

Ethnic Media and Counterhegemony: Agonistic Pluralism, Policy, and Professionalism

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In this article I use Chantal Mouffe’s theory of agonistic pluralism as a framework through which to analyze the actual and potential role of ethnic media as facilitators of counterhegemonic discourses in Australia and other liberal democracies. The pluralist approach provides a powerful way to circumvent the integration-fragmentation divide that often inhibits both political and academic understandings of ethnic media. It articulates a political culture that can sustain and respond to counterhegemonic movements and has at its center the transformation of differing political identities from enemies into adversaries. Two areas of the current media landscape are analyzed: policy and professionalism. It is argued that both are far from simple in the way they shape ethnic media’s counterhegemonic potential, and in its current form each presents an adaptable and flexible hegemonic position that must be exposed to further the democratic potential of ethnic media.

Keywords: agonistic pluralism, ethnic media, democracy, media policy, journalistic professionalism

In this article I analyze the actual and potential role of ethnic media as facilitators of counterhegemonic discourses in liberal democracies through an engagement with Chantal Mouffe’s (1993, 1999, 2000, 2012) theory of agonistic pluralism, with specific examples drawn from Australia (Mouffe, 1993, 2000; Wingenbach, 2011). In challenging the prioritization of rational consensus in Habermasian democratic theory and the individualism of neoliberalism, Mouffe’s work on agonistic debate provides a powerful way to circumvent the integration–fragmentation divide that often inhibits both political and academic understandings of ethnic media. Seeking to “highlight the contingency of social order and maximize the possibilities for inclusion of multiple identities” (Wingenbach, 2011, p. xi), the pluralist agonism approach stops short of celebrating difference in and of itself, insisting instead on a shared symbolic space within which ongoing debate must take place (Mouffe, 1993, 1999, 2000, 2012; Wingenbach, 2011). As such, it offers an approach to democracy in which the connections and relationships between political identities—always constituted with reference to an outsider—are of fundamental importance (Mouffe, 2000).

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A persistent issue within Mouffe's agonistic political theory is that of the actual "institutions and practices that might constitute agonistic democracy in action" (Wingenbach, 2011, p. xii). Media, in both institutional form and through ideologies of practice and identity, have a central role to play here (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006; Karppinen, 2007a, 2007b). The agonistic task of transforming antagonism into agonism, and enemies into adversaries, requires a media system capable of fostering pluralism in a way that embraces difference as ineradicable and in which claims to universal notions of legitimacy and rationality are constantly challenged. Despite a situation of "communicative abundance" (Keane, 2013), in which the media landscape in much of the West seems to offer countless avenues for self-expression, alternative viewpoints, and platforms for political monitoring, Mouffe's postfoundational approach is based on more than media choice—or what Karppinen (2007a) calls "naïve pluralism." Instead, an agonistic approach rests on the contingency of foundational political constellations and the rejection of consensus as anything more than the imposition of one form of political organization over others (Glover, 2011; Wingenbach, 2011).

When applied to ethnic media, it opens space for the critical analysis of both hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses and structures. I focus in this article on two areas that, in rendering hegemonic media norms and structures obscure or neutral, require exposure for their contingent nature to come to light. One is the area of policy. Media policy development and implementation is best seen as consisting of competing claims and interests (Freedman, 2008). The current sedimentation of the neoliberal market perspective contributes to the marginalization of ethnic media, which, by and large, struggle to affect dominant political cultures. The dominance of such a policy perspective reflects a failure to "rescue political liberalism from its association with economic liberalism" (Mouffe, 1993, p. 7) and reduces pluralism to market choice, further excluding communities that lack economic, social, and political resources necessary to intervene in the so-called marketplace of ideas (Freedman, 2008; Karppinen, 2007a, 2013).

The other involves hegemonic media and news-making practices and identifications that revolve around ideas of professionalism. These norms have recently come under intense challenge, as key nodal terms in their discursive armory—such as objectivity—have been confronted (Carpentier, 2005). Still, the struggle continues between hegemonic and counterhegemonic approaches to journalism, and it is arguable that ethnic media, and indeed ethnic identity, are yet to feature significantly in existing rearticulations of journalism that revolve predominantly around new media cultures of audience participation and community involvement in the news-making process (Husband, 2005; Sreberny, 2005). These areas of policy and professionalism are examined in an attempt to highlight the conditions under which hegemonic and counterhegemonic practices might take place. Both hold their hegemonic positions via adaptability; they are therefore both vulnerable to countermovements and narratives but also resilient and durable (Mouffe, 2000).

I begin with a discussion of Mouffe's (1993, 2000, 2012) version of agonistic pluralism, articulating its facility in better understanding the place of ethnic media in the complex web of media policy, professionalism, and democracy. Within this context I then discuss print and broadcast ethnic media. Hardly representative of ethnic media as a whole, these two forms of media have nonetheless been heavily implicated in developments in the policy environment of media in liberal democracies and in dominant understandings of what it means to be a professional media worker.

Political Pluralism and Agonism

Mouffe's work on agonistic democracy can be understood, partly, by contrasting it with Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy and the public sphere (Kapoor, 2002). Both Mouffe and Habermas critique existing liberal democracy, but they do so from different ontological bases (Kapoor, 2002). Grounding her theory in a belief that antagonism and exclusion are inherent to the political, Mouffe (1993, 2000) challenges Habermas's belief that difference can be effectively transcended through rational debate in an ideal speech situation. Critiquing such an approach for its "rationalistic and individualistic framework" (2012, p. 637), Mouffe argues that the achievement of a shared consensus of the public good, premised on a common understanding of public issues, is an illusion based on the relegation of political antagonism to the role of temporary impediment. Such a model mistakenly strives for "consensus without exclusion," and in doing so reflects a misunderstanding of the entrenched role of conflict in "the political" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 101). Further, such a model, particularly in its early incarnation, is dangerous in its belief in the transcendence of difference, and thus its inevitable disavowal of the exclusions that have historically left sections of society outside of the space of rational debate in democracies (Fraser, 1990; Mouffe, 2000).

Rather than attempt to transcend conflict, Mouffe (2000) seeks to reengage it by denying a transcendent, foundational political position as anything other than enforced closure on a process that is ideally a series of unfinished hegemonic contests. The political is a space constituted through inevitable conflict and objectification through power that cannot be denied or rendered obsolete but must rather be embraced and rearticulated as agonistic political encounters based on what Jones (2014) calls a "thin conflictual consensus" (p. 22) around liberty and equality. The task is thus one of seeing difference as ineradicable and therefore not as requiring transcendence but rather rearticulation from antagonism to agonism, through the establishment of a "common symbolic space" in which parties "recognise, at least to some degree, the legitimacy of the claims of their opponents" (Mouffe, 2012, p. 633). As Mouffe (2000) says:

Envisaged from the point of view of "agonistic pluralism," the aim of democratic politics is to construct the "them" in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an "adversary," that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question. (pp. 101–102)

Such a position does not do away with consensus completely. Rather, it seeks to find a "new kind of articulation between the universal and the particular" (Mouffe, 1993, p. 13). Here, we can usefully draw on the postfoundational nature of Mouffe's work (Wingenbach, 2011). Unlike anti-foundational agonistic democrats, Mouffe maintains the necessity and inevitability of some form of political ordering and structure, based on an ontological need for foundations to "render social order possible" (p. 7). Whereas antifoundational agonistic thinkers see any such order as repressive and in need of eradication through an emancipatory politics, the post-foundational position maintains that such foundations can never be overcome completely but must instead be exposed as contingent rather than universal and transcendent of particular political cultures. According to Wingenbach (2011):

The task of post-foundational political theory is not to destroy foundations but to make their contingency visible so that politics can incorporate into its regular practice the ongoing interrogation, contestation, and re-formation of the necessary but always necessarily incomplete and inadequate grounds of social and political life. (p. 12)

The postfoundational approach therefore recognizes the inevitability of collective representations in political systems still largely centralized, controlled by few, and engaged in "making decisions that affect all citizens" (Garnham, 2003, p. 196). Contra Habermas, with his focus on legitimacy through the transcendence of difference via deliberation, Mouffe insists on seeing any kind of democratic consensus as developed through exclusion and power and as being the reflection of a temporary hegemonic position that must be open to counterhegemonic movements. Pluralism and difference, for Mouffe (2000), are not impediments to democratic action but instead are constitutive of democracy itself, and thus should be reimagined rather than transcended.

Although there is little direct engagement with media in Mouffe's work, she reflects the position of many critical media theorists in the belief that "the media are playing an important role in the maintenance and production of hegemony, but it is something that can be challenged" (as cited in Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006, p. 5). Such a challenge has come from within various media sectors via alternative media, from confrontations with media funding policies, and from challenges to journalistic standards (Carpentier, 2005; Freedman, 2008; Husband, 2005). Indeed, the agonistic approach, although rarely applied to ethnic media research, has been used in studies of the Internet and digital social movements. This research has been able to effectively point to certain aspects of Internet culture as providing a space for counterhegemonic discourses (Jane, 2017; Macgilchrist & Böhmig, 2012; McCosker & Johns, 2013). However, this literature also reflects some of the challenges of applying Mouffe's theory to existing media structures and practices.

In terms of media practice, Jane (2017) points out the lack of detailed guidelines for how to differentiate agonistic from antagonistic discourses in media. Mouffe and other agonists, namely Connolly (1995), offer some guidance here, suggesting that "to accept the position of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity" and to embrace "conversation" rather than "rational persuasion" (Mouffe, as cited in Kapoor, 2002, p. 465). Agonism has been aligned with a process of empathetic listening in a way that decenters the subject and acknowledges the webs of power that language and communication situate us within (Dreher, 2009; Husband, 2009). Clearly, then, the intended outcome of an agonistic approach to engagement must shift from one of persuasion to one more open to an ongoing process of conversation, with the possibility that no final conclusion is reached (Dreher, 2009).

A lack of connection between counterhegemonic movements and wider structural and institutional forms in the media studies literature can also be related to the ongoing challenge of institutionalizing postfoundational agonistic democracy (Wingenbach, 2011). One of the central problems here is agonism's rejection of closure and of external universal principles against which to judge media. Any practical or institutional crystallization of agonistic democracy must itself be seen as the outcome of hegemonic discourses, requiring constant challenge (Dahlberg, 2011). The concretization of agonistic pluralism thus rests more on a system of interactional principles (reciprocity, respect, openness) and a broad understanding

of institutions as "open to deep conflict over the meaning of common principles" (Wingenbach, 2011, p. xiii). However, tying these principles to concrete media practices and systems is another challenge. As Wingenbach (2011) suggests, "it is difficult to find a careful articulation of the institutions and practices that might constitute agonistic democracy in action" (p. xii).

Yet it is clear that counterhegemonic movements and political pluralism cannot spontaneously and consistently emerge regardless of contextual hegemonic structures (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006; Mouffe, 2000). Mouffe's postfoundational position dictates slow and careful change to existing systems, practices, and institutions (Wingenbach, 2011). Although I cannot claim to be able to solve the problem of agonistic pluralism as applied in practice or in institutional form in this article, I argue that the theory can further explicate conditions that shape the role of ethnic media in democracy. The relative success of any counterhegemonic movement is determined partly by the strength of the existing hegemonies, and in particular, the flexibility and adaptability they exhibit in the face of challenge (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006).

Below I suggest that the extant contexts of media policy and the norms of journalistic professionalism can be seen as hegemonic constructions that shape the counterhegemonic potentials of ethnic media (Mouffe, 2000). Again, both are contingent and malleable and have been challenged intensely recently, leaving important discursive "nodes" tested but not defeated (Carpentier, 2005). Yet, precisely because of their amenability, and their relationships to dominant discourses of communication, journalism, and democracy, they remain as powerful contextual factors in the work of ethnic media as facilitators of political pluralism.

Ethnic Media and Policy

Mouffe's insistence on an engagement with the political makes media policy a key site for agonistic critique. Media policy is a field made up of competing interests and claims vying for ascendancy in the policy-implementation process. According to Freedman (2008), the policy process, although complex and multifarious, is far from a technocratic application of neutral political values on media structures and industries. Rather, it is made up of a series of groups, from grassroots organizations to multinational corporations, arguing for policy and regulation that reflect different political, economic, and social values and goals. Media policy is therefore inherently political, and the success of one policy perspective and approach necessarily entails the marginalization of another.

The privileged position given to pluralism, diversity, and contestation in many liberal media policy traditions has given way to a more 'naïve' sense of pluralism in which market choice comes to define the health of a media system (Freedman, 2008; Karppinen, 2013). Although neoliberalism is a highly contested term and expresses itself differently in different political landscapes, there has been a general shift toward policies that rely on the market to determine social and economic values and wherein reregulation has increasingly favored large players in the media sphere. The logic of the market, and within it the myth of the marketplace of ideas as an open and equitable space, has formed the basis of a hegemonic policy discourse that, according to several scholars, has successfully been normalized as the only legitimate policy approach to media regulation (Couldry, 2010). The way that this general, if uneven, trend affects ethnic

media can be examined through a focus on pluralism as a contested political term and as a concept applied to both the policy process and measures of media availability (Karppinen, 2007a, 2007b).

According to Freedman (2008), the policy process, "for all its conflicts, is ultimately dominated by those with the most extensive financial, ideological, and political resources who are best able to mobilize their interests against their rivals" (p. 22). Although multicultural, ethnic, and grassroots organizations and collectives have had success in the policy process, this has often been through the resistance to policy and regulatory findings that would further marginalize ethnic broadcasters and journalists rather than through any positive implementation of policy that would directly challenge the prevailing hegemony. The justificatory logic behind the neoliberal approach to media policy further restricts the voice of ethnic media. Freedman (2008) points to a general trend toward quantifiable, hard, and large-scale data and information in policy decision making and a general skepticism toward more abstract and cultural claims, such as may accompany ethnic media in the form of arguments for their roles in migrant settlement, cross-cultural understanding, belonging, and empowerment. Indeed, fundamentally challenging hegemonic media policy discourses is made more difficult by a policy process that favors an engagement with things as they are and that is skeptical of projections of a more equitable and ethnically diverse media environment.

The outcomes of this policy process are defended in terms of increased media pluralism, despite many media landscapes experiencing increased concentration (Freedman, 2008). Reflecting a naïve pluralism, measures of media difference often revolve around choice of products, with decreasing concern for real political dissensus (Freedman, 2008; Karppinen, 2007a, 2007b). Thus, a saturated media market is seen as satisfying the need for a plural media landscape. Questions of language, ethnicity, and culture are increasingly seen as impeding the satisfaction of the needs and desires of the sovereign consumer.

The effects of this policy perspective are evident to different degrees around the world. In Australia, proposals to slash community media funding have been justified with reference to the existing funding of public-service media, which in turn are under pressure to justify their existence through market logic. In Canada, "neo-liberal immigration policies which promote free market principles and idealize 'model citizens'" (Yu & Murray, 2007, p. 104) as independent and upwardly mobile have combined with a heavily commercialized Korean Canadian media sector to result in a lack of quality local news and a situation in which the social responsibility role of media is deemphasized. Still others have pointed to the slow creep of "free-market" ideologies to join "social-responsibility" ideologies in Sweden (Camauër, 2003, p. 76).

An important contribution of an agonistic perspective to the policy process is the transformation of pluralism as a measurable outcome to pluralization as an ongoing process, institutionalized in the policy-making system through a commitment to genuine agonistic debate among a wide range of parties with different political values (Karppinen, 2013). The aims of such a process would shift from one of consensus based on external foundational values to one of ongoing debate and contestation, whereby policy and regulatory decisions would be acknowledged to be built on the temporary exclusion of other, valid approaches. Thus, Karppinen (2013) proposes an understanding of pluralism in which difference is not based on preconceived notions of group identities or simply on differing opinions. Instead, the concept would be open to "different social positions," including "expressions of ethnic identity . . . as a valid part of a social perspective" (Karppinen, 2013, p. 72). He argues further that

pluralism is best conceived not as ultimate goal of media policy, but as a critical concept that refers to the recognition and challenging of existing power relations. In this sense media pluralism is not a state of affairs that can be achieved in a definitive or perfect sense. Rather it denotes an ongoing project that has no ultimate solution and that constantly throws up new contradictions and dilemmas. (p. 72)

For ethnic media, such an approach may be beneficial in several ways. It would, on one hand, problematize preexisting measures of pluralism based on established political positions as objective justification for media policy. On the other hand, while rejecting the closure of the pluralization process based on such measures, it would introduce ethnic identity as one of many positions with a legitimate, but not necessarily privileged, role to play in the policy process. Ideally, marginalized movements would be able to positively affect policy, rather than simply resist negative regulatory and policy change.

Journalistic Professionalism and Hegemony

The agonistic exposure of contingent hegemonic formations can also be applied to the field of journalistic professionalism. Any claims to a universal and neutral journalistic culture are made problematic, as agonism insists on seeing such norms as the result of the imposition of one discursive formation over others from a horizon of possibilities. Unlike classic public-sphere theory, which has been used to identify journalistic cultures and systems required to support rational debate, agonistic pluralism views each iteration of journalistic professionalism as a form of hegemony that inevitably excludes alternatives (Mouffe, 2000).

This professionalism is not reducible to individuals, but it instead can be seen as a set of objectified values, practices, and identities that are legitimized through the establishment of communities of practice, which in turn define dominant criteria for the establishment of a professional identity. Journalistic values such as objectivity, neutrality, and autonomy are normalized through educational systems, official representative bodies, and the active marginalization of alternative approaches (Hanusch & Hanitzsh, 2017). Carpentier (2005) describes this in terms of "hegemonic nodal points" that fix and normalize the identity and practices of the professional journalist:

These nodal points articulate the media professional as objective, as a manager of people and (other) resources (based on their responsibility/property), as autonomous and as a member of a professional elite who are (semi-) professionally linked to a media organization. As new articulations and contestations of this hegemony are always possible, adequate attention needs to be directed to these counter-hegemonic articulations. (p. 214)

According to Husband (2005), the norms of professional journalistic practice are expressed through discursive and practical forms of consciousness. Discursive consciousness is the realm of communicable knowledge that can be passed on through training and education. Practical consciousness is perhaps more opaque, and thus harder to expose for its contingent nature. This form of consciousness refers to the unspoken, almost mystical and embodied forms of professional conduct that might express themselves in journalism through notions such as having a "nose for a story." Both forms of consciousness refer to

processes through which wider structural forms of professionalism are expressed through the individual and made to seem natural and neutral.

Professionalism also involves the conflation of ethnicity and gender with a professional identity (Husband, 2005; Rhodes, 2001; Sreberny, 2005). The professional identity prevalent in much of the West, based as it is on an Anglo-American model of journalism, implicates a White subject, one whose ethnicity is rendered invisible by the absence of questions over his or her ability to separate ethnic and professional commitments (Chalaby, 1996; Rhodes, 2001). The normality and neutrality of certain forms of professionalism are not seen as contingent, but “rather as a Promethean non-negotiable natural state of being” (Husband, 2005, p. 466). For ethnic minority media producers whose aims cannot easily be disassociated—or who cannot successfully build an image of professional disassociation—from particularistic concerns with culture, language, and community advocacy, “the fusion of ethnic identity with media professional identity may not be so seamless or effortless” (p. 467).

In a more applied example, a self-described woman of color reflected on her experiences in mainstream newsrooms in the United States, powerfully outlining the hegemonic power of contingent professional norms dressed up as transcendent, foundational principles:

As an employee with multiple outsider identities, I was never trusted. My editors assumed that I could never be neutral—that my identification with other aggrieved groups would overwhelm my journalistic skills. The mantra of objectivity was a convenient device through which to enforce a gendered hegemony that would make a feminist or anti-racist subject position problematic, while allowing reporters with conservative politics to function unquestioned. (Rhodes, 2001, p. 49)

For ethnic media, existing professional norms obstruct the movement of ethnic broadcasting beyond a specialist position and into a genuine plural political space. Closing off the norms of news making, storytelling, and media performance renders hegemony less visible. It normalizes a contingent set of historically, socially, and culturally located practices and values. The issue here is not so much that ethnic community broadcasters (or newspaper or website editors) lack any form of formal training and professional standards, but rather that the continuing hegemony of the professional discourse outlined above inevitably marginalizes a constitutive outside (Mouffe, 2000). It is precisely these forms of hegemony that can be exposed and continuously challenged through an agonistic approach.

The response of some ethnic journalists and media producers has been to reject the dichotomy that positions them as either a professional or a member of an ethnic community (Sreberny, 2005). Professional norms of autonomy, objectivity, and detachment are rejected in favor of a community-advocacy approach better able to appreciate the subtleties of diverse migrant communities and the issues they face. The application of preexisting frameworks of interpretation is replaced by a more embedded approach to journalism, in which closeness and connection are not seen as impediments to an ideal of objectivity but are instead seen as advantages in developing reciprocal relationships with subjects.

One of the central contributions of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in Australia has been to address this dichotomy faced by ethnic minority journalists and media makers. SBS addressed this issue by embracing normative understandings of professionalism and arguing that ethnic minorities were just as capable as others in fulfilling these roles (Ang, Hawking, & Dabboussy, 2008). The organization thus embraced a cosmopolitan multiculturalism, at times in opposition to ethnic groups who argued for the need for autonomous control over their own media products. As Ang et al. (2008) state in their detailed story of SBS, "Because it operates as a professional organization SBS has worked to broaden the public recognition of diversity rather than ghettoize it" (p. 6).

An agonistic view of SBS, as taken by Dreher (2009), demonstrates that SBS normalizes diverse languages, cultures, and politics in Australia, and as such denormalizes the hegemonic construction of Australia as a White, European country with a homogeneous culture (Ang et al., 2008; Dreher, 2009). It also challenges the conventional media practices of "familiar" White faces using English, replacing them with accents and non-White presenters and hosts (Dreher, 2009). Although the adherence of SBS to a professional journalistic culture, and the organization's increasing reliance on commercially generated income, can be seen as aligning it in certain respects with wider hegemonic media hierarchies, it nonetheless provides space in which hegemonic media practices and identities are challenged (Dreher, 2009; Husband, 2005).

African media producers and journalists in Australia also speak about their own work by rejecting and negotiating dominant professional norms. Neutrality is discussed not as an overarching ideal but rather as a way to negotiate sensitive political or religious issues and thus avoid the alienation of sectors of the community. Further, a sense of pan-Africanism, employed by some through the identifier of "African," is employed as an overt strategy in calling attention to common challenges facing African migrants and the collective responses available. When such identifiers are used in mainstream media, as they were in the Melbourne newspaper *The Age* in 2012 in an article on "African" youth crime, they are rejected as the imposition of a generalized template that ignores difference among African Australians (Oakes, 2012). Through an agonistic approach, one can see this process and others like it not as a form of rational deliberation with the goal of a transcendent consensus, but rather as a form of agonism, in which claims to higher reason and legitimacy are challenged and alternative forms of journalism put forward (Budarick & Han, 2015).

Discussion

Little research has directly engaged with the conditions necessary to encourage a more pluralist and agonistic media landscape. In this article I have connected ethnic media to agonistic pluralism at a rather broad theoretical level, trying to tie into specific practices wherever possible. There are, however, several approaches to ethnic media that echo the agonistic task of turning enemies into adversaries, and antagonism into agonism (Ball-Rokeach, Yong-Chan, & Matei, 2001; Lindgren, 2015; Yu & Murray, 2007). The work discussed below has connections and relationships at its center, with a focus on structural and policy changes that provide ethnic media with a more consistent voice in mediated political debates.

The communication infrastructure model of Ball-Rokeach et al. (2001) posits a series of relationships among communications systems and publics. Although concerned primarily with belonging, the model provides a useful framework for thinking through some of the connections necessary for the facilitation of greater understanding by focusing on the integration of media at a variety of social levels (Ball-Rokeach et al., 2001). Ball-Rokeach et al. (2001) propose three levels of communication infrastructure, the macro (mainstream media), the meso (community, including ethnic, media), and the micro (interpersonal community dialogue and interaction). A strong communication infrastructure would consist of integrated micro, meso, and macro communication sectors, each feeding into the other and ultimately into a sense of belonging through a storytelling function. In line with agonistic communication, these stories and the integration of communication sectors that facilitate them would not necessitate the leveling of difference, but instead would involve conflict and diversity. In relation specifically to ethnic community media, Ball-Rokeach et al. (2001) suggest that local (meso) media can facilitate micro-level storytelling (interaction at the neighborhood and community levels) and can act as a "bridge between macro and micro storytelling (e.g., getting neighborhood stories into mainstream media or on the agenda of civic decision makers)" (p. 399).

Yu and Murray's (2007) recommendation in Canada for "direct, unmediated access to government information in the language of Korean media" (p. 117) could be a way both to lower the costs associated with producing local news and to encourage connections between ethnic media and local government, community, and nongovernmental organizations. Downing and Husband (2005) recommend subsidies for minority media to make them more financially viable and to go some way in overcoming the "asymmetry in market access" (Yu & Murray, 2007, p. 117) that plagues media.

Lindgren (2015) also suggests a closer relationship between local and municipal governments and ethnic media through measures including the translation of press releases, hiring an ethnic media coordinator to work with ethnic newspaper journalists, observing the content of ethnic publications, and developing policy on local government advertising in migrant media. These measures, based at a more local government level, also go some way to overcoming the policy gaps inherent in wider national systems in which ethnic media are treated as part of a wider community broadcasting sector, or as part of a print media market based on an economy of scale. Such moves would require a positive approach to communications rights, in which both the right of expression and the right to be understood were encouraged by the enacting of legislation designed specifically to assist media sectors that lack the market access or the direct policy structure needed to contribute to a plural democratic discourse.

Finally, such measures may go some way to allowing ethnic groups to speak across difference agonistically, in ways that do not necessitate an engagement with, or construction of, overarching norms of mediated conduct but allow for unique histories, identities, emotions, and passions to emerge, not through an attempt to find agreement but through a recognition that disagreement need not lead to conflict and can, in fact, lead to understanding. Ethnic media practices that can be understood through this framework include arguing for the inclusion of community advocacy in reporting, introducing marginalized forms of expression and affectation into public debates, and the development of connections to social movements that seek to change existing political institutions and organizations.

Conclusion

The task of agonistic pluralism matches well the challenges facing multicultural and ethnic media. The inherently porous nature of communities and identities and the inevitability of representative democratic decision making mean that a better way of facilitating interaction between political positions, identities, and publics is necessary (Mouffe, 2000). I have focused here on two areas that shape the agonistic potential of ethnic media—policy, and professional norms and identities. This shaping is in no way unilateral, as both policy and practice offer interesting potentials and clear restrictions for ethnic media. It is hoped that this article can form part of a broader research agenda in which ethnic and migrant media are analyzed for their role in the context of established and emerging democratic systems and models. There are many unexplored pathways in such a project.

The sheer diversity of ethnic media makes uniform policies difficult and, at times, possibly undesirable (Husband, 1998). State support itself can be a double-edged sword. As Camauër (2003) has argued in the case of Sweden, state policies can change quickly, leaving media that relied on them out in the cold with a change in the local, national, or even international policy environment. Government funding can only be part of the solution (Husband, 1998). The dangers of overcommercialization within alternative media systems are also clear (Griffin-Foley, 2006). There are also issues, unaddressed in this article, with making unproblematized claims to ethnic media as representing ethnic communities. As Husband (1998) suggests, "Essentialist politics are not unknown within minority ethnic movements . . . and myopic profit maximisation is not a practice evident only within majority ethnic media populations" (p. 145). In discussing the complexities of Turkish broadcasting in Germany—in identity, space, and politics—Kosnick (2007) points to a broadcasting sector fractured by internal and external forces. In wider political approaches, what can seem like empowering strategies of localization and integration aimed toward migrants can be part of an "intervention against apparently competing loyalties" (p. 21). Regarding ethnic media, there is a danger in discussing "minority empowerment in rather abstract terms, presupposing the existence of homogeneous immigrant 'communities' that are simply waiting for a chance to raise their voices" (p. 17).

Analyzing the policy implications for a media system that is better able to achieve the ideals of agonistic politics is a necessary step in debates over modern forms of democracy, politics, and media. The power of the agonistic and pluralistic approach is that, when applied to media and democracy, it highlights the impossibility of fully formed democracy while democratic debate is defined restrictively, in ways that exclude some. Yet to take this so far as to reject any form of common ground in political debate would seem to do more harm than good for marginalized groups. What is proposed through agonistic pluralism is a system in which such groups can engage in debate based on difference and disagreement, but in a way that they can affect, inform, and shape the overarching mechanisms of political decision making that are inevitable in large complex societies (Husband, 1998; Mouffe, 2000).

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