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Transnational Communication Networks
Among Diasporic Communities

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Canadian Heritage

June 1998

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Introduction

Hamid Mowlana identifies three primary actors in transborder flows of communication: governments, transnational corporations, and individuals (1997: 37). Most commentators on the communication aspects of globalization tend to focus on the first two. However, the aggregate impact of cross-border contact among individuals using means such as mail, telegraph, telephone, facsimile, and digital technologies, has been substantial. The present study examines communication links among members of diasporic communities spread over several continents. Global migration trends have produced transnational groups related by culture, ethnicity, language, and religion. Whereas members of some of these groups had generally operated small media (weekly newspapers, magazines, radio and television programming) to meet the information and entertainment needs of their communities, the emergence of digital technologies is enabling them to expand such communication activities to a global scale. While they remain beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that these developments have implications for official policies on broadcasting and on culture/multiculturalism.

Previous restrictions imposed by national broadcast regulators are being partially overcome by means such as Direct Broadcasting Satellites (DBS). Having little input into the content of dominant national or global media, transnational communities have found the new media particularly appropriate in maintaining active links among their far-flung members. Indeed, some diasporic groups in North America and Europe were among the earliest adopters of DBS for cross-border transmissions - with its pizza-sized receiving dish installed on homes becoming the symbol of community self-assertion. On-line technologies are also enabling individuals in diasporic groups to sustain inter-continental networks. However, whereas the use of technological and market-based solutions seem to be enabling such communities to overcome structural communication barriers, these new media are not universally available and it is primarily the more affluent members of transnational groups who seem to be benefitting from them.

Diasporic Formations

Diasporic connections are becoming increasingly significant in the light of what is viewed as the diminishing importance of national borders and the growing global linkages among non-state actors. Whereas Arjun Appadurai is somewhat premature in declaring the imminent "end of the era of the nation-state" (1996: 18), what he calls the "transnations" of diasporic communities do appear to be significant aspects of globalization processes. He suggests that as electronic media "increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries, and as these audiences

themselves start new conversations between whose who move and those who stay, we find a growing number of diasporic public spheres" (1996: 22).[1] However, these public spheres are not those identified by Jürgen Habermas (1991) since, not only are they extra-national but they do not appear necessarily to promote what Vincent Mosco has referred to as "transnational citizenship" (1997: 38) or what Graham Murdock has called "cosmopolitan democracy" (1998).

According to James Clifford, diaspora is understood as "a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling and travelling" (quoted in Grossberg, 1996: 101).[2] For the purposes of this study, diasporas are conceptualized as comprising members of an ethnic group who reside in the home land and in a number of other countries where they or their ancestors may have arrived as immigrants. Whereas the term tended to refer primarily to the existence of Jewish communities around the world, it is increasingly being used to denote communities with similar dispersion. Postcolonial and cultural studies have keyed onto this phenomenon to discuss the emergence of unique cultural developments occurring among such communities (Morley and Chen, 1996). The emergence of hybrid "new ethnicities" has also been the subject of much discussion (see Karim, 1996b). However, most studies examine only a section of the diasporic community living in a particular location rather than considering the links between various parts of the planet.[3]

It is important to locate the diasporic phenomenon within the context of globalization processes of the last few centuries, which have intensified in recent times due to vastly improved transportation and communication technologies. Human migration patterns have been determined by colonization and by trading connections. There also appears to have been a connection between the economic involvement of Northern countries in Southern ones and the more recent migration flows from the latter to the former. Saskia Sassen indicates that economic links ranging from off-shoring of production, foreign investment into export-oriented agriculture, and the power of multinationals in the consumer markets of developing states has often resulted in the mass movement of people (1996: 77). Organized recruitment of workers by governments or employers has also stimulated immigration.

> Ethnic links established between communities of origin and destination, typically by transnational households or broader kinship structures, are crucial after a flow has begun, and ensure its persistence. These recruitment and ethnic links tend to operate within the broader transnational spaces created by neocolonial processes and/or economic internationalization. (Ibid.)

The mass migrations of the 1700s and 1800s led to new economic growth of the countries of the New World (while at the same time displacing indigenous economies and communities). These included movements of slaves from Africa, indentured labourers from Asia, and settlers from Europe. Following the lifting of restrictions on race-based immigration in the 1950s and 1960s, Asians and Africans began to migrate in larger numbers to North America, Australasia, and Europe. There has also been substantial migration from Latin America into the United States. These movements of people of various origins to different parts of the world have created diasporas that are layered by periods of migration, the extent of integration into receiving societies, and the maintenance of links with the land of origin as well as with other parts of the transnational group. This layering has resulted in wide variations of connections and attachments

that such worldwide communities have to each other.

The identities of individuals and groups within specific diasporas are formed by complex historical, social, and cultural dynamics within the group and in its relationships with other groups. Retention of ancestral customs, language, and religion, the marriage patterns of its members, and particularly the ease of communication between various parts of the transnational group help determine its characteristics. In an essay on the Chicano diaspora, Angie Chabram Dernersesian notes that

> ... these identities will be encountered from particular social and historical locations, from situated knowledges, from ethnographic experiences of rupture and continuity, and from a complex web of political negotiations with which people inscribe their social and historical experiences and deliver their self-styled counter narratives. I do not think we need to celebrate the transnational movement for its own sake. Just having a transnational identity is not something to be romanticized or something only we have: *everyone* in the world has one, thanks to the global culture of communications and the far reaching grip of capitalist formations. (1994: 286)

However, we do need a better understanding of the social, cultural, political, and economic impacts that the social dynamics of transnational groupings have on their members and on others. They are emerging as key players in globalization processes. Diasporic communal networks are sets of planetary linkages that form a third tier of inter-regional connections in addition to those maintained by governments and transnational organizations.

Diasporas are often viewed as forming alternatives to the structures of worldwide capitalism; but in many instances they are participants in international economic activity. From the banking network of the Rothschilds, originating in 18th century Europe, to the more recent global businesses like the Hinduja Group, diasporic families have been leading players in global transactions. At 450 billion dollars, the annual economic output in the early 1990s of the 55 million overseas Chinese was estimated to be roughly equal to that of the 1.2 billion people in China itself (Seagrave, 1995). Indeed, Joel Kotkin writes that "global tribes" will "increasingly shape the economic destiny of mankind" (1992: 4). Thomas Sowell asserts that similar patterns of economic achievement of some ethnic groups in Australia, the United States, Asia, and South America points to the importance of the cultural capital that they bring to these lands. However, studies such as these that focus primarily on the capitalist characteristics of certain diasporas tend to de-emphasize the vast disparities in wealth, education, and social status within these communities.

Commentators writing from cultural studies and postcolonial perspectives, on the other hand, tend to view diasporas as ranged against global and national structures of dominance - of the empire striking back. Jon Stratton and Ien Ang suggest that for the postcolonial immigrant to Britain "what the diasporic position opens up is the possibility of developing a post-imperial British identity, one based explicitly on an acknowledgement and vindication of the 'coming home' of the colonized Other" (1996: 383-84). The diasporic site becomes the cultural border between the country of origin and the country of residence - Homi Bhabha's "third space"

(1994). This is the zone of intense, cutting-edge creativity born out of the existential angst of the immigrant who is neither here nor there. She is Abdul JanMohammed's "specular border intellectual" who, "caught between two cultures ... subjects the cultures to analytic scrutiny rather than combining them" (1992: 97). Guillermo Gómez-Peña seeks to oppose "the sinister cartography of the New World Order with the conceptual map of the New World Border - a great trans- and intercontinental border zone, a place in which no centers remain" (1996).

While the globally dominant Eurocentric cultural structures, particularly media conglomerates, are being vastly strengthened (Herman and McChesney, 1997), there has emerged over the last few decades a variety of voices from the South and from diasporas that attempt to present other world views. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have explored a "constellation of oppositional strategies, which taken together have the potential of revolutionizing audio-visual production and pedagogy" (1994: 10). They refer to the aesthetics of resistance in the New Cinemas of Cuba, Brazil, Senegal, and India as well as to diasporic films made in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Just within the South Asian diaspora, one can cite a list of accomplished authors that includes Michael Ondaatje (Sri Lanka/Canada), Shyam Selvadurai (Sri Lanka/Canada), Moez Vassanji (Kenya/Tanzania/Canada), Rohinton Mistry (India/Canada), Anita Desai (India/Canada), Cyril Dabydeen (Guyana/Canada), Bharati Mukerjee (India/Canada/United States), V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad/United Kingdom), Salman Rushdie (India/United Kingdom), and Hanif Kureishi (United Kingdom). Diasporic artists are viewed by the likes of Peña, Bhabha, JanMohammed, Shohat, and Stam to be at the cutting edge of modernity and cultural life in their countries of settlement. The evolution of the Toronto South Asian Review into the Toronto Review, to suggest one example, seems to affirm such beliefs.

However, the present inquiry does not explore the work of diasporic avant garde but seeks to highlight the commercial and consumerist approaches of transnational communities to develop links within their diasporas. It looks at this third tier of globalization, specifically how diaspora members use technological and market-based means to develop communications networks. There has been growing use of digital technologies by transnational groups for the dissemination of entertainment and news, and for maintaining links between members. Rather than directly challenge dominant media networks, they have sought to apply available market mechanisms to create and to sustain their community links.

South-North Film and Television Flows

The global debate on the New World Information and Communication Order that raged in the 1970s and early 1980s revolved around the imbalance in communication flows between the North and the South. A key complaint of developing countries was that while the West, and in particular the United States, argued in support of the free flow of information, most of the traffic was from North to South. It was impossible for Asians, Africans and Latin Americans to compete with the technological superiority and established cultural industries' structures of the North. In the area of news dissemination, the infrastructures established in the colonial period continued to maintain the advantage in the North's favour. This continued hegemony of the North was viewed in the context of a cultural imperialism. The UNESCO discussions and the McBride Commission's report (1980) failed to resolve the problem. Indeed the ensuing period of

communications deregulation, trade liberalization, and technological innovation has made it even more difficult for governments in developing states to have a say in managing transborder information flows (Herman and McChesney, 1997).

However, as John Tomlinson, John Sinclair and others have argued, there is emerging a significant information flow from South to North. Indeed, the cultural imperialism critique tended to disregard the largely autonomous centres of non-anglophone cultural production and their regional ambits. Sinclair identifies what he calls "geolinguistic regions" centred in developing countries around Mumbai (formerly Bombay) for the Hindi film industry, Hong Kong for Chinese genre movies, Cairo for Arabic film and television, and Mexico City for film and television production in Spanish (1997: 159). However, these are the foci not only for contiguous regions where these languages are spoken but the cultural hubs for worldwide diasporas.

The commercial success of Mumbai's film industry ("Bollywood") is comparable to that of its American counterpart in Hollywood, which it seeks to emulate. Whereas the artistic merit of much of mainstream Indian cinema is questionable, it has become known for churning out the largest number of films in the world every year. And since the vast majority of these are musicals, there has grown over the last nine decades a massive recording industry centred around Bollywood. The late introduction of television in India has resulted in this medium using Bollywood film, reviews, retrospectives, music, gossip etc. as fodder for entertainment programming. Whereas the extent of Indian film's transnational distribution is much smaller than of Hollywood, it has significant penetration in South Asia, South-East Asia, the Middle East and East Africa. The Indian diaspora remains the mainstay of audiences and of distribution networks in these regions as well as in Western countries where cinemas exclusively showing Indian films flourish in cities with significant populations of South Asian origins.

Similarly, the Cairo film and television industry exports to Arabic-speaking countries and to the larger Arab diaspora. Whereas Hong Kong action movies have had some success among non-Chinese audiences around the world, it is the Mexican and Brazil television networks Televisa and TV Globo, respectively, which have been able to capture cross-cultural markets beyond their borders. They capitalized on the advantages of their own large domestic audiences and the geolinguistic regions - Spanish-speaking Latin America in the case of Televisa and the string of former Portuguese colonies scattered around the planet in that of TV Globo.[4] Of increasing importance for Televisa is the Spanish-speaking population of the United States which is growing rapidly and is relatively affluent. Televisa and TV Globo are also exporting products to former imperial powers in Europe such as Spain, Portugal, and Italy[5], and even dubbed versions to Russia and developing countries. Going against the arguments put forward by cultural imperialism theorists, these networks, which are the largest in the non-English world, have used both the technological, organizational, artistic and programming models of American television to produce their own success stories. US television's soap opera genre, "indigenized" by the Latin American networks as the telenovela, has provided a workable formula for worldwide cross-cultural exports.

The cultural imperialism perspective failed to realize the ability of the media entrepreneurs in Southern countries to use and adapt new technologies for their own innovation. In Mexico, the

arrival of videotape became the means to enhance vastly program exports. Later, satellite technology was used to interconnect the various Spanish-language TV stations which Televisa for many years controlled throughout the US, thus establishing a national network for Mexican-originated programs and creating a national audience of "Hispanics."

> The international expansion of Televisa and its corporate ancestors has always been production-driven, based on an economics similar to the export of domestic product upon which the US cultural industries have built themselves. As early as 1954, Azcarraga (Senior) had attempted to sell his programs to US networks, and when they were rejected as only fit for 'ghetto time', began establishing his own stations throughout the US, and a network to distribute programs and sell advertising for them. In these enterprises, his *prestanombre*, or front-man', was Rene Anselmo, a US citizen. By 1986, a national network of broadcast stations, low power repeater stations and arrangements with cable stations, all interconnected by satellite, was reaching a claimed eighty-two per cent of Hispanic households, or fifteen million viewers (bigger than NBC, it was said), supplying them with programs largely beamed up from Mexico City. (Sinclair, 1997: 161)

Televisa is now engaged in an intense battle with domestic US Spanish-language networks like Univisión and Telemundo to attract Hispanic-American consumers, whose projected buying power is expected to surpass 400 billion dollars by the year 2000 (Collins, 1996: C6; Goldsmith, 1996).

The role of ethnic media in global communication flows is steadily growing in importance. Sociologists and communication scholars have viewed ethnic media as serving what may appear to be two contradictory purposes - to contribute to ethnic cohesion and cultural maintenance as well as to help members of minorities integrate into the larger society (Riggins, 1992: 4). Charles Husband asserts that "we need autonomous ethnic minority media which can speak for, and to, their own community; ethnic minority media which can generate a dialogue between ethnic minority communities; and between these and dominant ethnic community audiences" (1994: 15). Ben Viccari, the dean of Canadian ethnic media, asserts that "through the ethnic media, the newcomer can learn about Canadian culture, history, social services and a multitude of other things that can help him or her understand the privileges *and the responsibilities* inherent in Canadian citizenship" (1995: 6). However, obtaining sufficient space for the ethnic broadcast media on the electromagnetic spectrum has involved a continual struggle with national regulators.[6]

The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has rejected applications for minority Black ethnic radio stations in Toronto and for a national multicultural cable television network (Partridge, 1991: H5).[7] This has resulted in a mixture of multilingual radio programming on non-mainstream media including community, campus, and VHF stations apart from the 13 ethnic radio licenses for AM and FM frequencies in six cities (CRTC, n.d.) and a number of Aboriginal stations. Ethnic and multilingual television programming in Canada is to be found on community cable, time slots bought on local and national[8] channels, a commercial multicultural channels serving southern Ontario and Montreal, and the US-based Black

Entertainment Television on a national specialty cable package. There are also South Asian, Chinese and Spanish/Italian services available in various cities via DBS at significant cost to the user.

Marginalized ethnic media are in a number of cases becoming sophisticated in terms of operation and content. They are also in direct competition with mainstream media. The total circulation of the 46 ethnic newspapers (including two Chinese dailies) in Vancouver, almost half of whose population is from ethnic minorities, is larger than the combined figure of its two main English-language papers (Grescoe, 1994/95: 82). The perceived economic strength of Canada's Chinese community also led *Maclean's*, which styles itself "Canada's Weekly Newsmagazine," and *Toronto Life* magazine to produce regular Chinese editions. Canadian Television Network, the largest privately-owned broadcaster in the country, has an agreement with the national Chinese-language network, Fairchild Television, to produce a Chinese version of its popular current affairs program, W5. Racecourses in eight Canadian cities have weekly simultaneous telecasts of races run at Hong Kong's Sha Tin racetrack to attract immigrant Chinese punters. Even though South Asians in the United States form a relatively small proportion of the US population they have the highest average income of any ethnic group (Oxford Analytica, 1995) and have begun appearing in commercials on mainstream television.

A number of ethnic television broadcasters export their programming to other parts of the diaspora. "West Indians United" and "Jafri's TV Asia", produced by companies run by South Asian immigrants to Toronto, have been sending their weekly programs to be aired in Guyana and the UK, respectively. On a much larger scale, either Univisión and Telemundo, the Spanish-language networks in the US, is available on almost every cable system in Latin America. Miami has emerged as a major centre for cultural programs, which are beamed back to Spain, Mexico and other Latin American countries. "And in smaller, poorer countries, local television stations often simply tape stories from Univisión or Telemundo's nightly newscasts for their own use, which gives these American networks a degree of credibility and visibility unusual in the region" (Rohter, 1996: 4/6). The picture that Latin Americans see of American society is very different from that presented by mainstream US television like the CNN and by global TV news agencies like the World Television Network and Reuters Television. Univisión and Telemundo adhere to Latin American news values that favour greater analysis than that offered by mainstream American television. The Spanish-language networks also seek out Hispanic perspectives on national news stories. For example,

> ... during the 1993 flap about child care that followed President Clinton's aborted nomination of Zoë Baird as Attorney General, it was the Spanish-language networks that made a point of seeking out Hispanic women who work as nannies and housekeepers and listening to their tales of abuse and exploitation. English-language coverage, by contrast, focused on the plight of the middle-class professional couples who typically employed those women. (Ibid)

The failure of NBC's 24-hour Spanish-language cable news network, Canal de Noticias, three years after its establishment in 1994, seems to speak to the strength of ethnic-run networks. Canal de Noticias, which reached 5 million households via cable and satellite in 22 countries, including 1.2 million in the US, cited growing competition as the reason for shutting down.

(SkyReport, 1997).

The growing ethnic-based commercial broadcasting infrastructure is integral to the increasingly global ethnic economy.[9] Advertising on ethnic radio and television is viewed by niche marketers as a way to reach growing minority populations in a time of fragmenting audiences. While surveys of minority audiences' viewing habits have been conducted for a number of years, systematic tracking of their consumption patterns is in its early stages.[10] In 1996 Univisión hired Information Resources Incorporated, a market research company, to seek to measure the sales impact of television advertising among Hispanic viewers. As the largest Spanish-language US network, Univisión "owns 11 stations and has 19 affiliates, [it] is also carried on 740 cable systems and is seen by 92 percent of Hispanic households in 162 markets across the United States" (Collins, 1996: C6). The market survey was part of the broadcaster's plans to demonstrate to clients the effectiveness of buying time on the network. Information Resources intended to use the data collected to persuade consumer-product companies to raise their budgets for ethnic advertising. It also planned to extend its market research to other fast-growing minorities in the US.

But there is a price to be paid in adopting a market-based model of ethnic broadcasting. John Downing notes that advertising during telenovela broadcasts on Univisión and Telemundo often makes exaggerated and unrealistic claims (1992: 272). In the programming of some of the commercially-based ethnic broadcasters who buy time slots on Canada's Vision TV's schedule, there does not appear to be much differentiation between advertisers' products and program content, which at times seems akin to an infomercial. Creative artistic and cultural programming appears to be a low priority in commercially-based ethnic broadcasting. Writing about the impact of market forces on Black film and video production in the United Kingdom, Ali Hussein notes that "It is often forgotten by those who point to the existence of mainstream Black-owned commercial radio stations, a Black cable channel and satellite channels now operating as evidence that the market will take care of every need, that what is precisely at stake is the aspiration of Black producers to engage with popular cultures, as well as with the higher ideals of artistic innovation and experimentation whilst informing, educating and entertaining" (1994: 131). Whereas the Black Entertainment Television reaches out to the African diaspora (and other viewers) in North America, the production values of most of its programming can hardly be distinguished from that of other networks. Given the paucity of media content for specific ethnic minorities, their members seem to become reliant on commercial ethnic broadcasters. The primary problem does not appear to be cultural imperialism, but the loss of cultural integrity in the struggle for commercial success within national borders and beyond.

Digital Broadcasting Satellite Systems

Ethnic media have frequently been at the leading edge of technology adoption due to the particular challenges they face in reaching their audiences. The relatively small and widely scattered nature of communities they serve have encouraged them to seek out the most efficient and cost-effective means of communication. Technologies that allow for narrowcasting to target specific audiences rather than those that provide the means for mass communication have generally been favoured. Marie Gillespie notes about the Indian community in Southhall,

England, that many families obtained VCRs as early as 1978 "well before most households in Britain" (1995: 79). This is probably true for other parts of the South Asian diaspora, which has high rates of watching movies from India.

The arrival of Ku band satellites and digital compression technology has enabled a vast increase in the number of radio and television channels that can be beamed over large distances directly to residential sites equipped with pizza-sized (generally between 18-24 inches) satellite dishes. Whereas developing as well as developed countries have expressed fears that digital broadcasting satellites (DBS) would erode their sovereignty by transmitting foreign programming to their populations in unregulated manners, this technology is providing remarkable opportunities for diasporic communities. Ethnic broadcasters, previously having limited access to space on the electromagnetic spectrum in Northern countries[11], are finding much greater options opening up for them through DBS. Diasporic programming using this technology has grown exponentially in the last few years, well ahead of many mainstream broadcasters.

Digital networks have realized the viability of ethnic channels and are making them an integral part of their services. ExpressVu, one of the only two licensed national DBS providers in Canada, carries the (South) Asian Television Network, Telelatino (Spanish and Italian), and Fairchild Television (Chinese) - Star Choice offers the latter two. In the US, DirectTV and DISH Network provide an even wider variety. WMNB (Russian), Network Asia (India-oriented), Ukrainian Broadcasting Network, CiaoTV - The Italian Superchannel, Egyptian Satellite Channel, and Nile TV appear on DirectTV. The DISH Network's offerings include Fox Sports Americas, MTV Latino, and Telemundo, all in Spanish; Antenna in Greek and Croatian; ART in Arabic; TV5 and RFI in French; RTPi in Portuguese; and RAI in Italian (SkyReport, 1998b; "Quick Overview").

Among the earliest buyers of digital satellite dishes in Canada were from Italian and German communities who wanted to receive television, radio and teletext news transmissions of Europlus (Lofaro, 1994: I8). This European-based service, which carries content from public broadcasters in Italy and Germany, is received in eastern Canada and United States, Central and South America, and the Caribbean ("soc.culture.german FAQ": 20.5). The owner of a satellite dish dealership in the Ottawa area stated that

> ... his customers purchase the dishes to keep informed about news events in Italy and to pick up live soccer games televised on Sundays. It's a limited market, he agrees, but one that has not been fully served in the past. "Some of my older clients watch the Italian programming all day, they don't watch regular TV anymore..." (Lofaro, 1994: I8)

A Toronto-based cable station, which specialized in domestic and imported Italian/Spanish programming, is now disseminating material across Canada through DBS. The Greek-language radio and television network Antenna broadcasts from Greece to the US, Australia, and Cyprus ("Welcome to Antenna Internet").

Even as mainstream networks in Europe were making plans to introduce digital broadcasting,

Orbit TV had begun providing extensive programming via DBS to the Arab community both in Europe and the Middle East by 1994. Based in Rome, it has 24 television and 24 radio channels broadcasting in Arabic, English, and French. While providing a variety of its own fare, Orbit also serves as a pass-through medium for established Western networks such as CNN, BBC, Disney, Star, and ESPN as well as Egyptian and Jordanian channels (Forrester, 1995: 29). Arab Radio and Television, another transnational digital network, has seven channels that are broadcast to Arab countries, and one each to Europe and North America. Its programming appears to be less dependent on Western content, and ART Europe and ART America are marketed as providing "those born far from their homes with knowledge of their native cultures, traditions, and arts" ("ART", 1996). Arabic-speakers in Europe also have access to digital transmissions from Arab countries across the Mediterranean. In their study of the viewing patterns of residents of Maghrebi origins in France, Hargreaves and Mahdjoub found that whereas older, first-generation immigrants tended not to desire channels other than those received from Arab countries via DBS, younger viewers also wanted access to American services such as MTV and CNN and their French counterparts (1997: 474). Gillespie (1995) noted similar viewing patterns in Southhall.

One of the most fascinating uses of DBS technology in the Middle Eastern context is MED-TV, which presents itself as "the world's first and only Kurdish satellite television station" (Ryan, 1997: 98).

> Broadcasting in Kurdish dialects with help from a satellite parked over Africa, MED-TV delivers 18 hours of news, documentaries, and entertainment daily to a population of 30 million Kurds living in and around Kurdistan - a region split between Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran... Set up to "develop Kurdish culture and language and to provide communication for the Kurds," much of MED-TV's programming consists of dubbed material acquired from organizations such as the BBC. Based in London, with production facilities spread across Europe, MED-TV prides itself on its unbiased coverage of all sides in the Kurdistan dispute. (Ibid.)

This is a case of a diaspora within and without the divided homeland attempting to sustain itself and to counter forceful suppression with the use of communications technology. MED-TV faces resistance not only from the various states straddling Kurdistan, but also from anti-terrorist police forces in the UK, Belgium and Germany.

While there is increasing use of satellite broadcasting by religious groups like the Seventh Day Adventists, the Mormons, and the Jewish Lubavitch sect, the earliest and the most extensive application of this technology has been carried out by the Ahmadiyya sect, which has been declared unIslamic by the government of Pakistan. Run by volunteers, the Muslim Television Ahmadiyya International, attempts to reach the religious diaspora by renting time on four satellites. Broadcasting in seven Asian and European languages, the network has production facilities in Germany, Pakistan, Canada and the United States, with central studios in London - which is also the headquarters of the community and the residence of the Khalifa, the group's religious leader. Satellite dishes are sold to members at a subsidized price and are installed gratis by volunteers.

> The world's 11 million Ahmadiya are able not only to watch the Khalifa's weekly sermons, but also to ask him questions through satellite uplinks at many of their mosques like those in Toronto and Saskatoon. All new mosques ... will also have satellite dishes, and the uplink allows them to beam their own input to the satellite. (Harvey, 1995: C5)

Apart from carrying religious education and an evangelical message, the programming also appears to fulfil other objectives such as the learning about computers and the languages of countries where Ahmadis have settled.

Quite apart from the DBS television offered by global conglomerates like Rupert Murdoch's Star TV, which beams programming to several Asian countries, there have emerged several diasporic DBS-based networks. The Chinese Television Network, headquartered in Hong Kong, presents itself as serving "the over 1 billion global Chinese viewers" ("Brief Introduction"). It has been broadcasting to East Asia, Australia, the Pacific Islands, and the United States since 1994. The London-based Chinese Channel's programs are received in the UK and in continental Europe ("Chinese Channel"). In January 1998, California-based Space TV launched five Chinese video channels, ten Chinese audio channels, one Thai video channel, one Filipino video channel, and an Asian Business News channel for North American subscribers. The company also announced plans to launch Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese offerings (SkyReport, 1998a). Hong Kong's Television Broadcasts International "reaches into several Asian markets and to Chinese communities just about everywhere" (Berfield, 1997: 31).

India's state-run network Doordarshan has taken its International Channel to 40 countries (Berfield, 1997: 31). In Canada, Doordarshan's programming is carried by the Asian Television Network of South Asian Television. In its application for a broadcasting license, the latter cited an objective of the *Canadian Broadcasting Act* to reflect the country's cultural diversity in Canadian programming. Regarding the needs of the South Asian diaspora, it stated that the network

> ... has a unique challenge - to serve the needs and interests of a large and diverse community that shares a common heritage dating back thousands of years. Where there are linguistic, religious and regional differences, South Asians around the world have retained great emotional attachments to the South Asian culture as exemplified in art, drama, literature and other forms of entertainment. This is the cohesive bond that binds the community together. This cohesive bond provides the basic foundation for SATV's proposed programming service. ("1996 Specialty.")

This network, which grew out of an ethnic broadcaster, began disseminating locally-produced and imported content in 1997 in several Indian languages and English to Canadian and US audiences through the American AlphaStar DBS system ("ATN"). When AlphaStar failed financially, ATN/SATV promptly moved to the newly-established Canadian ExpressVu and is distributed in the US via the DISH network. That "Asian Indians have the highest per-capita income and educational level of any U.S. ethnic group" (ibid) appears to have been factored into the network's marketing strategy.

Adoption of the market model of mainstream broadcasting appears to belie the cultural studies view of minority media resisting dominant structures and discourses. Ethnic DBS networks carry out similar types of market research, programming schedules, and advertising. Apart from certain differences in the modes of narrative, the only major difference seems to be in the languages and cultures of the content. But the very advantage that DBS offers , i.e. of enabling broadcasts to widely-scattered audiences, inhibits local programming. Many ethnic-oriented services tend to produce one-way flows of material, either from home countries or parts of diasporas which have significant populations of respective groups. Additionally, the fairly expensive hardware and subscription costs generally do not allow the less well-off in the transnational communities to receive the programs. Commentators like Appadurai who have predicted the overshadowing of the nation-state by diasporic networks linked by electronic technology appear to have disregarded the economic differences within diasporas.

On-line Media

Diasporic groups are also making extensive use of on-line services like the Internet, Usenet, Listserv, and the Wold Wide Web. These world-wide networks are allowing for relatively easy connections for members of communities residing in various continents. As opposed to the broadcast model of communication which, apart from offering little access to minority groups, is linear, hierarchical, and capital intensive, on-line media allow easier access and are non-linear, largely non-hierarchical, and relatively cheap (Karim, Smeltzer and Loucheur, 1998). The ability to exchange messages with individuals on the other side of the planet and to have access to community information almost instantaneously changes the dynamics of diaspora, allowing for qualitatively and quantitatively enhanced linkages. As the number of language scripts and translation capabilities of on-line software grows, an increasing number of non-English speakers are drawn to the medium.

An organizational strategy developed by Terry Edwards and Siriluck Kedseemake proposes the development of worldwide task-oriented workgroups drawn from experts with origins in Thailand, which would serve to counter the effect of the brain drain from that country (1997: 32-42). Diasporic web-sites are already creating global directories of individuals, community institutions, and businesses owned by members of diasporas. Some sites have hypertext links to sites of alumni associations. Listings of forthcoming festivals and cultural events are also provided for those travelling to other parts of the diaspora. The availability of on-line versions of newspapers from countries of origin further enhance inter-continental connections. Global on-line technologies also offer some unique advantages for diasporic groups. For example, a world-wide registry would be extremely useful for the medical purposes of locating matches for human marrow donors - who are generally limited to one's own ethnic group. Similar databanks would facilitate global genealogical searches and in looking for adopted children's biological families. Members of endogamous groups are already using the medium to register themselves in matrimonial sections of diasporic web-sites.[12]

Many web-sites catering to transnational communities have chat rooms where users can carry out a discussion by posting messages. Usenet also allows for ongoing discussions between

individuals with common origins in newsgroups like as soc.culture.germany, soc.culture.pakistan etc. Discussions range on topics that include culture, literature, entertainment, politics, and current events in the countries of origin and settlement. Newsgroups allow for the participation of users with common interests, located around the world; these have been termed "virtual communities" (Rheingold, 1993). However, the notion of virtual or electronic community seems more pertinent when speaking either of a freenet that networks a particular geographic locality or a diasporic group that is linked together by more than a single-issue, sharing a symbolic universe that includes a broad variety of cultural markers (Mitra, 1997: 55-56). Indeed, cyberspace becomes the "place" where the users electronically reconstitute the relationships that existed before migration. Discussing the participation of Indian immigrants on soc.culture.india (sci), Ananda Mitra writes,

> There is a presupposition that most members of the Indian community would access the network and would chance upon these general messages and thus re-establish contacts with people they might have known before. This signifies that the community produced by, and around, sci is a representation of the allegiances that existed before the diasporic experience occurred. For instance, when one encounters a message that refers back to a college in India there is an effort to find, in the virtual community, familiar relationships that have been severed by the process of geographic movement but can now be re-established in the virtual space of the Internet. (Ibid: 63)

This is not Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" (1983) since it is extra-national, but it is, nevertheless, imagined. The communal identity that emerges is not the old one, but one that is a hybrid of: past alliances, the re-establishment of relations through the newsgroup, as well as the experiences of negotiating real life in the new country of settlement and interaction with other individuals/groups in that society.

While the friendships and the antagonisms present in the old location may be revived, diasporas also find themselves forming alliances with those who had formerly seemed to be enemies. In the case of the South Asian diaspora, the common problems of trying to live in an unfamiliar environment appear at times to be bringing together Indians and Pakistanis in a camaraderie that does not appear to exist in their respective home countries, which have been antagonists over the last half century. Whereas discussions on newsgroups do at times revive the old rivalries and prejudices (Mitra, 1997: 64-66; Appadurai, 1996: 196-97), they also seem to express new experiences of finding commonalities. The following cross-posted message appeared on soc.culture.pakistan, soc.culture.indian, and soc.culture.punjab by a user called Ramesh, who related an experience that opened up a discussion among newsgroup participants on commonalities between Indians and Pakistanis:

> When I went for a job interview, there were 2 pakistanis and people of other countries like middle east. I was wondering what it would be like with 5 muslims total and me a lone hindu... To my surprise from the moment I introduced myself as from India the 2 paki guys started smiling at me. When the interviewer went out these 2 guys started asking from which part of India I am, and whether I eat

non veg and how many years it takes to complete the course and whether I am new to US and it went on and on like some long lost friends. Gee I was so surprised, I used to think that Pakistanis hate anything with a remote Indian connection ... (Ramesh, 1998)

The following posts in the discussion string were affirmations by Muslims and Hindus from South Asia of the affinity that people from India and Pakistan seemed to have towards each other in the United States. They also alluded to the negative impressions created by the dominant discourses in the home countries about each other. The opportunity that Usenet creates for users to participate in creating content appears to allow them to circumvent the hierarchical mass media as well as to counter the material from hegemonic sources.[13]

Diasporic members with origins in countries with repressive governments have been using on-line media to mobilize opposition not only within the diaspora but also among other sympathetic individuals around the planet. An effort led by Zarni, a Burmese exile studying at the University of Wisconsin, managed to put the issue of economic sanctions against the Myanmar government on the US Congress's agenda by coordinating an intense lobbying campaign in 1996 through his Free Burma Coalition website (Holloway, 1996: 28-29). In the same year, a world-wide grouping of aboriginal groups called the Indigenous Peoples Global Caucus pressed its case at the United Nations in discussions about the drafting of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Caucus had a representative stationed in Geneva who monitored the debates between delegations of various national governments; a joint position expressed through a stream of statements e-mailed to Geneva from the various members of the Caucus from various continents managed to assert their views in a forum where they previously had minimal input (Indigenous Peoples, 1996).

Discussion

This may point to some use of new communication technologies by diasporic groups to foster a form of what Murdock has called "cosmopolitan democracy" (1998). The linking together of diasporas with broader groups on the Net concerned with particular issues such as human rights, the environment, and development would help to harness the connections and energies devoted to distinct purposes into common fronts which would form, dissolve, and reappear in varying configurations responding to specific contingencies. However, whereas the Internet is encouraging the growth of global linkages, it appears to have limits in the extent to which newsgroup members are satisfied only in engaging in worldwide discussions. My own tracking of a Muslim newsgroup (Ilm Net) administered from Winnipeg has indicated that while there is some participation beyond North America, the bulk of active members tend to be Canadian. Dissatisfied with the Canada and US-centred nature of discussions, UK participants expressed a desire to form their own network. It seems that there continues to be a need to ground oneself in the local while engaging the global.

We also need to keep in mind that even though the use of on-line media and DBS is increasing steadily around the world, the limited data available indicates that there are wide differences in use of these technologies. Whereas Canadian surveys have indicated high levels of use among

ethnic minorities like the Chinese (Environics, 1997) and South Asians (Chow, 1998: D1), the lowest levels in the US are among the African American (Nua, 1998) and Latino communities (Chabran, 1996). And as we move beyond North America, Europe and Australia, the ownership of computer hardware and subscription to Internet services falls dramatically. Ethnic-based programming on DBS uses a market model and is targeted at fairly affluent members of various diasporas. Mainstream companies are showing increasing interest in ethnic media with corporations like CBS in the US acquiring TeleNoticias (SkyReport, 1997) and Shaw Communications buying a stake in the Telelatino network in Canada (Star Choice, 1997). It appears that as ethnic broadcasters become successful on the national and global stages they will become targets for takeovers by global media conglomerations. This may further compromise local community content.

However, it is clear that the terrain of broadcasting nationally and globally is in the process of undergoing remarkable changes. This has significant implications for state agencies concerned with regulation and policy. It is increasingly difficult to police one's borders given the ability of new communication technologies to facilitate inter-continental links between individuals and groups. Whereas the growing links between diasporic networks will not render national borders insignificant to the extent that Appadurai has suggested, national governments will have to take into account the dynamics of global diasporas and their effect on their own populations. Policies regarding multiculturalism, the allocation of broadcast licenses, access to information and communication technologies by minorities, and the development of multimedia products by diasporic groups need to be re-evaluated. Attention needs to be paid additionally to the effects of the linkages between transnational communities on a putative global citizenship. Also significant is the impact on national citizenship and cohesion.

The early stage of diaspora studies and the evolving nature of new media use around the world do not allow for definitive statements on the directions that current developments will produce. Further research will need to address various aspects of the use of communication technologies by minorities. Their information and entertainment needs that have led to the growth of ethnic media have not been fully examined, particularly the effect of these media on issues of citizenship and social cohesion and the relationship of these media with the mass media. The implications of the restrictions of national broadcast regulators, which have generally impeded the emergence of ethnic public service broadcasting, and those of the commercialization of ethnic media have also yet to be analysed. There is a clear need for better quantitative data on access and use of digital media by ethnic groups. Content analyses of materials produced by diasporic communities as well as ethnographic research will go a long way in helping construct a fuller picture.

The impact of media use by minorities on identity formation also needs to be studied - while it appears that older immigrants prefer content exclusively related to their cultural backgrounds, younger ones seem to want a broader variety. This raises issues concerning cultural retention as well as integration into receiving societies. Whereas the maintenance of one culture is sometimes viewed within a zero-sum framework as a loss for another, the gains made by society as a whole through the diversity of perspectives has not been examined adequately. The hybridity of cultural production and of multilayered identities have major implications for cultural/multicultural and broadcasting policies, especially within the context of globalization. Research in such areas will

help us to understand better the effects that diasporic networks are having on nation-states, particularly in the light of the emergence of digital technologies and international deregulation in the communications sector.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] The formation of a diasporic consciousness aided by media use is not a new phenomenon: for example, the different parts of the Indian diaspora in eastern and southern Africa, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Guyana, and Trinidad share the common cultural markers derived from consuming Indian films and film music over the last three or four generations.

[2] This view, developed within cultural studies, is significantly different from an earlier anthropological definition of diaspora which referred to a dispersed community, more of whose members were resident outside rather than in the homeland. I am indebted to Lamont Pittson of the Multiculturalism Program of Canadian Heritage, who brought this to my attention.

[3] The term diaspora is also rarely applied to globally dominant ethnic groups like the English or the French. In postcolonial and cultural studies, the focus is primarily on groups from the South.

[4] TV5 is an example of a state-sponsored transnational network established under the aegis of La Francophonie, the French counterpart of the Commonwealth.

[5] Sinclair notes that "the potential lies in the linguistic and other cultural similarities which might be cultivated to create an intercontinental media market across all those countries which have Latin-based languages: Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian; that is, the geolinguistic region of Latin America and Southwest Europe, itself a fusion of the cultural legacies of former empires." (1997: 160).

[6] The major exception to this trend was the establishment of the national multicultural network called Special Broadcasting Services by the Australian government in 1980. It shared features of both public service and community broadcasting (Patterson, 1990: 93-99).

[7] The Canadian *Broadcasting Act* (1991) requires the country's broadcast system in general as well as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (the national public broadcaster), "to reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society" (sec. 3.1 d iii). The minister for the Department Canadian Heritage, within her limited authority to give directives to the CRTC, has instructed it to reserve the next radio frequency for use in promoting the "multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society" (Saunders, 1998: D2). For the lack of access of

minorities to publicly-supported broadcast media in the UK and France, respectively, see Hussein (1994) and Hargreaves and Mahdjoub (1997).

[8] The only national television channel that carries regular ethnic minority programming is Vision TV, a specialty non-profit multifaith channel which allows for paid-time programming for "broadcast ministries." A number of South Asian broadcasters, using this means, are able to reach their respective audiences scattered across the country. Their programming (including West Indians United, Sanji Dharkan, Jafri's TV Asia, Z-TV, Pakistan TV, and Asian Horizons), while occasionally containing some religious content, is largely cultural. (However, given the lack of general distinction in South Asian cultures between what in the West is viewed as the sacred and the profane, radio programs on community channels also include religious content.)

[9] Governments in countries such as Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, and United States have recognized the potential of this sector of the national economy in varying degrees, and have provided support for it (see Karim, 1995; 1996a).

[10] For a discussion on audience segmentation and targeting by ethnicity see Wilson and Gutiérrez (1995: 244-61).

[11] For example, France's main broadcast regulator the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel was actively encouraged by the centre-right government to exclude Arabic stations from licensed cable networks (Hargreaves and Mahdjoub, 1997: 461).

[12] Collection of personal data on such databanks, however, broaches the issue of privacy on the Internet and its attendant problems.

[13] The Washington-based Council for American-Islamic Relations plays an active role in monitoring discourses of the mass media and opinion makers about Islam, and encourages subscribers to its Listserv to communicate their responses to institutions responsible for any disparaging remarks.

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