They respond to the needs of ethnic and racialized minorities; they provide a voice in advancing the welfare of the community; they challenge social injustices; they foster a sense of cultural pride; and they articulate the essence of their communities (Gonzales, 2001). Their popularity and success reflects a worldwide trend toward people making media because of greater ease in publishing alternative and community media (Deuze, 2006; Niles, 2008). “They” refers to multicultural (or “ethnic”) media whose collective objectives address the informational, integrative, and advocacy needs of racialized and immigrant Canadians. In a global context in which the local and the global are in constant interplay, yet individual understanding of international relations and intercultural divisions is lacking, multicultural media provide fresh insights into cultural multi-belongings and spatial interdependencies (Mediam’Rad, 2009). This multidimensionality is crucial in theorizing a) the origins and rationale behind multicultural media; b) the role they play in society at large and minority communities in particular; c) the challenges in navigating a corporatized mediaspace; and d) their underlying logic despite variations in form, function, and process.

Mapping multicultural media
Multicultural media come in different shapes and sizes (Browne, 2005; Riggins, 1992). As a rule, they consist mostly of mostly small broadcasters (radio/television), cable channels, newspapers, and magazines that target racial and ethnic minority audiences, including Aboriginal peoples, racialized women and men, and immigrants and refugees (Lieberman, 2006; Murray, Yu, & Ahadi, 2007). Often local but sometimes regional or national or transnational in scope or circulation, many multicultural media outlets are “mom and pop” start-ups, published on a weekly or intermittent basis in languages other than English or French and distributed free of charge, reflect commercial or community orientation, and provide entertainment or essential information for survival or participation as citizens. Other multicultural media resemble mainstream media, with sufficient resources to publish on a daily basis for profit (Lin & Song, 2006). And technol-
gies are directly impacting multicultural media (Georgiou, 2002). From multi-channel digital television packages to the Internet and social media (with online text and video), digitalization has pried open new possibilities for networking across local or transnational spaces.

**Conceptualizing multicultural media**

Multicultural media originated and continue to flourish for a variety of reasons, both reactive and proactive, as well as outward and inward. On the reactive side, multicultural media constitute a minority reaction to media mistreatment (Husband, 2005; Karim, 2006). Media (mis)treatment has tended to frame Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, and racialized minorities using one of five frames, namely, as invisible, problems, stereotypes, adornments, or whitewashed (Fleras & Kunz, 2001; Mahtani, 2002). In an industry driven by the logic that “only bad news is good news,” the framing of minorities as troublesome constituents resulted in one-sided coverage that was systemically biasing in its consequences. Not surprisingly, racialized minorities reacted by capitalizing on alternative media to reflect their needs and realities, in a language they can relate to, with a style that taps into their experiences (Ahmad, 2006; Ojo, 2006). In addition, multicultural media proactively strive to celebrate minority successes, accomplishments, and aspirations. By refracting reality through the prism of minority experiences, realities, and aspirations, multicultural media foreground profiles of minority achievements, promoting a positive self-image while fostering a collective community confidence and cultural identity.

Multicultural media play outward- and inward-looking roles as well. They do so outwardly by supplying information of relevance and immediacy to the intended demographic, including how to navigate the labyrinth of a strange new society. In advancing a minority trajectory of settling down, moving up, and fitting in through creation of a more level playing field, multicultural media advocate positive social changes in the quest for an equitable and inclusive society. The importance/role of building bridges with society at large in securing the civic participation of minorities while prompting their integration into the larger community should not be underestimated. Multicultural media also play an inward role as a marker of identity by reporting news of relevance to the community through a perspective and tone that resonates more meaningfully with its audience. Multicultural media provide information about the homeland that is crucial to adaptation; after all, news from or about home capitalizes on an immigrant’s longing for information about the “there” as a basis for fitting in “here” (Lin & Song, 2006). Utilizing positive stories of minority success both at home and abroad not only strengthens identities, cultural heritage, and a sense of community in fostering a sense of bonding, multicultural media also furnish community members with an *esprit de corps* to help them engage along intercultural lines (Lin & Song, 2006).

In short, multicultural media can be analyzed and classified along reactive–proactive and outward–inward dimensions (Fleras, 2007). The intersection of these continua at right angles establishes a four-cell table (ideal-typical typology) that reveals the dynamics and complexity of multicultural media (see Table 1). It also suggests the possibility of categorizing multicultural media accordingly.
Table 1: Typology of multicultural media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inward (bonding/insular)</th>
<th>Reactive (defensive)</th>
<th>Proactive (affirmative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reaction to mainstream media negativity/invisibility by offering a minority perspective including access to local and homeland information “constructing buffers”</td>
<td>Focus on celebrating both personal and community accomplishments to foster community cohesion and culture pride “creating bonds”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward (bridging/integrative)</td>
<td>Counteract social injustice by advocating positive changes for leveling an unlevel playing field “crossing borders”</td>
<td>Utilize positive images of minority success for bolstering civic participation while fostering intercultural dialogue “building bridges”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multicultural media as bridging and bonding
Conceptually speaking, multicultural media constitute a form of social capital. Two dimensions underpin the concept of social capital: bonding (“within”) and bridging (“between”). Bonding social capital consists of those dense social ties and intense patterns of trust that secure strong mutual support and high levels of involvement in a closed community. In contrast, bridging social capital entails weaker social links and more generalized trusts in an open community with greater individual initiative, tolerance of difference, and participation in society (Chen & Thorson, 2009; Murray, 2008; Putnam, 2000).

As Robert Putnam pointed out in his landmark book *Bowling Alone* (2000), the quality of people’s lives and the life of society/community depends on establishing reserves of social capital with respect to trust, friendship, involvement, cooperation, life satisfaction, volunteerism, and sense of community (“neighbourhood”) and commitment. And yet the more ethnically diverse a community, according to Putnam’s (2007) more recent work, the less likely people are to connect or to display trust. The potential loss of social capital puts the onus on multicultural media to neutralize this disconnection and distrust, in part by providing both the bridging capital between different groups (ties to people unlike you), in part by securing bonding capital within one’s own group (ties to people like you). In that multicultural media represent instruments of cultural preservation as well as agents of societal incorporation, their reciprocal status as both pockets of insularity and pathways to integration cannot be underestimated in advancing the principles of multiculturalism in a multicultural Canada.

References


