



**The Media of the Diaspora.** Edited by Karim H. Karim. New York, NY: Routledge. 2003. 187 pp. ISBN 0716756730.

Already recognized as a “substantial contribution” to our knowledge of diasporic/migrant/minority-ethnic media, editor Karim Karim’s anthology *The Media of the Diaspora* was first published in hardcover in 2003. Part of Routledge’s series on transnationalism and globalization edited by Steven Vertovec, the paperback version was not released until late in 2006. It includes the editor’s introduction and some 14 case studies spanning six continents, all but two of which are published here for the first time. The lag in academic publishing makes it difficult for Karim to meet his aim to make a timely contribution to the emergent body of literature on diasporic media (p. xv). The question is whether *The Media of the Diaspora* remains as relevant today as when it was first published. The answer is a qualified yes. Diasporic studies have not penetrated Canadian communication studies well, and here are some statistics that bear that out:

- less than 17 hits in *CJC*, most attributed to its 2006 special edition on Culture, Heritage and Art (Vol. 31, no. 1);
- not more than 1% of all 298 standard research projects awarded to the field by SSHRC in 2007;
- no regular dedicated course on ethnic/diasporic media in any Canadian communication program; and,
- notable underrepresentation in the Metropolis research program.

So the need for such a volume remains. Yet five years is a long time in geopolitical events, given the EU focus on 2008 as the Year of Interculturalism, the Muslim riots in the *banlieux* around Paris, the impending regime shift in U.S. foreign policy, and escalating complaints about hate expression within Canada. Although many of the case studies provide insightful and ever-green material with important historical context and comparative perspective for the Canadian researcher, it is Karim’s own review essay (written soon after September 11, 2001) that appears most dated, although it remains useful for undergraduate teaching. Nonetheless, the political project remains. Strongly influenced by Homi Bhabha, Karim believes that transnational “third spaces” can be characterized by a considerable degree of creativity, offering hope for a genuinely cosmopolitan global citizenship.

Perhaps the most interesting question that almost all the works address is under what conditions diasporic media contribute to the growth of world citizenship or, instead, promulgate further fragmentation. Citing the expert on the Chicano diaspora, Angie Dernerseian, Karim writes that he does not “think we need to celebrate the transnational movement for its own sake” (p. 4). Transnational communities should not automatically be assumed to be “the empire striking back” (p. 5). Indeed, Karim reminds us that diasporas are increasingly important participants in transnational economic activity. Significant growth in intercontinental traffic of media products under a market model emanating from diasporic locations is a growing feature of globalization—and at odds with the cultural studies view of diasporic media as “resistive” or “constitutive” of any cosmopolitan project.

In his study of how Bollywood places the doubly displaced viewers of the Fijian Indians in Australia, author Manas Ray argues that the study of transnationality has to abjure the master narrative of diaspora as a “slip zone” of indeterminacy and shifting positionalities. The challenge instead is to explain hybridity as the *nameable* held under the sign of erasure (p. 34). Importantly, Ray’s dialectical analysis “clubs” different postcolonial diasporas together as parties to an original historical contract to understand “Pan

Indianness,” but works simultaneously to understand the particularities of different trajectories and multi-level alienation that diasporas experience in the multicultural West. Ray explores Žižek’s thesis (1997) that such study proposes a profoundly different ordering of public space as a product of growing migration and a criss-cross of different primordia. Disparate groups are tied together by the universal function of the market as constructed by the homeland and by local diasporic politics. (Bollywood’s clever exploitation of constitutive myths in changing market patterns at home and abroad is textually explored at length.) Given the reverence with which Homi Bhabha’s concept of “third space” (1994) is held in the field (and by Karim as well), it is interesting to see how Ray argues that Bhabha’s focus on the intellectual in exile is only a minor part of how the South Asian dynamics of the diaspora work in general.

Although published before (Tores, 1998) Hamid Naficy’s revised work on narrow-casting Middle Eastern TV in Los Angeles merits inclusion in this volume for its good institutional map of diasporic television as genre and product of the interaction between ethnic TV (produced in the host country), transnational TV (digital satellite TV imported by signal or program), and diasporic production. Like Ray, Naficy looks at the dialectics of production between home and host country, disclosing the tight imbrication of commerce, news, and politics. Particularly interesting is his analysis of diasporic productions about Islam before and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. An increasingly hostile LA zone provokes defensive pan-Iranian diasporic consolidation. Naficy’s hope is that such interethnicity and multilingualism “brings forward” long historical intermingling of cultures in the Middle East. Fragmentation, in this view, then, shows democratic prospects for a new global citizenship because it allows both unforeseen juxtaposition and transgression of boundaries that have divided Middle Eastern peoples.

In contrast, Amir Hassanpour’s study of media in the Kurdish diaspora emphatically does *not* support poststructural claims about a radical shift in the exercise of state power, or an intercultural Kurdish liberation. Hassanpour provides a rich analysis of Med TV, the first Kurdish satellite TV station, suggesting it did indeed contribute to a first-ever articulation of pan-Kurdish dialogue and dissent, undermine Turkish rule, and provoke reprisals. He discloses how the Turkish embassy mobilized Kurds in England to rail against Med TV’s “terrorism” or “hate propaganda.” Particularly disgraceful is the use of international special forces to attack the network in Brussels and London during the mid-1990s. France “cracked” under public pressure and did not renew the channel’s lease in 1999. By making extensive use of the diaspora and diasporic media opportunities in an interstate world order, then, Hassanpour argues that the Kurds were able to react swiftly in protest—but failed in their efforts to achieve statehood. John Downing, the noted US critical commentator (Downing & Husband, 2005), was of the view that Hassanpour’s article above all others represents new challenges to theorization of diasporic studies, and this author concurs.

Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins turn conventional wisdom on its head in their collaboration titled “Banal Transnationalism.” Their audience reception study among Turkish migrants living in Europe shows that not every diasporic citizen automatically pines for home or is desperately alienated in their host country: what happens is a *de-ethnicization*. It is unfortunate the authors do not recognize the expatriates’ “banal” silence?/repression? of the Kurdish politics in Turkey, although there is a passing reference to discomfort on viewing scenes of bloodshed and violence from the homeland. The lacuna represents a double marginalization for the Kurdish case, and reveals the challenges of both ideological criticism and qualitative research in diasporic studies. Complex dialectics in politics between host and home countries may not surface voluntarily in discussion among dias-

poric groups unless they are specifically challenged.

Not until the article by Cunningham and Nguyen in the media section (midway through the volume) do we reach a kind of empirical and political pragmatism in focus on “actually existing hybridity”—again, an idea that is published elsewhere, but a useful inclusion in such a compendium. Intergenerational differences and the emergence of an urban economic underclass among recent immigrants are changing the diasporic formation. The media tends to “stage” these differences, managing them in a productive tension, rather than “resolving” them as a functionalist model of media-social relations might imply.

Given the period of the book’s publication, most attention has focused on Peter Mandaville’s article, “A Virtual Ummah?” that asks: does bypassing traditional structures of religious authority on the Internet create some space for “secular” Muslim citizenship, or, with thanks to Zarqa Nawaz, FUN damentalists? As Canada’s experience with the current criminal proceedings against the Toronto Jihadists ironically demonstrates, since 9/11, the Internet and transcontinental media links have increasingly come under suspicion. It would have been useful to have Karim Karim explore further the question of whether this “chill” will blunt or eliminate the potentialities for diasporic media. Nor does he express a view on Mandaville’s observation that the derogative label of Western Islam may be well deserved, skewed to the affluent, and circulation of its cultural texts still too often censored both in the homeland and host country to contribute to its full dialectical potentiality. The true impact of participation in diasporic media on cosmopolitanism will not be known until the new generation of the diaspora takes up its place in public leadership.

*The Media of the Diaspora* raises big questions, provides small answers, and offers a serious challenge for a research agenda to be broadly taken up in Canada and around the world. Karim Karim and the other contributing authors deserve a prominent place in the formation of diasporic studies.

## References

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