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under Australian and Canadian Multiculturalisms

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Abstract: This paper examines media representations of certain ethno-cultural groups in Australia and Canada, notably the pervasive tendencies toward under-representation and mis-representation. Recognizing the limitations of content analysis, the paper also considers the social production of media images of cultural difference. Research on the sites of image production is reviewed and policy interventions are suggested regarding media portrayals of cultural diversity in multicultural societies. These themes are illustrated by case studies of counter-productive media representations of immigrant spaces in Sydney and Vancouver.

Key words: media representations, media production, multiculturalism, cultural diversity, Islamaphobia, ethnic landscapes

Media Representations of Ethnic Minorities

Significant changes in the demographic composition of Australia and Canada have prompted governments to employ the notion of multiculturalism as a framework to govern ethno-racially diverse societies. Although both countries have been heralded in their attempts to weave cultural pluralism into the fabric of the nation, there have been critiques that the institutionalisation of multiculturalism remains incomplete. As one example, mass media's representation of ethnic minorities has been considered "mixed at best, and deplorable at worst" (Fleras 1994, 267). Specific migrant groups and the particular spaces in the city with which they are associated have consistently weathered a bad press in Sydney and Vancouver.

Researchers have insisted that it is imperative to explore the role of media in society because the media play a crucial role in the construction of social identities (Henry 1999). The media shape perceptions and understandings of immigrants, and these perceptions inform the opinions and decisions of key urban managers, such as town planners, housing officers, elected councillors or building inspectors. Media are the dominant source of information through which residents gain knowledge about their city and also their nation - shaping their perception of country and locality. Our interests lie in exploring the relationships between multiculturalism and media coverage of ethnic minorities in Sydney and Vancouver. The research on media and ethnic minorities in both countries has been broad (Fleras 1994). We identify common themes and review the methods through which researchers have examined this field. Two case studies are outlined to demonstrate our key findings. We end by posing contemporary theoretical challenges to research on media representations of immigrants under multiculturalisms.

A clarification of terms is appropriate here. We refer to the portrayal of "ethnic minorities" rather than the portrayal of immigrants. Media depictions constantly confuse and conflate these two categories. It makes little sense for us to focus upon settler status rather than

cultural status, when the latter is more indicative of relative citizenship status. We use the term "ethnic minorities" to embrace both racial and ethnic groups, including Indigenous or First Nations peoples. It is vital to note that in both countries, these terms are hotly contested. For example, there remains significant debate in Canada over the use of the term "visible minority" to describe ethnic minorities. We also refer to the notion of a dominant culture in order to discuss the Eurocentric nature of media coverage in both countries. In Australia, the dominant culture is identified as that of Anglo-Celtic-Australians who trace their ancestries to the British Isles. In Canada, the term white is often employed to describe those individuals who identify as Anglo-Canadian or French-Canadian. In delineating some of the complexity of these terms, we insist that the terms are fraught with tension and are interpreted differently across a variety of national and local contexts.

Representations of ethnic minorities

There are two principal ways in which ethnic minorities are problematically treated by media. Firstly, there is the absence or under-representation of cultural groups in the media. This partiality ignores the civic presence of ethnic minorities, ultimately denying them urban citizenship within the metropolis. The second form of partiality refers to the array of misrepresentations or negative portrayals of ethnic minorities. The mis-representation of ethnic minorities, and of the places they inhabit, provides justification for mistreatment, for various forms of oppression.

Under-representation

Research up until the mid-1990s found that ethnic minorities were largely absent from magazines and soap operas in both the Canadian and Australian context (MediaWatch 1994; Bell 1993). For example, for many decades the substantial presence of Italian-Australians was poorly reflected in television programmes (Goodall et al. 1994). In a study of ethnic minorities' representation in Canadian entertainment, MediaWatch monitored eight made-in-Canada dramatic series and discovered that only four per cent of the female characters and twelve per cent of the male characters were non-white (MediaWatch 1994). They concluded

that ethnic minorities (and especially ethnic minority women) were severely under-represented in dramatic series. Miller and Prince (1994) provided a similar examination by looking at newspaper stories, concluding that non-whites are not receiving news coverage representative of their numbers.

The exclusion of a range of specific groups results in ethnic diversity being under-represented. Various researchers explain that despite the culturally diverse natures of Canadian and Australian societies, ethnic diversity is regularly absent from media representations (Fleras 1994; Goodall et al. 1990). In their text Racism, Ethnicity and the Media, Goodall et al. (1994, 187) soberly concluded that the "nation that is represented is not, for many Australians, the nation of which they are a part". Canadian media organizations are expected to reflect "the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada" (Broadcasting Act, 1991 [Canada]). However, media institutions in Canada continue to ignore ethnic minorities (Roth 1996; Fleras 1994; MediaWatch 1994; Zolf 1989). Cultural mixing has also been avoided within media. Goodall et al. (1994) observed that marriages and families remained ethnically homogeneous in soap operas and in most advertising. Similarly, in the Canadian context, "mixed-race" relationships in dramatic series are rare. If depicted at all, relationships are seen as being riddled with problems (Mahtani 2000; Camper 1994).

Minority marginality in the media has only served to further entrench the invisibility of ethnic minorities in society. Ethnic minorities in both Canada and Australia do not see themselves reflected in the media, and this perpetuates feelings of rejection, trivialises their contributions and devalues their citizenship. It also problematically encourages 'whiteness' as a norm. A study conducted by the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (1996) on two major Winnipeg newspapers found that ethnic minorities and First Nations peoples were usually denied access to the media. Australian researchers have found through audience studies with ethnic minorities that this limited presentation of voices reinforces exclusion (Jakubowicz and

Seneviratne 1996; Goodall et al.1994)[1]. Ethnic minorities are rarely represented as people who have something important to say - instead, their "lived experiences [are] reduced to the level of an "angle"... for spicing up plot lines" (Fleras 1994, 6). This marginality proscribes the right of immigrants to speak about the future of their country and locality and undermines national and local belonging.

Researchers have suggested that the representation of non-dominant cultures has generally expanded in recent decades (Carruthers 1995; Fleras 1994; O'Regan 1993). However, most studies have concluded that such expansion has been very careful not to challenge Eurocentric cultural hegemony. One of the ways in which cultural hegemony is retained is by confining portrayals of ethnic minorities in the media to negative stereotypes.

Misrepresentation

Problematic media depiction of immigrants is by no means a recent phenomenon. Colonial newspapers were vehemently anti-Chinese and Anti-Afghan (Anderson 1996; Henningham 1986). In the context of narrow official definitions of national identity, such as the White Australian Policy, problematic representations of immigrants were not completely unexpected. A racialized hierarchy was in operation, in which non-whites were portrayed as below and against white.

One would anticipate that media portrayal of ethnic minorities would be less disparaging within a society defined as multicultural. However, media researchers indicate the opposite is occuring (see Henry 1999; Miller and Prince 1994; Bell 1993; Ungerleider 1991; Karim 1989). Ethnic minorities are often portrayed as mysterious, inscrutable, or incompatible with an assumed mainstream (Sun 1998). Fleras (1994, 273) explained how ethnic minority images in Canadian media are consistently stereotypical ones, "steeped in unfounded generalizations that veered towards the comical or grotesque." Similarly in Australia, the

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[1] The paucity of voice is a particular feature of the problematic media treatment of Indigenous (or what are referred to in Canada as "First Nations") peoples in settler societies. Indigenous voices have generally not been heard in most media representations, and until recently they were even silenced in the discussion of issues which were specific to them (Goodall et al. 1994; Francis 1992; Meadows and Oldham 1991).

media images of ethnic communities have become caricatures in themselves - including images of Italian marijuana growers, and Chinese gamblers or drug dealers (Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales 1992). Media negativity is uneven across cultural groups in Vancouver and Sydney. Immigrants from Asia, Muslims, and Indigenous people suffer greater negativity in the media than do other ethnic groups (Bell 1993; Fleras 1994; Hamilton 1990; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1991; Sankaran and Agocs 1991; Ridington 1986). Leaders of Islamic groups in both Australia and North America have complained that problematic media portrayals have sustained a widespread Islamaphobia (Razak 1996; Islamic Council of NSW (ICNSW) 1989). As we show later, this Islamaphobia in part explains resident opposition to proposals to build mosques and religious schools in cities like Sydney and Toronto (Dunn 1999; Isin and Siemiatycki 1999).

Depiction of the spaces of Asian immigrants demonstrates negative media portrayal. Media are frequently hostile to ethnic concentration in Sydney and Vancouver. These districts were portrayed historically as no-go zones for whites, places of vice, corruption, violence and general immorality (Anderson, 1987). Media treatment of Cabramatta, a Sydney suburb associated with Indo-Chinese-Australians, emphasises representations of crime, vice and violence (Figure 1), constructing Indo-Chinese-Australians as 'bad migrants'. News reports of Asian crime waves in Ottawa were found to have reinforced the stereotype that Asians are mysterious (Sun 1998; Riley 1993). In Vancouver and Sydney, other precincts are becoming the new focus of critical media attention, including Lebanese-Australians in Lakemba or Sikh Canadians in Surrey. The ethnic minorities which the media associate with these spaces become popularly linked with crime, disadvantage, cultural apartness and exclusivity. At the larger scale of the individual property the media give voice to white horror at the "monster home" of immigrants, which we explore in more detail later in the paper (Sun 1998; Lozanovska 1994). These constructions of place provide powerful expression to long held western stereotypes of ethnic minorities.

Figure 1: Issues covered in articles about Cabramatta,
The Sydney Morning Herald, select years, 1992-1998

Ethnic minorities are constantly identified as the source of a "social problem" in media representations. DuCharme (1986) examined national newspaper coverage of Canadian immigration policy for a five year period. Her research demonstrated that the use of particular quotes, headlines and clichés resulted in representations that were discriminatory, describing immigrants as a "threat to the system, but also to Canadians as individuals" (DuCharme 1986, 3). Routinely employed examples of ethnic minorities as "social problems" include pimps, high-school dropouts, homeless teens or drug pushers (Fleras 1994). Images of black Canadians on television are often limited to roles of villains or victims, or buffoons and folksy sitcom types (Cuff 1990). News media in Australia have been found to construct similar narratives of 'normative deviance', from the presumed Anglo- or white-norm, by collecting incidents of social indiscretion which are taken as examples of general anti-social behaviour by an ethnic minority (Loo 1993; Lowe 1985). This media practice has been described as the "policing of deviance" (Jakubowicz and Seneviratne, 1996). Editorials and news copy often cry out for deviance to be repressed, for culturally different spaces to be purified, and threats sent 'home'. Absence and negativity confirm the non-normality of ethnic minorities in media reports.

However, under-representation and negative representation only scratch the surface of the problem. Researchers have identified a set of guiding narratives beneath these representations. These narratives provide the contexts for judging the bad and the good migrant, and the good and bad migrant space. They operate as structures which champion assimilationism, and which confirm the cultural dominance of white Canadians and Anglo-Australians. Following the first few decades of official multiculturalism in Australia and Canada, critical theorists were quite pessimistic about the challenge that such policy posed to Anglo/white hegemony. However, a few studies concluded that under the influence of government endorsed multiculturalism, and an associated gradual decline of Anglocentrism, representation of ethnic minorities has improved (see O'Regan 1993). Official multiculturalism may have aided the voicing of criticism of media treatment of ethnic minorities and provided a cultural space from which to struggle against Anglo or white hegemony (Carruthers 1995).

In the next section, we provide a grounded example of the themes discussed in the earlier section of this paper through a case study of media Islamaphobia in Sydney. Debates over mosque developments in Sydney demonstrate the impact of media mis-representation of Islam, feeding off the fear and dislike of Muslims by some non-Muslim Australians.

Media Islamaphobia and municipal planning disputes

Media mis-representation has been an influential vehicle for spreading Islamaphobia. The media stereotypes of Islam in Australia portray Muslims as alien and foreign to western society (Lowe 1985), as "backward, uneducated, vulgar, violent" (ICNSW 1989). Content analysis revealed that negative terms were used to describe Muslims or Islam 75 percent of the time (Dunn 1999), principally as militant, fundamentalist and fanatical (Figure 2). In Sydney these stereotypes were used to heighten public unease, widen opposition, and were expressed in planning arguments to oppose planning proposals. Residents of Sydney suburbs

like Auburn, Minto and Green Valley have drawn upon these stereotypes in land-use disputes regarding the development of mosques in their communities.

Figure 2: Types of negative reference to Islam in Australian reporting on Algeria, 1992-1996
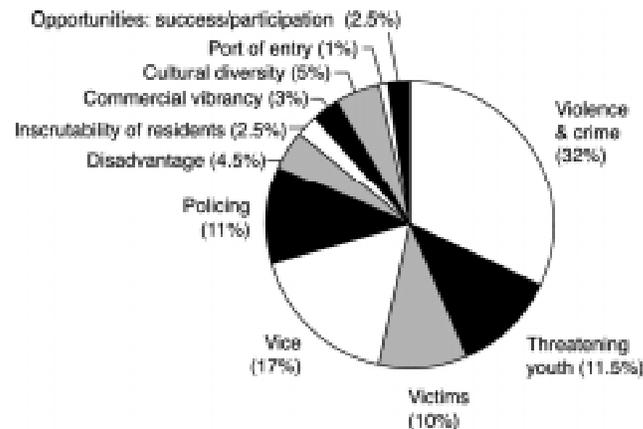
Muslims proposing mosques in Sydney were portrayed by resident objectors as alien 'Others' : as unknown, unfamiliar, foreign, mysterious and as threatening. Islam was seen as too alien to the 'Australia way of life' and ultimately irreconcilable with Christianity. Resident objectors referred to Muslims as "religious fanatics" and to the "extravagant enthusiasm and emotional nature of the religious denomination concerned" (Dunn 1999). Letters of objection to newspapers or local councils would focus on the 'odd hours' of worship and the 'unusualness' of Islam. Development Committees and Chief Planners from throughout Sydney Councils refused development consent for mosques on the grounds that the proposals were "out of character" with surrounding development. Some Sydney Councils encouraged or demanded that Muslim groups 'tone down' or 'de-Islamise' the appearances of their places of worship. The stereotype of fanaticism, manifest as unusual hours of operation and 'chanting', was converted into planning issues of traffic and parking congestion (associated with frequency of prayer meetings) and noise emission (from 'chanting' and egress). Resident complaints about chanting from mosques were referred to by building inspectors as 'noise nuisances' or 'noise emissions'.

A common suggestion by mosque opponents was that Muslims would residentially concentrate around a proposed Islamic centre and change the 'way of life' there. Proposed mosques were portrayed using military rhetoric by objectors, employing terms like 'foothold', 'intrusion', 'occupied' and 'takeover' to indicate the supposed cultural effects of such a development. Opponents of the mosques talked of the "forced transformation of their neighbourhoods" and of "neighbourhood takeover", and by drawing upon the 'intolerance' stereotype of Islam, the argument went that Muslims would compel non-Muslim residents to sell-up or convert to Islam. Worries about 'overwhelmed neighbourhoods', and of imposed Islam, influenced the thinking and actions of local authorities. For example, Auburn City Council's Chief Town Planner warned of a likely change to the population structure that would result from the establishment of Auburn Mosque:

> A 'place of public worship' becomes a focal point and the larger its catchment the greater the effect will be in changes in the social and population structure of the locality. ... the most appropriate recommendation should be one of refusal (Auburn City Council, Chief Town Planner's Report to the Committee of the Whole, 7.5.85:1, quoted in Dunn 1999, 462).

Neighbourhood cultural change, supported by the stereotype of Islamic intolerance, came to be considered a valid ground upon which to refuse development permission. Councils across Sydney refused consent for the construction and alteration of mosques on the basis that such developments were "not in the public interest". Opponents of Islamic centres or mosques were always keen to stress that a mosque was entirely different to a church in terms of its usage and opening hours. This was to enable a different planning treatment than would occur for a Christian place of worship. This ground for development rejection enabled the stereotypes of Islam, including those with no direct planning application, such as militancy and misogyny, to be deployed by mosque opponents in their campaigns.

Deen (1995) expressed particular concern for young Australian Muslims growing up in a media environment in which their religion was never discussed as a faith but only as a problem. Mosque proposals, or the Islamic associations involved, became the focus of local pathologies of cultural difference and multiculturalism. Rarely did local media consider intolerance and Islamaphobia to be the central problem. Those opposing Islamic centres

consistently asserted that there were no local Muslims, so there was no need for an Islamic centre in that locality. Throughout the 1980s, Sydney Councils accepted that the 'regional' nature of a place of worship was a valid ground for refusing consents.

Clearly, specific media stereotypes of Islam were the symbolic tools which opponents took up in their complaints and arguments to local authorities. Media narratives of nation and locality informed such debates. In different ways, these representations were converted into issues of town planning, and through that, the cultural shaping of space was influenced.

Critiquing research methods

In this section we explore the methodologies of studies examining immigrants and their representation in media. Research has relied on a limited number of methods dominated by content (or discourse) analysis, which has been used to indicate the level of representation or exposure which various ethnic groups experience, for example, how many characters in a soap, how many mentions in a newspaper. This form of analysis has been used to gauge the ways in which ethnic groups are represented, the sorts of stereotypes drawn upon in newspaper articles, or the evaluative tenor of comments on current affairs television (Jakubowicz and Seneviratne 1996; Bell 1993). Such measures provide indications on the extent of mis- or under-representation of various groups in the media. For example, Dunn and Roberts (forthcoming) demonstrated the negative way in which the migrant reception suburb of Cabramatta was portrayed in Sydney newspapers (Figure 1). In Canada, media researchers have regularly employed content analysis approaches, and there are useful examples of this genre (Indra 1996; MacGregor 1989). Government reports have also relied on content analysis approaches (Bell 1993; Karim 1989). One of the most recent studies of media and minority relations, an examination of the racialization of crime in Toronto's print media, used content analysis to focus on three major Toronto newspapers to explore how the media construct images of Blacks and Vietnamese (Henry 1999).

While useful, content analysis approaches have been critiqued because the results divert the focus away from the social production of media content (Burgess and Gold 1985). Thus, media researchers have begun to re-direct their attention towards the very processes through which media images of minorities are constructed. The practices and routines of the newsroom and other sites of cultural production are increasingly being recognised as spaces where ethnographic methods of research can be directed (Putnis 1994). In order to "ground" some of these claims, we provide a brief criticism of a Canadian national news documentary about Asian immigration to Vancouver. We begin by providing a brief clip from the documentary, and then evaluate this account, paying particular attention to the ways cultural difference is pathologised.

"Chinatown's Legacy." was produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the largest media organization in Canada. As a national public broadcaster, the CBC is mandated to "reflect the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canada" (Canada House of Commons, 1991). "Chinatown's Legacy" aired on the CBC's national news and information programme, "The National Magazine" on July 27, 1997, days before Hong Kong's return to China, as part of a special series to herald the event. The programme's audience is among the largest in the country, ranging from 750,000 to two million daily. It is considered Canada's flagship news and information programme and its documentaries have won critical worldwide acclaim. Excerpts from the documentary follow:

> Many in Vancouver have a special relationship with Hong Kong. Some have family and business there...but they are not the first Chinese immigrants to come here. And now many new arrivals are asking whether or not they will ever be able to call Canada home.

> Now a new wave of immigrants has arrived, its road paved, made smooth by the struggles of the past. In the ten years leading up to Hong Kong's hand-over to China, close to 90,000 immigrants moved from Hong Kong to Vancouver. With money, education and confidence. Who have not so much arrived in Canadian society, but have invited Canadian society to join them. Somehow, left in the dust is all the pain and suffering of the old Chinatown.

(Visuals: houses knocked down by wrecking balls, trees sawed down)

> The immigrants from Hong Kong have made an undeniable mark on Vancouver. They had no way of knowing how hard the early wave tried to avoid attracting attention. Throughout the last ten years, whole neighbourhoods disappeared and were remade.
>
> Trees vanished to make way for what angry neighbours called "monster homes." And it became evident this wave was here on its own terms. Segregation was forced on the early immigrants - now sometimes, it is chosen...Late at night, at Vancouver's Hastings Park, the race course is empty. The betting hall is full. Here, immigrants from Hong Kong can bet live on the big races back home. The Chinese love to gamble. And in Hong Kong their winnings, in fact their wealth, was something to be flaunted. The way to show the world they've made it. For they come from a sort of stateless society, one with no strong loyalty to Hong Kong, China or Britain...

In this brief excerpt from the portrayal of Hong Kong immigrants to Canada, we draw on several examples within the narrative which reinforce particularly destructive racist stereotypes, demonstrating how the Asian community in Vancouver is effectively "mugged by a metaphor" (Lubiano 1996). Firstly, the "monster home" metaphor capitalises upon the mainstream perception of the Asian immigrant in Vancouver. The narrative about the monster home is accompanied by stark images of wrecking balls decimating homes, including the steeple of a church being reduced to rubble. The monster house - seemingly ugly, frightful, ostentatious and ominous - becomes a metaphor of the people living in it. As Sun has shown, it provides a "concrete dimension to the traditionalist Orientalist image of the Asian as an inscrutable, mysterious and ugly ethnicity" (Sun 1997-98, 147). Secondly, by stressing that Asians "love to gamble," the Asian community is marked as deviant and sinister. Vancouver's Chinatown is once again imagined as "White Vancouver's Other" (Anderson 1996, 200). Finally, the recurring image in this documentary is one of the wealthy immigrant. This choice reflects hegemonic assumptions as to what constitutes successful immigrant settlement and social cohesion. Not all Asian Canadian families own monster homes, nor are they unusually wealthy; indeed such categorizations have proved difficult to support empirically (Ley 1999). Clearly, the report reveals unquestioned presumptions about immigrant settlement in Vancouver, ultimately refusing Asians citizenship within the city by

positioning them as a threatening and alien overclass who compete with so-called "real" Canadians for urban resources.

One of the authors of this paper worked as a national television news producer at the CBC, and her qualitative interviews with journalists working in the national newsroom revealed that decisions about representations of cultural diversity are placed within a series of competing, often contradictory, social relations. Darius, a pseudonym for a twenty-five year old African-Canadian television news visual researcher who worked in television news, voiced her concerns about this documentary: "It's a blatantly racist piece. But let's face it - it's almost impossible to intervene in some of these programming decisions. Before reporters even leave the building, the point of view of the story is decided."

The interviews suggested the importance of critical examination of the construction of news in order to combat racial stereotypes more effectively. There is need to conduct research to explore how journalistic representations of cultural diversity are situated within complex social relations in the national newsroom, where choices for varied representations are made within the rigid restraints of a racial hierarchy. This particular case demonstrates how members of the Asian population in Vancouver are effectively pathologised and excluded from full citizenship. Secondly, it demonstrates that while content analysis provides a useful method for critiquing media reports, it is also crucial to unveil the complex and varied decision-making processes lurking behind the conception and portrayal of minorities in the media (Mahtani forthcoming; Fleras 1994; Head 1981).

Theoretical and empirical questions

In conclusion we raise several questions requiring further research, moving beyond a focus that is preoccupied with tabulating media wrong doing. Instead, we wish to develop a critical set of proposals and recommendations. One possible avenue for research may be to interview those individuals who have been adversely affected by negative ethnic minority

portrayals in order to gauge the role the media play in promoting or devaluing multicultural guidelines. By "situating these struggles," we hope to examine the following questions:

- How are immigrants and their spaces represented by the media in Sydney and Vancouver, and by extension in other gateway cities?
- Is media comment upon migrant groups, and immigration generally, still dominated by assimilationist assumptions?
- Do the media continue to perceive their audience as an Anglo or white mainstream, or is there an acceptance of a culturally diverse audience?
- What discourses of nationalism pervade media discussions of migrant settlement, migrant groups and immigration (White nation, Anglo nation, biculturalism, or multiculturalism)?
- What has been the structural impact, if any, of official multiculturalism upon media representations of ethnic minorities?
- What role do the ownership and control of media production have upon the representation of immigrants?
- What do ethnic minorities expect of the mass media, and how do they perceive their current representation?
- What mechanisms of media scrutiny have ethnic minorities developed, and what has been their impact?
- What is the contemporary extent and role of 'ethnic media' within Sydney and Vancouver?
- How do ethnic media, and media watch dogs, perceive and construct members of their own group, other minorities, the hegemonic majority, and the nation?
- How should constructions be judged? Should self-generated but essentialist constructions be examined with the same critical eye as negative media portrayals?
- Has the development of alternative sites and sights (ethnic media, media-watchers, anti-racist media workers) been an outcome of a deepening multiculturalism or is it a legacy of white / Anglo media dominance, or both?

Our future research will reflect these concerns in order to develop fuller understanding of media portrayal of immigrants in Sydney, Vancouver and other cities, with a view towards adjusting the colour bars that currently position some immigrants as "out of place" in both metropolitan sites.

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