ROLE OF ETHNIC MEDIA IN PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY, SECURITY & TERRORISM

Born in India, Monika Spolia grew up in Canada. She finished her BSc. in Physics and Mathematics at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Always fascinated by cultures and grass-root movements, she travelled to India to pursue her Masters in Anthropology at the University of Rajasthan in Jaipur. During this time, she also conducted independent research on Adivasi (indigenous people) in India and worked on a resettlement action plan for villages in Rajasthan. Her works were published in the articles in *Fairs and Festivals of Indian Tribes* and in *Tribal Dances of India*. She has often been on the forefront for expressing her ideas and theories. She completed her Doctorate in Anthropology and Political Science. As a social activist, she organizes and partakes a lot of Indo-Canadian events bringing together a harmonious hodgepodge of cultural communities, a Canadian society, Unity in Diversity. With years of experience in writing, research and journalism, she is the Chief Editor and founder publisher of *Bharat Times* Newspaper in Montreal, Canada.

Ethnic Media plays a crucial and extensive role in the contributing to perceptions of identity, security and terrorism. With over ten years of experience in owning and managing an independent English print and online media, Bharat Times, I will shed insight from a journalistic perspective into the ethnic media's perception, portrayal and possible impact on issues of identity, security and terrorism. Furthermore, I will attempt to explore the notion of identity as it is constructed by ethnic media.

I set out to profile the local ethnic population (Montrealers, Quebecers and Canadian South-Asians). At least a decade ago, the niche market for ethnic media were the immigration stories by lawyers, immigration consultants and agents. As soon as my first issue reached the press, I received phone calls from immigrants/refugees who wanted me to play an advocacy role on their behalf by defending their efforts to gain Canadian citizenship. But the cases were complex and I chose to limit stories to basic information. Over time I redirected attention to stories that touched upon local community matters.

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BACKGROUND: UNDERSTANDING ETHNIC MEDIA

Ethnic media is constantly growing and Montreal alone holds distribution of well over a hundred ethnic newspapers. This implies that each community has several newspapers which, in turn, suggests the presence of sub-communities. When I began working in media in 2003, I realized that most ethnic media reproduced the news from "back home". Some newspapers even printed the news directly from the internet. To

be fair, members of ethnic communities enjoyed reading the news from back home.

News from back home tends to be far more prevalent than the activities of the local ethnic community. The mainstream media grants meager amounts of space to local ethnic news.

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PERSPECTIVES OF ETHNIC MEDIA

Like mainstream media, the market for ethnic media is driven mainly by supply and demand. In ethnic media, there is less of a preference for politics than for news about Hollywood, Bollywood and such things as jokes and cooking recipes. The religious and community leaders want visibility and with that in mind they will often direct stories towards ethnic media.

ETHNIC MEDIA PERCEPTION OF IDENTITY, SECURITY & TERRORISM

Ethnic media attempts to reflect some kind of community identity and/or at the very least finds a way to participate in its construction. Each ethnic media gives expression to some aspect of communal identity and makes an effort to articulate it. Such identities are often rooted in cultural nostalgia that either make reference to events in the countries of origin or find some local cultural activities that provide some connection for community members

As regards perceptions of security and terrorism ethnic media hesitate to write about the issues and readers do not see it as the role of their local media to cover such stories. The issues give rise to considerable sensitivity. For example, a Punjabi origin person is careful when talking about the Kanishka incident openly the same way a non-Singhalese Tamil doesn't like talking about Tamil Tigers. Too often the broader population lumps together ethnic communities into one group and fails to comprehend their degree of internal diversity. The overseas civil conflicts in South Asia are difficult for observers in Canada to comprehend and ethnic media does not see its mandate as providing guidance or clarity in this regard. After all the broader population is not the readership of the ethnic media. Ethnic media readers are aware of the community's internal challenges and don't desire that ethnic media play out conflicts in "their own" press.

IS ETHNIC MEDIA AWARE OF THE CONCEPTS OF IDENTITY, SECURITY AND TERRORISM?

Ethnic media needs to tread carefully to avoid setting false alarms around security matters and yet where there is a real threat there is a need to act in a responsible manner.

Ethnic media seeks to preserve harmony within the community rather than stir up fears. Does ethnic media have some impact on the perception around security and terrorism? It could have some impact if it so chooses but it is more likely to steer clear of such matters. Under certain circumstances, the ethnic media can act as a human rights advocate where it believes a security issue may infringe upon the rights of an individual. On the rare occasion it does this it will reinforce ethnic community ties. In this regard, it can work with community organizations to articulate a point of view that reflects the concerns of the community. At times however the risk in such matters is that the ethnic media loses its autonomy and no longer serves as a neutral or independent voice.

The promotion of ethnic group identity is often seen by community members as a fundamental right and where the community regards itself as the target of a security threat it may instil feelings of solidarity. There is a need for ethnic media to not get drawn into ethnic solidarity movements and become the vehicle for their expression (I will return to this point below).

ETHNIC MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF IDENTITY, SECURITY & TERRORISM

Each ethnic media outlet carves out its own identity and seeks a balance between stories from back home, local immigration stories and community affairs. Security and terrorism issues can sometimes cut across these three dimensions of ethnic media. It is difficult as an ethnic media outlet to speak out about issues of security and terrorism. Doing so risks alienating some members of the community. Even the reprinting of a text from a mainstream newspaper risks being viewed as staking out a position on the issue which in turn may result in a backlash.

Ethnic media often deals with tight-knit communities as well as local community businesses. Coverage of security and terrorism issues that are seen as directly affecting the community are often sensational and therefore can be the cause of conflict within the group. Ethnic media is offered little to no guidance in how best to address these matters and there is

insufficient concern from societal decision-makers about the ramifications of such coverage for fragile media outlets. It is important for ethnic media not to lose the trust of its constituents and security issues may render fragile the relationship between media and community. Indeed ethnic media networks attempt to bring communities together as they strive to raise funds. In the absence of external financial support, ethnic media is largely left to its own devices in this regard. As a newspaper editor it is of utmost importance to act as a moderator to steer discussions in a constructive direction with a view to preserving communal harmony.

Given the views expressed above it should come as no surprise that the way ethnic media treats identity, security and terrorism is done with much caution. Ethnic media has its own particular sense of identity whether based on a community, religious affiliation and/or patriotism. Identities are fluid and not fixed. Newly arrived immigrants identifying with the ethnic community often challenge the established group's approach to issues. Although security and terrorism are somewhat of a taboo in ethnic media, stories about immigration and the cases of specific immigrants wishing to enter Canada are more common. Ethnic media may face serious challenges in addressing the sensitivities around immigration stories.

Many people around the world want to come to Canada. Others wish to bring their families here. Many are vulnerable to being exploited notably the younger segment of the community that are at risk. Ethnic media needs to avoid at all cost contributing to raising anxiety and fomenting prejudice. Disengaged youth can be manipulated by individuals that seek to fuel intra and inter-communal conflict. As it competes hard to survive with other forms of media, the ethnic press lacks the capacity to inform its readers about the risks associated with terrorism, let alone contribute to fighting it.