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Augie Fleras

## **The Conventional News Paradigm as Systemic Bias: Re-Thinking the (Mis-)Representational Basis of Newsmedia-Minority Relations in Canada**

### **Das konventionelle Nachrichten- paradigma als systemischer Bias: Die Basis der (Fehl-)Darstellung von Minoritäten in Nachrichtenmedien neu durchdacht**

#### **Abstract**

Canada's mainstream news media are widely accused of renegeing on the principles and practices of an official multiculturalism. Both print and broadcast news media continue to unwittingly frame migrants and minorities as "problem people", that is, people with problems or who create problems. Moves to "un-frame" this biased and unbalanced coverage by modifying the media mindset are well-intentioned. Yet an agency-oriented solution for improving the processing of minority news information may prove insufficient. The politics of mis-representation reflect a structural ("systemic") bias because of the "news values" implicit within a "conventional news paradigm". The centrality of a systemic ("mediacentric") bias is revealed in two ways. First, the very dynamic of newsmedia as a "medium of negative" tends to "racially profile" migrants and minorities as "troublesome constituents" in need of control or criticism. Second, the institutionalization of a liberal-universalism bias inhibits the framing of "deep differences" outside of a monocultural newsmedia framework. Such a mediacentric news bias not only intensifies the mis-representation of diversity, but also exposes those systemic barriers that preclude an inclusive newsmedia. The conclusion seems inescapable: Transformative change in redefining the representational basis of minority-newsmedia relations will materialize only when the conventional news paradigm "re-thinks" those "news values" that conceal as much as they reveal.

Den Mainstreammedien Kanadas wird der weit verbreitete Vorwurf gemacht, sich nicht an die Prinzipien und Praktiken eines offiziellen Multikulturalismus zu halten. Nachrichtenmedien sowohl der Presse als auch des Rundfunks rahmen Migranten und Minoritäten weiterhin unbeabsichtigt als „Problemgruppen“, d.h. als Gruppen, die Probleme haben oder machen. Versuche, diese verzerrte und unausgewogene Darstellung durch eine Veränderung der Denkart zu „entrahmen“, sind gut gemeint. Aber eine Agenturorientierte Lösung zur Verbesserung der Bearbeitung von Medieninformationen über Minoritäten kann sich als unzureichend herausstellen. Die Politik der Fehldarstellung (misrepresentation) spiegelt – wegen der „Nachrichtenwerte“, die einem „konventionellen Nachrichtenparadigma“ implizit sind – einen strukturellen („systemischen“) Bias wider. Die Schlüsselrolle eines systemischen („medienzentrischen“) Bias wird in zweierlei Hinsicht aufgezeigt: Erstens tendiert die bloße Dynamik der Nachrichtenmedien als „Medien des Negativen“ dazu, Migranten und Minoritäten mit dem „rassischen Profil“ von „störenden Bestandteilen“ zu versehen, die kontrolliert und kritisiert werden müssen. Zweitens verhindert die Institutionalisierung eines liberalen Universalismus-Bias die Rahmung von „tiefgreifenden Differenzen“ außerhalb des monokulturellen Nachrichtenrahmens. Dieser medienzentrische Bias verstärkt nicht nur die Fehldarstellung der Diversität, sondern er erklärt auch die systemischen Barrieren, die inklusive Nachrichtenmedien verhindern. Der folgende Schluss scheint unvermeidlich: Grundlegender Wandel bei der Neubestimmung der Repräsentation von Minoritäten in Nachrichtenmedien wird sich nur dann wirklich einstellen, wenn das konventionelle Nachrichtenparadigma jene „Nachrichtenwerte“ „redefiniert“, die genauso viel verhüllen wie enthüllen.

My thanks to Minelle Mahtani for helpful comments.

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## **1 Contesting the News Frame: Biased Coverage or Coverage that's Biasing?**

The politics of news continue to be sharply contested. To one side is the notion of news as an empirically grounded mirror of social reality conveyed by dispassionate journalists who objectively report on “what’s new“. To the other side, news is increasingly embraced as a socially created and culturally specific construction rather than something “out there” to be plucked for placement. There is nothing natural or normal about the packaging of news, despite vested interest efforts to reinforce that impression. More accurately, what passes for news reflects a creation by individuals who meaningfully interact to make choices with regards to what’s on, what’s not, who’s quoted, what sources, and which spin (Weston 2003). Consistent with this notion of news as socially con-

structured is reference to news as a discourse in defense of ideology. As a “discourse of dominance” that frames and is framed, mainstream news-media embody ideas and ideals that draw attention to some aspects of reality but away from others (Henry/Tator 2002). A reliance on “frames” not only emphasizes what stories will appear, how issues will be framed, the context in which the item will appear, and the selection of approved images. The agenda-setting functions of frames also ensure that selected aspects of reality will be normalized as more acceptable or superior than those deemed to be irrelevant or inferior.

A bias that persists because of these news frames is generally conceded. But consensus is lacking over the source of this bias. Does ownership (structure) or journalism (agency) determine what’s new(s) with respect to definition, coverage, collection, and packaging (Miljan/Cooper 2003)? For some, news media bias is driven by the commercial logic associated with ownership patterns and the shift toward convergence (Herman/Chomsky 1988; Winter 2001). News is not really about news, according to this line of argument, but little more than pre-existing packages of domination by ruling elites who “orchestrate hegemony” around a preferred agenda (Hall 1980; Hier/Greenberg 2002). For others, biases are embedded within newscasting routines, including pressures because of deadlines, availability and access to (re)sources, press routines, production priorities, and interference from ownership (Fishman 1980; David 2003). A journalistic dependence on government and other experts as primary sources of factual material has proven a source of bias as well, especially when coupled with a reliance on the newswire for information (Kalant 2004). For still others, news bias originates in those news values journalists bring to the newscasting process (Miljan/Cooper 2003). News stories reflect a political and social perspective that informs journalist standards and priorities. Or as journalism professor, Todd Gitlin once said, albeit in a different context, “journalists (and media in general) frame reality through the principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation, involving tacit assumptions about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Drezner/Farrell 2004, 34). The resulting mediocentrism (tendency of media to automatically interpret the world from their perspective as necessary and normal) reinforces the role of news-media as interpreters and framers of events – participants rather than innocent bystanders – so that newsmedia actually contribute in constructing the events they cover.

The interplay of these perspectives yields a pattern. What passes for news reflects a systemic bias that unintentionally defines “what matters”.

News is essentially a “medium of the negative” primarily because news values embrace the mediacentric logic that the “only good news is bad news”. Both electronic and print news represent an exercise in storytelling that boxes incidents into a confrontational framework, with clearly marked protagonists and positions, including heroes, villains, and victims (van Dijk 2000). An adversarial format transforms news into frames that capitalize on negativity, while securing disproportionate coverage for those with loud voices, extreme views, strange appearances, and bizarre behaviour (Weston 2003). Isolated and intermittent events are spliced together into a story that inflames as it inflates, regardless of its resonance with reality, thereby implying a looming crisis where none actually existed (Hier/Greenberg 2002; Henry/Tator 2002). The growing tabloidization of news not only morselizes reality into “bitable” bits, but also revels in a kind of “gotcha” journalism that worships the relentless pursuit of the “scoop”. The erosion of journalistic standards is inevitable as rumour replaces responsibility, sensationalism replaces substance, and voyeurism replaces veracity (Miller 1998; Tumber/Waisbord 2004). The editor of one of Canada’s two national papers, Edward Greenspon of *The Globe and Mail*, spoke frankly of a profession enamored with the abnormal (“if it bleeds, it leads”/“if it scares, it airs”):

“Let’s not be coy here. Journalists thrive on the misery of others. It’s not, as some have supposed, that the media dwell on the negative. It is that we dwell on the unusual and extraordinary [...]. If it happens everyday, it ain’t news. Which creates a natural bias toward the negative since most of life actually unfolds as expected” (Greenspon 2003).

In that newsworthiness prefers the negative and adversarial over the positive and cooperative, the conventional news paradigm reflects a systemic bias – namely, a bias that is institutional, not personal; consequential, not intentional; routine, not random; cultural, not conspiratorial; and structural, not attitudinal (see Weston 2003). But while conflict discourses strike a responsive chord within the industry, a constant diet of negativity impacts badly on migrants and minorities. The themes of conflict or crisis “frame” migrants and minorities as “problem people”, that is, “troublesome constituents” with problems, who are problems, and who create problems. In that migrants and minorities are “framed” (“set up”) by such negative coverage – just as people may be “framed” for something they didn’t do – the consequences are comparable. Migrants and minorities are “set up” to fail by default or to fall by association because

of institutional pressures that unintentionally conspire to mispresent facts or falsify evidence (see also Ross 2003).

Of course, no one is implying that migrants and minorities are without problems or blame. Nobody is proposing a moratorium on negative minority coverage to appease the “gods” of political correctness. Nor is anybody accusing journalists of fabricating a fictionalized news content that is “print to fit” (but see Parenti 1986). The branding of migrants and minorities as problem people is not necessarily intentional, despite evidence suggesting that journalists often internalize prevailing news norms (Henry/Tator 2003). More accurately, the problematizing of minorities and migrants reflects a mediacentric bias in the processing of mainstream news information. With mediacentrism, newsmedia (and those who work for the media) tend to interpret reality from a media vantagepoint as normal and necessary; conversely, non-media ways of framing the world are discredited as irrelevant or inferior – and unmarketable. The effects of this systemic (mediacentric) bias pose a threat to Canada’s multicultural commitments. In that many Canadians lack meaningful first hand experiences with Canada’s race, ethnic and aboriginal diversity, newsmedia are often the preliminary and primary point of contact in shaping peoples’ attitudes toward migrants and minorities – for better or worse as Sandra Lambertus (2004, 179) warns:

“[T]he media’s reliance on representations that promote stereotyping is pernicious, because once their characterizations are disseminated, it is impossible for media to control the impact on behaviours and attitudes in the future”.

The cultural weight and the cumulative impact of media miscasting has proven controlling – not in the deliberate sense of brainwashing or propaganda – but by unwittingly marginalizing minorities and migrants as more than a “handful” but less than Canadian (Fleras 2004).

This paper is part of a broader discourse on the representational politics of diversity in mainstream news media (Fleras/Kunz 2001; Mahtani 2002). The content of the paper and its argument are predicated on two assumptions: First, while the embrace of diversity is known to confer both resiliency and adaptability as well as institutional creativity, mainstream newsmedia remains diversity-averse preferring, instead, the “pretend pluralism” of a business as usual mindset (Karim 2002). This aversion to “taking differences seriously” is systemic rather than personal, reflecting the interplay of corporate structure and reliance on advertising revenue with the tenacity of deeply entrenched news values (Kalant 2004). Second, the newsmedia may have a role to play in inte-

grating migrants and minorities into society, although the nature and scope of this responsibility is open to debate. But, logically, the newsmedia must first address how they propose to integrate diversity in a manner that challenges the news norms of a conventional news paradigm. The implications cannot be underestimated: An inclusive media can bring people together; by contrast, myopic and mean-spirited coverage can polarize and provoke to the detriment of living together differently (Miller 2003).

The paper begins by demonstrating how newsmedia representations of migrants and minorities betray Canada's commitment to an inclusive multiculturalism. The problematizing of minorities and migrants as "troublesome constituents" is neither calculated nor a miscalculation, but reflective of a systemic ("mediacentric") bias that unwittingly yet logically frames diversity as conflict or problem. In other words, the problem goes beyond biased coverage but, instead, involves coverage that has a biasing effect because of newsmedia's fixation with the negative. The paper continues by advancing the notion that the foundational principles of liberal universalism underpin this systemic bias. The liberal "news values" of a conventional news paradigm cannot cope with the demands of "taking differences seriously" outside of conflict framework. The paper concludes by acknowledging that initiatives for improving the quality and quantity of minority coverage will remain mired in a monocultural rut unless proposed solutions can disrupt those "news values" that systemically reflect and reinforce a conventional news paradigm (Wilson II et al. 2003).

## **2 Framing the Context**

### **2.1 Canada – A Multicultural Immigration Society**

Canada is widely regarded as an immigration society. An immigration society is characterized by three properties: First, immigration is perceived as a long term investment and asset to society; second, policies are in place to regulate the flow of immigrants; and third, programs exist to assist in the settlement and integration of immigration. Immigrants to Canada are seen as potentially permanent residents and citizens rather than as temporary guestworkers – although Canada historically defined migrants like the Chinese as temporary residents and continues to have a guestworker program in place. At the heart of Canada's commitment to

immigration is an implicit social contract, namely, rights for responsibilities. If immigrants promise to play by the rules of society, according to the contract rules, Canada promises to facilitate their integration by ensuring full equality and equal participation. Rhetoric, however, does not always match reality: Visible minorities, especially those of relatively recent entry into Canada, tend to occupy a marginal status at the level of income and employment. The fact that they remain subject to discrimination or marginalization reflects badly on Canada's egalitarian ethos (Fleras/Elliott 2003).

Overall numbers back up Canada's claim to status as an immigration society. About 18 percent of Canada's population is foreign-born ("immigrants") – a figure that is second only to Australia at 22 percent. Historically immigrants to Canada were from Europe and the United States; however since the early 1970s, nearly 80 percent of immigrants are drawn from non-conventional sources, primarily China and India. Because of this shift in immigration sources, approximately 13,4 percent of Canadians self-defined themselves as "visible minorities" in the 2001 Census (ie. persons who are non white in colour, non Caucasian in race, and non Aboriginal). The overwhelming majority of visible minorities live in the major urban centres of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal – in effect reinforcing the reality of Canada as a monocultural society with isolated pockets of intense multicultural diversity. And despite Canada's claim to immigration society status, Canadians tend to be somewhat ambivalent about immigrants. The ambivalence is reflected in debates over annual numbers (approximately 225000 per year since the early 1990s), source countries (Asia), and entry classes (skilled workers are preferred but family members – both as a separate category and as dependents – continue to outnumber other categories).

Canada's official multiculturalism represents a political response to the challenges of immigrant settlement and integration (Fleras 2002). Canada took the then unprecedented step of becoming a formal multiculturalism in 1971 following an all political party agreement. Its ranking as possibly the world's first and only official multiculturalism was consolidated with the constitutional entrenchment of multiculturalism in 1982 and passage of the 1988 Multiculturalism Act. Its lofty status as symbol and substance, notwithstanding, official multiculturalism continues to be widely misunderstood by both Canadians and overseas observers. Canada's multicultural commitments are not about celebrating differences or promoting ethnic diversity: Put bluntly, official multiculturalism is about addressing disadvantage through removal of discriminatory barriers. Ac-



According to the logic of Canada's official multiculturalism, a society of multi(many)cultures is possible only if people's cultural differences do not preclude access to full citizenship rights, to equality and participation. To the extent that diversity is tolerated under an official multiculturalism, minority differences cannot violate the laws of the land, interfere with the rights of others, or challenge core constitutional values such as gender equity. Not surprisingly, Canada is not nearly as multicultural (both as an empirical reality and normative standard) as supporters say it is. By the same token, Canada is a lot more multicultural in principle and practice than many critics concede (Fleras 2002).

Central to Canada's multicultural commitments is the concept of institutional inclusiveness. Inclusiveness entails a combination of principles and practices by which institutions respond to diversity as different yet equal by rethinking "how things are done around here" for purposes of recognition and reward. All of Canada's major institutions are under pressure to inclusivize because of economic pressures (to take advantage of an increasingly lucrative ethnic market); political pressures (to comply with the provisions of Canada's Employment Equity Acts (1986/1996); and regulatory pressures (to ensure that the workforce composition reflects the diversity within the community). To be sure, institutional inclusiveness can take different forms, including (a) levelling the playing field, (b) mainstreaming the institution through minority hires, (c) creating parallel institutions that reflect minority experiences and aspirations, and (d) challenging conventional norms and foundational principles that define a "business as usual" dynamic. Nevertheless, this move toward institutional inclusiveness is proving significant. Inclusiveness not only converts the principles of an official multiculturalism into practice, but also confirms the primacy of removing disadvantage over celebrating differences in establishing a society of many cultures.

To date, most institutions have made moves toward inclusiveness. They discarded the most blatant forms of discriminatory bias while establishing programs for improving the selection and retention of workforce diversity. Unchallenged as yet are those systemic biases that inadvertently exert an adverse impact on those who dare to be different or who are disadvantaged through no fault of their own. Nowhere is this systemic bias more evident than in the mass newsmedia. Mainstream newsmedia continue to endorse a conventional news paradigm that frames minorities and migrants as "troublesome constituents" because of news values that remain embedded around the abnormal, the negative, the extreme, and the confrontational. The mediacentric bias that informs

a conventional news paradigm has had a systemic – an unintended yet negative – effect in under-representing migrants and minorities in areas that count (business), of over-representing them in areas that don't (crime), and of mis-representation everywhere else in between (entertainment or sports). The symbols and stories that intensify this under-, over-, and mis-representation of migrants and minorities are not without consequence or political context. The representational basis of media-minority relations are ultimately relationships of inequality with respect to power and privilege. That alone makes it doubly important to deconstruct how these inequities in representation are congealed (constructed, expressed, and sustained) and contested (challenged and transformed).

## **2.2 Portraying Diversity in Canada's Multiculturaland: “Normalizing Invisibility, Problematizing Visibility”**

At times of rapid social change people often embrace mainstream news media to allay uncertainty and confusion. Newsmedia are especially salient as information sources in those countries such as Canada that are experiencing a demographic revolution because of unprecedented immigration patterns. Individuals rely on media to form attitudes about diversity, in part because many lack first hand contact with different ethnicities, except in the most superficial manner (Wilson II et al. 2003). Migrants and minorities are no less reliant on newsmedia in securing markers of identity as well as indicators of acceptance. Those individuals who see themselves positively reflected in the newsmedia boast of increased self-esteem, validation, and sense of community and belonging (Karim 2002). But those who perceive coverage as inconsistent with their concerns and aspirations may experience a sense of rejection, despair, or hostility (Klute 2004). Finally, government officials and civic organizations look to the media for decision-making, especially as stories break in times of crisis such as the unannounced arrival of refugee claimants (Hier/Greenberg 2002). Such an assessment should come as no surprise: Until superseded by other sources of information, mainstream news media play a pivotal role in fanning public opinions and framing government responses (Metropolis 2004).

Mainstream newsmedia have evolved into major brokers for promoting diversity principles and negotiating inclusive practices. For what is at stake is nothing less than the vexing issue of media representation of migrants and minorities in advancing a multicultural blueprint for cooperative coexistence. Responses are varied, but the challenge is twofold:

First, how to depict migrants and minorities as different yet equal – and do so in a broadly informative yet nuanced way – without getting tangled up with media preconceptions and journalistic prejudgements (Weston 2003)? Second, how to incorporate diversity into the newsmedia by way of corresponding adjustments to the conventional news paradigm? Is it possible to reconcile a newsmedia's natural inclination to dismiss, problematize, or de-politicize diversity with the multicultural principle of taking differences into account for recognition and reward? To date, reaction to the clash of cultures is mixed: For some, mainstream news media have capably discharged their obligations to inform public discourse; for others, media coverage has done a disservice in fuelling the flames of intolerance; for still others, the verdict reflects a confusing pastiche of the progressive with the deplorable alongside the indifferent. Such disarray in responses is not without significance: Improving the representational basis of media-minority relations must logically precede debates over the role and responsibility of the newsmedia for integrating migrants and minorities.

### *2.2.1 Mis-representation / Over-representation / Under-representation*

Media portrayal of migrants and minorities has left much to be desired (Mahtani 2002). Mainstream news media have been reproached for their unbalanced and biased coverage of those migrants and minorities who continue to be insulted by defamatory images and demeaning assessments (Holtzman 2000; Shaheen 2001). Minorities and migrants remain vulnerable to questionable coverage in which they are: (a) miniaturized as irrelevant or inferior, (b) demonized as a social menace to society, (c) scapegoated as the source of all problems, (d) “otherized” for being too different or not different enough, (e) refracted through the prism of euro-centric fears and fantasies and (f) subjected to double standards that lampoons minorities regardless of what they do or didn't do. A fixation with the sordid and sensational produces a minority newshole that disdains the normative by exaggerating the exception – in the same way media coverage of crime dotes on the least frequent (violent, stranger on stranger crime), while downplaying the most common (property crime) (Surette 1998). Media mis-representation can be further classified into categories that frame minorities and migrants as (a) invisible, (b) stereotyped, (c) problem people, (d) adornments (props or tokens), and (e) whitewashed. Glaring inconsistencies abound because of the mixed messages that

“normalize invisibility” while “problematizing visibility” (Henry/Tator 2003): To one side there is a tendency to “normalize” the invisibility of highly visible migrants and minorities; to the other side is an inclination to “problematize” any presence as a menace or threat to society.

Consider newsmedia treatment of Canada’s aboriginal people. For the most part, aboriginal women and men are largely invisible except in contexts of resentment (because of scandals or victimization) or resistance (ranging from blockades to standoffs to protests) (Miller 2004; Green 2004). Any sense of balance or impartiality is compromised by media framing of aboriginal peoples as dangerous outlaws who cannot be trusted or respected (Lambertus 2004). Aboriginal peoples are vilified as: (a) a threat to Canada’s territorial integrity or national interests (demands for nationhood and self-determining autonomy); (b) a risk to Canada’s social order (the violence from Oka Quebec to Burnt Church New Brunswick); (c) an economic liability (the costs associated with massive land claims settlement or restitution for residential school abuses); (d) an irritant to the criminal justice system (ranging from the Donald Marshall case to police shootings of aboriginal people, including the killing of Dudley George at Ipperwash, Ontario); or objects of pity because of widespread social pathologies in dysfunctional communities. Compounding this negativity is criticism of aboriginality as lifestyle, including an excessive reliance on welfare, a predilection for alcohol and substance abuse, a pervasive laziness and lack of ambition, and a mismanagement of what little they have, then justifying it by hiding behind the smoke-screen of aboriginal rights or victimhood.

Such dismissive coverage paints a villainous picture of Canada’s First Peoples as people with a “plight” unable to cope with the plot of contemporary challenges (Weston 2003). Paradoxically, aboriginal efforts to bring about substantial change are no less tarnished. News coverage of aboriginal protest or civil disobedience is distilled into a conflict paradigm, in which one side is “deified” as good (“the cowboys”), the other is “demonized” as evil (“the Indians”). Protestors are frequently branded as dangerous or irrational because their actions fall outside the norms of civility – in contrast to government or law officials who self-define themselves as embodiments of order and paragons of reason (Abel 1997). Not surprisingly, the intensity and repetitiveness of aboriginal resistance (from Oka to Ipperwash, from Gustafsen Lake to Burnt Church) is both puzzling and infuriating to many Canadians who “just don’t get it” (Miller 2004), prompting this scathing indictment by Dan David (2004) over media coverage of a crisis at Kanehsatake:

“In mid-January [2004], Kanehsatake exploded in the national consciousness once more. Looking back at the media coverage of the events, familiar patterns emerge. Major Canadian news organizations immediately pumped up the volume by resurrecting images of the 1990 Oka crisis, masked Mohawk warriors and all. They soon transformed the story into one of criminals versus a crime-fighting chief. Then journalists painted Kanehsatake as a community with never-ending problems, doomed by petty family squabbles [...]. Few journalists looked much deeper into the story or deviated from these easy stereotypes.”

The demonizing of aboriginality and aboriginal activism cannot be lightly dismissed. Insofar as they are refracted through the prism of whiteness, aboriginal peoples continue to be victimized by a eurocentrism that privileges whiteness as the norm of acceptability by which they are judged because of who they aren't rather than who they are (Maaka/Fleras 2005; Benson 2005). Such negativity not only marginalizes the legitimacy of dissent, but by distracting from the real issues also trivializes aboriginal struggles for righting historical wrongs. The following case study poses an elemental question: How does news coverage of a crisis situation expose the nature of the relationship between colonizer and colonized – especially when dominant discourses overshadow those of the “outsiders” (Lambertus 2004). The study also demonstrates how news media and government/police negotiate the social construction of news by working to control the definition of the situation.

\* \* \*

## Case Study

### **Cowboys and Indians Redux: Criminalizing Aboriginality, Aboriginalizing Crime**

Mainstream news coverage of aboriginal issues is subject to second-guessing (Fleras/Kunz 2001; Weston 2003). Newscasting media are accused of perpetuating errors of omission or sins of commission by refracting aboriginal realities through the prism of mainstream whiteness (Fleras 2003). Few aboriginal news stories are situated within a historical context; fewer still incorporate cultural insights that reflect aboriginal concerns from aboriginal perspectives (Abel 1997; Sheffield 2004). Coverage is conveyed from an outsider's point of view without much aboriginal input because of fear, laziness, inexperience, or just plain ineptitude (RCAP 1996; Weston 2003; David 2003). An assessment of this nature should come as no surprise. Aboriginal issues are much too complex, contradictory, and contextual for capture by the “bang bang” mandate of a “junk food” journalism (also Lasica 1996).

## Newsmedia “Indians”: Images that Injure

Media coverage of aboriginal peoples may be charitably described as uneven at best, criminal at worst. Such an ambivalence reflects media “pigeon-holing” of aboriginal peoples as pathetic victims, noble environmentalists, or angry warriors (RCAP 1996). To one side, aboriginal peoples are defined as pure, innocent, vulnerable, and deserving of government protection. To the other side, they are depicted as ruthless thugs in dire need of government control. To still another side is a portrayal of aboriginal peoples as hapless victims who have or create social problems entailing government assistance. By tapping into a cultural and historical reservoir of stereotypical negativity, namely, the motif of cowboys and Indians, news media coverage fixates on the atypical in aboriginal communities to the exclusion of the normative and cooperative (Weston 2003; Lambertus 2004). The stereotyping of aboriginal peoples as problem people is further compounded by collapsing aboriginal resistance into the framework of conflict, crisis, or crime. Not surprisingly, media depictions of aboriginal initiatives that challenge these “optics” tend to focus on confrontation rather than on the contextual.

Media coverage of aboriginal issues has been described as racist. But mainstream newsmedia are not overtly racist in the conventional sense of strong language, open bigotry, and blatant hostility. Racism is conveyed systemically rather than intentionally since coverage of aboriginal peoples conforms with a media-centred definition of news at the expense of aboriginal realities or aspirations. Just as androcentrism reflects the natural tendency of men to interpret reality from a male point of view as normal and superior while female perspectives are ignored, dismissed, or misunderstood, so too does a mediacentric bias reflect a systemic bias in normalizing media perspectives at the expense of alternative viewpoints. Interpretive frames may be imposed that tend to diminish or demonize aboriginal people without any intended malevolence. In that newscasting is essentially an exercise in storytelling, a critical component in the narrative consists of casting people as heroes, villains and victims (Media Awareness Network 2005). The choice of words may have the effect of “othering” aboriginal peoples as a faceless enemy rather than as humans with individual identities and indigenous rights (see Lakoff 2004). Whether intentional or not, the end result appears to be the same: The agenda-setting functions of mainstream news perpetuate images and messages of aboriginality that can only inflame or infuriate rather than enlighten or reassure.

## Informing or Inflaming?

Stuart Hall in his landmark work on *Policing the Crisis* (1978) argues that times of crisis yield insights into how an ideological frame works. Conventional frameworks are rendered problematic because of counter-discourses that challenge a business as usual mindset (Henry/Tator 2003). Similarly, news coverage over the Atlantic lobster fishing crisis has exposed the deep fissures between Canada’s aboriginal peoples and a newsmedia in the service of the Canadian government. In late 1999, Canada’s Supreme Court ruled that some aboriginal groups in Atlantic Canada (including the Mi’kmaq and Maliseet) were entitled by virtue of unextinguished aboriginal and treaty rights to hunt and fish

without a license and out of season for subsistence purposes or in pursuit of a modest livelihood (Coates 2000). The exercise of aboriginal customary rights over the harvesting of lobster proved a flashpoint. In an industry where a licence to fish for lobster was tantamount to printing money, lobster fishing licences have proven tricky to come by, in the process excluding aboriginal from access to this lucrative industry. Not surprisingly, tensions between aboriginal peoples and lobster fishers escalated, especially when non-aboriginal fishers smashed hundreds of aboriginal lobster traps in the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling. But a subsequent Supreme Court ruling bowed to public pressure by conceding the prior right of federal regulation to manage fisheries on behalf of national and environmental interests, but not before aboriginal fishing fleets were pillaged and burned, 4000 aboriginal lobster traps were destroyed, and graphic video footage of open violence undid Canada's much touted reputation as a "kinder, gentler" society (Toughill 2000). Eventually calm was restored through negotiated compromises with most but not all aboriginal groups, only to be shattered again by violent episodes, including the pelting of federal fishing officers with fish entrails, federal boats ramming Mi'kmaq fishermen, and the exchange of shotgun fire.

How then did the news media respond to these crises in aboriginal peoples-Canada relations? Mainstream news coverage of Burnt Church was no less myopic than that during the Oka crisis in 1990 which also attracted both national and international media attention (Kalant 2004). The overall thrust of newsmedia's Oka coverage was framed around the theme of criminality and conflict – into little more than a law and order issue instead of a struggle over land or aboriginal rights (Winter 1992; Skea 1994; Valaskakis 1994). With confrontation as the preferred slant, the saga was transformed into a morality play invoking a titanic struggle between the forces of order and those of disorder, with the police and government on the good side, Mohawk factions on the bad side (York 1991). A double standard prevailed: Mohawk were demonized as hotblooded HOODS who offended Canadian law, clashed with authorities, and whose criminality was contrary to core Canadian values and national interests. By contrast, overfishing and illegal poaching by non-aboriginal fishers tended to be underplayed, while police violence to crush aboriginal resistance was condoned by the simple expedient of criminalizing aboriginal behaviour (also Lambertus 2004). Media preoccupation with criminality may have prolonged the dispute; it most certainly distracted public attention from the more substantial issues pertaining to aboriginal rights as well. Admittedly, insightful articles were published that put the controversy into a historical context from an aboriginal perspective (Toughill 2000; also Coates 2000). But most narratives hid behind the catchy headlines or photogenic visuals that titillated rather than informed.

Similarly, newsmedia coverage of the crisis at the "Maritime Oka" proved to be equally lop-sided. In its fixation with conflict and confrontation, reference to Burnt Church conjured up images of armed conflict involving a rump of white fishers against a rabble of lawless aboriginal peoples. The confrontational aspects monopolized media attention while more fundamental issues went unexamined. To one side were aboriginal peoples who endured criticism for recklessly defending an indefensible position foolishly espoused by the Supreme Court. To the other side were non-aboriginal fishers who too defended their interests, violently at times and by taking the law into their hands,

against a backdrop of protecting their livelihood from environmental ruin. Admittedly, news coverage did not shy away from emphasizing conflict by non-aboriginal fishers. Nevertheless, emphasis was slanted toward the righteous anger of non-aboriginal fishers, many of whom were portrayed as law-abiding conservationists in defending their interests against special aboriginal privilege. Through language and presuppositions implicit from reading inbetween the lines (van Dijk 2000), a coded subtext was clearly implied: for openly breaking the law by fishing without a licence and out of season, aboriginal fishers deserved what they got from white vigilants. The framing of aboriginal fishers as environmental predators could not be more ironic, given longstanding stereotypes of aboriginal peoples as custodians of the environment, but it is precisely this contradiction that constituted newsworthiness.

### Duelling Discourses

Equally disconcerting were the preferred sources of information. Whether by intent or inadvertently, media coverage was largely aligned with the position of The Department of Fisheries and Oceans whose news releases could hardly be deemed either neutral or even-handed. Mainstream media uncritically accepted a federal communications strategy which pounced on Mi'kmaq as law-breaking renegades, both greedy and irrational, and hell-bent on illegally plundering depleted resources without much thought for laws or conservation. By contrast, the government position was praised as balanced, just, and reflective of national interests in restoring "peace, order, and good government". But the framing of aboriginal resistance as a law and order issue tended to downplay the broader context that sparked the struggle. References to aboriginal and treaty rights to justify aboriginal struggles were dismissed as little more than a smokescreen to cloak and justify a host of criminal activities at odds with "the Canadian way". An aboriginal perspective rarely appeared as a counter-balance, in effect glossing over the competing perspectives that informed the crisis, as demonstrated by the following contrastive positions (see Kitchener Waterloo Record, August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000).



<b>Government/DFO Position</b>	<b>Aboriginal Position</b>
The Supreme Court of Canada upheld Ottawa's absolute right to regulate fisheries	Canada's Supreme Court upheld an aboriginal and treaty right to make living from fishing, with the result that governments must prove the need for imposing any limits.
Provide aboriginal peoples with larger role in fishery management	A right to self-regulated and self-managed commercial lobster fishery rather than just a say in management, including their own tagging system and fishery patrol officers
Provide aboriginal peoples with a total of 17 commercial lobster licences, with a total of 5000 traps. Offer money to improve wharfs, purchase new equipment, increase training in equipment upkeep	With or without licenses or permission, these entitlements are aboriginal by right rather than a payoff to keep the peace or ensure local self-sufficiency
Recognize only one commercial lobster season (from spring to early summer), but allow aboriginal peoples access for ceremonial purposes in late summer	Two seasons are acknowledged, including a commercial season in the spring/summer and autumn
Aboriginal peoples are citizens who must comply with the laws of the land	Canada's laws and jurisdictions do not necessarily apply. Aboriginal peoples are relatively autonomous political communities who are sovereign in their own right, yet sharing in the sovereignty of Canada, and whose sovereignty is independently sourced rather than at the mercy of the state.

To sum up: Mainstream coverage of the so-called lobster “wars” missed the point of the struggle. The struggle was not about breaking the law; nor was it about violence between the law breakers or law enforcers. Rather the fundamental issue revolved around the politics of jurisdiction in determining „who owned what, and why“? Whose rights – those of aboriginal nations or the Canadian state – would prevail when contesting competing claims to the same territory? Was it possible to balance constitutionally guaranteed aboriginal and treaty rights to forage or fish with those of federal authorities to regulate on behalf of all Canadians and for conservation purposes? Who would decide, and on what grounds? Do rights in Canada entail a one size fits all formula or can entitlements be customised to fit the distinctive status of aboriginal peoples? Can an inclusive Canada be constructed around a principle of taking differences seriously, or is our much vaunted multiculturalism an embrace of a “pretend plu-

realism” that rewards conformity and consensus (Fleras 2002)? Was the conflict about re-dividing the existing resource pie or was it about challenging the colonial foundational principles that govern the constitutional order of settler society (Maaka/Fleras 2005). The extent that the mainstream media did not address these concerns, the struggles at Burnt Church were depoliticized by reducing the resistance to the level of a COPS-based reality show.

\* \* \*

Migrants and minorities are no less vilified by colour-coded discourses (see Appendix). People of colour, both foreign- and Canadian-born, are taken to task by mainstream newsmedia for failing to adopt and adapt. Coverage of refugees fixates on illegal entries and the associated costs of processing and integration into Canada (Hier/Greenberg 2002). Rarely addressed are the traumas of seeking asylum, difficulties in securing a passage to Canada, and problems in making an adjustment to a new and complex environment – thus reinforcing how what is *not said* can be as distortive as what is. Immigrants are routinely framed as “troublesome constituents” who pose security risks; steal jobs from “real” Canadians; cheat on the welfare system; clog up resource-starved social, medical, and municipal services: create congestion and crowding; compromise Canada’s highly touted quality of life; take advantage of educational opportunities without making a corresponding commitment to Canada; engage in illegal activities such as drugs or smuggling; and imperil Canada’s unity and identity by refusing to conform (see Li 2003). Framing migrants and minorities as “folk devils” within the context of a “moral panic” discourse also raises questions over national identity (who is a true Canadian?) and national security (who to keep out?) (Hier/Greenberg 2002). Not surprisingly, coverage of immigrants and immigration pivots around the following rhetorical frames: “Who belongs in Canada?” “Who should be admitted?” “What kind of policies can keep ‘them’ out?” “What are the relations between ‘us’ and ‘them’?” “What is at risk for us?” “What kind of resources are available to deal with this ‘problem’?”, and “What can be done to protect ‘Canada’s’ (cultural and citizenship) space?” (Henry/Tator 2002, 109; also van Dijk 2000).

The absence of balanced coverage does a disservice to diversity. Immigrant communities across Canada are increasingly frustrated by mainstream mis-coverage of their status, role and contribution to Canadian society (Davie 2000). Newsmedia portrayals tend to negate migrants and minorities as the “other”; that is, as problem people remote in time or

space and removed from the normative pale, while whites are normalized as the standard by which others are dismissed or demonized (Henry/Tator 2003). Minorities and migrants “complain” of being “stigmatized” as “foreigners” or “outsiders”, whose lives seem to revolve around their “defining” status of race or religion, to the virtual exclusion of other attributes. Images of “them” as “those people” are filtered through the prism of “whiteness”, in the process projecting mainstream fears or fantasies onto the “other”. As Michael Pickering writes in his book *Stereotypes*, such a mediacentrism says more about “us” than “them”:

“The boundaries between normal and deviant are constructed by reference to what is defined as „the other“. The process of othering not only defines its targets as objects, but it conforms the privileged position of the normal, natural subject. The process of othering tells us much about who does the othering.”

The framing of minorities as either “good” (“model”) or “bad” also corrupts the possibility of any “realistic” portrayal of minority women and men, with lives that mix foibles with fortune.

Of particular note are those migrants and minorities whose realities veer outside a preferred Canadian identity or pose a security threat. Consider the rise of Muslim-bashing in the newsmedia (Raza 2003; Saloojee 2003; also Sheehan 2001). There is little in the way of balanced news coverage about the Middle East and, what little there is, rarely shows Muslims or Islam in a positive light. Islam is slandered as a violent, backward, and intolerant religion while Muslims are typically slurred as potential terrorists who must be closely monitored before being shipped back “home where they belong” (Canadian Islamic Congress 2002). Islamophobic contempt toward Arabian peoples as inferior and hostile could easily have contributed to the dehumanization of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib – not as isolated individual act but as the logical consequences of a “system” doing its job. Finally, race and crime are often linked together by the media, according to John Miller (2003) and others (Henry/Tator 2002). Double standards persist: White criminal behaviour is excused as an aberrant individual act; by contrast, black crime remains a “group crime” for which the entire community must take responsibility for both the problem and the solution. By virtue of criminalizing race, while racializing crime, the cumulative effect of this hypocrisy is nothing short of controlling.

A similar situation prevails across Europe. Evidence from a EU – wide research report by Online/More Colour in the Media based on a one day monitoring of newspapers and television news broadcasts demonstrates how negative coverage of migrants and minorities proved the rule rather than exception – notwithstanding variations between print and television news as well as between tabloids and broadsheets (ter Wal 2004). The survey found that negative news portrayals did not disparage ethnicity or race per se. Rather negative coverage stemmed from associating migrants and minorities with negative news contexts, including: (a) crime, public order, and deviance, (b) discrimination (within the context of a legal/criminal offence), (c) religious fundamentalism, and (d) criticism of asylum seekers and illegal immigration as security risks. Such stereotypical images cannot be deemed to be inconsequential: Negative news coverage has reinforced minority over-representation in domains as diverse as crime and conflict (from protest demonstrations to public order maintenance) or as entertainment, celebrity or sports, but their under-representation in reports about politics and government. The tendency to filter minority experiences through the lens of whiteness as the tacitly accepted norm and standard not only diminishes minorities by denigrating those aspects of culture that instill pride and identity (see also Rider 2004). Migrant concerns and minority contributions to society are also depoliticized by marginalizing minorities as objects of contempt or amusement rather than actively engaged individuals.

### **3 Mainstreaming the Newsmedia: Couched in Compromise?**

“The news today is the same as it was yesterday,  
it just happened to different people.”

Canadian comedian Don Herron,  
cited in Hackett (2004, 146)

Newsmedia coverage of diversity has improved in recent years (Fleras/Kunz 2001; CRE 2004). Both research and anecdotal evidence attests to this shift. Canada’s news media have taken steps to improve the representation of migrants and minorities. Initiatives range from more diversity training for journalists to less race-tagging (assigning a racial label to victim or perpetrator) without good reason, to reduction in the kind of language that minorities find offensive. A widely respected journalist for a major Canadian paper writes about the challenges and responses to sensitive topics, including those that brush up against Muslim sensitivities:

“News organizations bend over backwards not to provoke and not to generalize. We walk softly and talk even more softly, though that sometimes ends up – by my estimation – in weirdly reticent and pre-emptively self-censored reportage [...]. Editors huddle and debate the potential repercussions from all possible angles. I can think of no other constituency that is more respectfully – or hyperobsequiously – treated” (Rosie DiManno 2004).

Modest improvements, notwithstanding, it’s business as usual for an industry that disdains diversity except as profit or spin (Lasica 1996; Klein/Naccarato 2003). According to a recently published report entitled *Frame Work: Employment in Screen-Based Media – A National Profile*, both aboriginal peoples and visible minorities remain underrepresented, especially in management and creative positions (Women in Film and Television – Toronto, cited in Gill 2004; also Task Force 2003). Or consider the startling revelation that no visible minorities or aboriginal peoples sit on the board of Canada’s national broadcaster, the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) (Fernandez 2004). This interplay of the “good”, the “bad”, and the “ugly” in diversity coverage has prompted a scathing indictment from Lionel Lumb (2004) of Carleton University’s School of Journalism:

“It’s clear that Canada’s minorities have entered the mainstream, but Canada’s broadcasting mainstream still flows blindly in some sort of self-created canyon from which it can’t see the Canadian reality [...]. Diversity is not a drawback – it’s a treasure for Canada and Canadians to celebrate. There could be so much more to television and radio programming, and it’s time that broadcasters got the message that reflecting diversity is not a duty, it’s a delight.”

Messages remain mixed: For example, there is much to commend in news media outrage over a spate of anti-Jewish incidents across Canada in the spring of 2004. Yet this overwhelmingly positive coverage invoked a conflict theme whose subtext unwittingly equated both Jews and Muslims as problem people because of their transplanted territorial politics. And news media are not averse to playing the “racism” card (or amplifying the message of politicians who do so to revive sagging political fortunes) by problematizing the divide between Canada’s multicultural ideals and its monocultural realities. To the extent that Canada has neither fully disengaged from a monocultural past nor entirely re-engaged with an inclusive multiculturalism, newsmedia have pounced on these

reality gaps as endless fodder for content. Even positive coverage may not be as neutral as implied by appearances. For example, Miljan and Cooper (2003) argue that 80 percent of Canada's news coverage of aboriginal peoples is factual. What they fail to address is whether the framing of the factual involves negative or positive content (for example, consider the negative spin on a factual article *Organized Crime Keeps Six Nations Cops Busy*, Hamilton Spectator, 11 May 2004).

### **Diversity in Canada's Media**

- How much diversity is there in the newsroom? In 2000, a study by Florian Sauvageau and David Pritchard of Quebec's Laval University indicated that only 2.7 percent of Canadian journalists across all media were non-white. This figure is consistent with an earlier study in 1993 at the Ryerson School of Journalism involving 41 daily newspapers which revealed a total of 2.6 percent of non-whites in various positions from reporters to supervisors. Increasing the number of non-white journalists was not regarded as an immediate priority while coverage of diversity placed nearly last on the list of priorities (Media Awareness Network 2005). There is no evidence of a conscious effort to exclude journalists of colour, but rather institutional barriers that are either systemic or polite.
- How many visible minorities in Canada's national broadcaster, the CBC? In the year 2002, visible minorities constituted 5 percent of the workforce, a figure largely unchanged since 1995 and inconsistent with the proportion of visible minorities in the population in 2001 at 13.4 percent. There is no breakdown of visible minorities by creative or supervisory positions.
- Ethnic media are cresting a wave of popularity despite virtually no funding from the Canadian government. According to Media Awareness (2004), there are 14 full-service radio stations offering programming for ethnic groups, over 60 mainstream radio stations offer some ethnic programming, over 250 ethnic papers including 7 non-English dailies, and some ethnic television such as Toronto's multicultural station CFMT (Omni 1 and 2), Aboriginal Peoples Television Network on pay television, and about 45 digital specialty services (see Cardozo 2005).

Let's be upfront about this. The mis-representation of minorities and migrants may be inconsistent with Canada's multicultural commitments. But errors of omission or commission are neither intentional nor attitudinal, but systemic and institutional. The very practice and conventions of newscasting – the way news is defined, collected, and presented – per-

sists in perpetuating popular yet pejorative images of migrants and minorities (Weston 1996). To be sure, news values involving a “trafficking in the extremes” are not exclusive to minority coverage; to the contrary, they inform newsworthiness in general. Most news stories – not just those about migrants and minorities – are framed around a preference for negativity because of prevailing news values (ter Wal 2004). Nonetheless the impact of negative coverage on vulnerable minorities is incomparable: The negativity which frames a disproportionate number of stories about migrants and minorities creates a one-sidedness that glosses over those more life-affirming aspects of any community (Cottle 2000; Henry/Tator 2003). For example, while crimes of black Canadians are reported alongside those of whites, the newsmedia ignore wider black issues unless something spectacular happens, with correspondingly few stories of blacks living crime-free everyday lives. Rarely do migrants or minorities appear in everyday news stories outside of stereotypical slots, thereby precluding their acceptance as normal members of society (ter Wal 2004).

In short, what is not said by the newsmedia may be just as important as what is said. The interplay of negative representations combines with the absence of complex characterization to foster a colour-coded news discourse whose “palemale” gaze is pro-white rather than anti-minority. Migrants and minorities are not necessarily labelled as inferior; rather they are stigmatized as incompatible with mainstream cultural values because of their association with negative contexts. This racialization of culture is dismaying: Children of migrants and minorities are conditioned to despise cultural differences outside the imprint of middle-class white culture. They learn to dislike who they are because of depictions that damage reputations by inference or association. A spokesperson for an American Islamic association said this about the film *Alladin* (quoted in Giroux 1995, 40):

“All of the bad guys have beards and large, bulbous noses, sinister eyes and heavy accents, and they’re wielding swords constantly. Alladin doesn’t have a big nose; he has a small nose. He doesn’t have a beard or a turban. He doesn’t have an accent. What makes him nice is they’ve given him this American character. I have a daughter who says she’s ashamed to call herself an Arab, and its because of things like this”.

Admittedly, the impact of negative media depictions is neither automatically determinative nor predictably demoralizing. Media messages rarely tell us what to think but rather what to think about, in large part by privi-

leging mainstream discourses over those at the margins. Such negativity is hardly an error of perception and assessment, although no one should discount the tenacity of ignorance, arrogance, indifference, or laziness as prejudicial factors. Rather such negativity reflects the normal operations of institutional structures that deny and exclude. The institutionalization of negativity toward migrants and minorities may be interpreted as a kind of social control (Churchill 2002). Mainstream news media do not set out to control – even if they often collude with agencies such as police in manufacturing news that is print to fit (Lambertus 2004). More accurately, the repetitiveness of negative coverage exerts a controlling effect by problematizing migrants and minorities as troublesome constituents. The cumulative impact of such “institutionalized propaganda” (Fleras 2004) is nothing short of hegemonic. By changing peoples attitudes without an awareness that their attitudes are changing, those in positions of power secure control and compliance through consent and consensus rather than coercion. The “normalizing” of conventional patterns of power and privilege as natural and inevitable as well as universal and superior also reflects a systemic bias within the newsmedia.

#### **4 “Silences of the News Media”: Uncovering Systemic (Mediacentric) Bias**

Newsmedia miscasting of migrants and minorities is neither random nor accidental. Nor is it something out of the ordinary – a kind of idiosyncratic departure from an otherwise inclusive organizational norm. The mis-representation of migrants and minorities is systemic and institutionalized: institutionalized, because of coverage that is routine, repetitive, and predictable rather than isolated and haphazard; systemic, because of the foundational principles that marginalize migrants and do so without a trace of malice or intent. Coverage is racialized through largely unconscious race filters that transform “raw facts” into newsholes consistent with mainstream norms, foundational values, and a prevailing news paradigm (Henry/Tator 2002). A bias both systemic and mediacentric reinforces the racialization of newscasting – that is, how race discourses inform news coverage by privileging whiteness as the tacitly accepted norm. Parallels can be found elsewhere: In the same way that media institutions are gendered around “palemale” realities and “malestream” experiences, so too are newsmedia racialized in ways that privilege mainstream interests at the expense of others. The naturalness and invisibility of these constructions make it doubly difficult to accommodate (“normal-



ize”) diversity except as conflict or problem. Such an assessment may appear unnecessarily pessimistic and unduly harsh. But it is precisely this alarm over media power and minority disempowerment that must be explored before matching solutions to problems.

#### **4.1 Systemic Bias: News as Discourses in Defense of Ideology**

Mainstream news media are powerful agencies with a capacity to dominate and control. The exercise of power is blatant in some cases, such as the tendency to racialize crime, while criminalizing race. In other cases, media power is sustained by an aura of impartiality, objectivity, and balance. Issues are framed in ways that camouflage production values so that most consumers are unaware of the social constructedness behind the apparent naturalness of media products. Yet mainstream newsmedia are anything but neutral or passive in the collection, coverage, and delivery process. Newsmedia encapsulate within themselves a number of hidden agendas and dominant ideologies that reinforce their dynamic as discourses in defence of dominant ideology (Herman/Chomsky 1988; for review see Klaehn 2002). They are “loaded” with ideological assumptions that draw attention to some aspects of reality by normalizing the ideas and ideals of a dominant discourse as natural or superior, while problematizing as irrelevant and inferior the values and views of those who challenge convention (Abel 1997). The ideological work of the newsmedia is rarely conveyed to audiences, in part through the use of coded terms such as “inner city” or “immigrant waves” that conceal as they evade by imparting a sheen of legitimacy to hidden agendas (Li 2003). The end result is hardly suprising: What passes for news is often little more than institutionalized thought control (“institutionalized propaganda”) by consequence if not necessarily by intent.

The work of Foucault – especially his landmark publication *Power/Knowledge* (1980) – capitalizes on the notion of newsmedia as dominant discourses. According to Foucault and those of a postmodernist persuasion, there is no such thing as absolute Truth (or Knowledge or Reality) in our mind dependent world, only discourses about “truths” (or knowledge or realities) whose “truthfulness” reflects peoples’ social location (in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity and so on). A dominant discourse can privilege its version of truth as normal or necessary without making these interpretations appear self serving or contrived. In reflecting and advancing the interests of the power elite, a hegemonic newsmedia play a critical role by normalizing the boundaries of legiti-

mate debate while marginalizing those with opposing interests (for discussion see Henry/Tator 2003). Those in positions of power can “otherize” opponents as deviant, dangerous, illegal, unrepresentative, or reflecting self-interest – not necessarily through overt expressions of racist discourse but through coded language (including narratives, images, and rhetorical devices) that deny and exclude behind a façade of good intentions, principled stands, liberal values, and democratic ideals.

Media are ideological in a second way. In addition to securing dominant ideologies, they themselves are pervaded by ideological assumptions that influence the framing of news stories. Incidents and issues are routinely framed around crisis formats or a conflict “spin” in hopes of playing the angle (e.g. “race card” or “gender wars”). Migrants and minorities are commonly cast as troublesome constituents whose insistence on equality is as problematic as their demands for recognition of differences. This “framing” experience is neither neutral nor objective but driven by a newsmedia culture that normalizes conformity while problematizing dissent (Abel 1997; Henry/Tator 2002; Lambertus 2004). A whitestream gaze defines the existing status quo as essentially good and fundamentally sound. Those who provoke this consensus and conformity through protest actions or civil disobedience are framed as “troublesome constituents” in need of control or coercion. In the process of dichotomizing the world into good and bad, newsmedia tend to distort minority aspirations and migrant experiences by denying their realities as complex individuals with normal lives.

## 4.2 Mediacentric Bias: Systemic and Subliminal

How does newscasting embody an exercise in institutional bias? A distinction between systemic and systematic bias is useful: A systematic bias involves conscious and deliberate intent to deny or exclude on the part of actors who act on behalf of institutions. It can also involve polite forms such as coded language or aversive actions; alternatively, it may entail open hatred toward others through the use of strong language, blatant discrimination, or physical attacks. In both cases, a systematic bias involve an egregious process by which *something* is done by *somebody* to *someone* with an intent to hinder or hurt. This intended bias is widely perceived as a random and isolated act by dysfunctional individuals whose actions are intrusive and disruptive. The persistence of such bias is criticized as abnormal – an aberrant departure from the normative standards of an otherwise healthy society. Framing bias as systematic is

consistent with liberal ideologies that assert the normalcy of racial equality as the prevailing standard in Canada. Discriminatory actions are subsequently framed as anomalous departures from the norm rather than as a process systemically entrenched within the structures and operations of mainstream institutions (Aylward 1999).

There is another type of bias, both impersonal and unconscious, yet no less invidious or destructive. Its unobtrusiveness makes it that much more difficult to detect, let alone to isolate and abolish. Systemic bias refers to this inadvertent yet powerful form of institutional exclusion that masquerades as a “discrimination without prejudice”. The defining feature of systemic bias is its perceived normalcy, that is, a “business as usual” mentality that unwittingly but routinely penalize migrants and minorities – even if the controlling actors themselves are free of open prejudice or abide by the seemingly progressive principle of “treating everyone the same around here”. A systemic bias may be likened to an institutionalization of ethnocentrism (or Eurocentrism). Just as ethnocentrism reflects an unconscious and routine tendency to normalize one’s way of life as natural or superior, and to assume that others are (or want to be) thinking along those lines as you, so does a systemic bias reflect the impersonal yet automatic tendency of an institution to privilege its way of doing things as normal and inevitable while other ways are dismissed as irrelevant or inferior. With systemic bias, institutional routines, rules, and rewards may not be explicitly racist or deliberately discriminatory; after all, institutions rarely go out of their way to exclude minorities or deny migrants. Nonetheless, a discriminatory effect is exerted because the disadvantaged are negatively affected by race-neutral rules that do not take differences into account. In short, systemic bias differs from its systematic counterparts at critical junctures – one is impersonal, the other is deliberate; consequences prevails over intent; routine over random; normal over deviant; and structural over attitudinal.

Neither intent nor motive count under a systemic bias. Unintended consequences are the determining factor since disadvantage is inadvertently perpetuated by applying identical standards to unequal contexts without taking context into account. Systemic bias is grounded on the principle that policy programs and institutional rules can be inadvertently discriminatory if informed by well-intentioned yet ultimately flawed assumptions about what is normal or acceptable (Shkilnyk 1985). This systemic bias flows from the consequences of those institutional practices – from recruitment and retention to promotion and rewards – that themselves are free of any explicit bias but whose unintended effects impact

negatively on migrants and minorities. The logical consequences of applying seemingly neutral rules – evenly and equally – to unequal contexts should not be lightly dismissed in advancing inequality. Migrants and minorities may experience discriminatory coverage through no fault of their own but because of a systemic bias in the news values of a conventional news paradigm – as demonstrated below.

### **Stereotyping as Systemic**

Media stereotyping provides a useful insight into mediacentrism as an instance of systemic media bias. Just as people are dependent on stereotyping for simplifying the processing of everyday information, so too are media reliant on stereotypes for codifying reality. News media stereotype because they routinely and typically associate minorities and migrants with certain types of activities and within specific content categories – crime, crisis, or conflict ( in addition to sports and entertainment) – but rarely within the content categories of business, education, health, or general Canadian business (Lester/Ross 2003).

Media stereotyping of minority women and men is not necessarily a perceptual problem by prejudiced individuals. Rather, media stereotyping is intrinsic to the operational dynamic of an industry that must simplify information by tapping into a collective portfolio of popular and unconscious images. Limitations in time and space prevent mainstream media from developing complex interpretations of reality across the spectrum of human emotion, conflict, or contradiction. For example, TV programming is sanitised around the formula of keeping it “safe”, “simple”, and “familiar” for fear of alienating audiences or “spooking” advertisers. Distortions through simplification are inevitable within the boxed-in constraints of a 26 inch screen and a 22 minute time slot for character development and plot resolution. TV news programming has little option except to collapse, distill, and distort „reality“ because of time constraints, dramatic expediency, and the perpetual motion imagery expected by a speeded-up MTV audience (Alia 1999).

In other words, stereotyping is systemic to media processes because of its embeddedness in normal institutional operations, rules, and rewards. Institutional stereotypes do not necessarily originate from conscious awareness and deliberate intent. They arise instead from the logical consequences of seemingly neutral priorities or normal procedures. Stereotyping of minorities is not a random error in perception but inseparable from the way “things are done around here”. The cumulative effect of systemic stereotyping cannot be underestimated. Not only do minorities lack the institutionalised power to deflect, absorb, and neutralize negative typecasts. They also are saddled with an additional negative cultural weight in society that exposes their vulnerability by stereotypecasting (Canadian Islamic Congress 1999). To the extent that media stereotyping says more about the mainstream than minorities, the end product is “unreal”. But while not “real” in the conventional sense, as sociologists have long reminded us, stereotypes become real in their social consequences (Pickering 2001).

Reference to stereotyping as systemic confirms the obvious: A systemic mediacentric bias is embedded within the foundational principles and operational logic that govern the definition, coverage, collection, and packaging of news. Yet another mediacentric bias prevails that is no less systemic and negative. Put bluntly, mainstream newsmedia are diversity-averse. True, newsmedia can deal with surface diversity (“pretend pluralism”), but an inclination to equate unity with homogeneity and equality with uniformity make it difficult to take seriously the demands of a deep and defiant diversity (see Parekh 2000). In the same way that Canada’s Official Multiculturalism cannot cope with the highly politicized demands of national minorities or aboriginal peoples, newsmedia appear incapable of framing “deep difference” except as conflict or problem. Media disdain for coverage of “deep differences” has marginalized migrants and minorities because their differences are framed as contrary to Canada’s constitutional principle of liberal universalism. With liberal universalism, our commonalities are thought to supersede our differences – at least for purposes of recognition and reward. What we have in common as morally autonomous and free wheeling individuals is deemed to be more important than what divides because of membership in distinct racial or ethnic groups (Maaka/Fleras 2005). Differences are only skin deep, as far as a liberal universalism is concerned; therefore, any preferential treatment because of racial and ethnic differences cannot be tolerated in a society where everyone is (or should be) equal before the law. Yes, special treatment for disadvantaged minorities is defensible, but can only be defended on grounds of need rather than race or rights. For liberal universalism, then, the superficiality of “pretend pluralism” is preferable over the complexities of “deep differences” as a blueprint for living together differently.

How can the “pretend pluralism” espoused by a liberal universalism be systemically discriminatory? Just as diversity remains underappreciated as a bona fide contributor to Canadian society, despite increased levels of tolerance, so too are minority representations compromised by a systemic news bias that promises inclusiveness yet remains gridlocked in monocultural structures that deny or exclude. Historically newsmedia saw themselves as a social glue that integrated society in two ways: by breaking down differences and barriers related to region or birth, while building a society based on shared interests rather than differences (see Wilson II et al. 2003). Coverage continues to be distorted by the ethnocentric assumption that migrants/minorities are like “us” or want to be like “us” or must be like “us” – especially if they hope to

prosper. But the refracting of diversity through monocultural lens may amount to unequal treatment when – or because – it perpetuates disadvantage in a context of inequality. Imposing a singular and standardized (“one size fits all”) lens on complex and diverse realities is distortive by virtue of conflating – and confusing – equality with sameness.

In short, the attainment of inclusiveness cannot be taken for granted. Rather than simple tinkering through cosmetic reform, a commitment to inclusiveness must begin by “interrogating” the systemic bias of an institutionalized liberal universalism. Instead of endorsing a pretend pluralism, the focus must shift toward taking differences seriously in allocating recognition and reward. Admittedly, there are numerous obstacles in “operationalizing” the concepts of “taking differences into account” or “living together differently”. How do we determine what kinds of differences count, and what counts as differences, who says so, on what grounds, and why? In that a pretend pluralism endorsed by mainstream media neither takes differences seriously (except as a problem to be solved) nor takes difference into account (except as a source of conflict and confrontation), a systemic (mediacentric) bias prevails.

## **5 Undoing Mediocrity: Toward an Inclusive News Media**

Mainstream media images are central in constructing social identities. Media images assist in the identification and construction of people as social beings, in part by the naming of others as troublesome constituents in need of criticism or change (Lambertus 2004). Newsmedia also play a critical role in reproducing the social knowledge that legitimises the status quo in three ways: first, mainstream news media often provide our first and only point of contact with the world out there; second, media secure a cultural frame of reference for defining a public discourse about “good” and “bad”; and third, news media serve as an ideological discourse by privileging the values of some, disprivileging those of others. Commercial considerations are no less invasive. Mainstream news media are first and foremost business ensembles whose singular purpose is to maximize profits (Enteman 2003). As revenue generating systems, they are designed to attract reader attention through stories (about confrontation or crisis or scandals) or angles (a conflict format) that capture public interest, boost audience ratings, and bolster advertising returns. As candidly conceded by the owner of the *National Post* in his company’s ongoing competition for readership with Canada’s other national paper:

“It is a long game and we are going to win it. [How? By] reaching out to advertisers and making sure there is enough content to generate new advertising categories” (Leonard Asper, cited in Cobb 2004).

The conclusion is inescapable: news media are driven by the priorities of advertising and audience rather than the principle of social reform or public responsibility. Insofar as news media were never designed to engage constructively with diversity or inclusiveness, only the promise of profits may improve more responsive coverage. If the existing coverage of diversity does not endanger the corporate bottom line, ethical concerns about “images that injure” are perfunctorily dismissed (Lester/Ross 2003).

## 5.1 Unlocking the Silences

How, then, to unlock the silences that shroud mainstream news media? Is it possible to construct a newscasting that is (a) responsive and responsible, (b) does not sensationalize by highlighting crime or conflict to the exclusion of other stories, (c) contextualizes minority actions within a broader framework, (d) is sensitive to diversity without collapsing into the cloying, and (e) strives for inclusiveness without compromising news standards? Answers to these question are elusive because they lack consensus or quantification, and are fraught with second guessing over the role and responsibility of mainstream newsmedia in integrating migrants and minorities as the list below demonstrates:

- Should minorities be portrayed only in a positive light or can racialized groups afford a broad range of roles and statuses?
- Should news values emphasize difference (thus jeopardizing unity) or should they focus on commonalities and similarities (hence, denying identities)?
- Can any news media possibly capture the internal diversity of migrants and minorities in terms of gender, social class, ethnicity, age, sexual preference, and so on – without falling into the trap of essentialism, tokenism/political correctness, stereotyping, or romanticism?
- Have mainstream media become too diversity-friendly, as some critics intone, in effect sacrificing integrity and accuracy because of fears of offending or threats of retaliation (McGowan 2001)?

- Can change come about by more minority hires or removal of bias? Or is substantial change possible by transforming the system, i.e. challenging those news values that historically informed a conventional news paradigm?
- If the goal is an inclusive media, what is the appropriate level of inclusiveness? Four options are possible:
  - (1) a level playing field through removal of discriminatory barriers,
  - (2) a minority-izing of mainstream media by incorporating minority personnel and cultural sensitivities,
  - (3) a parallel system that complements the mainstream, namely, ethnic presses or Canada's APTN (Aboriginal peoples television network) or
  - (4) a separate system that challenges the prevailing news paradigm?

Journalists are widely perceived as catalysts for improving media minority coverage (Henry/Tator 2002; Mahtani 2002). According to Aidan White, General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (cited in ter Wal 2004), standards must be established to ensure that journalists who report on minorities and multiculturalism are telling the full story through coverage both factual and inclusive as well as sensitive and professional. This inclusiveness commitment is consistent with the goal of expanding coverage from a minority's perspective (Klute 2002). Practical steps must be explored to bring minority communities and their concerns into the mainstream of newsroom coverage (ter Wal 2004). Proposed are diversity-specific initiatives that enhance inclusiveness by increasing the number of minorities in newscasting from start to finish. According to this line of thinking, it is both morally right and economically prudent that the proportion of minority journalists reflect the population at large. Not only are different perspectives brought into play by diversity-sensitive newscasting, but minority-hires also provide the quantification to comply with employment equity (affirmative action) initiatives (see Wilson II 2000). And yet in Canada, it is estimated that while visible minorities now constitute just under 14 percent of Canada's population, only 3 percent of journalists self-identify as visible minorities.

But paradoxes abound when linking improvement with numbers (Mahtani 2002, 2003). Without a corresponding change in the prevailing news paradigm, increased minority hires look good on paper but not in practice if the reins of power remain in "palemale" hands. Discriminatory newsroom practices are unlikely to be contested by "safe" and "attractive" minority hires who prefer to "toe the line" rather than "rock the boat". Herein lies the first of many paradoxes that confront journalists of



colour: According to Clint C. Wilson II and his coauthors (2003), the natural inclination of any new hire is conformity (fit in) for survival and success. Success on the job depends on complying with institutional expectations rather than “making waves”. Those journalists of colour who resist the “the way things are done around here” may be quietly ostracized by a “silence that shrouds” (see Mahtani 2003). The urge to dissent does not need to be disciplined: Its expression is pre-empted in the first place by way of constraints that are structural rather than attitudinal, more implicit than explicit, and organizationally embedded in rather than opposed to institutional norms (such as narrative structures) a professional ethos (for instance objectivity) (Hackett 2004). Therein lies yet another paradox (Wilson II 2000): Even the recruitment of visible minority journalists may prove irrelevant without a major rethinking of the conventional news paradigm. Their role as agents of change are compromised by placement in a culture and structure whose working assumptions are predicated on framing minorities as troublesome constituents. These systemic biases make it difficult for minority journalists to balance their professional ambitions (gaining acceptance of peers and supervisors) with community commitments (fulfilling a void in the information needs of a multicultural society). In that all employers for mainstream newsmedia are expected to “toe the line” in a manner consistent with a eurocentric perspective, Clint Wilson II (et al. 2003, 132) manages to capture a feel for the paradox:

“It must be understood that newsroom policies and sanctions work against changes in news coverage of non-Whites without regard for the racial heritage of reporters. Some reporters of color accept the tenets of racial policy as simply sound journalism: Decades of racially insensitive practice have come to define professional practice. But other journalists of color lament the newsroom atmosphere that forces them to see their profession from an Anglo-American perspective. They complain that their colleagues and superiors – who are not so much overtly racist as insensitive and ignorant – evaluate their performance on culturally biased news criteria. If journalists focus too heavily on race-related issues, it jeopardizes their being held in high esteem by their peers, and work on such issues rarely results in the kind of recognition that leads to promotion. Given the nature of the various factors supporting traditional newsroom policy, the slow progress toward equitable and accurate news reporting [...] becomes understandable, although not excusable”.

In brief, there is not much likelihood of hastening transformative change to conventional news paradigm without challenging the prevailing news values that journalists of colour encounter in the newsroom culture.

Consider coverage of aboriginal peoples as a proxy for the challenge at hand. Most journalists are either too poorly-prepared or too ill-predisposed to cover most aboriginal stories (David 2003). There is too much to learn and too little time to learn it; stories are located in inaccessible locales; a mistrust of journalists creates problems of rapport; and a community-wide reluctance to speak out ensures that “officials” do the talking by default – even when the authorities themselves are the problem. Standard journalist practices such as framing issues around the principle of “two sides to every story” can prove simplistic since many issues are much more complex than an “us” versus “them” mode (Bromley 2004; Tannen 2003). This polarization of an issue not only sacrifices nuance, according to Deborah Tannen albeit in different context, but also encourages debate-capture by the most extreme and vociferous. The coalescing of issues around personalities also pins the blame on victims by siphoning attention away from the social, historical, and cultural context that may have created the crisis in the first place. To the extent newsmedia cannot capture the sheer diversity, complexity and shifting identities of aboriginal experiences, perhaps the best aboriginal peoples can hope for is to be “paraphrased correctly” (Lischke/McNab 2005, 1). As well, journalists rarely have time to reflect or double check because of pressures for timeliness and speed in an internet era and the demands of real time television coverage. Coverage of complex issues such as aboriginal claims to sovereignty may falter in the push for brevity to accommodate shrinking attention spans (Weston 2003). Not unexpectedly, there is excessive reliance on safe and manufactured news, uncritically appropriated from staged news conferences or gleaned from predictable press releases and wire services. Adding insult to injury in covering aboriginal issues is the absence of personal payoff. Little peer satisfaction can be salvaged in pursuing stories that may result in accusations of racism by the subjects or in charges of collusion by colleagues. Worse still, the aboriginal beat is rarely a fast track to promotion or career success, according to Dan David, an aboriginal columnist, since the beat just “aint sexy” without a whiff of scandal or taint of crisis.

Are we any closer to answering the key question? How will newsmedia assume the role and responsibility of integrating migrants and minorities into the mainstream if the industry itself has yet to meaningfully integrate diversity within its own ranks? The challenges are formidable

in righting the wrongs of a conventional news paradigm; they span the spectrum from balancing the interests of the news industry to addressing minority demands for more inclusive (accurate and balanced) coverage. A top-down, spoon-fed, junk-food journalism that refuses to communicate or engage is no longer acceptable. Endorsed instead for re-priming the agenda is a process connecting the community as partners and participants in co-creating a dialogue about news (Lasica 1996). To be sure, the news profession may not see this challenge as a problem; after all, journalists as a group may believe they are sufficiently responsive to diversity by co-opting the language of equality, diversity, and liberalism. But such a response is superficial rather than transformative without a corresponding critique of those discourses of domination that continue to marginalize (Henry/Tator 2002; also Lasica 1996).

A closeted mindset strongly suggests a need for increased reflexivity among journalists (and the news media). No one is accusing journalists of intentional racism, but a lack of awareness of their own “westo-centric” attitudes can contribute to a racialized status quo. The focus is on becoming more “culturally safe” by cultivating a critically informed self awareness of those news values that comprise a conventional news paradigm. A commitment to cultural safety puts the onus on acknowledging the (micro)politics of “social location” in advancing those discourses of domination that deny or exclude. In that what one sees depends on where one stands, journalists must acknowledge how their positioning in society with respect to class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, age and dis/ability will profoundly influence coverage and spin. To be sure, even a commitment to critical self awareness is no guarantee of inclusive coverage. A complex web of relationships and rules are in place that can neutralize piecemeal efforts at reform without corresponding changes to the entire system. Those journalists who challenge the discourses of domination may be criticized for overdosing on political correctness or hiding behind journalistic cowardice (“fears of being labelled a racist”). Critics argue that newsmedia have become so fearful of offending any constituency that there is growing aversion to any diversity coverage that could be construed as negative, embarrassing or critical. Honest and objective news collection may be sacrificed in the process (see McGowan 2001).

## 5.2 Images of Power, the Power of Images

The lives of migrants and minorities continue to be “bent”, “folded”, “spindled”, and “mutilated” by negative coverage. Their realities remain distorted, ignored, stereotyped, and miniaturized – not consciously, perhaps – but by unconscious predispositions that inform the processing of news information (Weston 2003). With images as powerful as they are, minorities and migrants are under pressure to reclaim institutional control as one way of escaping those “psychic prisons” that deny or exclude. Knowledge is empowerment, or so we are told, and reclaiming control over minority representations provide a counter-hegemony to privileged discourses. Control over images is critical if minorities and migrants want to prevail as subjects of the world rather than objects for manipulation or amusement (Hanamoto 1995). Yet claims to ownership are not simple or straightforward. Mainstream media are structured in relationships of dominance, as Stuart Hall (1980) once observed, involving a hierarchy of discourses that hegemonize the “out there” through the “in here”.

The focus of this paper revolves a key question: What is it about the news values of a conventional news paradigm that fosters coverage at odds with the profession’s highest aspirations (Weston 2003)? The paper has responded accordingly: Put bluntly, migrants and minorities do not suffer from biased coverage, but more from coverage that has a biasing effect because of a conventional newsmedia’s fixation with the negative to the exclusion of the positive. Any solution must address the root of the problem by focusing on those systemic mediacentric biases that negatively frame migrants and minorities as “troublesome constituents”. Contesting media hegemony and institutionalized power must go beyond adding a splash of colour to the storyline or a few minority hires. Emphasis must focus on the removal of those systemic biases and cultural barriers; after all, to modify attitudes without corresponding institutional modifications is equivalent to walking up a down-escalator whose speed is structurally controlled. Progress yes, but slow and at considerable cost. Institutional change is mandated, in other words, and the transformation of the prevailing news paradigm must begin with the problematizing of dominant news values – themselves often invisibly yet powerfully normative, seemingly natural yet socially constructed, and ostensibly neutral yet ideologically loaded.

The necessity to balance newsmedia priorities with migrant/ minority demands is overdue. In a multicultural and multimedia society such as Canada, migrants and minorities will only pay attention to newsmedia

that pay attention to them (Wilson II et al. 2003). No one said the challenge would be easy: To one side is the challenge of creating a mainstream news media that are safe for diversity, yet safe from diversity. To the other side is an even more daunting challenge: how to construct images of migrants and minorities that are safe from – yet safe for – mainstream news media. At the core of this challenge is power. The control of knowledge and its dissemination through media representations is fundamental to the exercise of power in society. Control over representations will remain rooted in power, inasmuch as all representations are socially constructed and shaped by those who create and consume them. Failure to unmask those discourses of domination that underscore patterns of power will further marginalize those at the margins (Henry/Tator 2003). Admittedly, improvements may not yield a “power to the people”. But a business as usual mindset is decidedly disempowering for those at the margins. Until the issue of power is resolved in terms of who controls what and how, and whose values will dominate in sorting out who gets what and why, the systemic mediacentric bias that informs the conventional news values paradigm will continue to erode Canada’s multicultural commitments.

## Appendix

In preparation for the conference, the author decided to collect all references to racial, ethnic and aboriginal peoples contained in Canada’s two national papers. The study which commenced on April 26, 2004 was continued after the conference and finished on April 25, 2005. Inclusion of an article headline/header for this study was restricted to those involving (a) an event in Canada involving ethnic, race, or aboriginal relations, migration and settlement, immigration and multiculturalism, racism and discrimination, and conflict and crime involving minorities, (b) its placement in the news/business section (rather than entertainment or sports) and (c) the presence of an ethnic minority dimension in a headline or header or accompanying photo. A textual analysis of the content was not pursued because headers and headlines create a first and lasting impression for many readers.

The *National Post* published a total of 385 stories relative to diversity or minorities over a one year period. Only 19 could be conclusively defined as positive, with the remainder as negative (or ambiguous or neutral), either implied or explicit, in defining migrants and minorities as troublesome constituents. The *Globe And Mail* published a total of 360 stories of which 49 were positive while the rest were negative or ambiguous. Altogether, a total of 745 were published with 67 deemed to be positive and 676 deemed to be otherwise. The survey and sample – and findings – are intended to be informational rather than scientific, given the high level of subjectivity in such an exercise. A list of all newspaper headlines and headers are available on the web.

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