



Ethnic print media in the multicultural nation of Canada

A case study of the black newspaper in Montreal¹

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the social and cultural roles of ethnic print media in the country within the prism of Canada's multicultural policy. Specifically, the article examines how the ethnic groups are framed in the mainstream national media in Canada and then examines how these ethnic media are [re]constructing their own identities in contrast to their framed identities in the mainstream national print media such as the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post* and *Toronto Sun*. In exploring the overall socio-political impacts of these ethnic print media on the social fabrics and cultural identity in Canadian society, *Montreal Community Contact*, an ethnic newspaper of the black community in Montreal, is used as a case study.

KEY WORDS ■ Canada ■ ethnic media ■ journalists ■ mainstream media
■ multiculturalism ■ visible minorities

Introduction

In Canada today, there are over 250 ethnic newspapers² and about 14 full-service radio stations. These ethnic media, which are predominant in larger urban areas such as Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, represent over 50 cultures and over five million Canadians whose cultural heritages are neither French nor Anglo-Saxon. Since 1979, when Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunication Commission (CRTC) granted a license to Toronto-based CFMT-TV, Canada's first multicultural television station, two other multicultural television stations have been licensed in Montreal and Vancouver. CRTC, which is the regulatory body for broadcasting and telecommunication stations and services, has also licensed five ethnic specialty and pay-television services, and 44 digital specialty services licensed across the country (Media

Awareness Network, 2005). These stations broadcast programmes in over 15 languages to many ethnic groups in the country. There is also an indigenous television station, the Aboriginal People Television (APT). The APTV, which was established in 1999, is the world's first national public television network for the aboriginal people.

These ethnic media, which are usually established by an individual or group of individuals from diverse ethnic groups, offer an alternative view to the news and commentaries in the mainstream media. They contribute to a sense of community identity for the people that they serve by meeting the specific information needs of the community. They are the 'communal voice' on issues of utmost importance to their audience or readership. They can best be described as the community cultural resources in the sense that they 'facilitate cultural citizenship in ways that differentiate it from other media' (Meadows et al., 2002: 3). By providing extensive coverage of events and activities in their respective communities, they also contributed to a re-conceptualization 'of Habermas's notion of the public sphere' within their communities (Avison and Meadows, 2000, cited in Meadows et al., 2002; Molnar and Meadows, 2001).

Within the prism of Canada's multicultural policy, this article explores the social and cultural roles of ethnic print media in the country. In particular, it looks at how the ethnic groups are framed in the mainstream national media in Canada and then examines how these ethnic media are [re]constructing their own identities in contrast to their framed identities in the mainstream national media such as the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post*. To explore the overall socio-political impacts of these ethnic print media on the social fabrics and cultural identity in Canada, *Montreal Community Contact*, an ethnic newspaper of the black community in Montreal, is used as a case study.

Multiculturalism as the context

Canada adopted a multicultural policy in 1971 and officially became a multicultural country. The basic objectives of the multicultural policy include assisting ethnic groups to retain and foster their ethnic-cultural identities. The policy is also aimed at promoting creative cultural exchanges among all ethno-cultural groups in the country (Dyck, 1996).

Multicultural policy came into effect based on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which was originally set up in 1963 to examine how the English-Canadians and French-Canadians could co-exist and have practically equal stakes in Canadian

federalism in the face of the growing threat of separation from Quebec's nationalists.

In 1988, the new Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed. This new act consolidated the existing policies and practices into legislation, and obligated institutions, especially those under control of the federal government, to reflect the multicultural nature of Canada in representation and services.

This post-multicultural mandate – to implement programs and policies that reflected, reinforced, and promoted Canada's multicultural realities – was extended to include media institutions such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the National Film Board (NFB), and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). (Fleras, 1995: 409)

In exercising its power as spelled out in the new act, CRTC, which is the regulatory body³ for the telecommunication and broadcasting industry in Canada, indicated in the 1991 Broadcasting Act that all licensed broadcasting stations should reflect the racial and multicultural diversity of Canada in their programming and employment. This is to 'safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada' (CRTC, 1991).

But, in spite of the declaration in the 1991 Broadcasting Act, blacks and other visible minorities⁴ in Canada are often misrepresented in the mainstream media, especially in the print media. As discussed further in the next section of this article, the image of blacks and other visible minorities in the Canadian mainstream media is greatly distorted. Through either an act of omission or commission, the mainstream media position aboriginal people and other people of colour as 'others' within the multicultural society of Canada. The 'others' are everything that Canada and Canadian values are not. With the consistent negative portrayal of blacks and other visible minorities, they have sustained the discourse of 'otherness'.

Portrayal of blacks and other visible minorities in the mainstream media

The significant body of literature on media representation of blacks and other visible minorities shows deliberate racism in the media coverage of issues and cases relating to this group of people, despite the stipulation in the 1991 Canadian Broadcasting Act that the media organizations should show the 'multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada' in their coverage. Media institutions such as the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* (CBC), *Globe and Mail* and *National Post* 'have come under scrutiny for disregarding minority representations and meaningful input, thus robbing them of credibility as a progressive force within the community. People of colour have been rendered

“invisible” by selective depictions in TV programming, newscasting, and advertising’ (Fleras, 1995: 407).

Jiwani (1992) examined the representation of women of colour in the films and concluded that they were mainly portrayed as deceptive and second-class citizens. The lifestyles and experiences of both foreign-born visible minorities and Canadian-born visible minorities, especially men, are still continually being ‘filtered through the fears and fantasies of a dominant white culture’ (Fleras, 1995: 407) and the ‘us and them’ mentality of the mainstream media culture.

A critical analysis of columns and editorials in the two national daily newspapers, *Globe and Mail* and *National Post*, by Henry and Tator (2003) shows consistent patterns in ‘Jamaicalization of crimes’ and ‘criminalization’ of blacks in Toronto and Canada. As Henry and Tator aptly put it:

Blacks are depicted as the undesirable and dangerous ‘Other’, and one of the most pervasive and persuasive rhetorical strategies is the racialization of crime. More specifically, the Black man is constructed as a threat to the social order, and is a symbol of danger. The repetition of this idea and image in the print and electronic media leads to the notion that the Black man requires continual surveillance. (2003: 10)

There is an assumption among some journalists of the mainstream media in Toronto and Vancouver that the killing of a visible minority, especially a Black from the Caribbean or an Asian from south Asia, by another visible minority is always a gang-related case. Although this is not often the case, the media, and print media in particular, still continue to report ‘gangland aspects’ (Henry, 1999; Mahtani, 2001). In short, within the discourse of the mainstream media in Canada, visible minorities are seen as ‘others’ and a threat to the social-cultural fabric of the country. ‘The discourses of the Canadian mass media, whether consciously or unwittingly, present a view of the world that serves to stigmatize whole communities of people based on their ethnicity and/or skin colour’ (Henry and Tator, 2003: 9).

Blacks are often depicted as ‘criminals’, ‘villains or victims, or buffoons and folksy sitcom types’ (Cuff, 1990; Henry and Tator, 2003), while the First Nation people are represented as ‘primitive’, ‘savage’, ‘the noble savage’, ‘the savage Indian’, ‘blood-thirsty barbarians’ and ‘the drunken Native’ (Fleras and Kunz, 2001; Valaskakis, 1993). Muslims are seen as terrorists and a threat to national security. The Asian immigrants are represented as ‘human cargoes’ and ‘disease-carrying embodiment of danger who posed a significant threat to the moral, physical and economic well-being of “legitimate” Canadians’ (Greenberg, 2000: 531).

In extreme cases, as evident in the study of over 200 editorials and columns of the *Toronto Sun* from 1978 to 1985 by Ginzberg (1985), blacks and

other people of colour are considered as genetically inferior to the white people. Here are some examples of the *Toronto Sun's* extreme columns and editorials in which biological racism is woven into the words and images used in the description of blacks and other people of colour:

One cannot come out and say that these awful riots are caused by Black people who seem to be subhuman in their total lack of civility. (Barbara Amiel, 2 October 1985, cited in Ginzberg, 1985; Henry and Tator, 2002)

The Blacks of North America have diverged widely from their distant relatives in Africa. In their music and dancing and in their athletic prowess some specific genetic distinctions shine through the environmental influences. (Mackenzie Porter, 15 July 1978, cited in Ginzberg, 1985; Henry and Tator, 2002)

Too many Afro-Asians abroad, even some of those with august rank of diplomat, possess only a veneer of civilization. (Mackenzie Porter, 23 April 1984, cited in Ginzberg, 1985; Henry and Tator, 2002)

This systemic stereotyping of the visible minorities and women could be seen on one level as a result of individual prejudice and ethnocentrism. On another level, the stereotyping of the women and visible minorities could be traced to the institutional operational dynamic of the media. Fleras (2001) argues that the stereotyping is intrinsic to the media operational dynamic because the industry is constructed 'around simplifying information for audiences to consume by tapping into a collective portfolio of popular and unconscious images, both print and visual, each of which imposes a readily identifiable frame or narrative spin' (p. 318). This identifiable frame or narrative spin naturalizes the stereotypes in such a way that it fits into the common-sense knowledge. The more people get exposed to this narrative spin or identifiable frame, the more the stereotypes become 'real' to them. 'While not "real" in the conventional sense, they become real in their social consequences' (Fleras, 2001: 318).

Apart from the systemic stereotyping that comes from the institutional operational dynamic of the media, the monopoly of the Canadian media industry by a few white conservative rich men is another factor for the unfair representation of the visible minorities in the media. Researchers such as Henry (1999), Miller (1998) and Mahtani (2001) and journalists such as Siddiqui (2001) have argued that the control of the media by these few rich ones has led to the homogenization of the media landscapes. The end product of this homogenization is the production and enforcement of the cultural political ideologies and Eurocentric views of the elites. As Winter (1997) observes, the news media 'legitimize a fundamentally undemocratic system. Instead of keeping the public informed, they manufacture public consent for policies which favour their owners: the corporate elite' (p. xv). Also, given the fact that political influence, commercial logic and profits are the underlying

principles behind monopolization of the media outlets and contents, there is a slim chance of 'greater diversity of stories that expose racial injustice, or tell other kinds of stories about minorities' (Mahtani, 2001: 15).

In the quest to maximize their profits and acquire a significant market share, the media owners and managements could have easily excluded visible minorities on the ground that the white folks have more market share and money for media products. This hypothesis is validated in the study commissioned by the Government of Canada on the participation of visible minorities in Canadian society. The report,⁵ *Equality Now* (Canada House of Commons, 1984), noted that the media institutions in the country usually adopt an only 'white sells' approach, especially in advertising. Fifteen years after this government survey, Henry Mietkiewicz, the *Toronto Star* media critic, did an informal survey of television advertisements and found that the 'white sells' maxim is still valid. From Mietkiewicz's survey (1999), only 10.4 percent of the 1787 television advertisements that were broadcast in over 114 hours of television programming on Canadian and American channels in February 1999 provided more than three seconds of screen time to a visible minority character, even though about 31 percent of the total advertisements survey had visible minority characters. 'Such low visibilities may set into motion self-fulfilling prophecies: white content attracts white consumers who in turn encourage more white-based coverage in a self-perpetuating manner' (Fleras, 2001: 313).

The absence of racial and cultural diversity in the newsrooms of other major media outlets in Canada could also be partly responsible for negative representation and portrayal of blacks and people of colour in the media. As discussed in the next section, most newsrooms are still all white. Thus, in the reporting of news, many journalists in these newsrooms are 'largely bound by the dominant cultures within which they operate, including embedded societal prejudices, stereotypes, and populist frames of thinking' (Mahtani, 2001: 18).

Invisibility of blacks and other visible minorities in Canadian newsrooms

In spite of the growing population of visible minorities in Canada, Canadian news media are lagging behind in recruiting minority journalists. Most of the newsrooms today are still all white. In the study by Pritchard and Sauvageau (1998), it was established that 97.3 percent of journalists in the Canadian media are white. The finding of this study was not so much different from the result of the study carried out six years earlier by the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association and Professor John Miller of Ryerson University's School of

Journalism. According to the study (research work done by Miller for the Canadian Newspaper Association in 1994), 'minorities in Canadian newsrooms', non-whites hold only 2.6 per cent of the professional jobs in Canadian daily newspapers with more than 75,000 circulation. In the 41 Canadian newsrooms surveyed in the study, there are 2620 professional journalists. Of those journalists, only 67 are minorities. While there are 16 Blacks and 17 Chinese-Canadian, only four native Canadians are in the newsrooms, the study indicated.

In a follow-up study⁶ done in the summer of 2004, Miller and Caron found a slight increase in the number of visible minorities in the newsrooms. 'Non-whites now constitute 3.4 per cent of the newsgathering staffs of 37 papers that returned questionnaires, compared to 2.6 per cent of staff at papers which responded to a similar survey in 1994' (Miller and Caron, 2004). That is, 72 out of 2119 journalists in these newspapers are visible minorities. This number is extremely low, considering that visible minorities make up 13.4 percent of the about 31 million population of Canada. Twenty-two of the surveyed 37 newspapers in 10 provinces of the country reported all-white staff. The table below provides a racial breakdown of the visible minorities in the newsrooms of these 37 daily newspapers.

Table 1 Racial groups in newsrooms

Racial group	Total number of positions in 2004	Total number of positions in 1994	Change
South Asian	16	13	+3
Chinese	27	17	+10
Black	16	16	0
Filipino*	3	–	–
Arab/West Asian*	2	–	–
Latin American	3	2	+1
Aboriginal	1	4	–3
Other**	4	15	–11

Note: *Not measured in 1994. **Other included Filipino and Arab/West Asian in 1994.

Source: Miller and Caron, 2004.

How come minority populations cannot see themselves in the newsrooms? Are there not capable minority journalists who can report news? The simple fact is that diversity and equity in employment are not among the top priorities for Canadian owners and editors. In the article, 'Too White', for the *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Joynt (1995) points out that 'publishers ranked diversity only 19th among their concerns, after such issues as computerization and competing with Canada Post for flyer business'. Miller and Caron (2004)

indicated that interest in diversity is low among the managing editors of Canadian daily newspapers. The 2001 survey of editors, reporters and professional association representatives by Barahona also showed that the management of the media organizations in the country did not see any need for diversity in the newsrooms.

Because the Canadian media organization does not practise equity when hiring, many qualified and brilliant minority journalists are not hired. A classic example is the case of Shelley Walcott, a graduate of Concordia University's School of Journalism, Montreal, and a former contributor to the *Montreal Community Contact* (the same newspaper that is used as a case study in this article). Before being hired by CNN in 1999, Walcott, who is black, was rejected by about 50 Canadian news media. In the article that appeared in the *Montreal Gazette* of 24 January 2000, Larry Blase, CNN Newsroom executive producer, described Walcott, who is a video journalist and writer for the CNN Headline News, as an excellent writer. 'She has a great disposition and work ethic. She's a really good writer and very well spoken. And she's not American', Blase said.

Why was Walcott's talent not noticed in Canada? From the perspective of Miller (1994 and Miller and Caron, 2004), there is a systemic bias against the visible minorities when it comes to hiring. This systemic bias, he notes, might be an unconscious one because many managing editors tend to hire people that they could identify with and relate to. Sylvia Stead, assistant editor of the *Globe and Mail*, which is the Canadian equivalent of the *New York Times*, indicates that the absence of many visible minorities among the staff at the many Canadian news media is due to the fact that the media, in general, is always 'behind the times' in terms of hiring.

One reason I think we're low is because news organizations' hiring tends to change slower than how society changes. We're not reflecting society today because we can't just go out and hire completely new staff members to reflect the Canada of today. We make a conscious effort, but I think we're always behind the times. (Stead, cited in Vongdouangchanh, 2005)

Second, experience at the ethnic media is generally not considered to be 'real' reporting and editing experience by many managing editors at the big media outlets in Canada. To these managing editors, there is no real journalism in the ethnic media. This assumption is not limited to the ethnic media only. It is also applicable to weekly newspapers and electronic media in the small towns. They often view journalists at the ethnic media and small-town media as 'second-citizens' in the profession.

Unlike the USA where editors⁷ organize job fairs, compile a report of minority-hiring success stories, and examine newsroom culture and opportunities for training and promotion, in Canada there is no enabling structure for

the talented minorities to break into the ranks of reporting and editing. Most of the jobs in the Canadian journalism industry are hardly advertised for everybody to have equal opportunity of applying. It is always through word of mouth and traditional professional networks that people get to know about the possible job opening. Since many people of colour are not in the newsrooms and also not often in the traditional professional networks, it means that they might not know about the possible job openings (Henry and Tator, 2002). And there is no concrete effort from the mainstream media organizations to go after them either. To this end, many visible minority journalists have had to seek employment outside the media industry. Some volunteer their time at ethnic media and help in defining news agenda for their ethnic communities.

Ethnic media – filling in the gap

Ethnic media,⁸ which are usually products of attempts by various ethnic groups to organize themselves and sustain their cultural heritage within the multicultural society of Canada, provide news and programs of interest to the people of their respective ethnic communities. They report on community experiences and events.

Several of these ethnic media were established in response to the misrepresentation, under-representation and invisibility of visible minorities in the mainstream media. They are meant to reflect the racial and cultural diversity of Canada through the reportage of their own issues. They provide room for cultural expressions in the sense that cultural folklore and languages are regularly used in reporting and programming. This draws them closer to the community and gives people in the community a sense of belonging. Although significant numbers of the ethnic media use ethnic languages, there are handfuls that operate solely in either English or French. For instance, only a few ethnic media in the black community in different parts of Canada use French and ethnic languages (such as Creole) in their programs or reporting. Virtually all of them operate in English because many within the black community originally come from Caribbean and African countries where there were colonial ties to Britain. More importantly, English is the predominant language in Canada even though French and English are the official languages of the country.

But irrespective of the language of operation, they are still transmitters of cultural information. In addition to publicizing cultural information such as meetings, festivals and celebrations, they perform the assimilatory role by providing information on the 'involvement of the ethnic community members in the [Canadian] politics and more coverage of the relationship between

ethnic groups' native homelands and their adopted country' (Viswanath and Arora, 2000: 54). As illustrated by the case of *Montreal Community Contact* in the next section, the ethnic media are part of their communities' communication system. They provide safe nests for people of their respective communities. More importantly, they foster cultural specificity and expression within the framework of Canada's linguistic and cultural diversity.

However, hardly any visible minority group constitutes a homogeneous community. Ethnic media could, therefore, easily become a centre of cultural tensions and political ideology within the ethnic community, because of the differences in political orientations and religious beliefs between the people in the community and the people that run the media. In a study of the Spanish-language media in the greater New York region during the 1980s, Downing (1992) found that, through their huge operation, the Spanish-language media had the opportunity to empower the local Hispanic community, but failed to do so because of the class division in the community. For instance, 'the interests of immigrants, especially, seem very low on the agenda of these media, with information about their homelands prominent in a way that specific advice on dealing with the Immigration and Naturalization is not' (Downing, 1992: 273). The political and economic issues in the home countries seem to be far more important than the daily struggle of the working-class Hispanics in New York. Since these media are owned by the elite members of the American Hispanic community, the news stories tend to reflect the political views and ideological positions of these elites on the socio-economical and political affairs of their home countries. Basically, in comparison to the Hispanic media in Miami, Florida, the Latino media in New York region 'do not produce the strident ultrarightist rhetoric' (Rothchild, 1984, cited in Downing, 1992: 273).

English black print media in Montreal

According to the 2001 census, there are about 139,000 blacks living in Montreal. This figure includes both the foreign-born and Canadian-born blacks. The majority of them speak the English language and other languages such as French, Yoruba, Igbo, Creole, Hausa, Akan and Gonja. Three English newspapers serve the community. These papers are the *Ghanaian News*, *Caribbean Camera* and *Montreal Community Contact*. All of these papers are free. Of these three, only the *Montreal Community Contact* is published in Montreal and this is the primary reason that it is used as a case study in this article. Both the *Ghanaian News* and *Caribbean Camera* are published in Toronto, but have a strong presence in Montreal through their bureau offices there.

The news orientation and philosophy of both the *Ghanaian News* and *Caribbean Camera* are significantly different from the *Montreal Community Contact*. The *Ghanaian News*, which is a monthly newspaper, focuses on news relating to Ghanaian immigrants in Canada, especially those in Montreal and Toronto. It provides news about what the Ghanaians in Canada are doing and also news about on-going developments in the political and economic terrains of the nation of Ghana. A significant percentage of the news features and commentaries in the paper regularly explores the potential business links for the Canada-based Ghanaians in their 'abandoned homeland' of Ghana. While it does attempt to play an assimilatory role for Canadian-Ghanaians, it strongly emphasizes cultural retention and business investment in Ghana. But its reportage of trade and investment usually appears cautious and conservative (Riggins, 1992). It is an unconscious self-censored approach by the newspaper to steer clear of controversy among the political, linguistic and cultural diversified Ghanaian immigrant population in Canada.

The *Caribbean Camera*, which was founded in 1990, is similar to the *Ghanaian News* in terms of its news focus. It covers more the social and political affairs of the Caribbean countries. Much of its local news is about Caribbean festivals and the visits of top Caribbean diplomats and government officials to Canada. However, it is geared mainly towards Caribbean expatriates in Canada rather than working-class black Canadians. Although it does have occasional commentaries and editorials on the social issues such as black-on-black violence in Canada, it rarely runs straight news reports on these issues. As noted on the webspace of York University (2002), '*Caribbean Camera* is an excellent source for advertising, and offers a range of information, from how to book your next vacation, find legal representation or just catch up on the latest cricket score'.

The *Montreal Community Contact*, on the other hand, provides a bridge between these two newspapers. It focuses on the issues that are of importance to all blacks from Caribbean and African countries. Ninety percent of its news, editorials and commentaries are about the situations confronting both foreign-born and Canadian-born blacks in Montreal. Unlike the *Ghanaian News* and *Caribbean Camera*, it does more in-depth reporting of issues within the Montreal black community and sometimes about blacks in North America (such as the 2005 Hurricane Katrina and blacks in New Orleans, USA). As discussed in the next section, the *Montreal Community Contact* as an ethnic newspaper performs what Subervi-Velez (1986) termed the 'dual role' of the ethnic media. The dual role refers to the fact that ethnic media are tools of cultural preservation, and also at the same time agents of assimilation of ethnic minority audiences to the dominant mainstream culture and values (Riggins, 1992; Subervi-Velez, 1986).

***Montreal Community Contact* newspaper: redefining the landscape?**

As with the early black presses in 1850s' Canadian society, the *Montreal Community Contact* came into existence because the needs and aspirations of the black community in Montreal were not being met by the mainstream media. In the search for a communal voice and cultural expressions, the paper was established in 1992 by its publisher, Mr Egbert Gaye, a member of the 1984 class of journalism graduates from Concordia University, Montreal.

The paper, which is published every fortnight, has a total circulation of about 7500. It is a widely read newspaper among the English-speaking Africans and blacks in Montreal. It does not have a functional website at present. It depends mostly on volunteer staff from the community for news coverage, production and management. Many of the volunteer reporters and editors at the paper have at least undergraduate degrees in journalism, political science, communication studies, design arts, English or creative writing from Canadian universities. There are a handful of columnists and editorial writers with doctoral and masters degrees in areas such as sciences, engineering and social sciences.

The paper is free and generates its funding and running costs primarily from free-will subscriptions, advertisement and government grants. About 80 percent of the advertisements that appear in the *Montreal Community Contact* come from business groups, associations and professionals within the community. The paper generates between two and five percent of its advertisement income from business organizations outside the community and governmental departments such as Heritage Canada. During election years, politicians from inside and outside the community also advertise in the paper. Likewise, political groups at the federal, provincial and municipal levels advertise their political platforms and programs.

In contrast to the images and representations of the black Canadian in Canadian mainstream media, the *Montreal Community Contact* strives to promote black heritage and celebrate the successes of black professionals in all facets of Canadian society. A closer look at the contents of the 150 randomly selected issues of the paper from January 1998 to June 2005 shows that the cultural traditions and heritage of both foreign-born and Canadian-born blacks in Montreal are 'not reduced to the level of folklore and that languages evolve in a manner adaptive to the requirement' of the Canadian multicultural society (Riggins, 1992: 3). Some of the paper's writers and columnists often interweave 'patois and pidgin English'⁹ with Queen's English in discussing social issues, cultural and historic experience. They do this deliberately to keep alive the soul and richness of linguistic and cultural diversity within the

black community. On another level, adopting a mixture of patois, pidgin English and Queen's English situates the writing within the context of their own values and historic experience. More importantly, it is an expression of cultural identity and linguistic heritage. The paper presents a forum for these writers and columnists to define their identities and legitimize their own values.

While it provides a means for the social construction of reality, the paper does not allow overt political pressure within the community to affect its editorial judgment. Although most of its news is filtered through the 'black lens', the paper does not publish materials that promote hatred and discrimination against any racial, religious or political groups. The paper still strongly emphasises journalistic standards such as clarity, fairness and accuracy. It strives towards ethical journalism in its coverage of stories that focus on the social, political and cultural interests and aspirations of the black community in Canadian society.

Issues such as employment, cultural identity, investment, parenting and social services, politics, business entrepreneurship and immigration affairs normally get ample news coverage in the paper. This news angle or focus is in sharp contrast to the approach of the mainstream media, which usually report ethnic minorities or visible minority groups in news stories with a crime angle or feature news stories that are exclusively about the cultural days or festivals of the ethnic groups.

The black community in Montreal gets lot of space in the city's only daily English newspaper, the *Montreal Gazette*, and airtime on *Global TV* and *CFCF 12 TV* in February, which is the black history month, and in the summer during the *Nuit D'Afrique* festival, Jazz festivals and Carifestival. Other than those months of the year, there is almost a black-out of blacks in the city's media, except when a black athlete wins a medal for Canada in a major sporting event or when there is black-on-black violence.

Although strictness in the immigration process and screening of refugees in the post-September 11 period has also made Montreal's oldest black church, the Union United Church,¹⁰ part of the *news that's fit to cover*, the community is still highly marginalized in the mainstream media.

The absence of black folktales, experiences, history and stories in the mainstream media made the *Montreal Community Contact* an integral part of the Montreal black community's communication systems. It responds to the communication needs of people and organizations in the community by presenting information and news coverage of relevance to them. Its columnists and editorial writers normally provide critical voices to the issues presented in the mainstream media, especially the *Montreal Gazette*, *National*

Post, and *Globe and Mail*. They critiqued news and perspectives in the mainstream media that they found unfair to their community. Essentially, the paper presents an alternative discourse to the communication agenda set by the dominant, socio-political and cultural order.

Through its regular columns and stories on culture, economy, music, politics and education, the paper contributes to the processes of change and progress in the lives of an economically marginalized community. Stories such as new start-up businesses and profiles of successful blacks in different professional segments promote a positive self-image of blacks, which helps in building the self-confidence and faith in the community's ability to take initiatives in changing its circumstances.

However, the fact that the paper covers stories and publishes columns on positive aspects of the community does not mean the paper does not report on conflicts and crimes in the community. It does cover negative news and crises in the community. However, when these stories are covered, especially black-on-black violence, there are usually editorials and columns that put the 'crisis' issues or community 'problems' in perspective in an attempt to have community dialogue and resolution on these 'problems'.

Although the *Montreal Community Contact* serves as an instrument for role performance and resource utilization, the overall political and cultural influence is limited due to its small circulation. There are about 139,000 blacks living in Montreal according to the 2001 census. Since the paper has a circulation of fewer than 8000, this means about 7 percent of the community read the paper. Therefore, its impact on the cognitive levels of people, especially people outside the black community, in relation to the representation of visible minorities in the media is limited. Secondly, the paper is not accessible to the mainstream audience because it is mainly left at the stores and shops run by blacks. A few copies are sometimes left in the city hall and black community centres. This distribution mechanism is not peculiar to the *Montreal Community Contact*. It is actually the common distribution pattern of ethnic papers in Canada.

The fact that the *Montreal Community Contact* and many ethnic newspapers are generally lacking in mainstream society means that they do not necessarily change the stereotypical images of their communities created among the mainstream audiences. Although they might have allowed cultural folklore and expressions that are empowering to their respective communities, their absence among the mainstream audience creates a cultural exclusion instead of inclusion. This means we have a situation whereby cultures only talk to themselves instead of one another. The end result of this situation is primarily a cultural enclave, not cultural diversity.

This is one of the problems inherent in Canada's multicultural policy. The policy does not directly address 'the underlying attitudinal basis, that is, racism that causes structural inequalities' in access to media, employment and negative representation of the visible minorities. 'The promotion of good race relations through positive rhetoric is commendable, but in no way does it eradicate cultural and racial discrimination merely because it reconceptualizes it' (Kobayashi, 1993: 222, cited in Roth, 1998). As long as this underlying attitude is not addressed, it will continue to constitute a barrier to the elevation of public consciousness around the issues of cultural and racial pluralism, especially in the media.

In spite of this problem, the *Montreal Community Contact* and other ethnic print media would have a far-reaching effect on the Canadian political landscape and culturally pluralistic society if they were socially and economically strong enough to compete freely in the same market with the daily newspapers in the country. Like *Black Entertainment Networks* (BET) and *Essence Magazine* in the USA, they will operate counter-hegemonically to the mainstream media and be 'well-positioned to provide the missing social, cultural, historical, and political contexts necessary for understanding complex social realities that White Anglo journalists and editors are unlikely to understand' (Henry and Tator, 2002: 238).

Meadows (1995), citing Gramsci (1988), reminds us that media are an important cultural resource that can be used by the dominant culture to win consent for particular ideologies. Since ethnic media are cultural resources, they can operate on the cusp of social change. By providing an alternative voice to the dominant discourse of the mainstream media, the ethnic media might help mainstream audiences and journalists to have a critical self-awareness of their positions in the construction and circulation of meaning through their works.

Conclusion

Ethnic groups and individuals have appropriated media for their own culturally specific use. They adopted media such as newspapers and radio cultural resources to strengthen their identity, heritage and culture within multicultural Canadian society. The appropriation of the media becomes necessary in the light of the fact that aboriginal and visible minorities in Canada 'continue to perceive mainstream media representations of them and their issues as at best inappropriate, and at worst racist' (Meadows, 1995: 198).

Ethnic media thus become 'sensitizing agents' in understanding and dealing with ethnoracial issues within the multicultural society of Canada

(Henry and Tator, 2002). They serve as cultural interpreters and community resources; representing indigenous values. While the ethnic media meet local aspirations and cultural needs, they still have a limited impact in setting the political and policy agenda in national politics because they only cater to a small segment of the Canadian population. Only 13.4 percent of the Canadian population are visible minorities, and in an absolute sense they are not all 'faithful consumers' of the ethnic media. However, ethnic media might become an important tool in important political decisions and policy agendas by 2017 if the recent projection by Statistics Canada is right. In its recent release, Statistics Canada indicated that one in five Canadians will be non-white when Canada marks its 150th year of Confederation in 2007 (Mahoney, 2005). If this projection holds, the ethnic media may become a powerful cultural tool to be enlisted in winning consent and influencing political decision, due to the fact that they are already situated within the social and political structure of the communities they serve.

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Notes

- 1 It is imperative to note that the situation with the *Montreal Community Contact*, which serves the Montreal black community, may not be representative of other ethnic print media in Canada. Every media organization operates under the different circumstances and has certain peculiarities to it. However, this study on the ethnic media and *Montreal Community Contact* should be seen as a window to the future research on ethnic print media in Canada.
- 2 In Toronto and Vancouver, there are at least three Chinese language daily newspapers. Each of these newspapers has a circulation of 45,000.
- 3 There is no national regulatory body or agency for the print media (newspapers and magazines) in Canada. Only electronic media has a regulatory body, which is CRTC.
- 4 According to the Canada's 1995 Employment Equity Act (C.44) that was assented on December 15, 1995, 'members of visible minorities' means persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour (for more information on the stipulations of the Act, see <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/e-5.401/text.html>).
- 5 The report criticized this approach and urged the media institutions to embrace the cultural and racial diversity in their contents and marketing.
- 6 For this study, Miller sent questionnaires to managing editors at 96 of the country's 102 daily newspapers, but only 37 responded. Twenty-one of the newspapers in the 1994 study did not respond.

- 7 In contrast to what is seen in Canada, the American Society of Newspaper Editors is working hard to have newsroom parity with the general population by the end of the year 2005 in the USA. As studies have shown, absolutely nothing concrete is being done by the Canadian Association of Journalists, news directors, managing editors and publishers to see that the Canadian newsrooms have diversity in terms of hiring. Though I must note that Global TV and CTV, which are the two largest private television outlets in Canada, have summer internship programmes for Aboriginal people and visible minorities in journalism schools.
- 8 Some ethnic newspapers in Canada receive subsidy from the Government under the country's multicultural policy. The subsidy is meant to help ethnocultural groups and their media to 'maintain and enrich heritage culture and language, strengthen their communities and otherwise further the aims of the multicultural policy' (Department of Secretary of State Ottawa, 1971: 28, cited in Mahtani, 2001).
- 9 Pidgin English is a bastardized form of Queen's English. It is commonly spoken in the former British colonialized West African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. It is also spoken in the former French colonies such as Cameroon. Patois, on the other hand, is non-standard local dialect of Queen's English. It is commonly spoken in Caribbean countries such as Jamaica.
- 10 In the post-September 11 era, Montreal's oldest black church, the Union United Church, gets a lot of attention in the city's mainstream media because political refugees from Muslim nations and other countries deemed as 'rogue nations', such as Sudan, Iran and Iraq, usually seek refuge in the church's sanctuary when faced with deportation by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board. The fact that the sanctuary of the Union United Church becomes the last haven for political refugees of all races and religion backgrounds alone normally attracts mainstream media attention, resulting in articles and letters in the *Montreal Gazette* and sound bites and airtime in the electronic media in the city – Global TV, CFCF 12 and CBC.

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