ETHNIC MEDIA IN CANADA: THE POWER OF REFLECTION; A LINK TO NATION BUILDING AND IDENTITY

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The very existence and evolution of multilingual media in Canada is a rich expression of democracy that envelops so many intrinsic Canadian values and experiences. The role of ethnic media in Canadian nation-building has been significant both in the past and present in an increasingly multicultural, multilingual and diverse society. Throughout the generations, immigrant communities as well as second and third generations have derived considerable and necessary knowledge about this country from publications, broadcasting programs, and more recently Internet streaming and blogs.

The inherent contribution of multilingual media in Canada evolved from a need to have not only information in one's language of comfort, but also relevant editorial perspective reflective of ethnocultural community leadership, ethno-specific and other relevant social issues. The cohesive bond that binds communities is this need for distinct information, which provides a context for many Canadians of multicultural backgrounds.

As waves of immigration arrived, the establishment of multilingual media provided a platform for ethnocultural community building, assisted in the process of settlement and contributed to a sense of community stability. It continues to form a bridge to the understanding and acceptance of this country, inclusive of the privileges, rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship. Ethnic media were and are a key contributor to the feeling of belonging within a linguistic and or ethnocultural community. They also contribute to the contextualization of oneself to the larger Canadian society and encourage self- esteem. As traditional media diminish access to marginal voices, ethnic media continue to develop an important role in the expression and reflection of diverse communities.

The impact of ethnic media is revealed in the following key streams: For recent and new immigrants, it is a necessary and desired lifeline that is not only a conduit to Canadian life-shaping information, but also a lens for the interpretation of Canadian standards, values and quality of life. Engaging in this very real connection with multilingual communities, using the comfort of mother tongue, significantly increases authenticity and cultural relevance for audiences. For subsequent generations, continuity provided by comprehension of the mother tongue and cultural traditions leads to reaffirmation of ethnic identity.

The evolution of ethnic media in Canada coincided with the very arrival of immigrant communities to this country. A historic perspective reveals that shortly after arriving in Canada, establishing a newspaper was an important and necessary priority. Its' beginnings can be traced even to the first newspaper in Canada. *The Halifax Gazette* began publishing in1752. The founder, John Bushell, took on a German partner, Anton Heinrich, who introduced Canada's first ethnic newspaper, *Dei Weltund die Neuschottlandische*, in German, in 1777. In 1787, Heinrich, a German immigrant, had become publisher, and from the Gazette press began publishing *Die Welt* and *Neuschottlandischer Kalendar*, meaning "The World and Nova Scotian Newsletter." No copies exist today, but the same individual published the German-language "Nova Scotian Almanac" in 1788 and1789. A copy of the 1788 "Almanac" is preserved at Library and Archives Canada.

Ninety years later, in a Manitoba log cabin, Icelandic settlers published *Framfari* (in translation,"Progress") the first ethnic newspaper in that province. This community had fled famine, volcanoes and political unrest. Long after *Framfari* disappeared, two papers in Icelandic were started, *Heimskringla* ("The World") in 1886, and *Logberg* ("The Tribune") in 1888. They merged in 1959 as *Logberg-Heimskringla* and was published in English. Today as a twice monthly online publication, it enjoys a North America-wide circulation among Icelandic communities, as well as having the reputation of being Canada's oldest surviving ethnic newspaper.

The emergence and evolution of multicultural media serving marginalized communities in Canada has been a challenged journey fraught with casualties, but also transformed by champions — one illustration being the weekly newspaper *The Provincial Freeman*, first published in Windsor, Ont., on March 24, 1854 by Mary Ann Shadd-Carey, at a time when many fugitive slaves from the United states had settled in Ontario. She herself was the daughter of freed black slaves and was committed to the advancement of self-reliance and independence of black Canadians, with the objective of transforming, in her words, "black refugees into model citizens." Shadd-Carey was the first black female publisher in Canada. The editor was Samuel B. Ward, who was born a slave. In 1856, the newspaper was seized over debts and closed with issue No. 49 on Aug. 22,1857.

At the turn of the 20th century, many multilingual publications were to spring up in Western Canada as substantial waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe arrived at the invitation of the Laurier government. By 1905, according to the *Canadian Almanac*, there were 18 foreign-language publications in Canada. In the next decade, with waves of Polish and Ukrainian immigrants, newspapers in both

these languages were being published, and by 1916 records show that there was a proliferation of ethnic newspapers published in the Canadian West.

By 1951, reflecting the wave of post-war immigration from Eastern and Central Europe, close to 70 publications were being printed. Ensuing decades heralded ethnic media growth commensurate with the country's growing diverse demographics. By 1965, there were publications, for example, in Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Byelorussian, German, Slovak, Greek and Maltese. By the 1970s, there was accelerated growth in media serving Chinese and South Asian communities. Ethnic media in Canada underscore the need and value of communication in a language of comfort with relevant content to a specific community not adequately served by traditional media. The value of multilingual media can be exemplified in a speech given by the late NDP leader Jack Layton, a former Toronto city councillor. In an address to the Canadian Ethnic Journalists and Writers' Club in 1992, he described how his elderly mother-in-law, who was of Chinese origin, would diligently read every available Chinese-Canadian publication from cover to cover. He mused as to how often that would occur with traditional English language newspapers.

The value of ethnic media is also demonstrated in the settlement and integration process, and is manifested by the regard which communities attribute to ethnic media as a trusted and welcome source of information. This is further exemplified by the experience that even if similar information is available from other sources, the medium of choice is ethnic media. Furthermore, as individuals age and are living in other than their country of origin, they tend to revert to their native tongue as the language of comfort.

As a third pillar of communication in Canada, ethnic media are not only a bridge to accessible content, but also serve as a barometer of positive portrayal, acceptance, self-expression and identity.

It can be contended that ethnocultural communities develop and maintain their ethnic identity in concert with the influence of communication options. Access to local ethnocultural communities and exposure to people who speak other languages is a positive factor in nation building. The existence and availability of ethnic media reinforces and enhances citizenry by creating a comfortable environment that facilitates successful integration, as well as contributing to community development and sustainability.

Canadian ethnic media act as a promoter of a just society. By engaging community discourse, they become a vehicle with which to dispel false assumptions regarding cultural and social differences. Ethnocultural communities benefit from community participation and engagement through communication in their language of comfort. It is this open and trusting climate that supports grassroots diversity and thus can be maximized as a tool to manage the risk of social imbalance.

The contribution of Canadian ethnic media not only has value on a local and national scale, but also contributes to the international arena. In instances where homeland countries are under dictatorial governance, it has been demonstrated that the articles and editorials published and/or broadcast in Canada have provided necessary alternative voices

that would otherwise have been supressed.

Multilingual media in Canada today encompass a diverse range of communication streams inclusive of print, over-the-air broadcasting, digital channels and the Internet. The Canadian Ethnic Media Association recently created a multilingual ethnic media directory that confirmed more than 1,200 multilingual media entries for Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta alone. This will prove to be an important tool to harness and maximize the potential of multilingual communication as well as access to the various communities.

Canadian ethnic journalists, editors, publishers and broadcasters tend to be community leaders, opinion makers and entrepreneurs. This community leadership contributes to the enrichment, sophistication and positive dynamic of Canadian society.

Diversity is a national asset, as is the richness of Canadian ethnic media. Canadians who speak many languages and understand many cultures open international doors. Canadian ethnic media are the key to unlocking doors for Canadians both here and internationally. Canadian multilingual media help ensure that integrated and inclusive citizenship will be every Canadian's inheritance.