported claim that the CBC creates Canadian stories and contributes to a greater sense of national identity In short, I don't think there is a common Canadian story" (2005, August 25).

The one media professional to attack the nationalist agenda did so in more oblique language. Although *The National Post's* Andrew Coyne showed no concern for issues of identity, he scoffed at "the public broadcasting cult" and what he called the press' "obligatory chorus" defending the CBC as the glue bonding Canadians (2005, August 27). Arguing that the explosion of choice made possible by new technology renders the CBC irrelevant and the need for PSB obsolete, he subsequently wrote, "You can find programs catering to every conceivable

kind of taste, high or low, broad or narrow. And while that is not yet true on radio—one reason CBC Radio still enjoys both critical respect and a popular following—it will be, as satellite and Internet radio replace traditional broadcast stations” (2005, September 24). Despite their clear differences (Coyne trumpeted the market over state intervention, while Bennett and Nareby were simply critical of this instance of state intervention), the three were united in viewing the national mandate of PSB as superfluous *and* in concluding that the time for funding a public-broadcasting system in Canada had drawn to a close.

It is the response to such arguments from defenders of PSB that I'm interested in exploring. To that end, my survey focused on articles, columns, and letters to the editor that appeared in the national print news media (the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, and *Maclean's*) between August 13 and October 8. (Because it is the future of a national institution at stake, I focused on news publications purporting to reflect and engage a national audience.) This period is slightly longer than the lockout itself in order to capture walk-up pieces and post-resolution reflections. My overall goal was to assess the degree to which the articulated vision of PSB reproduced and/or departed from the nationalist and democratic mandate traditionally associated with PSB. I included any item published between these dates in which the main theme related to the lockout itself, or in which the lockout was spun as an opportunity to re-evaluate PSB. While this meant including some very small news and banner clips (the latter a design feature of the *Post* in particular), I left out a few sports stories about the audience of major-league games as well as any item that made just a passing reference to the lockout. That these were stories about a labour dispute rather than about the media per se is significant. The very fact that news writers and commentators moved beyond labour issues into matters of public policy establishes the degree to which they perceived a pressing need for public discourse on the issue—one more reason to expect that discourse to be wide-ranging in terms of the possibilities and alternative visions explored.

I evaluated the vision of PSB by noting the presence or absence (in the writer's editorializing and in interviewee comments quoted or paraphrased) of the following values, all of which are regularly cited in scholarly literature on PSB: nationalism, the need to compensate for market failure, higher standards of journalism, and democracy (Fleras, 2003; Lorimer & Gasher, 2004). The values associated with nationalism can be conveyed in varying ways. I categorized these in terms of references to a distinct Canadian identity, national cohesion, regional representation, and Canadian content. (I discuss the degree to which regional representation can be considered a democratic value below.) I assessed the strength of the positions according to whether the declaration was part of a concerted argument (strong) or a passing reference and/or implicit assumption (weak).

To gain a broader appreciation of the popular discourse potentially informing the media's accounts, I also researched a variety of sources available to the news media during the lockout—those most likely to present alternative, democratic visions of PSB. These included press releases and other publications put out by the Canadian Media Guild (CMG) and Friends of Canadian Broadcasting; discussions posted on (and some podcasts available through) cbcunplugged.ca, freelancer Tod

Maffin's news and opinion site; a selection of articles from larger "alternative" media outlets: *NOW* and *This* magazines and rabble.ca. Although my choice of sources was somewhat arbitrary, I kept track of the sources quoted in the *Globe*, the *Post*, and *Maclean's* to provide some quantitative guidelines. The list of sources included CMG staff, CMG members, CBC management/spokesperson, politicians/spokespersons, academics, lobbyists, and "others."

Results

The CBC lockout received a remarkable amount of press for a labour dispute in the national print news media between August 15 and October 8, 2005 (see Table 1). While the *Globe and Mail* was responsible for most of it (69 of 109 items), the *National Post* (with 36 items) did not shrink from covering it. (Unless otherwise indicated, all figures exclude calculations of letters to the editor, which were overwhelmingly positive but carry less weight as forums for public criticism.) In all, during 57 days, 109 items (almost two items per day) and 88 letters to the editor appeared. Of those, the majority (60) were news stories. But the ratio of news to opinion pieces—1.2:1—was again noteworthy, indicating the extent to which issues concerning Canada's public broadcaster touch a chord (or a nerve). The *Globe* accounted for 35 of the total 45 columns (11 of them by guest columnists) and three of the four editorials written on the lockout.

Table 1: Item profile

Source	Total	News (excluding letters)	Column (guest)	Editorial	Letters
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	69	31	35 (11)	3	63
<i>National Post</i>	36	29	6 (1)	1	22
<i>Maclean's</i>	4	—	4 (1)	—	3
Total	109	60	45 (13)	4	88

The vast majority of the coverage expressed a supportive or neutral attitude toward PSB in general and the CBC in particular (see Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c). (I categorized arguments to dismantle or reduce support for PSB and/or CBC as "anti," to uncritically increase or maintain support as "pro," to challenge the current vision and/or management practices as "critical.") The *Post* led the way in critical commentary on both PSB and the CBC. Twenty-nine percent of its opinion pieces (6% of its total coverage) proposed doing away with PSB, while 43% suggested an end to the CBC and another 43% were critical of the corporation. For example, one "critical" editorial warned that the corporation risked "remaining as hidebound and parochial as it was before the dispute" and then advocated "a full-scale review of [its] mandate," questioning specifically whether CBC TV should be retained or turned into a pledge-based service (2005, October 4). No column or editorial explicitly supported the institutions, although two news items represented a supportive view of PSB and the CBC in sources quoted. In the *Globe*, by contrast, 45% of opinion pieces (23% of its total coverage) explicitly endorsed PSB, while 21% defended the CBC (9% of total coverage). And

although 40% of opinion pieces were critical of the CBC, no columnist or news item suggested dispensing with either the service or the institution. Similarly, such a proposal did not surface in the pages of *Maclean's*.

Table 2a: Position re PSB and CBC—*Globe and Mail*

	PSB	PSB: % of total	PSB: % of opinion pieces	CBC	CBC: % of total	CBC: % of opinion pieces
Pro	16	23	45	6	9	21
Neutral	53	77	65	48	69	39
Critical	—	—	—	15	22	40
Anti	—	—	—	—	—	—

Table 2b: Position re PSB and CBC—*National Post*

	PSB	PSB: % of total	PSB: % of opinion pieces	CBC	CBC: % of total	CBC: % of opinion pieces
Pro	2	6	—	2	6	—
Neutral	32	88	71	30	82	14
Critical	—	—	—	4	11	43
Anti	2	6	29	4	11	43

Table 2c: Position re PSB and CBC—*Maclean's*

	PSB	PSB: % of total	PSB: % of opinion pieces	CBC	CBC: % of total	CBC: % of opinion pieces
Pro	1	25	25	—	—	—
Neutral	3	75	75	4	100	100
Critical	—	—	—	—	—	—
Anti	—	—	—	—	—	—

So, within that supportive context, what is the vision on offer? In all three news outlets, nationalism was dominant (see Table 3). Of 44 representations of a PSB vision in the three publications, just over half (24) appealed to the values of nationalism. Fifteen of these I classified as strong appeals—with the most forceful and comprehensive visions coming, for the most part, from guest columnists in the pages of the *Globe*—Knowlton Nash, Robert Rabinovitch, and Patrick Watson, to name a few.⁵ Higher standards and the need for a public broadcaster to compensate for market failure were each cited six times (often in conjunction with a nationalist vision). Two items—both in the *Globe*, where the range of

vision was widest—cited democratic principles. Not a single commentator supportive of PSB and/or the CBC criticized the nationalist vision.

Table 3: Vision of PSB

	Nationalism	Higher standards	Compensate for market failure	Democracy	Other
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	18	6	5	2	5
<i>National Post</i>	4	—	—	—	1
<i>Maclean's</i>	2	—	1	—	—
Total (44)	24	6	6	2	6

The nationalist vision on offer comprised four specific values, each appearing in fairly even doses (see Table 4). The importance of PSB in developing or affirming a distinct Canadian identity was mentioned eight times; Canadian content and the role it plays in connecting Canadians with each other were each referenced seven times; and regional representation appeared five times.

Table 4: Vision of nationalism

	Distinct Canadian identity	Regional representation	Canadian unity	Canadian content
<i>Globe and Mail</i>	7	3	6	6
<i>National Post</i>	1	2	1	1
<i>Maclean's</i>	2	—	1	2
Total (32)	10	5	8	9

Finally, whose thoughts and opinions were solicited in these items? The quantitative results show a slight bias toward CMG staff and members (see Table 5)—though it must be noted that not all CMG members upheld the union line. They also indicate a relative lack of “expert opinion” either in the form of interest-group representatives or academics. Only 2% and 4% of all people quoted came from each category, respectively. But these figures don’t really tell us much. More telling is a qualitative analysis of the data that I discuss in the following section.

Discussion

Nationalist values are deeply embedded in the popular vision of PSB in English-speaking Canada, as demonstrated by discussion in the national print news media during the CBC/Radio-Canada lockout in 2005. Former CBC news anchor Knowlton Nash, for instance, called upon the CBC “to be our Canadian voice seeking a place in a sky teeming with American accents” and “to strengthen our sense of nationhood” (2005, August 24). CBC president Robert Rabinovitch referred to “those nation-sharing moments that bring us together and remind us

of who we are as Canadians” (2005, August 30). And journalist Rex Murphy, master of rhetorical flourish, warned readers, “Canada is not nearly as secure an idea as many of us would wish to think it is.” What Raboy calls national identity fragmentation, Murphy called “multiple solitudes,” and he urged the public broadcaster to address Canadians’ “need . . . to see a constant refreshment of our national ideas, a continuous exploration of the continuities and themes of our common enterprise: that beyond the contests and strife inevitable in a federation—what Quebec wants, how the West ‘gets in,’ how rural and urban Canada achieve a healthful equilibrium—there are pulses of harmony, shared value and common aspiration around which we are composed as a nation” (2005, September 3). That is, if the divisions and diversity are stumbling blocks to unity, it is the job of the public broadcaster to clear the path.

Table 5: Sources quoted in numbers (and percentage)

	CMG staff	CMG member	CBC mgt	Lobbyist	Academic	Politician	Other
<i>Globe and Mail</i> 87	15 (17)	15 (17)	21 (24)	3 (3)	3 (3)	18 (21)	12 (14)
<i>National Post</i> 73	73 (11)	12 (16)	14 (19)	0 (0)	4 (5)	21 (29)	14 (19)
<i>Maclean's</i> 9	—	3 (33)	3 (33)	—	—	—	3 (33)
Total 169	23 (14)	30 (18)	38 (23)	3 (2)	7 (4)	39 (23)	29 (17)

Note: mgt = management; not all rows add up to 100% due to rounding.

One aspect of nationalism, regional representation, could arguably be interpreted as a variation on the democratic principle of access. Yet, while there may be a democratic impulse wrapped up in such appeals, they tend to be inserted into discussions of Canadian identity and/or cohesion. For example, a *Post* article reported on comedian Rick Mercer’s observation that “CBC provides an invaluable service to TV viewers and radio listeners in far-flung regions of the country that don’t have access to the same options as urban residents.” But Mercer’s follow-up quote implies this is a boon for nationalism, not democracy: “The reason we need a public broadcaster is because nine out of the 10 top shows are always American, and we need to have that other voice there . . . I hate to resort to clichés, but what does that say about the country?” (Strachan, 2005, October 5).⁶ In other words, the nationalist argument once again swallows up and reorients the democratic position.

Two other, more direct, references to a democratic vision of PSB must be noted.⁷ In the first case, a scathing attack on the current state of the CBC, the corporation’s former chairman Patrick Watson presented a vision of PSB in which nationalism and democracy are two distinct principles. Alongside a discussion of the importance of Canadian content, he emphasized the value of PSB in creating “effective citizens.” A public broadcasting system, he wrote, “will offer a con-

stant, reasoned, informed and diligent challenge to power, and a questioning of civic values promoted by commerce” (2005, September 22). In a separate article, broadcasting expert and University of Toronto professor emeritus F. W. Peers made an appeal to different democratic principles. Addressing the question of how the CBC will restore its reputation after the lockout has ended, Peers endorsed the idea of extensive public consultations and suggested they be incorporated into the governance structure of the CBC on an ongoing basis. The CBC board of directors, he proposed, should be comprised of “citizens appointed from across the country who at last must make themselves known to the people they represent. It must be a two-way process: audiences telling the CBC what services they most value, and directors sharing some of the realities that at times limit choices, and at other times permit the creative members of staff to surprise and delight listeners and viewers” (2005, October 6). Whatever the democratic merit of these two positions, it is noteworthy that neither invoked open access to the airways, and only Peers endorsed a participatory form of democracy. For Watson, democracy is about access to a certain quality (critical and/or political) of information; for Peers, it is about governance. The strong democratic values Raboy and Balas cite seem to have no real purchase.

Understanding why the news media fail to pick up on a particular issue requires examining their sources. Of those sources quoted in the articles and columns, arguably the academics and interest-group representatives were most likely to provide alternative visions of PSB. In total, seven academics were cited, but only one, Michael Nolan, professor emeritus at the University of Western Ontario’s Faculty of Information and Media Studies, was asked for his vision of PSB. The comments that made it into print were disappointingly vague: “The public broadcaster should not be simply following the industry. The public broadcaster’s role is to lead and to provide a distinctive style of broadcasting” (Dixon citing Nolan, 2005, August 20). As for interest-group representatives, all three quotes came from the same person, Ian Morrison, chair of Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, an independent media watchdog that, according to its website, exists to “defend and enhance the quality and quantity of Canadian programming in the Canadian audio-visual system.” No other media expert was called upon for comment.

My review of other sources available to the news media during the lockout affirmed this pattern. The Canadian Media Guild, in its press releases and “On the Line” publication for picketers, stuck largely to the narrow labour issues in dispute, while Friends of Canadian Broadcasting stuck closely to a core feature of its mandate, the promotion of Canadian content (although the organization did argue against the patronage appointment of the CBC chair). Neither the left-leaning *NOW* magazine nor columnists at *rabble.ca* strayed from a nationalist vision. Nationalist values also prevailed on the podcasts created by locked-out CBCers and in blogs on Tod Maffin’s site, *cbcunplugged.ca*. The latter, however, includes the text of a talk by Maffin in which he articulates his vision of PSB. Among other things, he suggests setting up “regional centres of investigative journalism” that give “our top people the freedom to spend weeks or months working on important stories. Stories that engage dialogue, that bring down governments.”

Here Maffin clearly alludes to some democratic elements but—surprisingly, given the rhetoric about the blogging culture and democracy—not the principle of accessibility. (Maffin’s vision is also firmly rooted in a nationalist ethos in which the CBC is the “lifeline to Canadians—especially in the North”; and he urges the corporation to be “distinctive To be the voice of Canada . . . [and] showcase the unique spirit of Canadians” (2005, September 30).

The utter lack of an alternative vision can only speak to the degree to which nationalism has come to stand in for democracy in the popular discourse on public broadcasting, at least as it is represented by the English-Canadian national print news media (and the alternative press coverage) I examined. A full investigation of how this came to pass is beyond the scope of this article, but some clues can be found in a brief look at the arguments made by early promoters of public broadcasting in Canada. They clearly appealed to two sets of principles (Basen, 2003; Peers, 1969). The first, the democratic principle of accessibility, was presented as a bulwark against the interests of the rich and powerful. In contrast to the United States, where commercial broadcasters won federal regulators’ support in the early 1930s, the 1932 Canadian Broadcasting Act treated the airways as public property—a resource to be made accessible to all and to be managed in such a way that serves the public interest. Decreeing the airways “a natural resource,” then—prime minister R. B. Bennett introduced the bill by affirming that “no other scheme than that of public ownership can ensure to the people of this country, without regard to class or place, equal enjoyment of the benefits and pleasures of radio broadcasting I cannot think that any government would be warranted in leaving the air to private exploitation and not reserving it for development for the use of the people” (cited in Bird, 1988, pp. 112-113). And for some, at least in theory, the principle of accessibility included the notion of participation: Leonard Brockington, the inaugural chairman of the CBC, expressed this sentiment when addressing a parliamentary committee in 1938. “We believe we should be false to our trust as custodians of part of the public domain, if we did not resist . . . any attempt to place free air under the domination of the power of wealth. *Either all of us have a right to speak over the air, or none of us has any right to speak over the air*” (Basen, 2003, p. 148, emphasis added).⁸ Although we would be wise to question the sincerity of such appeals, it is significant that democratic values were not only part of the public discourse, they were in fact put forward with great passion. Clearly, Brockington, Bennett, and others believed the public might be persuaded of the relevance of public-service broadcasting by seeing its democratic potential. That cultural and political leaders no longer believe this to be true of the current juncture is an important, if worrying, revelation of this study.

The second principle, Canadian nationalism, has proven to have the greatest staying power. The question is the state or the United States,” as Canadian Radio League co-founder Graham Spry famously pronounced (cited in McChesney, 2000, p. 237). This dictum, and Spry’s position generally, is more complex, however, than a simple assertion of an abstract Canadian distinctiveness defined negatively against an encroaching Americanism. To begin, Spry was committed to a positive notion of nationalism, believing that Canada had its own “spirit . . . char-

acter and soul to express and cultivate.” Further, his nationalism stems from a concern about the deepening commercialization of the broadcasting sector. Behind U.S. radio, he wrote, “stands General Electric, J. P. Morgan . . . Westinghouse, the motion picture and theatrical group, etc., in a word ‘Capitaleesm’ with a vengeance.” To be sure, however, Spry was concerned first and foremost with *American* capitalism: “The fact that the Radio Corporation of America and its associates are primarily American in their outlook colours our feelings,” he wrote elsewhere. “We fear the monopoly not only as a monopoly, but as a *foreign* monopoly” (cited in McChesney, 2000, p. 233, emphasis added).

Spry’s meshing of nationalist sentiment with anticommmercialism injects his civic spirit with a democratic impulse—a phenomenon we still see today as Canadian nationalists invoke America’s domination of the global media industry as the most pressing threat to sovereign airways. Yet the two principles of democracy and nationalism are frequently treated as indistinguishable in another sense as well. Accessibility, giving voice to the voiceless, is a cornerstone of the cultural nationalist position that argues it is only through sharing voices and stories from disparate regions that national identity, especially in a country as large and as sparsely populated as Canada, can be forged and sustained. PSB comes to be understood fundamentally, if not exclusively, in the words of CBC current affairs journalist Ira Basen, as “a vehicle for telling Canadian stories and reflecting a Canadian identity” (2003, p. 155). As a result, accessibility is embraced neither as an end in itself nor as a means of establishing a forum for airing and negotiating political differences—both of which are arguably strong democratic values emphasized in the scholarly literature on PSB. It is embraced, rather, as a means of building a sense of identity with a national community—and a nation-state in particular.

Such a shift in perspective signals another significant shift: insofar as nurturing a nationalist identity simply requires airing the voices, talents, and ideas of those living in Canada’s far-flung regions, the goal of PSB becomes one of *representation* rather than *participation*. This reinforces a narrow definition of cultural difference as *diversity* (Bannerji, 2000). That is, certain socially sanctioned cultural forms—often those emphasizing supposedly unique characteristics of groups of people with a common heritage, and which neatly fit into existing artistic modes and political and economic practices—come to define the public sphere. There is little space, however, for voices, talents, and ideas to challenge that multicultural hegemonic project, and which speak to the deeper, structural inequalities underlying Canada’s “multicultural mosaic.” Thus, the principle of democratic accessibility has, since its earliest days, been subsumed and/or obfuscated by the appeal of a (representational democratic) nationalism.

This form of nationalism bubbles to the top of the public discourse throughout the history of PSB in Canada. Although it was not legally mandated in the 1936 legislation that created the CBC, only two days after the inaugural meeting of the corporation’s board of governors, one of the governors (Lord Brockington) said, on air, “If the radio is not a healing and reconciling force in our national life it will have failed of its high purpose” (quoted in Peers, 1969, p. 199). It gained additional institutional heft in the 1968 Broadcasting Act, in which the CBC was

directed to “contribute to the development of national unity and Canadian identity” (Raboy, 1996, p. 109)—a move that can best be explained as a response to the upsurge of Québécois sovereigntist militancy. It recurred repeatedly as the primary defence against the neo-liberal assault on PSB during three sets of consultations in the 1980s, and it was reaffirmed when the government rewrote the Broadcasting Act in 1991. This time around, the legislation mandates the CBC to “be predominantly and distinctively Canadian,” to “contribute to shared national consciousness and identity” and “reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada” (Canada, 1991).⁹ And it was there in 2005, during the CBC/Radio-Canada lockout of 5,500 employees.

To be clear, I am not suggesting here that the vision of PSB never refers to other principles or values. It does: Higher journalistic standards and compensation for market failures are two common themes (both of which are critical to grounding PSB in a democratic ethos). Rather, I suggest that the appeal to nationalism tends to dominate all other values associated with PSB, in part by subsuming and/or obfuscating the democratic principle of accessibility. And even in a period when so much of the news media is preoccupied with explicitly interpreting (rather than simply trying to report on) current affairs, another of Raboy’s observations holds true: The media consistently fail to push against the normal reading of society (1992). Yet the threat to PSB is real. It has been, and continues to be, doubly squeezed: financially, by years of fiscal retrenchment, and culturally, by a market mentality that admits of no distinction between communications media on the one hand and, say, toothpaste on the other.

Challenged to prove the relevance of PSB in this period, defenders of the sector would do well to return to the democratic principles of accessibility, participation, and publicness. Such values not only offer greater opportunity for debate, they also make it possible to explore the tensions between democracy and English-Canadian multicultural nationalism. With PSB listeners acting also as its producers, on-air voices, and writers, within a framework that acknowledges not just cultural diversity but also the real political and economic differences Bannerji and Sharma highlight, public broadcasting in Canada could approach its democratic potential. And in the process, it would broaden and enliven the public sphere far more effectively than the (representational democratic) nationalist approach adopted so far.

Notes

1. My focus is on English-speaking Canada and Canadian nationalism. I did not review the French-language press and conceptions of Québécois nationalism that inform CBC/Radio-Canada in Québec and the rest of French Canada.
2. Martin Collacott’s report for the Fraser Institute, “Canada’s Immigration Policy: The Need for Major Reform,” offers an example of precisely this assumption. Although immigrants’ varied cultural backgrounds are to be celebrated as enriching Canadian society, he comments, “[W]e should at the same time not be reticent about demanding a full commitment to Canadian law *and Canadian values*” (2003, p. 33, emphasis added). He suggests this can be achieved by including a loyalty oath at citizenship hearings for new immigrants.

3. Rather than eradicating race and racism, such notions of cultural sovereignty *reconfigure* racialized identity in terms of “traditions” or “cultural fundamentalisms” (Verena Stolcke’s term) within discrete spatial limits. And although the differentiated cultures are not arranged hierarchically, they are defined, by necessity, relationally, setting the context for an ideology of common subjectivity, a sense of collectivity spawned by the privileged association between the dominant culture and a defined geographic space. As a result, a sense of spatial empowerment develops against and over “others” not included therein. As such, (im)migrants those who transcend national boundaries are constituted as a “problem.” That is, it is not necessarily the colour of one’s skin but the fact that one is an outsider, a foreigner, that underlies modern notions of race and racism. “Foreigners,” writes Sharma, “are perceived as weakening the bonds of community said to hold the national family together. Migrants, especially those arriving from places deemed as far (not necessarily only geographically but culturally) from the Self-identity of those claiming home-ownership rights, challenge the very idea of the existence of national homelands” (2006, p. 14).
4. Watson clarifies in that piece and a follow-up one that he was not advocating the privatization of CBC, but a public tendering process.
5. I characterize a strong appeal as one that uses clear, concise language instead of generalities and/or elaborates the position beyond a single comment.
6. Clearly, the collapse of values here may not reflect Mercer’s intention, but his intentions are not important from the point of view of public discourse.
7. I have excluded a third possibility – a quote from labour minister Joe Fontana: “The CBC belongs to the people. It does not belong to the unions and it does not belong to management. The CBC belongs to the people and I tell them to stop posturing and get on with a negotiated settlement” as it is arguably empty rhetoric and not a serious statement of vision (Dixon & LeBlanc, 2005, September 29).
8. The democratic principle of accessibility was still significant enough in 1967 for the White Paper on Broadcasting to assert the need “to prevent the air from falling under the control of wealth or any other power The air belongs to the people and the constant aim of the CBC is to have the principal points of view on questions of importance heard by the people as a whole” (see Taras, 1999, p. 119).
9. The 1991 Broadcasting Act also, for the first time, identifies broadcasting as a public service – an apparent advantage for the anticommmercialization forces. The difficulty is, as Raboy points out, that with declining funding on the one hand and a loosening of restrictions on private broadcasters on the other, such an acknowledgment is hollow indeed (1996).

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