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Edited by Simon Cottle

Ethnic Minorities and the Media

ETHNIC MINORITIES AND THE MEDIA
Changing Cultural Boundaries

EDITED BY
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ETHNIC MINORITIES AND THE MEDIA

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SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Simon Cottle's edited collection *Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries* constitutes an incisive intervention into a number of controversial debates about media representations of 'race' and ethnicity in societies such as those in Europe and North America. Each of the eleven contributors engages with a key aspect of these debates from a new vantage point, showing how the cultural boundaries of identity formation may be discerned precisely as they are imposed, transformed and contested across the mediasphere. As the editor makes apparent from the outset, the media engender an array of crucial sites whereby the cultural dynamics of racial and ethnic discrimination (frequently characterized as an 'us' versus 'them' opposition) are being actively invoked in hegemonic terms. At the same time, however, he points out that these same spaces also can be used to affirm social and cultural diversity and, as such, help to create the conditions for the articulation of resistance to these forms of discrimination. It is this shared concern to examine afresh the fluidly contingent forces of cultural power being played out in media discourses, institutions and audiences which lies at the heart of this timely and sophisticated collection.

The Issues in Cultural and Media Studies series aims to facilitate a diverse range of critical investigations into pressing questions considered to be central to current thinking and research. In light of the remarkable speed at which the conceptual agendas of cultural and media studies are changing, the authors are committed to contributing to what is an ongoing process of re-evaluation and critique. Each of the books is intended to provide a lively, innovative and comprehensive introduction to a specific topical issue from a unique perspective. The reader is offered a thorough grounding in the most

salient debates indicative of the book's subject, as well as important insights into how new modes of enquiry may be established for future explorations. Taken as a whole, then, the series is designed to cover the core components of cultural and media studies courses in an imaginatively distinctive and engaging manner.

Stuart Allan

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An edited volume necessarily incurs many debts of thanks, and this one is no exception. I would like to thank Martin Barker, Charles Husband and Teun van Dijk for offering their interest, support and kind words at the outset of this project. I thank, too, all the authors in this volume for providing their very different chapters. These collectively represent, I think, some of the very best, critically engaged, scholarship in this most humanly pressing of fields. My sincere thanks, then, to all contributors who produced their chapters on – or even before – time, and I here publicly forgive the laggards among them who, for reasons not always within their control, began to unhinge my sanity along the way. Such is the lot of the editor!

Once again, I would also like to say a personal thank you to Professor J.D. Halloran for all the support and encouragement that he has kindly offered to me over recent years. His formative influence upon the field of mass communication research and research into issues of media and racism would here be difficult to overestimate. I would also like to thank all the producers both past and present of *Black Pyramid*, an independent film and video collective based at St Pauls, Bristol, for agreeing to share with me their insights into the problems of making minority television programmes while struggling to make a difference. Thanks, then, to Lorna Henry, Ian Sergeant, Femi Kolade, Shawn Sobers and Rob Mitchell.

This book, in no small measure, bears the imprint of the series editor, Stuart Allan, whose editorial talents have effortlessly moved back and forth between the minutiae of syntax to the book's abstract conceptualization. Stuart has also proved to be a dab hand at wielding an axe when necessary, though mercifully his gentle swing and precision cuts have proved (relatively)

pain free. I thank Stuart for helping to make this a better book than it might otherwise have been, and for his consistent support, editorial acumen and unfailing good humour – all essential qualities in the very best of editors. Thanks too, to my colleagues at Bath Spa University College, particularly Rob Mears for his gracious support across the years and Andy Brown for his theoretical knowledge of all things 'race'.

Finally, as always, heartfelt love to my family, Lucy, Ella, Theo and Sam, and to my mother Rita Cottle, for putting up with the often dissociated presence in their midst.

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1

Introduction
MEDIA RESEARCH AND ETHNIC MINORITIES: MAPPING THE FIELD

Simon Cottle

Mapping the field

Today in countries such as those in Europe and North America, the relationship between the media and ethnic minorities is typically characterized by continuity, conflict and change. This book aims to explore the complexity of this interaction by bringing together a range of the latest findings produced by some of the leading international researchers in this field – a field, as we shall hear, which is also essentially contested.

In academic discourse, as in wider society, contending definitions of 'race', 'racism' and 'ethnicity' – to name but a few of the key terms with which we must grapple – currently struggle for theoretical and political recognition. These terms and their corresponding theoretical frameworks, sometimes called the **problematics of 'race'**,[1] variously provide us with the means of thinking about and/or thinking through some of the most fundamental categories, distinctions and discriminatory processes that humanity has yet produced for itself and within which, or in relation to which, many of us conduct our lives and construct a sense of who we are, where we belong and where we want to be. Specifically, three general 'problematics' currently contend and debate the field of 'race' and ethnicity in terms of '**race relations**', '**racism/racialization**' and, most recently, '**new ethnicities**'. We shall encounter each in the discussion that follows. Approached through these frameworks ideas of 'race' and ethnicity can be evaluated positively or negatively, seen as imposed from outside or mobilized from within, and accounted for with reference to deep-seated social inequalities or the pursuit

of cultural differences. Fundamentally, though, questions of 'ethnicity' and 'race' are about the drawing and redrawing of boundaries.

Boundaries define the borders of nations and territories as well as the imaginations of minds and communities. By definition, and often by design, they serve to mark out the limits of a given field, territory or social space. Depending on where one is positioned or is able to stand – whether inside or outside, at the centre or on the margins, or perhaps crossing and recrossing borders – they serve simultaneously to include some of us, exclude others and to condition social relations and the formation of identities. Over time, boundaries can become deeply embedded in the structures and institutions of societies, in their practices and even in their 'common sense'. Once institutionally sedimented and taken for granted, these boundaries all too often harden into exclusionary barriers legitimized by cultural beliefs, ideologies and representations. In such ways, the marginalized and the excluded can become ontologically disenfranchised from humanity, misrecognized as 'Other', exploited and oppressed and, *in extremis*, vulnerable to systematic, lethal violence.

The media occupy a key site and perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power. It is in and through representations, for example, that members of the media audience are variously invited to construct a sense of who 'we' are in relation to who 'we' are not, whether as 'us' and 'them', 'insider' and 'outsider', 'colonizer' and 'colonized', 'citizen' and 'foreigner', 'normal' and 'deviant', 'friend' and 'foe', 'the west' and 'the rest'. By such means, the social interests mobilized across society are marked out from each other, differentiated and often rendered vulnerable to discrimination. At the same time, however, the media can also serve to affirm social and cultural diversity and, moreover, provide crucial spaces in and through which imposed identities or the interests of others can be resisted, challenged and changed. Today the media landscape is fast changing.

Global and local developments in media markets, corporations and technologies are transforming the media environment, leading to new possibilities as well as to new forms of containment with respect to the production, circulation and consumption of media representations of ethnic minorities. Forces of political deregulation, global competition and the convergence of (digitalized) technologies – principally telecommunications, computers, broadcasting and satellite and cable delivery systems – have all reconfigured the global operations, institutional structures and strategic goals and market capabilities of major media players (Herman and McChesney 1997; Mohammadi 1997; Thussu 1998). These same forces have also contributed to the proliferation of media systems and output, growing

audience fragmentation and the strategic importance of niche marketing within and across the borders of nation-states – forces that look set to continue into the foreseeable future.

Set against this wider tide of strategic corporate change, however, are the daily encounters and growing (tactical) uses made of new – and old – interactive technologies of communication by ethnic minority groups and diasporic communities. Today these communication technologies include international telecommunications, audio and video cassettes, mobile phones, mobile music systems, the Internet and email, digital cameras, photocopiers and fax machines, camcorders, and home-based computerized music recording and production systems. These time-space collapsing technologies present new communication opportunities for embattled and/or dispersed ethnic minorities, not least by helping to sustain subcultures and networks and keeping alive memories and myths of homelands as well as collective hopes for the future (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994; Gillespie 1995). These technologies facilitate instantaneous flows of information and ideas as well as the ritual exchange of symbols and images, thereby serving to construct and affirm 'imagined' – and now increasingly – 'virtual' communities.

Between the international media conglomerates and the daily mediated communications of ethnic minorities, there stands an array of 'intermediate' minority media organizations – the minority press, local cable TV stations, local radio, independent commercial television production companies, community-based film collectives. These organizations steer a difficult course between universalist appeals, market imperatives and systems of patronage on the one side, and particularistic aims, community based expectations and felt obligations on the other. Taken together they contribute an important, albeit under-researched, dimension to the communication environment of ethnic minorities and their struggles for 'authentic' and/or pluralistic representations (Cottle 1997; Dayan 1998; Browne 1999).

Integral to these struggles are demands that relate specifically to the cultural-politics of representation based on calls for enhanced media access and recognition, whether in mainstream and/or via minority media and outlets. Here limited gains, as well as continuing constraints and setbacks, characterize the contemporary ethnic minority media scene. The mainstream media, though differentiated by medium, outlet, genre and subject interests, all too often produce shocking examples of xenophobic reporting and racist portrayal, while often publicly committing to the ideals and practices of an inclusive multi-ethnic, multicultural society. Institutional inertia, as well as countervailing tendencies, are at work in the operations and the output of today's mainstream media, as are ideas of **multiculturalism** and the

representations of **white backlash culture**. Contradiction and complexity, continuity and change characterize the media today.

Ethnic Minorities and the Media examines how representations of 'race' and minority ethnicity are reproduced, elaborated and challenged within today's media. Particular attention is devoted to the forces that currently shape and constrain their inflection across the media sphere, and how ethnic minorities themselves respond to, use and deploy media within their everyday lives, cultures and identities. The subtitle of this book, *Changing Cultural Boundaries*, deliberately seeks to draw attention to the ways in which processes of change are currently impacting on the production and reception of ethnic minority media representations, as well as the necessity for many of the media's representational practices to be challenged and changed. No one can seriously deny the importance, not to say urgency, of this field of investigation. How could they given the enormity of the human consequences – both historical and contemporary – that ideas of 'race' and ethnicity have played, and continue to play, in structures of domination and inequality and in the political mobilization of cultural differences and identities.

Towards new departures

Historically, ideas of 'race' developed as a means to differentiate social groups as biologically discrete subspecies marked out by physical or phenotypical appearance, innate intelligence and other 'natural' dispositions. These ideas are generally traced back to the Enlightenment and scientific attempts to measure, calibrate, typologize and rank people in a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority. Within the context of western imperialism and colonialism, such efforts served to naturalize, in the most literal sense of the term, oppressive social relations. In so doing they sought to legitimize systems of power and domination – systems that also found expression in the production and circulation of popular cultural imagery and artistic forms (Said 1978; McLintock 1995; Pieterse 1995). Today, scholars debate ideas about 'race' in relation to the historical encounters between different peoples (Jahoda 1999); their 'disciplinary' force in legitimizing imperialism and colonialism (Said 1978); their basis in the philosophical tenets and culture of Enlightenment thinking (Goldberg 1993); or how they arose through the contradiction between Enlightenment ideas of equality and the inequalities of capitalist modernity (Malik 1996a). In other words, ideas of 'race' are debated not in relation to the discredited reductionism of biology but in relation to the changing social and discursive formations of history.

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