2ND EDITION

MEDIA CULTURE AND SOCIETY

PAUL HODKINSON

an introduction

$\circledS$ SAGE

CHAPTER 12
MEDIA, RACE AND ETHNICITY

FOCAL POINTS

- Histories of media, race and exclusion
- Developing media representations of ethnic minorities and migrant groups
- Arguments about the promotion of 'positive' images of minorities
- Complexities of ethnic identity and the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism
- Use of specialist media by ethnic minority and transnational groups

INTRODUCTION

What is the role of media in the construction of minority ethnic identities and the development of race relations? Can they contribute to an atmosphere of mutual understanding and inclusion with respect to different ethnic groups, or are they more likely to exclude, foster misunderstanding and divide? Long-term and more recent patterns of migration have resulted in a situation where many countries have considerable ethnic diversity within their populations. Alongside the effects of war and natural disaster, the increasing globalisation of markets suggests such movements of people may be liable to increase. This chapter's exploration of the relationship between media and ethnic identities within contemporary societies begins with a focus on the connection between media constructions of nation and exclusionary or racist forms of discourse. We'll then focus more specifically on the question of representations of ethnic minority groups in media, engaging with debates about stereotyping and assessing different approaches to the improvement of the situation. Finally, we examine the use of media by different ethnic minority and migrant groups, focusing particularly on specialist and transnational media consumption. Here, we'll discuss the implications of such specialist media use for the facilitation of transnational ethnic communities and the relations between such groups and the broader populations among whom they reside.

RACISM AND EXCLUSION

The notion of racial difference is now widely accepted to be a cultural construct, based not on essential biological differences, but histories of human behaviour, thought and discourse. Historically-specific sets of interactions and representations established that, while some of the characteristics that differentiate humans are ignored, others, such as skin colour, form the foundation for collective racial types regarded as naturally distinct. Important in the development of such understandings were negative Western representations of the perceived character of non-white people during the days of slavery and colonialism. Whether through literature, music, drama, journalism or cartoon, racial exploitation was justified through the representation of those on the receiving end as irrational, animalistic, lazy, uncivilised, childlike and, depending on the context, either dependent slaves or savage natives (Pieterse 1992). Carlyle (1849), for example, wrote of 'a merry hearted, grinning, dancing, singing, affectionate kind of creature with a great deal of melody and amenability in his composition', while Kipling (1899) suggested that white men carried the noble burden of passifying 'fluttered folk and wild… sullen peoples, half devil and half child'. As well as establishing specific negative perceptions that were to permeate culture for years to come, such discourse contributed to an underlying and pervasive understanding of human beings as divided into internally homogeneous and externally distinct 'races' whose relative superiority or inferiority were rooted in their fundamental essence.

More recent forms of white racist discourse, developed in the context of the migration of populations from former colonies to Western countries, have drifted away from notions of natural or biological racial inferiority and towards the notion of essential differences of culture. Different ethnic communities, it is argued, have naturally distinct and incompatible

collective values, allegiances and ways of living. This is deemed to make the co-presence of different groups within the same territory undesirable: a threat to each of their identities and a cause of natural hostility and conflict. Consistent with such emphasis on territory, Barker (1981) emphasised that this 'new racism', as he then called it, was intricately interwoven with constructions of national identity.

Political reactions to the migration of Caribbean, African and South Asian populations to the UK from the mid-twentieth century onwards provide a case in point. Anti-immigration rhetoric centred upon the encroachment of essentially different 'others' onto British territory and the resulting threat to (white) British cultural identity (Solomos 1993). Conflict was deemed an inevitable result. Calling for the repatriation of immigrants, Enoch Powell famously suggested in 1968 that whites were becoming strangers in their own country and that a bloody conflict was in danger of breaking out. A decade later, Margaret Thatcher lamented the potential 'swamping' of the 'British character' and more recently, the 'flooding' of British culture by a mixture of asylum seekers and economic migrants has been alluded to by various UK politicians and national newspapers. In 2015, large numbers of Syrian refugees seeking to enter the UK from France were described by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, as a 'swarm' while the country's 2016 referendum on European Union membership also was dominated by an emphasis on national sovereignty and anti-migration rhetoric. Elsewhere, US presidential candidate Donald Trump placed language about the need to protect the US from Mexican and Muslim immigrants at the centre of a broader campaign about the decline of the US as a nation and the need to make the country 'great again'.

Such connections between constructions of nation and exclusionary, racist discourse have led some to criticise all forms of nationalism within media. The sense of shared experience and belonging necessary for meaningful nationalist expression is deemed to entail an inevitable boundary between insiders and outsiders. Identities, after all, are relational, which means every 'us' is reliant upon its differentiation from one or more 'thems' (Woodward 1997). In Enoch Powell's formulation, the 'us' consisted of a particular white British identity, given meaning by its essential difference from the culture of immigrants. And whilst contemporary representations of Britishness usually include some ethnic minorities, explicit and implicit discourses of racial exclusion persist while ethnic minorities continue to face marginalisation within national media channels.

As well as implying strong criticism of media themselves, arguments about the link between national identity and racism raise difficult questions for those who call for public service broadcasters to represent or foster a cohesive national public culture (see Chapter 10). Such objectives tend to be inclusive in their motivation, but is it possible to encourage a clear and meaningful sense of a national 'us' without also generating a marginalised 'them'? Depressingly for its advocates, evidence suggests that public broadcasters have often been rejected in favour of commercial alternatives by ethnic minority viewers, many of whom feel excluded from the national cultural agenda of the former (Morley 2000; Ofcom 2007b, 2013; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross 1995). A recent Ofcom survey showed, for example, that the BBC's main flagship channel, BBC1, is watched by 72% of white British respondents but only 46% of Asian Pakistanis, 40% of Asian Indians and 49% of Asian Bangladeshis. The figure for black Caribbean and African respondents was a little higher, at 63% and 68% respectively, but still lower than for white British audiences (Ofcom 2013).

REPRESENTATION

The apparent opting-out from mainstream national media of some ethnic minority audiences brings us onto some long-running discussions about representations of marginalised groups in the mass media outlets of the countries in which they reside. Such debates about representation concern the extent to which ethnic minorities are represented *at all* within such media and the particular ways they are depicted.

UNDER-REPRESENTATION

Media on both sides of the Atlantic have a history of under-representing ethnic minorities. Though their representation is greater than that for other minority ethnic groups, the proportion of African Americans on US television shows has historically been significantly lower than their proportion of the country's population. According to Stephanie Larson (2006), in 1952 only 0.4% of television performances were by blacks, a situation that improved only gradually in the decades that followed. For Larson (2006), the number of black characters only improved significantly with the development of newer cable and digital channels in the 1990s. Yet although African Americans achieved a high of 18% of speaking roles by 1999 (ibid.), other minorities, including Latinos and Asians, have continued to be severely under-represented. In 2015–16, for example, while 16% of characters on the major US networks were black, only 7% were Latino, less than half their proportion of the US population, which was 16% in the country's 2010 census (GLAAD 2015).

Minority groups appear to be particularly under-represented in video games. A study of 150 popular games by Dmitri Williams and colleagues (2009) found that black, mixed race and Hispanic characters were all significantly under-represented. As in the case of television, the figure for Latino characters was particularly striking, accounting for only 2.71% of characters. Those Latino representations that the study did pick up, meanwhile, were non-playable secondary characters. As Williams and colleagues point out, Latino children are actually more likely than their white counterparts to play video games, yet they and their older peers are left unable to play or interact with any people of their ethnicity inside these virtual worlds.

Ethnic minority media presence in UK media, meanwhile, was extremely low prior to the 1980s, when a period of racial unrest prompted a concerted attempt to adopt a more inclusive approach. In spite of substantial improvements in the decades which followed, Sreberny (1999) was minded to conclude in 1999 that 'If you flick through the national channels for ten minutes, everything is white, white, white' (1999: 27), a sentiment apparently confirmed in 2001 by BBC Director General Greg Dyke, who described his own corporation as 'hideously white'. Importantly, Dyke's criticism was directed as much at under-representation within the staff and higher management of the BBC as within the content of the corporation. If we examine representation from an institutional and industry point of view more generally, it is clear that the situation has improved but there remains significant under-representation in key decision-making roles. While Ofcom (2007a) reports in 2007 that they accounted for 9.3% of the employees of UK broadcasters as a whole, even by 2016 ethnic minorities occupied just one of 46 seats on the boards of the country's four major broadcasters (Phillips 2016).

STEREOTYPICAL REPRESENTATIONS

The question of under- or over-representation, however, comprises only part of the story. This is because, even when present, the roles in which ethnic minorities have been depicted in media have tended to be restricted and stereotypical (see Chapter 11), constructing a narrow and generalised version of the lives and identities of such populations.

Among the stereotypes that developed during the years of slavery and colonialism were the devoted and childlike 'Uncle Tom'; the lazy, ignorant 'Coon'; the larger than life 'Mammy'; the 'happy go lucky' entertainer; and the dangerous, animalistic native – all of whom presented those of African origin as irrational and inferior. Although the most overt expressions of white superiority gradually receded, for much of the twentieth century, depictions of black and other minority groups were restricted to a limited number of often-repeated character types. For some decades, African American film actors found they had little choice but to play stereotypical slaves, house-keepers or violent criminals in a white dominated media industry. The situation is parodied beautifully in the 1987 film *Hollywood Shuffle*, which includes a satirical advert for a 'Black Acting School' in which white instructors teach aspiring black actors how to play slaves, rapists and gang leaders, chastising their students for failing to authentically walk or talk 'black'.

One of the most prominent African American representations in early television was an adaptation of radio comedy show, *Amos and Andy*, whose presentation of the exploits of two uneducated black characters drew heavily on slavery-related stereotypes of ignorance and buffoonery (Corea 1995). While the television version at least involved black actors, the original radio production had featured white comedians, in keeping with the broader minstrel tradition in which white entertainers mimicked African Americans (Larson 2006). The civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s, however, had a significant impact on media and the variety of roles in which African Americans were depicted slowly expanded. By the 1990s, it was common to see black actors as police, doctors, news readers, or even respectable situation comedy families. Meanwhile, in recent decades, black male Hollywood actors such as Denzel Washington, Will Smith, Samuel Jackson and Morgan Freeman have been cast in a range of starring Hollywood roles, including the latter as President of the United States in disaster block buster, *Deep Impact* in 1998, something that turned out to precede the election of a real black president in Barak Obama a decade later. More recently, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, one of the most keenly anticipated, talked about and watched blockbusters for years, featured black British actor, John Boyega, in one of the film's two lead roles.

That the casting of Boyega was so remarked upon, however, illustrated its unusualness, even in the contemporary media world. For, in spite of improvements, the overwhelming majority of lead and supporting roles in mainstream film and television drama remain white, even in relatively progressive examples such as *The Force Awakens*. Controversy erupted in 2016 about the continuing exclusion of minority characters from the Hollywood establishment when Oscar nominations, for the second year running, did not include a single non-white actor. Whether this reflected the ethnic make-up of Academy members, the lack of availability to ethnic minority actors of key roles in critically acclaimed films, or a combination of these, has been hotly debated. Most, though, were agreed that the episode vividly illustrated how much progress still needed to be made. The situation is particularly problematic for ethnic minority

women, who with a few notable exceptions continue to be excluded from prominent roles in a clear illustration of how racial and gender disadvantages can intersect with one another.

Meanwhile, many of the most prominent representations of African Americans across media remain restricted and stereotypical. In the case of the music industry, for example, opportunities for black artists are largely restricted to R&B, hip hop and related genres. Meanwhile, in spite of significant signs of diversification in recent years, substantial portions of mainstream hip hop remain dominated by stereotypes of urban gang culture, depicting a blend of male criminality, violence and heterosexual aggression on the one hand and – sometimes – passive, sexualised and commodified female groupies on the other (Perry 2003). A far cry from the grassroots empowerment associated with some earlier and more specialist forms of hip hop, such images – illustrated strikingly in the 2006 documentary, *Beyond Beats and Rhymes* – continue to account for a significant proportion of the mediated representations of black culture seen in the United States and across the globe. And crucially, such representations are filtered, promoted and encouraged by a largely white-dominated music industry whose primary market is white consumers, prompting Tricia Rose to lament 'the destructive forces of commercialised manufacturing of ghetto street life' (Rose 2008: ix).

In the UK and Europe, images of ethnic minorities often relate closely to US representations, such are the ubiquity of Hollywood, hip hop and high profile US television drama. There are specific histories in different countries also, however. In the UK, depictions of Africans, Caribbeans and South Asians have centred consistently on criminality, violence and trouble, with images of angry young non-white men dominating news media moral panics about muggings in the 1970s (Hall et al. 1978), and urban riots, gang culture, shootings and stabbings in the decades that followed (Malik 2002; Alexander 2000). Most recently, the London riots of 2011 saw a notable return to newspaper front pages of young black men engaged in street violence. And the resonance of such images with broader stereotypes, such as those that dominate much commercial hip hop, has rendered them difficult to dislodge, in spite of substantial expansions in the overall range of representations of black and ethnic minorities in media over time. Black people are also often represented as athletes and sports people – as is the case in the US and elsewhere – though more rarely as coaches or sports presenters. Such sports representations may have potentially positive or counter-stereotypical implications in some respects, but simultaneously can reinforce stereotypes of black aggression and physical power, as against thought, intelligence and responsibility, for example.

It is also clear that opportunities for black, Asian and minority ethnic (sometimes shortened to BAME) actors remain restricted and that high profile lead roles in UK drama have been elusive. In a recent speech to a meeting at the UK Houses of Parliament, Idris Elba, one of the country's best known BAME actors, argued that he was forced to turn to the US television industry to move beyond bit-part roles such as 'best friends' and 'cop side-kick parts'. 'I knew I wasn't going to land a lead role', he said, 'I knew there wasn't enough imagination in the [UK] industry for me to be seen as a lead' (Elba 2016). Ultimately Elba did break through this glass ceiling, his prominent performance in US drama, *The Wire*, prompting a series of high profile roles in both the US and the UK, but it seems UK producers were unwilling to take a chance on him prior to this.

Representations of South Asians, who form a substantial part of Britain's ethnic minority population, have tended to defer to a few different stereotypes, meanwhile. In particular, recent

South Asian representations have also invoked themes such as religious conservatism, strict parenting, a refusal to 'integrate' with mainstream culture and arranged marriages, with South Asian women often depicted as quiet, passive and subordinated victims. Such stereotypical depictions remain pervasive, particularly in news media, in spite of their being accompanied by more nuanced examples. Nadiya Hussain's 2015 victory in the BBC's highly popular and nationally coded 'Great British Bake Off' competition, for example, broke through established stereotypes in the most mainstream of forums, achieving near universal popularity for the British Muslim housewife in the process, yet the amount of media discussion and comment (mostly positive) on her ethnicity betrayed the unusualness of such a scenario.

TERRORISM AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

One topic, however, has dominated discussions of the representation of South Asian populations in white-dominated parts of the world more than any other in recent years and that is the depiction of Muslims as religious extremists or terrorists. Extensive coverage of the 2001 New York World Trade Center attacks, subsequent terrorist incidents in Madrid, London, Paris and the broader activities of so-called ISIS have contributed to the repeated depiction of Muslims and Islam in association with fundamentalism and deadly political violence. Here, under-representation is not the problem, with studies indicating something of an explosion of largely negative coverage of Muslims and Islam over the last two decades. One content analysis classified 91% of 352 articles examined in 2006 as 'negative', with nearly half specifically referring to Muslims or Islam as a 'threat' and much of the rest referring to them in stories about threat or danger (Greater London Authority 2007). A subsequent study found that the most common nouns used in relation to British Muslims were 'terrorist', 'extremist', 'Islamist', 'suicide bomber' and 'militant' and that 'references to radical Muslims outnumbered references to moderate Muslims by seventeen to one' (Moore et al. 2008). Summarising his review of these studies, Chris Allen concludes that 'threat, otherness, fear and danger posed or caused by Muslims and Islam underpins a considerable majority of the media's coverage' (Allen 2012).

More generally, the operation of news values has a tendency to ensure media representations of non-white, non-Western parts of the world is sparse and dominated by high amplitude negative stories about conflict, famine or violence. Alongside romanticised depictions of exotic traditional cultures within tourist-oriented representations (Taylor 2007), such negative images tap into a broader form of orientalism: a fear and fascination with the exotic, irrational 'other' (Said 1978). As well as having implications for the populations of these countries, such representations also can reinforce domestic stereotypes of black, Arab or Asian minorities in white-dominated countries. Representations of East Asian or Arab populations in the US, Canada, Australia or Europe, then, may not be entirely unrelated to broader representations of East Asia or of the Arab world in international news, documentaries, films and the like.

THE REPRODUCTION OF SUBORDINATION

The impact of the under-representation and stereotyping of ethnic minorities is impossible to gauge in precise terms, but theorists are largely agreed that it has significant implications for race relations. First, such representations may adversely affect the way minority populations

are viewed and treated by the dominant majority. Generalised and prejudiced expectations of black, Asian or South American people in Europe, North America or Australia may be reinforced and this may contribute to hostility or discrimination. As a result, minority populations may experience a consolidation of barriers to their achievement of employment or promotion, be more frequently stopped and searched by the police or refused tenancy. Stereotypical representations also can contribute to support for government rhetoric and policies that curb rights for minorities or restrict their cultural or religious expression.

Stereotypes may also impact the self-esteem and sense of belonging of members of the stereotyped group themselves. If all or most of the people who look and sound like you in the media display particular characteristics then this may increase the chances that you come to associate yourself in some way with these, whether you aspire to them or not. The absence of a range of representations and of successful role-models may compound existing socio-economic deprivation and everyday discrimination, further reducing hope. A further possibility is that the experience of media stereotyping and other forms of discrimination may prompt an active rejection among some of the values and goals of a society that has apparently rejected them. As with the stigmatised groups we examined in Chapter 11, the more such groups feel stigmatised and oppressed, the more they may be pushed into developing separate, oppositional values, identities or 'survival strategies' (Hall et al. 1978).

Because the interplay between representations and broader relations of power is a circular one, any concentration in majority prejudice or minority disaffection brought about by media stereotypes may feed back into future representations. There is a danger, then, of a self-perpetuating cycle, whereby the subordination of minority groups is reinforced by their representation in a white, bourgeois-controlled media where such stereotypical depictions are themselves reinforced by the concentrated subordination of minority groups (see Figure 12.1). In a broader sense, restricted or stereotypical media representations form one element of the process in which the cultural divisions between different ethnic groups are consolidated and hegemonic power relations reinforced (Hall 1997; Pickering 2001).
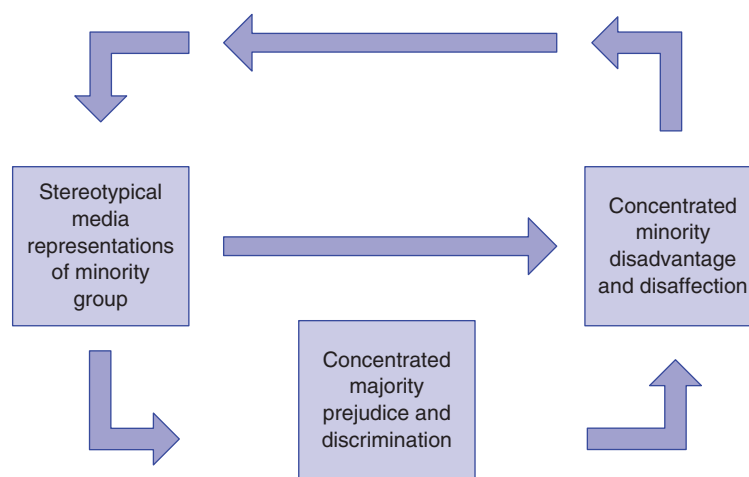

Figure 12.1   Simplified cycle of subordination

PROMOTING 'POSITIVE' IMAGES

Whilst most agree that stereotypes can be damaging, there has been much debate as to how to address the problem. Particularly from the 1970s and 80s onwards, various attempts have been made to actively promote 'positive' images of ethnic minorities, which, in one way or another, sought to reverse stereotypes (Hall 1997). Yet these attempts have differed with respect to which 'negative' images should be reversed and what exactly counted as positive.

REVERSING STEREOTYPES OF PASSIVITY

With respect to African Americans, some 1970s practitioners felt priority should be given to the reversal of the stereotypes of passivity, ignorance and deference which had derived from the days of slavery. A range of representations of black Americans emerged that sought to substitute subservience and ignorance with strength, assertiveness, rebelliousness and, sometimes, superiority over whites. A series of so-called 'blaxploitation' films, targeted primarily at black audiences, featured funk or soul sound-tracks, storylines centred on the ghetto and an emphasis on strong, black lead characters. Negative white characterisation was also sometimes a feature, whether in relation to corruption, criminality or merely being the object of humour.

Focusing on the most well-known film of the genre, *Shaft* (1971), which features the exploits of a strong, cocky, sexually successful police detective, Stuart Hall (1997) argues that such stereotype reversal can lead to its own problems. Consistent with the counter-stereotypical agenda, John Shaft occupies a position of authority and respect as well as being the film's hero. Meanwhile, his maverick, rule-breaking character – who has been compared with the likes of Dirty Harry – is anything but passive or subservient towards white colleagues and superiors, while retaining a clear attachment to his ghetto roots. The introductory theme music sums it up: 'He doesn't take orders from anybody, black or white, but he'd risk his neck for his brother man' (Hayes 1971). Yet as Hall explains, *Shaft*, like many of the other films in its 'blaxploitation' genre, ended up reinforcing a different set of black stereotypes, playing on the familiar theme of black male sexual prowess – 'He's a black private dick who's a sex machine with all the chicks' according to the introductory music – and depicting a ghetto full of stereotypical black pimps, drug dealers and gangsters. One set of stereotypes, then, was replaced with another:

> To reverse the stereotype is not necessarily to overturn of subvert it. Escaping the grip of one stereotypical extreme (blacks are poor, childish, subservient…) may simply mean being trapped in its stereotypical 'other' (blacks as motivated by money, love bossing white people around, perpetrate violence and crime… indulge in drugs, crime and promiscuous sex…). (Hall 1997: 272)

SUCCESSFUL, WELL-ADJUSTED, INTEGRATED

While blaxploitation films replaced subservience with black defiance and solidarity, a more common approach in recent years has been the promotion of images of ethnic minorities

as successful and upstanding members of society. In the UK a concerted drive towards the inclusion of 'positive' ethnic minority representations in the media, which began in the 1980s, has borne some noticeable results, to the extent that it is now unremarkable to see black or Asian presenters of news broadcasts, documentaries, children's programmes and other respected forms of output. Similarly, ethnic minority actors often are cast as professionals such as doctors, teachers and police. Here, the promotion of 'positive' images implies replacing stereotypes of separatism and criminality with the depiction of ethnic minorities as integrated members of society who hold positions of influence and responsibility and have 'mainstream' aspirations.

A particularly important historical example of the approach is *The Cosby Show*, a US situation comedy featuring an all black cast which achieved extensive success among ethnically diverse audiences. Re-runs of the show have recently been pulled from some networks as a result of sexual assault allegations against the show's star, Bill Cosby, but it was first broadcast in the early 1980s. It features the Huxtables, a harmonious and amiable middle-class nuclear family who, with the exception of their ethnicity, are comparable to other mainstream sit-com families. Both husband and wife are successful professionals and caring parents, while their children are intelligent and well-adjusted. Through achieving such popularity for a programme depicting so successful a black family, the show had, according to Michael Dyson, 'permitted Americans to view black folk as human beings' (1993: 82). Yet, in spite of this, Dyson is not alone in criticising the series.

The issue is with whether, in its emphasis upon upper middle-class normality, *The Cosby Show* adequately represents what life is actually like for African Americans. They may be 'positive' from a certain viewpoint, but the levels of affluence depicted are far removed from the low socio-economic positions of the majority of blacks in the US. This prompts Miller (1988) to suggest that, rather than easing the country's racial problems, the show reinforces the myth of the American Dream, acting as a reassuring mask which hides the inequalities that prevent most blacks from achieving the social position enjoyed by the Huxtables (cited in Corea 1995; also see Larson 2006). While recognising the achievements of the show, Dyson (1993) questions its failure to address issues of inequality and racism, suggesting that, in elevating a particular middle-class version of black identity towards social acceptance, it may even have reinforced the marginalisation of the rest of black society.

Such criticism seems harsh when levelled at a single programme. After all, diversity may be valuable in itself and *The Cosby Show* certainly contrasted with many other representations of African Americans at the time. It also demonstrated that not every programme about black people had to be about poverty, crime or indeed race. The perspective of the critics is worthy of greater consideration, however, when it comes to broader attempts to promote integrated, successful and financially comfortable representations of ethnic minorities across media output. Unless pursued with great care, such a body of 'socially acceptable' representations may risk obscuring the poverty and disadvantage suffered by many ethnic minorities and implying that America or other Western societies are 'colour-blind' (Larson 2006). Furthermore, if pursued too stringently, the promotion of characteristics deemed 'positive' by mainstream society may privilege an assimilationist vision of race relations and implicitly label as 'negative' anything which looks or sounds more ethnically distinctive. As Dyson puts it, 'being concerned about issues that transcend race and therefore display our humanity

is fine, but that does not mean we should buy into a vacuous, bland universality that stigmatizes diversity, punishes difference and destroys dissimilarities' (1993: 87).

There are two key points to take away from such debates. First, there are different versions of what constitutes a 'positive' or 'negative' image and it is far from easy to arbitrate between them (Malik 2002). To some, Shaft is positive because he is proudly and defiantly black, while for others he reinforces negative stereotypes of black promiscuity, separatism and violence. Likewise, some regard clean-cut middle-class conformist television personalities as positive while others regard the promotion of such images as part of a project whose emphasis on the merits of integration risks obscuring racial disadvantage and stigmatising distinctiveness. Second, whether or not it is a worthwhile enterprise, the promotion of 'positive images' may not always intersect with the promotion of a representative overall picture of the lives of particular ethnic minorities in a given country. The problem with stereotypes is that they select, exaggerate and disproportionately emphasise certain character types whilst systematically excluding others – and that is something that may also be true of some attempts to artificially promote 'positive' images (Pickering 2001).

THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

A further problem with the 'positive' images approach is that it has encouraged the development of a *burden of representation* on ethnic minorities in the media and the arts who, as a result of being isolated within predominantly white media institutions, found themselves expected to stand for their entire ethnic group (Mercer 1990). Unlike whites, whose ethnicity tends to be rendered invisible in Western countries by their majority status, the attitudes and behaviour of ethnic minorities in the media are often in danger of being taken as representative of all those of their skin colour, origin or religion. Attempts to promote positive images can reinforce the pressure on writers, directors, artists and actors to ensure a socially acceptable impression is conveyed – and this can create limits on feasible character-types and storylines. Crucially, the operation of the burden of representation rests on broader assumptions that ethnic minority groups are sufficiently monolithic that they can be represented by a handful of media characters or personalities. Contemporary representations may (sometimes) be 'positive' in one sense or another, but audiences still tend to be encouraged to think of ethnic minority identities in *essentialist* terms: black people are regarded as essentially similar, and as collectively different to South Asian people, and so on. It is for this reason that Sarita Malik suggests that attempts to replace negative images with positive ones 'do little to displace the assumptions on which the original stereotypes are based' (2002: 29).

The problem is linked to that of *tokenism*, or the tendency to have a single token black or ethnic minority character, presenter or guest in order to give an inclusive impression. Isolated among a cast of whites, the ethnic difference of minority characters can stand out, which may further encourage audiences to associate their actions and storylines with their ethnicity, rather than more complex individual traits or contexts. Tokenism can also lead to a dearth of situations in which ethnic minority characters interact with one another as opposed to with white characters. UK entertainer Lenny Henry recently pointed this out in relation to BBC crime drama, *Luther*, in which, although Idris Elba plays the lead role (and therefore is more than merely a 'token'), his character is completely surrounded by white colleagues, friends

and family. As Henry puts it 'An intellectual, troubled maverick cop who has no black friends or family. You never see Luther with black people. What's going on?' (BBC Online 2014).

Tokenism of a different kind can be found in some approaches to the reporting of racial issues in news and current affairs programming. In a well-intentioned attempt to refer to ethnic minority experiences and perspectives, journalists sometimes refer, in the singular, to 'the black community' or 'the Muslim community', reinforcing the impression of undifferentiated blocks of people who have a unified viewpoint. This is further reinforced through the use of 'spokespeople' or 'community representatives' for such groups who are regularly consulted for comment. Such references help ensure the inclusion of views that otherwise might be excluded, but risk further reinforcing the view of minority groups as essentially different, abnormal or *other*. Imagine the derision news in Western Europe or North America might face if it were to refer to 'representatives of white opinion'.

HYBRIDITY, DIASPORA AND TRANSNATIONALISM

SHIFTING ETHNICITIES

Partly in response to such problems, many theorists have shifted away from essentialist approaches in favour of an emphasis on the diversity and complexity of ethnic and racial identities. Associated with the work of Hall (1992) and others, the notion of *new ethnicities* sought to highlight the culturally constructed and malleable nature of race and ethnicity. If we regard ethnicity as a product of ongoing processes of human thought and representation rather than nature, then it follows that, rather than being a fixed state of *being*, ethnic identities are always developing, changing or *becoming*. They may retain stable features, but are constantly open to development and diversification according to changing circumstances – not least experiences of migration. The process of becoming involves ongoing encounters with new cultural influences as well as long-standing negotiations with intersecting aspects of identity such as class, gender, sexuality, locality, career and even strongly held leisure affiliations. The fluidity of ethnic identities, then, makes them subject to internal differentiation and external overlap.

Hall's approach focused attention on visible developments in the identities of second, third and fourth generation members of minority groups in countries such as the UK. The affiliation of these younger generations to their ethnic roots was increasingly becoming intertwined with the experience of growing up in urban, media-saturated Western environments. Rather than being simply 'Muslim', 'Chinese' or 'black' they were becoming distinctly 'black/Muslim/Chinese and British' in addition to their attachments to neighbourhood, age group, cultural interests and the like. These complex emerging identities have also been given expression in the form of hybrid forms of popular culture. The development and consumption by British Indian youth of Bhangra and post-Bhangra forms of music, for example, entailed a fusion of selected elements of traditional Indian music with Western urban dance rhythms and sequences (Huq 2006). The hybridity of Bhangra, along with a range of local variants of hip hop and other 'mixed' cultural forms, serves to illustrate the richly complex ethnic identities of those who created and consumed them and, specifically, the reconciling of heritage with everyday multi-racial local contexts (Back 1996; Gidley 2007).

In trying to think about new ethnicities, Hall and others were seeking to make sense of these youth cultural developments as part of a broader emphasis on the complexity of *all* ethnic identities. Amongst other things, this implies a move away from simplistic positive image campaigns or tokenistic approaches to media representation. If British Indian consists of countless different combinations of local, generational, age, gender, class and peer-group identities, then to speak of their representation by a single spokesperson, character or person-ality begins to look far-fetched. But this should not be taken to mean that people's ethnicity or origins are insignificant or do not engender crucial shared experiences and affiliations. In seeking to make sense of the interplay of individual and collective difference in a context of shifting patterns of migration and communication, some have turned to concepts such as diaspora and transnationalism.

DIASPORA

Diaspora refers to the dispersal around the globe of people who share a common point of origin, encompassing migrants themselves and their descendants who grow up within the destination or 'host' country. At the same time as allowing for the development of internal differences within diasporic populations – not least with respect to age, generation and contrasting destina-tion country experiences – diaspora draws attention to enduring affinities with and attachments to the transnational diasporic community and, in particular, the place of origin, sometimes referred to as the 'mother country'.

For Paul Gilroy (1993), diaspora encompasses not just a mutual connection to shared *roots* in the mother country or continent, but the collective experience of migration itself – the sense of common *routes* across the globe. In the case of those of African origin we can envisage a triangle of historical migration routes across what Gilroy terms *The Black Atlantic*, consisting of forced movement between Africa, the Caribbean and US during the days of slavery and then voluntary post-war migration from both the Caribbean and Africa itself to countries in Europe. Meanwhile, migration routes from the Indian sub-continent have taken populations to Western Europe, North America and the Middle East, among other destinations. And the notion of dias-pora has been used in relation to various other groupings, whose migration routes were formed in different ways at different times. As a concept, diaspora enables exploration of fluidities and differences within particular groups at the same time as recognising the sense of collective identification which can bind members together.

REPRESENTING DIASPORA

In contrast to positive image campaigns, some ethnic minority film-makers have sought to generate complex sets of representations of diaspora that are faithful to the shared realities of life for ethnic minorities at the same time as exploring complexities and differences. So-called 'diaspora films' often explore how characters negotiate their own path between cultural traditions associated with their ethnic heritage and elements of life within the society they live in. They tend to contest stereotypes and essentialism by presenting the trials, tribulations and conflicts of complex, rounded characters. Such films, whose depictions have sometimes involved the courting of controversy among sections of the ethnic minority groups depicted,

include *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *East is East* (1999), *Brick Lane* (2008) and two films directed by Gurinder Chadha on which we'll focus on briefly: *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002).

Over 20 years old now, *Bhaji on the Beach*, offers a glimpse into the lives of a multi-generational group of South Asian women during a day out to the quintessentially English seaside town of Blackpool. The film's title, soundtrack and storylines point to negotiations between South Asian diasporic traditions and life in Britain, covering inter-generational and gender differences relating to teenage sexuality, domestic violence, marriage separation, multi-racial relationships, non-marital pregnancy, abortion and white racism. The themes of generational conflict and negotiating between cultures are taken up a decade later in Chadha's lighter, more mainstream *Bend it Like Beckham*. The plot centres on the love for football of teenage Sikh girl, Jess, and the tensions this creates with her parents. Both Jess and her older sister, Pinky, break their parents' rules, but while Pinky's hyper-feminine identity and pre-marital sex are channelled into a traditional marriage, Jess' ambitions are oriented to a professional football career and romance with her white Irish coach. A range of representations of young male Asian identity are encountered along the way, including Jess' gay best friend, Tony, and more peripheral laddish characters.

The varied representations presented in diaspora films have been built upon by other forms of media centred upon ethnic minority life, including comedy. The UK series *Goodness Gracious Me* presented a satirical interpretation of a range of distinctively British South Asian character types, referencing both diasporic heritage and negotiations with British life. Various facets of both young and old Asian identities are mocked from a knowing, insider point of view, as are aspects of established British culture, and its treatment of Asians. The show is of particular interest, according to Malik (2002: 103), because it goes 'inside the stereotype', tackling it head on and even at times colluding with it, but with a crucial knowing wink.

More recent examples of the representation of multi-generational diaspora groups include BBC show, *Citizen Khan*, which has attracted appreciable audiences since its debut in 2012 and been both lauded and criticised for its provocative fun-poking at British Muslims. The show's deliberate comic highlighting of stereotypical aspects of ethnic distinctiveness contrasts with *The Cosby Show*'s assimilationist approach but combines this with a diversity of characters with different orientations and a number of traits, themes and storylines familiar to more mainstream sit-coms. For commentator Saira Khan (2012), it was the show's invitation for British Muslims to laugh at themselves – and for the rest of the country's population to laugh at and with them – that made it so distinct from universally serious representations of Muslims elsewhere across media. In the US, meanwhile, 2011 series *All American Muslim* depicted the complex and varied lives of five different families in Michigan, explicitly drawing out both collective and individual distinctiveness as well as commonalities with non-Muslim Americans across eight episodes.

None of these forms of representation are beyond critique. Even in their desire to counter monolithic views of ethnicity, directors of diaspora films have sometimes ended up reinforcing familiar stereotypes (Hussain 2005). Images such as the repressive Asian husband and backward looking Asian parents and traditions tend to be reinforced in texts that can present crude dichotomies between established diasporic traditions and a younger generation keener to embrace Western culture. A further difficulty is that, with the exception of *Bend it Like*

Beckham, the emphasis on ethnic minority lives and identities tends to result in diaspora films being pigeon-holed as specialist ethnic minority texts. The distinct and deliberate 'Asianness' of *Goodness Gracious Me* and 'Muslimness' of *Citizen Khan* rendered these too, vulnerable to pigeon-holing. In spite of their range of characters and self-conscious humour, they may ultimately be viewed as amusing portraits of the curious ways of the 'other'. Nevertheless, such representations have played a role in a gradual trend towards a greater range of representations and, as part of this, more complex characterisations which refuse simple 'positive' or 'negative', 'integrated' or 'non-integrated' pigeon-holes.

TRANSNATIONALISM

While the concept of diaspora remains useful in making sense of the lives of long-standing, multi-generational minority groups, more recent patterns of migration have prompted some to turn to the concept of *transnationalism*. Though it partially overlaps with diaspora, transnationalism draws specific attention to groups of migrants who retain significant practical connections to their 'home' country, whose current location may be temporary and who, as a consequence, can occupy a somewhat liminal role as transnational subjects. Recent patterns of economic migration within the European Union offer a significant example here, with various individuals or groups moving between countries to work for a period of time while maintaining transnational networks – via media, travel, political engagement, financial transactions or other means – with friends, family and institutions in their home country. In some cases – as with the UK Polish population, for example – such migrants can form diaspora-like communities within their country of residence, while at the same time maintaining extensive ties with their home country. Through highlighting these ongoing transnational connections and networks, alongside the uncertainty of their conceptions of home, transnationalism theories offer a useful extension to thinking about minority populations in such circumstances (Faist 2010; Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Mamattah 2006).

Representations of these more transitory groups of transnational migrants in media within their countries of residence tend to be considerably more limited than those for more established minority groups and largely confined to negative (and occasionally more positive) stereotypes about migration and migrants in news coverage. Alina Rzepnikovska's (2013) study of UK press coverage of Polish migrants found that initial stereotypes of efficient, hard-working labourers gave way to negative articles that presented them as an economic threat to UK workers and a social and/or criminal threat to the UK public. The latter representations, argues Rzepnikovska, involved the repeated construction of a racialised Eastern European 'other' associated with crime, drink and violence. Following up her textual analysis with interview research, Rzepnikovska argues the pervasiveness of such coverage had a profoundly negative impact on the lives of Poles living in the UK (ibid.).

MEDIA SEGREGATION?

Partly as a consequence of the ongoing marginalisation of minorities within mainstream channels, there has been a recent growth in the use by such communities of specialist media. The trend is connected to developments in media technologies and the broader pluralisation of

media, and reflects the obvious appeal both to established ethnic minority communities and more transitory migrants of reinforcing connections with other members of their diaspora and/ or their home country. Myria Georgiou (2002: 3) explains that for dispersed populations, 'the construction of shared imagination, images and sounds have always been key elements of sustaining community'. As internet communication has evolved and become more widespread, her point has become even more apt.

NEWSPAPERS, FILM AND GLOBAL BOLLYWOOD

Of course, the use of specialist media by ethnic minority groups is not entirely a phenomenon of the digital age. Specialist newspapers have long formed an important part of minority communications networks, with local retailers within areas of high concentration for particular groupings often stocking such publications, some of which oriented specifically to such localised populations and others distributed globally. In the case of newspapers serving the Tamil diaspora, *Puthinam* is oriented particularly to Tamils based in London, while *Eelamurazu* is distributed across the diaspora throughout Europe and Canada (Antony 2009). Specialist local radio can also play an important role. Georgiou, for example, emphasises the significance of Greek London Radio as a source of community participation for members of the Greek diaspora located within the city (Georgiou 2001).

In her seminal 1990s study of the media use of Punjabi young people and their families in the London suburb of Southall, Marie Gillespie (1995) demonstrates the importance of film as a means of engaging with forms of media content associated with the diaspora. Such was the demand in Southall for Bollywood films, for example, that dedicated networks of specialist video hire stores had emerged. Gillespie explains how, as well as being used by parents to encourage their children to engage with their cultural roots, Bollywood and associated fashion and celebrity culture also had independent appeal for young people. Defying theories that suggest media globalisation is a one-way process, Bollywood has become a massively lucrative enterprise whose success partly rests on the large-scale export of films to communities associated with the Indian diaspora (often referred to as Non-Resident Indians or NRIs). Indeed, Bollywood, along with associated fashion, music and celebrity industries, has become increasingly oriented towards the potential of its export market, producing increasing numbers of films that explore NRI settings, characters and experiences. This orientation, alongside the gradual pushing of boundaries of taste and decency, has ensured that the NRI market includes younger as well as older generations, cementing its place in the shared cultural imagining of the diaspora. As Manas Ray (2003: 32) puts it, 'Bollywood representation establishes the "India" community as a national but global community'.

ETHNIC AND TRANSNATIONAL SPECIALISATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Recent transformations in media technology have substantially expanded the range of possibilities for specialist communication within particular ethnic or transnational groupings. Digital television services offer the potential to reject mainstream mixed channels in favour of

more specialist alternatives defined partially or wholly by their ethnic orientation. Viacom's *Black Entertainment Television* network, for example, covers a blend of music, film, religious broadcasts and news targeted towards the US' African American population and in 2008 began to broadcast in the UK and Ireland. Meanwhile the *Zee TV* network broadcasts a mixture of drama, comedy, news, documentaries and films to South Asian audiences in the UK, Europe and the United States. Some mainstream broadcasters have also moved towards offering specialist minority-oriented services. *Radio 1 Extra*, for example, is oriented to a range of black music genres, and *BBC Asian Network*, covers music, culture and discussion oriented to British Asian youth. Given the corporation's historical emphasis on uniting the nation through universal programming, the development of such separate services represents a point for debate.

Of greatest significance, however, are the increasing possibilities of the internet with respect to the reinforcement and development of transnational or diasporic communications. Research by Ofcom (2013) indicates that internet use by ethnic minority groups tends to be higher than that of the UK's white British population. For example, 82% of the country's Indian Asian population had a broadband connection compared with 70% of its white British population. Qualitative research, meanwhile, suggests that the maintaining of transnational cultural connections constitutes a significant component of the internet use of some minorities and migrant groups. According to Georgiou (2002: 2), the internet allows communities disenfranchised within mainstream national media, to 'gain access and the right to speak in a transnational public'.

In her study of diaspora and transnational groups within Europe, Georgiou (2002) highlights extensive use of public internet resources, including information and news websites and interactive community forums where individuals could directly participate in the exchange of ideas. Typically hyperlinked together with networks of similarly oriented sites, the use of such resources can facilitate what we might conceive as specialist and ethnically distinct transnational imagined communities or public spheres (Dayan 1998). Similarly, the internet use of ethnic minority respondents in a Canadian study by Maria Bakardjieva (2005) was dominated by engagement with news websites, online radio stations and discussion forums oriented to their country of origin. According to Bakardjieva, such facilities enabled ethnic minorities in Canada to keep their country and culture of origin 'within attainable and restorable reach' (ibid. 125).

In addition to its role in the facilitation of minority public communication, the internet facilitates the development of disorganised sets of personal ties via more private forms of mediated interaction. In both Georgiou and Bakardjieva's studies, extended family and friendship networks were maintained across thousands of miles through email, instant messenger conversations and the exchange of images. Today, social media such as Facebook and Twitter provide even more effective and flexible means to reinforce transnational personal social networks, combining elements of private and public communication (boyd 2008; 2014). Such networks are of particular significance for more transitory migrant groups, enabling intensive forms of connection with fellow-nationals in their home country and elsewhere. Research by Komito and Bates (2009) demonstrates that use of social network sites by Polish migrants in Ireland has enabled vibrant and extensive Polish networks that included friends and acquaintances in Ireland,

Poland and around the world. Such is the significance of social media in this respect, they argue, that migrants' levels of contact with broader Irish society was reduced, underlining their status as mobile transnational subjects.

CONCLUSION: EMPOWERMENT OR GHETTOISATION?

In many respects, the increasing availability of specialist local and transnational forms of media to ethnic minority and transnational groups may be regarded as a positive note on which to end the chapter. Populations long under-represented, stereotyped and saddled with the burden of representation, alongside new groups of more temporary migrants, are increasingly able to engage with public culture, entertainment, discussion and ideas oriented specifically towards people of their ethnicity, nationality or status as well as to maintain regular personal contact with friends and relatives in a variety of locations. Their constant connection to these networks of representation, interaction and ideas suggests a reinforcement of shared belonging to distinct ethnic or transnational communities, with all the social and political benefits that may bring. For Downing and Husband (2005) the development of specialist ethnic minority media forms a key component in the positive affirmation of difference and self-determination by minorities, refusing establishment pressure to assimilate into mainstream culture. Governments should support the further development of such media, they argue, in the hope of expanding ethnic minority opportunities for expression and developing a new, disparate and multi-ethnic form of public sphere.

Although laudable in its rejection of assimilation, Downing and Husband's account might also have recognised some potential disadvantages of the media separatism they describe. If different ethnic groups increasingly participate in separate or parallel spheres of mediated communication, as is indicated in studies such as Komito and Bates' (2009) research above, could there be a danger that this bypasses rather than tackles the long-standing problems of prejudice and discrimination? As well as letting mainstream media off the hook with respect to the need to improve the services they offer minorities, increased segregation may mean that the long-standing issues created by physical ghettoisation of some minorities are exacerbated by a form of media ghettoisation.

The situation may not be quite as stark as this, however. Even in the case of those with the greatest commitment to specialist forms of content and communication, in most cases these form only part of overall media portfolios that encapsulate a range of tastes and interests. And although majority media consumption patterns do appear to differ from those of minorities, the most popular forms of content for the latter appear not to be particularly specialist. A recent UK television study, for example, found that, although their preferences differed from those of white audiences, the most watched television programmes for ethnic minority audiences were the BBC's New Year's Eve fireworks coverage, mainstream soap opera *East Enders*, and reality shows *The Great British Bake Off*, *X-Factor* and the *Apprentice* (Phillips 2016). Although lacking in detail, such figures bring a useful sense of perspective to arguments about ghettoisation, as well as indicating that, where mainstream shows do include significant minority characters or contestants in a manner that avoids stereotypes or tokenism, minority audiences tend to enthusiastically tune in. It also should be remembered that, if some ethnic minorities

and migrants *are* rejecting broad mixed-content media in favour of specialist alternatives, then they are far from alone in doing so. As the digital revolution embeds itself more deeply, audiences are becoming more fragmented across the board.

It remains important that the obvious interest of many ethnic minority and migrant populations in specialist forms of communication does not result in their being excluded from more mainstream services. This makes it paramount to accelerate progress with respect to the need to include a diversity of representations and forms of culture across all types of media. Public service broadcasters such as the BBC, in particular, must ensure that they also continue to prioritise the needs of ethnic minority audiences across the range of services they offer and not just on segregated or specialist channels. Perhaps, in combination with the proliferation of specialist media, such a drive towards wider inclusivity might offer a balance between affirmations of distinctiveness and the erosion of essentialism and prejudice.

QUESTIONS/EXERCISES

1   In what ways are discourses of racism connected with those of nationalism? Should attempts to represent or construct national identity by public service broadcasters be abandoned on the basis that they are liable to promote exclusion?

2   a) To what extent do representations of ethnic minorities continue to be restricted in contemporary media?

    b) Choose an example of a media text (e.g. a video game, film, news article, television programme or music video) and analyse the ways in which different ethnic or racial groups are represented in its content. Does the text reinforce or challenge stereotypes?

3   a) As approaches to the development of more 'positive' representations, what is the difference between *Shaft* and *The Cosby Show*? Which approach is preferable do you think?

    b) What is meant by the 'burden of representation' and how does this connect to attempts to promote positive images?

4   a) What is meant by the following terms: *new ethnicities*; *diaspora*; *transnationalism*?

    b) Identify a media text you feel represents or illustrates one or more of these concepts and analyse it with respect to how ethnicity is constructed.

5   Is the increasing availability and use of specialist and/or transnational media by minority groups a positive or a negative thing? Why?

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

Dyson, M. (1993) *Reflecting Black African-American Cultural Criticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press – Detailed discussion of a range of black American expression, including critical analysis of *The Cosby Show*.

Georgiou, M. (2006) *Diaspora, Identity and the Media*. Hampton Press – Explores the role of a range of media in the facilitation of global diasporic networks and identities.

Hall, S. (1997) 'The Spectacle of the Other', in Hall, S. (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage – Includes critical analysis of attempts to challenge stereotypical depictions through reversing them, as in films such as *Shaft*.

Larson, S. (2006) *Media and Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield – In-depth discussion of race and representation focused particularly on the US, covering a range of questions across different forms of media.

Williams, D., Martins, N., Consalvo, M. and Ivory, J. (2009) 'The Virtual Census: Representation of Gender, Race and Age in Video Games', *New Media and Society,* 11(5): 815–34 – Quantitative study that includes representations of different ethnic groups in video games, showing significant under-representation of ethnic minorities, particularly Hispanics.