

KEYNOTE

ETHNIC MIGRANT MEDIA: WEAVING OURSELVES A HOME

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

It's an honour to be invited to speak at this forum where we are gathered to talk about ethnic media and the possibilities it offers for our communities. I wish to acknowledge this magnificent whare whakairo (carved meeting house) 'Ngākau Māhaki', built and designed by Dr Lyonel Grant, which I think is the most beautiful building in the entire world. Kia ora to matua Hare Paniora for the whaikōrero, whaea Lynda Toki for the karanga and this pōwhiri. I acknowledge Ngāti Whātua as mana whenua of Unitec and Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae. I acknowledge the organisers of this forum, Unitec's Department of Communication Studies, Niche Media and Ethnic Media Information NZ, in particular Associate Professor Evangelia Papoutsaki, Dr Elena Kolesova, Lisa Ingledew and Dr Jocelyn Williams and all the participants gathered here today.

As a migrant to Aotearoa and now Australia, there are a few places that I call home. Tāmaki Makaurau, and Unitec specifically, would be one of those places. This whenua has been central to my own growth and development. I love these grounds; I walked them when I was a student nurse at Oakley Hospital in 1986 and then worked in Building 1, or as it was known then Ward 12, at Carrington Psychiatric Hospital in 1987. I also worked here at Unitec as a nursing lecturer from 1998–2004. I have this beautiful whaariki (woven mat) made from harakeke (NZ Flax) grown, dyed and woven at Unitec that has accompanied me for over three house moves since I left Unitec, and more recently across the Tasman.

It is this being at home that interests me as a migrant. Home is the safe space where I can be myself, and where there are other people like me. It's a place where I can be nurtured and supported, where I can thrive in my similarities and in my differences. Where I can see my norms and values reflected around me. I believe that the media can have a special place in helping us to see ourselves as woven through like this exquisite mat, as belonging to something larger than ourselves. I believe that it can contribute to helping us feel at home. Through it, we can feel embraced and included, we can be part of a conversation that



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can see us in all our glory. However, too often it is also a site where if we are already marginalised, we can be further marginalised.

I am going to briefly talk about the limitations of mainstream media, review some key functions of ethnic media and conclude with some challenges and opportunities for ethnic media. As you will see from my bio, I co-founded the [Aotearoa Ethnic Network](#), an email list and journal in 2006 to provide a communication channel for the growing number of people in the 'ethnic' category. I have been passionately interested in the role of media practices in intercultural relations in health, and also in the relations between settlers, migrants and indigenous peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. I have been actively involved in ethnic community issues, governance, research and education in New Zealand and Australia.

This hui is timely, given discussions about biculturalism and multiculturalism, the Māori media renaissance, the growth of Pacific and Asian owned or run media including radio, newspapers, online media; television, web-based news services, the under-representation of Māori, Pacific and ethnic in media and journalism, the growth of blogs through early 2000s and the growth in social media (Facebook, Twitter) in the last decade. It is also part of a longer conversation. I am referring to the forum we had in 2005 organised by the Auckland City Council and Human Rights Commission after the Danish cartoon fiasco, where I talked about the role of media in terms of 'fixing' difference or supporting complexity; the role of media in making society more cohesive or divisive or exclusive and the relevance of New Zealand media in the context of growing diasporic media. In that forum I suggested that there was a need for ethnic media but also adequate representation in mainstream media, the showing of complex multicultural relationships not just ethnic enclaves, and ways for people of ethnic backgrounds to be included in national and international conversations. Some authors, including myself, have also taken mainstream media to task over representations of Asians [Asian Angst story by Debra Coddington in 2006; [Paul Brennan's Islamophobic comments on National Radio \(2011\)](#) and Paul Henry's comments about then-Governor General Anand Satyanand (2010)]. A [2006 editorial in the Aotearoa Ethnic Journal](#) has also examined the role of mainstream media in intercultural exchange and

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promoting intercultural awareness and understanding. I have also challenged media representations of Māori and Pacific people as evidenced in [cartoons by Al Nisbet](#), which were printed in New Zealand media (2013). More recently, I have written with colleagues Nairn, Moewaka Barnes, Rankine, Borell, and McCreanor (2014) about the role and implications of media news practices for those committed to social justice and health equity.

Let me start by introducing a fairly binary definition of ethnic media, that I am going to use, as referring to media created for/by immigrants, ethnic and language minority groups and indigenous groups (Matsaganis et al., 2011). In contrast, media that produces content about and for the mainstream is known as the mainstream media. However, as most of you will know the line between

mainstream media and ethnic media is blurred, and consumers consume both. I also want to foreground two words, critique and ideology, which are the lenses through which I am giving this talk. These lenses are more important than ever in an era where critique is becoming censored for those in academia, and in the context of corporate governance of media. Foucault's notion of critique is, "... a critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest" (Foucault, 1988, p. 154), and Stuart Hall's definition of ideology: "The mental frameworks – the language,

concepts, categories, imagery of thought and system of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (Hall, 1996, p. 26).

It is in the spirit of critique that I want to talk about the mainstream media's role in co-opting and converting audiences into seeing "like the media". As Augie Fleras (2011) observes, media messages reflect and advance dominant discourses which are expertly concealed and normalised so as to appear without bias or perspective. The integrative role of mainstream media reflects and amplifies the concerns of particular groupings of power so that attention is drawn to norms and values that are considered appropriate within society. In this way attitudes are created and reinforced, opinions and understandings

are managed, and cultures are constructed and reinvented. The inflammatory front page headline of “[Sponsor a jihad](#)” in the *Herald Sun* (2014), above a photograph of a bald and bearded man, eyes downcast, highlights how language and media can potentially create fearful ‘others’. The picture out of focus, the lack of eye contact, the beard, all standing in for evil, fear and a threat to national security.

Clearly mainstream media must appeal to a large audience; a commercial imperative means that groups are pooled together for the purposes of advertising and marketing. Audience segmentation is tricky. Controversy must be managed and supported, provided larger official agendas are advanced; such as guarding against the insider Islamic threat or deterring the hordes of maritime arrivals through forcibly turning back the boats. Consequently social media, the internet and ethnic media are seen as able to service more specific audiences. In the case of social media, there are some great opportunities for connecting beyond the nation state: “As the internet surpasses the nation-state limitations and usually the legislative limitations that bind other media, it opens up new possibilities for sustaining diasporic community relations and even for reinventing diasporic relations and communication that were either weak or non-existent in the past” (Georgiou, 2002, p. 25).

Moving on to ethnic media, I see several functions or imperatives loosely using the typology by Viswanath & Arora (2000): ethnic media as form of cultural transmission, community booster, sentinel, assimilator, information provider and one lesser mentioned in the literature, as having a professional development function.

A clear mandate for ethnic media is information provision for the community about local events and events in the former homeland. Local Indian radio station, [Radio Tarana](#), flew a journalist to Brisbane for the G20 summit to cover Modi’s visit to Australia. In its role as cultural transmitter, ethnic media has a distributive function to publish or broadcast information that is important to the ethnic community, so information about events and celebrations comes to the fore. This in turn sustains and fosters a sense of belonging to an imagined community that feels coherent, united and connected to a homeland.

However, rarely in that role does it also act as a critic of community institutions or powerful groups within that community, revealing a limitation of ethnic media.

A second role of ethnic media is as a community booster. In this role the media presents the community as doing well, being successful and achieving. The communities served by the media expect that a positive image is reflected both to its own members and outside the community. Typically close links are fostered between local reporters and editors, and the community elite. Stories consist of human-interest features, profiles of successful members, particularly those who are volunteers or contribute to the community in a positive way. There is a reluctance to feature more radical or critical voices or critical stories, as they may adversely affect the community image and the commercial imperative.

A third role of ethnic media is a sentinel or watch dog. There is very little research on this role but in fulfilling this role, the ethnic media produce stories on issues that could affect the rights of communities, crime against immigrants and similar issues.

A more common role/function of ethnic media is assimilation, where ethnic media play a part in assisting their community members to be more successful through learning the ropes of the system. Ethnic media coverage then focuses on the role of the community in local politics and fostering positive relations and feelings between that

of the ethnic group’s homeland and adopted country.

A crucial role/function that is rarely articulated in the literature, but has been pivotal to my development, is that of the ethnic media as space for professional development. Through engagement in ethnic media, members of ethnic communities develop transferrable skills and the capacity to write, broadcast and present. This role is very personally relevant to me. Through writing for the *Migrant News* and *Global Indian*, I refined my writing skills. Through talking on ethnic radio stations like *Samut Sari* and *Planet FM*, I developed and refined my own capacity to articulate thoughts and ideas. Being featured in stories on [Asia Downunder](#) (now sadly retired) helped me to develop media skills and

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gave me the confidence to go on and develop my own online journal, the *Aotearoa Ethnic Network Journal* and write peer-reviewed publications, and feature on commercial radio and television. This would never have happened without the support of those ethnic media pioneers. I acknowledge them all. However, ethnic media is on rapidly shifting terrain. Increasingly consumers are negotiating the availability of media from their place of origin via the internet. Ethnic media have to consider their roles and business models in the context of neoliberalism and the withdrawal of the state from cultural funding.

Recently Television New Zealand, which is the public service broadcaster, announced its intention/plan to outsource production of Māori programmes (*Marae, Waka Huia*) and Pacific (*Fresh and Tagata Pasifika*) programmes. A depressing move, given the unrelenting negative representations of people in these communities who are socially and culturally marginalised in New Zealand mainstream media (see [here](#)) on how blame for the disparities in health is attributed to individuals and communities rather than neoliberal and austerity policies). This very manoeuvre was used to outsource *Asia Downunder* (a programme which ran from 1994–2011 for Asians in New Zealand, and featured the activities of Asians in New Zealand and New Zealand Asians abroad) [and] gutted Asian institutional knowledge and capacity within TVNZ when it was replaced with *Neighbourhood*. *Asia Downunder* was a casualty of the loss of the Television New Zealand Charter, introduced in 2003 but removed in 2011, which encouraged TVNZ to show programmes that reflect New Zealand's identity and provided funding.

In this context, I end with several questions. Given that ethnic media institutions help their audiences to reimage or sustain themselves and their place in the cultural and sociopolitical milieu of their new home (Gentles-Peart, 2013):

- What is the relationship between ethnic media and the “mainstream ideological apparatus of power”? (Shi, 2009, p. 9)
- What is the relevance of ethnic media in terms of the next generation?
- What is the relationship between ethnic media and indigenous media?
- How do ethnic media import or reinforce or critique the power structures of immigrants' homelands including gender, class and sexuality?

- Are there opportunities for ethnic media to lobby and advocate for their communities?
- What opportunities and possibilities are available for inter-ethnic media work?

I look forward to summing up the korero at the end of our forum, to report back to the roopu about the strands we have woven together and to enjoy the robust and dynamic discussions that I know are going to happen today.

Nō reira me mihi nui kia koutou katoa ano, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā ra koutou katoa.

Ruth De Souza

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