

Rethinking Multicultural/Multiracial Media and the Integrity of Immigrant Integration

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Abstract:

While it is still early to tell, the 2015 federal election campaign suggests a different conjuncture: a new politics of “call out” and “call in” culture on racism in Canadian political culture, and new assertiveness and division of labour between multicultural and mainstream media in campaign coverage. After the majority of Canadian voters rejected racialized wedge politics, the next important task is de-essentialization. A term usually applied to identity politics, this article argues for a broader creative economy lens on how it can also be applied to multicultural/multiracial media policy, the forthcoming Syrian influx of refugees, and evaluating the inclusivity and integrity of immigrant integration.

Keywords: Creative Industries; De-Essentializing; Diasporic Media; Ethnic Media; Inclusivity; Integration; Multicultural Strategies; Political Communication; Syrian Refugees; The 2015 Federal Election

Résumé:

Bien qu'il soit encore tôt pour le dire, la campagne électorale fédérale 2015 suggère une conjoncture différente: une nouvelle politique de “call out” et “call in” de la culture concernant le racisme au sein de la politique canadienne, et une nouvelle affirmation et division du travail des médias publics multiculturels et grand public dans la couverture de la campagne. Après un rejet par la majorité des électeurs canadiens d'une politique de la division racial, la prochaine tâche est de de-essentialiser. Ce terme, généralement appliqué à la politique d'identitaire, cet article plaide pour l'élargissement de l'économie créative concernant la façon

dont elle peut également être appliquée à la politique des médias multiculturelle/multiraciale, l'apport de l'arrivée des réfugiés Syriens, ainsi que d'évaluer l'inclusion et l'intégrité de l'intégration des immigrants.

Mots-clés: Communication politique; De-essentialiser; Élections fédérale 2015; Inclusion; Industries créatives; Intégration; Médias diasporiques; Médias ethnique; Réfugiés Syriens; Stratégies multiculturelles

Refugees. Who knew? They come in at least two types. Government assisted, who are afforded all the rights to services of citizenship except the vote, and asylum seekers, who are here at pleasure. Mainstream media are hypnotized by these rudimentary discoveries, but refugees will not likely turn to them first upon arrival. Both types of refugees have very different relationships to multicultural/ethnic media and the democratic public spheres. But, investor and family class immigrants do as well. How do these respective class of immigrants differ, if at all, in their relationships to the media in Canada? To deny a hierarchy among immigrant classes is specious. So how do refugees regard these “preferred” immigrant classes? How does each immigrant subclass define its views, and experience the everyday democracy that is ours over time? Critical researchers are having their ethical and conceptual world views stretched to the breaking point in theorizing “integration” of ethnic media into contemporary advanced multicultural and democratic societies. It is 2015.

That is why this special issue of the *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition* on “Multicultural Media and Immigrant Immigration” for 2015 and beyond is so very important.

Given the politics of racism, violence, and exclusion that have spilled over from the United States Republican leadership debates and the 2015 Fall federal election in Canada, some acknowledgement of the theoretical subtext of racism stubbornly inherent in earlier state-sanctioned multicultural media policy is long overdue. We have, over the past decade, acknowledged the dark side of Canada’s history offering refuge. We have begun reconciliation projects. We have observed the Tenth Anniversary of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, but recognized that without the reinforcement of the Convention on the Elimination of Racism and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (to which Canada is still not a signatory) it is a hollow straw in defense of the cultural right to difference.

The time may be now for the “post-integrative realities” of a “post-ethnic Canada” to be addressed as symbolized by Canada’s new rainbow federal cabinet, according to some analysts, but I remain to be persuaded. I am not mollified by any assertion that there is an evolutionary, and not revolutionary intent, a call for a “sequential advance that moves beyond the past, without . . . abdicating it” as author and sociologist Augie Fleras argues in this impressive volume. Moving beyond the past involves repudiating—not accepting—its errors and moving beyond them. It also involves realism about the inevitability of appalling human conflict, but most importantly, a dialogic, democratic, and deliberative way to resolve conflicts with fairness, reciprocity, and integrity. Thankfully, in Canada, we are beginning to air these questions about values and the regulatory ideal for social speech, but the connection between academic and practitioner discourses in cultural and journalism studies is still underdeveloped. We have seen a

new maturity and professionalism in the quality of news coverage in this last election, and a new politics of “call out” and “call in” culture on racism, one patently stronger and more tolerant than in the United States, but still troubling in these dark days after the Paris bombings and downing of the Russian bomber over Turkey at the time of writing.

When it comes to multicultural media and immigrant integration in Canada, there are many errors made. The first error is found in the formal discourse around “ethnic” media, imposed by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) as a product of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Canada’s Multiculturalism Act of the 1980s.

Theoretically, it is time to join common cause with the post-colonial authors who want to de-essentialize Western conceptions of ethnicity and therefore “ethnic” ghettoization. Yet however we may want to avoid gratuitous racialization, it is a historical fact that essentialization worked as an administrative category for the fostering—and containing—of ethnic media for many years. But its future is uncertain. Even the CRTC has abandoned its genre protection for “ethnic” licenses in cable regulation, effective 2016, so the private sector ethnic media incumbents like Fairchild TV or Asian Television Canada will enjoy less protection and access to subscription revenue in a pick and pay universe. Broadcast ethnic media are now less constrained by format or genre protection but at a price. They must negotiate with their cable companies for carriage and marketing on their own. They rise and fall on their market appeal.

Expect them to adapt to these new realities, develop new Internet streaming platforms, and seek to broaden their audiences. They may even deepen their financial partnerships with other global players, subject to foreign ownership requirements under the Broadcasting Act, which may be also up for review. But they are seemingly at the mercy of the lightning move to the over-the-top streaming competitors who set up virtual distribution. Some, like the Montreal-based WatchMojo, has become Canada’s largest YouTube channel; while the Toronto-based Ethnic Channels Group (ECG) has offered a direct Internet service of 150 channels for 12 different languages including Al Jazeera Arabic, bypassing or going over the top of the existing digital TV channels licensed in Canada.¹ If our future source countries for immigration continue to change, and other new ventures like WatchMojo or ECG enter, what are the implications for startups of new ethnic media against the older generations who have a head start? Are we unwittingly stratifying access to authentic local communication and cultural expression for future newcomers? My answer is: yes, we have. There has been systematic preference for incumbents, and insufficient attention to the need for robust business development and competition policy for new entrants.

Just as these new players are unleashed, the incumbent TV channels are in decline, as seen by the latest layoffs from Bell Canada, or the failure of the mainstream TV consortium to sponsor a national election debate in 2015, both signs of their declining market and cultural power. Trading places? Not yet. But “mainstream” media are surely easy to challenge when examined for their role in interpreting Canada to the world, or the world to Canada. When even the publicly supported CBC has scarcely six international bureaus, Canada’s mainstream media may be said to be isolationist, or at best, rentiers of the emerging global imaginary. Mainstream media *need* ethnic media content providers to interpret the world and Canada to the world. But, in the rush to global streaming sources and new digital content aggregators and platforms, the need to protect and promote local diasporic cultural production has never been more crucial.

Media centrism, today, actually obscures other new forms of cultural production that are emerging. At the very least we need to situate media policy in the context of a broader understanding of the creative/cultural industries. The most vibrant sector of the diasporic media

with the highest volatility, and interesting expansion to reflect newcomers to Canada has been the print sector, where print ethnic media entities have far outnumbered radio and TV ethnic media licenses, even if revenues have not. Effective print incumbents include the *Indo-Canadian Times*, a Punjabi-language weekly, *Indo Canadian Awaaz*, *Indo Canadian World*, and the English language papers for the South Asian community, like the *Asian Star*, *South Asian Post*, and *The Link* in the Greater Vancouver Area to name a few (Multilingual International Research and Ethnic Media Services, 2015, December 2). Even these incumbent and well-known “legacy” ethnic media content providers are uneven in their transition to the online world, and digital archives of their publications weak to non-existent. This needs policy remedy—the importance of their contributions to Canada’s political landscape cannot be lost to us again, just as we develop the civic literacy to interpret them.

Digital online blogs, news aggregators, and media are multiplying. New, culturally diverse millennial political commentators are emerging and drawing larger following. As digital media ventures have dropped in cost, more entrants risk their own money and sweat equity to launch new startups on YouTube. Other sites like I-politics.ca, begin to serve new target markets, or seek “big tent” multicultural formats to attract immigrants away from the old “Omni” TV (slowly being abandoned by its owner Rogers) but with aggregators in new form, like New Canadian Media.ca and others.

Ethnic media journalists are professionalizing in new ways, and telling new stories. They are active. They are vibrant. They are on the vanguard of a new form of electoral reporting: initiating stories on the 54 or more key target ridings with a critical mass of cultural minorities, stories about the electoral balance of power, the electoral success of Sikhs, and especially about the campaign premise of the Harper Conservatives that new Canadians are socially and fiscally right wing, the party to replace the Liberals in the heart of immigrants.

This attempt to rewrite political history was also made by the BC Liberal Government as seen by the leaked “multicultural strategy” in the 2013 provincial election, which led to two staff resignations, part of a similar effort to fundamentally “redefine (the BC Liberal’s) approach to ethnic media from being an ‘add-on’ to being viewed as part of the mainstream media”. The British Columbia Liberal fused partisan and government communications in a multicultural strategy, which ensured that opportunities and requests from ethnic communities and ethnic media were promptly acted on and not ignored. It called for quality translators and more party spokespersons who could speak to the target third language citizens in their preferred language, with a mission to reach out to their groups. Despite this apparent status shift in preferential access for ethnic communities, the strategy warned, “failing to ensure a sustainable outreach effort could be seen as time-limited pandering . . . if not done correctly, we will appear opportunist”. Finally, the Strategy concludes: “political centre-right is a natural fit for many immigrant/ethnic communities”.

July 23, 2013, as the leak broke, I received a media inquiry from a veteran journalist from British Columbia’s media scene. It is worth quoting in full:

Hi Dr. Murray: I’m working on a series in which one issue is ethnic enclaves and viewpoints. In relation to ethnic programming that the “mainstream” can’t understand due to language: I’m wondering if your research has turned up any radicalization or encouragement of ethnic enclaves in any communities? One editor suggested to me that he believes in his South Asian community, sometimes there are outlets that overly play to new immigrants fears, by suggesting that the

mainstream doesn't understand them, is out to get them, and therefore stay in your shell and do business with us, so to speak. Or is the phenomenon of ethnic media seen as a positive force generally?

So here we have proof that wedge theories of ethnic media and their role in economic enclaves are an automatic reflex among mainstream journalists—added to the selective micro segmentation and wedge politics practiced by political strategists. Where can we even begin in unraveling this unthinking systemic racist reflex?

This 2015 election suggests a different conjuncture may be opening: it proved hopeful for its majority voter rejection of racialized wedge politics. The niqab controversy or the Conservative radio and print ad aimed at Chinese and Punjabi voters in Toronto and Vancouver failed in their appeal to any socially conservative voter's fear of safe injection sites, sale of marijuana, or neighbourhood brothels. The joke on the South Asian Canadian forced to say "nice hair" in the Liberal attack ads is that so many South Asians took Liberal cabinet posts. Interracial satire reigned supreme in the Twitterverse.

After rejection of racial wedge politics, de-essentialization is the next important task. A term usually applied to identity politics, it can also be applied to policy. De-essentializing starts with contesting old dichotomies of cultural majority/minority Canadians and mainstream and ethnic/community/alternative media. Unpacking whiteness plays into this pedagogy for public education. Visible minorities now are in the majority in Richmond and Surrey, and 52% of the city of Vancouver so the term should be set aside (Mu, 2013, May 8). Is the rest of Canada going to catch up with how this changes the language and image of Canadian identities? What new civic citizenship narratives are emerging? And how will they play into the construction of our retrospective history around 2017, Canada's 150th anniversary?

De-essentialization also challenges premises that the mainstream or legacy media are any longer mainstream. They are fragmenting. They are not responding well to competition from more global streaming news and entertainment sources. Most have not made the transition to monetizing their digital contents. They are, in other words, ripe for competition from the cultural minorities in our major cities, which now are in the majority—as even past cabinet minister Jason Kenny predicted in the federal 2011 election. The economic advantage of the incumbent legacy content producing media has not leaked away completely, but it is diminishing.

De-essentializing implies turning tables. Whites are experiencing marginalization. Many whites on the progressive left understand some of what marginalization means when the past ten years of their electoral system have consigned them to a government of the right, which was elected by a minority. Whatever the reality of this cultural experience and its long-term political implications, it unsettles the "original" Canadian settler myths.

There is a large literature on "strategic essentialism" in identity politics that is useful in considering integration. It suggests a dialectical, intersectional awareness of the politics of race, which could add nuance and power to discursive realism in social analysis. If I am a racialized minority, I need to assert that identity as an equity-seeking group in political mobilization, even as I ensure I am never contained by it.

I find interesting grounds for rethinking what some have called super diversity², to call for inclusivity (an intention and policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded) and not inclusion (the act or state of including): equity and equality and not integration. If integration is the inverse of differentiation in the original calculus use in mathematical theory, progressive feminist theorists like Iris Marion Young or Nancy Fraser say we must set it aside. If

integration in social theory suggests free and equal association, based on desegregation, then perhaps it is an important social goal, but realism inherent in an understanding of strategic essentialism is necessary as well. A historical understanding of the tendency for minority status gains to ebb and recede, as feminist historians have shown, suggests it may not work. If the intent in integration is to achieve one harmonious whole, it still carries the whiff of assimilation and the European model of social cohesion, found to be fraying in multiculturalism there today. It is one thing to call passionately for white and racialized citizens to “renegotiate their multiple differences in/with/through everyday experiences” as Iris Marion Young has often called for in rethinking individual and group claim in democratic citizenship. But I caution multicultural studies to not fall into the (liberal) trap of emphasis on processual cultural hybridity, or fluidity, and not substantive social justice.

The core problem, I think, is that if we want to equalize life chances, restore representation, recognition, and the right to cultural and creative production to minorities in Canada, we need to recognize the changing way of life in Canada merits reworking of public cultural policy and redistribution of public investment.

Few collective state/public resources were redirected to “ethnic” media, something which clearly has to be challenged especially as the legacy news media founder.³ In other words, the redistributive dimensions of socio-cultural policy, overlaid on the social capital premise of the importance of ethnic media to social and economic enclaves, were never addressed (even in the so-called progressive not for profit, public or community media, policy domains still predominantly white).

It is possible that they may be. But inclusivity in policy design for diasporic peoples cannot be achieved by conventional thinking about how to effect integration. Instead, we must seek new cultural policy levers promoting expression. Just as we have seen the entrepreneurial class of immigrants bring with them higher tolerance for risk in launching new media enterprises, like the South Koreans here in British Columbia, so too do we need to turn to creative economy policy, and the focus on urban business levers, access to space and start up assistance, and capacity to build new cultural corridors and clusters of new media/design/creative producers. I have argued elsewhere that more cultural policy today happens in other substantive federal policy areas than in Heritage itself (Murray, 2015a; 2015b). The policy focus here switches to minimum wage policy, incentives to pay interns, develop new labour force training, open up recognition of professional credentials to access jobs, or offer start up assistance for new minority media ventures while promoting new sharing/social enterprise models. If estimates from Statistics Canada are right—and we will not know until the restoration of the long form census—at least one in twenty of future newcomers will turn to the creative economy to build a sustainable livelihood, but this estimate is low and seen in other similar jurisdictions to be closer to one in ten.

Canada sits in apparent administrative if not psychosocial “readiness” to welcome Syrian refugees—not without some inevitable reaction in some quarters. What do these refugees bring with them, and how will they join our communities, and intersect with our media-saturated landscape? Surely they come from a sector of the world where the growth in Arab media has been unsurpassed by other global regions, and social media and digital expression never more resistant and creative. How many of them will want to contribute here? Build their communities of Syrian compatriots across Canada and beyond? The bi-weekly *Al Ahram* newspaper in Canada, for example, is one the little known indigenous Arabic media providers⁴ that may well need extraordinary support from the government to increase its capacity to serve newcomers the

news they need during such relocation, notwithstanding its editorial tack right to the Conservative policy on military intervention it took during the last election. How might Al Ahram walk this editorial tightrope?

Local welcoming communities may need to link Syrian refugees to local writers, to write through their persecution, interpret Syria and the West's role in it to their neighbours, to process their images of Canada, and construct new meaning. Community colleges, universities, and journalists may rally around mentoring and connection with other local ethnic media outlets. Cities may ensure their new digital media start-up zones have space for the Syrian refugees to begin. If the predominant job status of the new arrivals to the new economy is one of the precariat, then general policies to address sustainable livelihoods for the entire workforce are needed, with special care given to immigrants, in a desperate push to reverse the last decade in the deterioration of the economic condition of immigrants five to ten years after arrival compared to previous generations. Arrival today is harder for all classes of immigrants, including family class immigrants (not initially the most economically self-sustaining, but the more successful over time) but the systemic problem is shared, requiring general social action. Ironically, the 2015 Federal election's focus on the lower-middle class may have to switch to the working poor—where many progressives thought it should be.

An endogenous growth perspective on diasporic media and its challenges is one way to adapt the flow of peoples to the nation state. This is not to exempt public institutions from the policy responsibility for inclusivity. Arguably every penny of the financing to be restored to the CBC, Canada Council and Canadian Media Fund promised by the Liberal Party should go to promote cultural diversification, and support indigenous productions finding new global markets. Such a view, then, argues that social infrastructure must not be overlooked in the forthcoming stimulative infrastructure projects to be undertaken by Canada's new Liberal Government.

But we have, in addition, a critical need to interrogate the rejuvenation of a Liberal party lens on cosmopolitan identity appropriate to Canada's next century. This discursive lens is far from trumpeting "being back" on the world stage; being a climate change player not denier; or bringing a renewed foreign policy sensitivity and proactiveness to the global table.

Telling the cosmopolitan narrative without a consumption framework, or bias to the global political or creative class, is difficult. The BBC's World Service public affairs program "World Have Your Say" sponsored a roundtable in Vancouver in 2013 about the future of international public broadcasting. Daphne Bramham, one of *The Vancouver Sun's* most noted journalists, made an impassioned plea for a media system which served a vision of a New Canada, one bringing the *global* to the *local*. She was perfectly articulating a post-national, cosmopolitan view of Canada's culture at a time of rapid in-migration, at a rate and level that is still the highest of many nations around the world. She was also asserting a new space for diasporic sensibility. All good. I responded at the time with a riposte that we also need an international media sphere more capable of bringing the *local* to the *global*. National media systems today have to rise to the policy challenge to provide the diversity and conduit between the local and global more effectively to adjust to people flows over time and interpret Canada to the world and its obverse—even more critical today. Of course, there was the usual talk about BBC colonialism, and concerns about sustaining sufficient international news from a Canadian perspective among the so-called legacy media (a devious term emerging in policy parlance), but my point—and the point so ably made by April Lindgren's work at Ryerson—is that we need a far more effective story on local news from the perspective of international immigrants,

permanent residents and their next generation as well as those here on visas, and arguably, even those who visit for a short period of time.

As more and more Canadians turn to global news and entertainment providers, the time is right to develop new models of inclusivity, integrity, and innovation among our democratic diasporic media. It is also time to call them to account, like all the parts of the media system, on their construction of social justice, narratives of inclusion in democracy, as well as commitment in the dialogue renewing it. The contents of this volume will prove illuminating in this context. The research job ahead to understand what works in creating the conditions for equity and inclusion of cultural minority newcomers—aside from place luck—is a large one, and even larger in a slow growth economy seeking to make the transition to a more innovative sustainable future (Griffith, 2015). The academy has never been more challenged, or more central to “transcreating” these narratives. Enjoy this read. We hope you will be inspired and share your ideas from it.

Notes

- 1 Akshan Karbasfrooshan, CEO and Editor in Chief of Watchmojo was a featured futurist at the CRTC’s Discoverability Summit in Vancouver in early December 2015. The service successfully targets male millennials. Ling Lin, the Head of YouTube partnerships for Canada who is based in New York, studied east Asian Studies at U of T (Agrell, 2010, November 18).
 - 2 In this use, the term “super diversity” looks at the probability you will encounter another ethnicity than your own. In this case, it is the neighbourhood of Burnaby-Edmonds—mostly middle to lower income residential areas (Todd, 2015, October 30).
 - 3 Funding to diasporic writers, artists, journalists or other cultural workers has failed to keep up with population growth on a per capita basis.
 - 4 Lists are available, but incomplete, at <http://nationalethnicpress.com/ethnic-press/newspaper/newspapers-ontario/>. Work in the tradition of Aliaa Dakrouy on the Arab consumption of Diasporic Media (2006); and Karim H. Karim and Mahmoud Eid needs further exploration.
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