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ETHNIC MEDIA

Moving Beyond Boundaries

Sherry S. Yu

The mediascape in multicultural societies is transforming. Aside from increasing transnational migration, forces of globalization (both cultural and economic) and digitalization allow media to transcend their formal national boundaries. Ethnic media are no exception. Formerly confined to the domain of ethnic or diasporic communities, these media go beyond not only geographic, but also ethnic boundaries. What is lagging behind this shift is the social perception and academic approach toward ethnic media, which consider ethnic media as media by and for immigrants, ethno-racial groups, and linguistic minorities only. This brief discussion traces the evolution of ethnic media by examining various aspects—terminologies, historical trajectories, and trends in production and consumption—and suggests that new critical approaches to understanding ethnic media are needed.

Terminologies and Definitions

There are many terms that describe media by and for immigrants, ethno-racial groups, and linguistic minorities. Among those terms, “ethnic media” has been used most widely in the field of ethnic media studies as well as in the public realm. Although not unanimously supported for various reasons, this blanket term helps even non-users understand instantly what these media are. Variations of the term reflect an emphasis on different aspects of ethnic media. Some scholars propose user-oriented terms that highlight specific projects pursued by these media for “ethnic” or “minority” groups, whether cultural or language retention, subaltern political struggles, or identity politics and community bonding. These terms include “ethnic media” (Husband 1998; Kosnick 2007; Matsaganis, Katz, and Ball-Rokeach 2011; Murray, Yu, and Ahadi 2007), “ethnic community media” (Tsagarousianou 2002), “ethnic minority media” (Browne 2005; Downing 1992; Husband 2005), “minority media” (Dayan 1999; Riggins 1992; Rigoni 2005; Srbereny 2005; Silverstone and Georgiou 2005), “minority language media” (Guyot 2007), and “multicultural media” (Ahmed, Veronis, Feng, Jaya, and Charmarkeh 2014). It is this emphasis on “ethnicity” or “minority” that sets these media apart from so-called “mainstream media.” Mainstream is defined, in relation to “ethnic,” as that “part of society within which ethnic and racial origins have at most minor impacts on life chances or opportunities” (Alba and Nee 2003: 12). Similarly, in the US, mainstream refers to “individuals with European heritage.”
(Matsaganis et al. 2011: 10). Does this mean that “mainstream media” are media by and for those who belong to these groups, mainly people of European heritage? Yes and no. Yes, the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in production and content in mainstream media is one of the main factors that motivated minorities to develop media by and for themselves (Gandy 2000). No, because while “ethnic media” are produced and consumed primarily or almost entirely by ethnic minorities, “mainstream media” are consumed by all, regardless of ethnicity.

What “constitutes” ethnic media varies as well. In Understanding Ethnic Media, Matsaganis, Katz, and Ball-Rokeach (2011: 10) define “ethnic media” as “media produced by and for (a) immigrant, (b) ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities, as well as (c) indigenous groups living in various countries across the world,” a definition in which media for indigenous people are considered as part of “ethnic media.” In contrast, media for indigenous people—which are also referred to by various terms—“indigenous media” (Alia 2010), “first people’s media” (Roth 2010), or “aboriginal media” (Fleras 2011; Knopf 2010)—are officially not considered ethnic media in countries such as Canada. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) defines ethnic media—or more specifically, ethnic programs—as media “directed to any culturally or racially distinct group other than one that is Aboriginal Canadian, or from France or the British Isles” (emphasis added) (Public Notice CRTC 1999a-117).

The emphasis on ethnicity is less significant when it comes to the production-oriented term, “diasporic media” (Georgiou 2005, 2006; Karim 2009; Naficy 2003). Georgiou (2005) uses a broader definition of “diasporic media,” which encompasses local, national, and transnational media that are available to diasporic communities. In understanding the multi-locality of media production and consumption, a broader conceptual approach focusing on the availability of media to local diasporic communities is considered. Karim (2009), on the other hand, distinguishes “ethnic” from “diasporic” by focusing on the origin of production: the former is produced in the local ethnic community in the host country, whereas the latter is produced in the country of origin. If the former connects the local community members, the latter connects geographically dispersed members of the same diaspora across many national jurisdictions. In a much narrower sense, the term “diasporic media” can also be considered as media locally produced by exiles. Naficy (2003: 51–52) establishes the following three categories: Ethnic television (programs produced in the host country by local minorities); transnational television (programs imported into or by the host country or multinational/transnational media); and diaspora television (programs produced in the host country by “liminars and exiles”; for instance, the diaspora television Naficy examines is Iranian media in Los Angeles).

The multiplicity and diversity of the terms reflect the efforts to capture the continually evolving nature of the mediascape for immigrants, ethno-racial groups, and linguistic minorities. It is, however, this fundamental nature that necessitates further revision of the existing terms, considering not only the ever-multiplying multi-local production and consumption of media, especially in the digital era, but also cross-ethnic media production and consumption among demographically diverse and increasingly transnational individuals. The Canadian mediascape, for example, is constituted of various multilingual options originating at various geographic levels and produced by cross-ethnic groups: “Multicultural media” (mainstream media that offer multilingual services such as Roger’s OMNI and Shaw Multicultural Channel); “third-language media” (established by
local ethnic communities such as Vancouver Chosun, Indo-Canadian Voice, and Shahrvand); “pan-ethnic media” (established by local ethnic communities targeting broader audiences such as the Asian Pacific Post and Canadian Immigrant); and “transnational media” (imported from the country of origin or produced locally by local branch offices such as Z-TV, CCTV, and Sing Tao). Enormous changes have been seen in the broadcasting sector alone in which these services are available on terrestrial, cable, satellite, and online (in the form of streaming services). The US also demonstrates how the old containment of the term ethnic media as relating to a particular group or territory is being left behind by the particularly strong cable and satellite sectors, which are also expanding into online services. Companies such as Time Warner, Dish Network, and DirecTV offer a variety of multilingual services including programs/channels both locally produced and internationally imported. Online streaming services such as hulu.com (est. 2007) also offer non-English programs, such as Latino and Korean programs with English subtitles, thereby reaching out not only to “ethnic” but also broader audiences.

The emergence of the “digital diaspora”—“diasporas organized on the Internet” (Brinkerhoff 2009: 2)—which facilitates diasporic communication over space rather than geographic place further confirms multi-local production and consumption and reinforces a trans-local sense of belonging (Cheng 2005; Georgiou 2005). Free from possible restrictions that may have been placed on home-bound online space, diasporic communities engage in a variety of spaces, whether online forums organized for overseas Chinese students, scholars, and professionals (e.g., Chinese News Digest, Hua Xia Wen Zhai) or the BBC World Service, which is offered in 31 languages, including Persian, Arabic, and Chinese, and facilitates bonding within and dialogue beyond diasporic communities (Ding 2007; Gillespie 2009; Andersson, Gillespie, and Mckay 2010).

The members of diasporas in general and digital diasporas in particular are not only technologically moving forward but are also demographically transformative and call for more attention to hybridity than the previously focused “ethnicity.” Indeed, in the process of adoption of the new while retaining the old culture through interaction with the other in multiple localities, their identity is constantly a work in progress, although in varying degrees and over different timescales. Take the example of socio-economically empowered “new Asian Americans” who lack the “stereotypical Chineseness” which has “settled comfortably in the mind of the West” (Ong 1999: 98) or “the multiple-passport holder” (Ong 1999: 1) who identifies with multiple nationalities, citizenship, ethnicities, and cultures, and who enjoys the benefits of each country. All of these different social groups constitute what outsiders assume as homogenous “ethnic” groups. It is, after all, the eyes of the beholder that reinforce or challenge perceptions and social categorization of the ethnicity of the other. In fact, such essentialization of ethnicity is a barrier to ethnic media studies by dismissing the coexistence of multiple identities, which leads to equally diverse media consumption and production patterns (De Leeuw and Rydin 2007; Dohest, Cola, Brusa, and Lemish 2012; Georgiou 2006; Sreberny 2005) and makes ethnic media projects equally diverse. Certainly, ethnic media projects have never been linear and generalizable: some pursue subaltern counter-public projects against the country of origin (such as the aforementioned Hua Xia Wen Zhai), while others pursue entertainment (such as mvibo.com which used to offer Korean entertainment programs, among others, with English subtitles). All of these examples suggest that the mediascape formerly confined to immigrants, ethno-racial groups, and linguistic minorities is evolving, and so should the existing terms that describe these media.
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Historical Perspectives

Such conceptual complexity is part and parcel of the complex history of ethnic media. One of the important factors that motivated the creation of ethnic media was, as Gandy (2000) argued, continued underrepresentation of ethno-racial minorities in mainstream media production and content. Examples are not hard to find. Georgiou’s study on London’s ethnic media (2002) found that there were even fewer blacks and Asians at the management level of the BBC, Channel 4, and ITV in 2000 than in 1990. Similarly, in Canada, visible minorities accounted for less than 7 percent of the Canadian public broadcasting workforce (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) in 2010 (CBC 2010). In the US, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) adopted the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) regulations in 1971; however, these regulations have not led to any substantial improvement (Hollifield and Kimbro 2010). In the case of media content, the situation is not so different. Studies continue to find examples of underrepresentation of ethnic minorities (see, for example, Awad 2012; Mahtani and Mountz 2002; Phillips 2011; Tator and Henry 2006).

As a response, coupled with ever-increasing global migration and the advancement of media technologies, ethnic media have proliferated around the globe over the past few decades. Especially in the two most-favored destinations for immigration, the US and Canada, a record number of ethnic media outlets—3,000 (broadcast and print combined) and 300 (print only) outlets respectively—have been documented (see New America Media and the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada). The level of development tends to depend on, but is not limited to, the demographic profile of ethnic groups (e.g., socio-cultural capital), the history of migration, and perhaps most importantly, the host country’s policy directives for immigration, multicultural integration or assimilation, and foreign relations. International policies concerning minority media are not absent, but rather broad in scope and limited in impact. Articles 17 and 19 in the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights only broadly mention freedom of opinion and expression and participation in cultural life (Browne 2005). UNESCO also looks into media usage in general, but rarely that of ethnic minorities in particular (Browne 2005). Media policies are rather an outcome of national self-determination than international governance, as is evident in the case of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression, to which the US is not a signatory (Parliament of Canada).

Riggins proposes five models for the nation-state’s structural support for minority media (1992: 8–10), which helps us understand the relationship between policy directives on immigration and ideological perspectives on ethnic media at the national level: (1) the integrationist model, which supports minority media with an intention to strategically and easily monitor minorities; (2) the economic model, which supports minority media to help multicultural groups assimilate into the dominant culture; (3) the divisive model, which encourages ethnic rivalry as a mechanism of social control; (4) the preemptive model, which encourages the state to establish its own minority media to prevent minorities from establishing their own; and (5) the proselytism model, which mobilizes minority media to promote state values.

Classic immigrant countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia oscillate between the integrationist and economic models. Similar patterns of U.S. and Canadian immigration policies demonstrate the phases of discrimination (the late 1800s and the early 1900s), phasing-out of discriminatory practices (1940s–50s) and neoliberal (1960s and onwards).
approaches (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Burnet and Palmer 1988; James 2000; Min 2006). The discriminatory policies in the early years of immigration in the US—such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Immigration Act of 1917—continued until the 1940s, when the US began to ease immigration and naturalization for its WWII allies (James 2000: 18). During this period, the high correlation between the US’s foreign relations and the development of ethnic media is exemplified in the case of German media, which suffered during WWI when the US entered the war against Germany (Wittke 1957). On the other hand, neoliberal policies such as the Immigration and Nationality Act of the US (1990) and the Business Immigration Programme of Canada (1986)—both of which focused on recruiting “quality” immigrants who would not only be self-sufficient socio-economically but also contribute to the economy of the new country (Kobayashi, Li, and Teixeira 2011; Li 2007; Li and Skop 2007)—facilitated the growth of ethnic media in North America since the early 1990s. The influx of affluent investor/entrepreneur-class immigrants started to establish ethnic media much like other ethnic enclave businesses (Zhou, Chen, and Cai 2006).

Canada’s commitment to multiculturalism as a political philosophy since the 1970s, however, makes Canada lean more toward the integrationist model, with an emphasis on the recognition of cultural diversity and assistance for the social integration of immigrants. As part of this multicultural mandate, media policies such as the Policy Framework for Canadian Television (Public Notice CRTC 1999b-97) and Ethnic Broadcasting Policy (Public Notice CRTC 1999a-117) ensure fair and accurate representation of ethnicity and ethnic programs in Canadian broadcasting. Such explicit policies are absent in the US, consistent with its opposition to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression since 2005 (Parliament of Canada). Nevertheless, the absence of such policies is compensated to a certain extent by strong grassroots initiatives such as New America Media (a network of over 3,000 ethnic media organizations) and the American Society of Newspaper Editors, which drive ground-level interaction within and across ethnic and mainstream media organizations (Roy and Close 2007).

Australia has followed a similar path. Australia’s “White Australia policy” has persisted so strongly in Australian politics that the notorious Immigration Restriction Act 1901, for example, required a dictation of a passage of 50 words in length in a European language (Joppke 2005). A move toward liberalization, such as the “good neighbor policy,” emerged in the late 1940s and led to neoliberal immigration policies between 1983 and 1996, which aimed to integrate into the Asia Pacific region (Castles 2000). Australia’s Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) is regarded as a prime example of state support for multiculturalism, although it was supported primarily because the station could be non-commercial and self-supporting and could mobilize minority support for the Labour Party in the 1972 election (Davies in Browne 2005).

Ethnic media in Europe, on the other hand, evolved historically to provide media for “guest workers.” The guest-worker programs in Europe—for example, Britain’s European Voluntary Worker, France’s guest worker recruitment through Office National d’Immigration, and Germany’s Gastarbeiter recruited through Bundesanstalt für Arbeit—invited foreign labor migrants and supported them while they resided in the country; however, none of these programs was intended to allow permanent settlement of the workers (Castles 2000). The development of ethnic media thus reflects this sentiment that ethnic programming targeting these groups—such as West Germany’s weekly television magazine program, Nachbarn (neighbors), in the mid-1960s—aimed to facilitate the
return of migrant workers to their home countries rather than settlement and integration in the host country (Browne 2005). The growth of ethnic media, however, took place during the intense commercialization, deregulation, and privatization of European public service media in the 1950s through the early 1990s (Curran 2000). Ethnic media were promoted as “eminently marketable” and media outlets such as London’s Sunrise Radio and Greek Radio emerged during this period (Tsagarousianou 2002: 219). The momentum for growth was further accelerated during the Civil Rights Movements in the 1970s and 1980s, which necessitated more venues for the expression of diverse voices (Browne 2005). In the broader spectrum of policy support for ethnic media, however, Europe has been rather inconsistent. For Britain, Georgiou’s study (2002) found that its broadcasting law of 1996 contained no clauses concerning the reality of a multicultural society, and the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport lacked policy support for cultural diversity in media production on the ground.

Current Contributions and Research

Aside from the history of ethnic media in the context of these important structural policy initiatives, various aspects of ethnic media have been studied, ranging from mapping of the sector to the trend in consumption and production. Some of the leading international mapping projects in the US, Canada, and Europe include: The Metamorphosis Project (1998–2002) by the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California (www.metamorph.org) and The Ethnic Media Project (2004) by the Center of Media and Society at the University of Massachusetts (www.umb.edu/cms) in the US; The Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Media in B.C. study (2006–7) by Simon Fraser University and Canadian Heritage (www.bcethnicmedia.ca) and The Ottawa Multicultural Media Initiative (2010–13) by the University of Ottawa and the City of Ottawa (artsites.uottawa.ca/ommi/en) in Canada; and Mapping Minorities and their Media (2002–5) by the London School of Economics of the UK (www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EMTEL/minorities/project_home.html) and Mediam’Rad: Ethnic and Diversity Media (2005–7) by the Panos Institute of France in Europe. These widely cited projects contributed to increasing the visibility of the formerly underrepresented media sector by mapping ethnic media organizations active in the region and initiating debates on issues concerning cross-ethnic media collaboration, intercultural dialogue across communities, and policies that govern media practices.

Beyond media mapping, studies have also addressed how these media are consumed and produced. Ethnic media play various roles depending on, but not limited to, production by media genre (e.g., news versus entertainment) and orientation to different media users (e.g., new immigrants, matured immigrants, transnationally mobile immigrants). In general, ethnic media are known to contribute to creating culturally friendly communicative spaces (Couldry and Dreher 2007; Georgiou 2005) that help fuel a sense of community (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, and Matei 2001; Cheng 2005; Karim 2002; Lin and Song 2006; Murray et al. 2007; Ojo 2006) or build identity and shared “consciousness” (Bailey 2007; Georgiou 2002, 2006; Kosnick 2007; Sinclair, Yue, Hawkins, Pookong, and Fox 2001; Sreberny 2000, 2005; Sun 2006). Such values are also found to be important for younger generations, as manifested in media led by hyphenated populations (e.g., Korean-Americans’ Kore Asian Media, formerly known as KoreAm Journal) or ethno-culturally hybrid populations with multiple identities (e.g., Vancouver’s Schema Magazine).
Ethnic media also serve to further the social, political, and economic integration of ethnic communities. Theoretical approaches in media studies of the range of socio-political roles adopted by ethnic media are rather extreme. Ethnic media are seen pessimistically as fragmenting “sphericules” (Gitlin 1998: 173) or “parallel societies” (Hafez 2007: 136) that are disconnected from the public sphere, or more optimistically as reforming a part of a “multi-ethnic public sphere” (Husband 1998: 134). To this end, Ball-Rokeach’s Communication Infrastructure Theory (2001) suggests the possibility for creating a well-functioning civil society, if ethnic residents, community organizations, and media are properly connected to their counterparts in broader society on different geographic levels. Examples of how ethnic media may mobilize communities to push for social and political recognition within broader society include Britain’s London Greek Radio, which is mandated to play a mediatory role by delivering “mainstream information” (e.g., social benefits, training, job opportunities) to those whose low language skills prohibit them from economic, cultural, and political participation in European societies (Georgiou 2005: 494). By contrast, ethnic media may be expected to create “a forum for intercultural dialogue” in response to spreading anti-immigration sentiments, as evident in the case of Germany’s Radio MultiKulti for Turkish people in Berlin (Kosnick 2007: 155). Younger-generation Muslims are also active in this mission in France by going “beyond the post-colonial ideologies . . . [to] emphasise dialogue with national [French] and European institutions” (Rigoni 2005: 566).

News content produced by ethnic media is expected to serve this end by providing space for expression, adaptation, and resistance. However, studies simultaneously find—although varying by community—significant emphasis on news about the country of origin rather than the country of settlement, and raise a self-alienation hypothesis (Lin and Song 2006; Murray et al. 2007; Lindgren 2011). On this note, it is important to ask whether such a skewed focus toward the country of origin truly reflects genuinely higher interest in the home-country news or something else, given socio-cultural, economic, and generational divides within the community and equally varied information needs among members: immigrant vs. ethnic; old vs. new immigrants; old vs. younger generations; local vs. transnational migrants; and socio-economically privileged vs. under-privileged.

The economic role of ethnic media explains why, at least to a certain extent. Ethnic media serve not only as an information hub for enclave businesses to advertise and connect with customers, but also as ethnic businesses themselves. Aside from transnational media branches such as Sing Tao—a leading Chinese-language daily found across major cities in North America—a majority of ethnic media are primarily mom-and-pop-style print media (Murray et al. 2007; Matsaganis et al. 2011), since sole proprietorships are easier to launch given the reduced cost of entry to digital distribution. The downside of such small-scale operational models is higher vulnerability in the market, which complies with the logic of political economy in the media industries. Indeed, it is predicted that minority media owners are more likely to face bankruptcies as they tend to be “under-collateralized and therefore vulnerable to economic downturns” (Waldman and the Working Group 2011). Thus, limited financial resources, let alone equally limited socio-cultural capacity, increase dependency on home-country news, which helps fill the daily “news hole” (Bennett 2012: 172) and, more importantly, creates ad space to attract advertising. The consequence is that the higher the emphasis on financial sustainability, the higher the portion of home-country news in the overall news output.
Critical Issues

Underrepresentation of ethno-racial minorities in media production and content was one of the factors that underpinned the growth of ethnic media. However, the pattern continues: ethnic media organizations and the discourse they produce daily are equally underrepresented in the broader media system. The record shows that in the US, African and Latino Americans—the two largest ethno-racial groups, which account for over 12 percent and 17 percent of the U.S. population respectively—own only 0.33 percent and 1 percent of television stations respectively (U.S. Census 2013; Waldman and the Working Group 2011). Studies also continue to find disconnects between ethnic media and broader society. Couldry and Dreher’s study of Australia’s emerging communicative spaces (2007) identified potential contributions to intercultural dialogue with mainstream media, but also a simultaneous lack of media strategies that enable substantive outcomes. Consequently, ethnic discourse produced by these media outlets is circulated only within their respective communities without reaching a broader audience. As Karim’s study on South Asian media in Vancouver (2002: 239) confirmed, “Even though civic discourse disseminated through ethnic media may not be as fragmented as Gitlin (1998) fears, the situation is also far from Husband’s (1994) idea of the multi-ethnic public sphere, where a multitude of voices reach a larger audience.”

Interestingly, however, while such a pattern of underrepresentation continues when the ethnic community is the “public” (Gandy 2000), a reverse pattern is observed when the ethnic community becomes important potential strategic “consumers” and “voters.” Mainstream media have been making efforts to tap into the ethnic market by publishing in different language editions (e.g., The Vancouver Sun’s former Chinese-language edition, taiyangbao.com) or developing cross-ethnic partnerships (e.g., Black Entertainment Television and Viacom, Telemundo and NBC, Sing Tao and Star Media Group). Such joint ventures are more attractive if the solid financial records of leading ethnic media have made them a desirable “commodity” (Jin and Kim 2011). What is of more concern is the “institutionalization of ethnic media”—the strategic use of ethnic media as an instrument to serve the needs of interest groups rather than to pluralize public discourse (Yu 2016). Disturbing cases found in Canada include the silent monitoring of ethnic media content for partisan purposes by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2012 and the “ethnic vote scandal” by the BC Liberals in 2013, which attempted to use ethnic media as channels to ethnic voters (Yu 2016).

Such marginalization of ethnic media and discourse has to do largely with a narrowed understanding of ethnic media in society in general and academia in particular. Whether the term “ethnic media” is officially defined (as in the case of Canada) or unofficially shared as a blanket term, it is generally understood as media by and for the other rather than media for all members of broader society as a potential option to consider in their daily media repertoire. As a result, policy frameworks concerning ethnic broadcasting (see, for example, the aforementioned Canada’s Policy Framework for Canadian Television and Ethnic Broadcasting Policy) tend to focus on fair and accurate representation or creation of space for ethno-racial minorities, rather than accessibility to these available ethnic resources for members of broader society. Equally, in academia, ethnic media studies have focused on varying aspects of ethnic media yet predominantly within the domain of ethnic communities rather than as part of the broader media system. However, given the rapid demographic changes in metropolitan centers—such as Los Angeles where over
60 percent of the population is non-white (U.S. Census Bureau 2010)—access to ethnic discourse for the proper exercise of citizenship and functioning democracy becomes more salient. That said, the notion of ethnic media as media only by and for the other requires a critical reassessment. Such a narrow conceptualization of ethnic media stands as a barrier to the proper production, integration, and distribution of ethnic discourse in places where minorities have overtaken the majority of the population. In an ideal multicultural society and the media system that it develops, multiple narratives from diverse communities must be produced and widely circulated, contested, and eventually integrated into the public discourse.

The Future of Ethnic Media and Ethnic Media Studies

To this end, more research efforts and grassroots initiatives are needed to explore the ways in which public discourse in a multicultural society can be pluralized. A potential solution suggested in Europe is to promote ethnic-mainstream media coproduction, such as the cases of Beur FM and Temoignage (France) and El Gringo and Metro (Sweden) (Matsaganis et al. 2011). In North America, what is more commonly seen instead is a tendency to create multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual spaces. Grassroots initiatives by media professionals such as New America Media and LA Beez aggregate ethnic news in collaboration with ethnic media to create a platform for “voices of the marginalized” (newamericamedia.org), while more localized efforts among local residents, academics, and journalists (such as the Alhambra Source) attempt to build cross-ethnic dialogue. What is unknown, however, are the success and failure factors that influence these initiatives, and, more importantly, the impact on broader society. Bailey and Harindranath (2006: 307) argue that ethnic media may help promote “differentiated citizenship” but their impact on broader society is still unclear. This same question about the broader impact needs to be extended to these emerging spaces to maximize the benefit of intercultural efforts, or to find new directions.

This brief discussion of ethnic media attempted to further ongoing debates on various aspects of ethnic media: terminologies and definitions, historical trajectories, trends evolving in production and consumption, and areas for future studies. All of these aspects seem to suggest that ethnic media are continually evolving—even more rapidly in the digital era—by going beyond geographic and ethnic boundaries. Ethnic media grow as a result of social changes and market forces, despite limited policy support. As Browne argues (2005), the development of ethnic media is after all the result of an interplay among social climate, lobbyists, legislature, political parties, regulatory agencies, and personal involvement. How these factors will come into play in transforming the understanding of ethnic media from media only by and for the other to media for all remains a question. However, the critical role of ethnic media as an important tool for a functioning democracy in a multicultural society seems to be no longer in question.

References


Further Reading


