RACISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MASS MEDIA

An overview of research and
examples of good practice
in the EU Member States, 1995-2000

on behalf of the

European Monitoring Centre
on Racism and Xenophobia, Vienna
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by
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on Migration and Ethnic Relations
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PREFACE

The research interest in analysing the way mass media report on ethnic issues has increased in the Member States over the last decades. And for this reason the EUMC decided to bring together the major research reports and their findings over the last five years in this report "RACISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MASS MEDIA - an overview of research and examples of good practice in the EU Member States, 1995-2000".

The project has been carried out by Dr Jessika ter Wal, at Ercomer, Utrecht University, the Netherlands. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to her for her excellent work. The report underlines the importance of media research in the area of racism and diversity.

The mass media, and especially the news media, have an unequivocal position in society when it comes to establishing and disseminating common cultural references. The mass media have an influence on people's attitudes as well as our common knowledge, but not always in the expected and desired ways.

The active democratic role of the mass media in society can be influenced by a number of factors. The way the mass media represent, focus and give voice to different actors and incidents in society could have the unintentional result of strengthening a racist discourse instead of fighting against it. Mass media reporting is especially sensitive when it comes to ethnic, cultural and religious relations in our society.

The mass media organisations in the Member States take different initiatives to promote cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, such as developing codes of conduct, recruiting broadcasters from the migrant and minority communities and training the personnel from multiethnic societies.

The report has already attracted a lot of interest from researchers, from journalists as well as from media organisations. I hope that the report will be of practical use to all those interested in the fight against racism and especially those working in the media.

Beate Winkler

Director of the EUMC

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4.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Research, public policy and media practices concerning racism and cultural diversity in France are in many ways paradoxical. Public agencies in France pride themselves on the country's founding role in the promotion of human rights, stretching back to the revolution of 1789, and commonly assert that its 'republican' model of integration offers unrivalled guarantees against ethnic factionalism. Yet until recently, extreme right parties have enjoyed greater electoral support in France than in any other west European state.

The policy and research agenda has begun to change since the election in 1997. Anti-discrimination initiatives have been accorded far greater weight than previously in public policy, and this is helping to create a climate in which public and private bodies are giving more serious attention to some of the difficult questions relating to the role of the media in an ethnically diverse society. The single most important development of this kind has been a report on the representation of visible minorities on French television commissioned by the main regulatory agency responsible for the media, the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Audio-Visuel* (Audiovisual Governing Council) (CSA). The controversy, which has surrounded this report, shows that there is still a long way to go in moving the research and policy agenda forward, but the very fact that it was commissioned by the CSA is itself a sign that significant developments are taking place.

4.6.2 MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

4.6.2.1 BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND REGULAR PUBLICATIONS

Since the mid-1980s, the politicisation of immigration and related issues, closely intertwined with the rise of the extreme Right *Front National* (FN), has stimulated a considerable body of research into

the relationship between the media and ethnic diversity in France. General bibliographies of this material include Maffioletti (1995) and *Fonds d'Action Sociale* (1997). Much of this research may be classified under the broad umbrella of content analysis, focusing on media representations of migrants and minorities and related questions using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods. The Centre d'Information et d'Etudes sur les Migrations Internationales (Centre for Information and Studies on International Migration) (CIEMI) publishes regular qualitative analyses of press reporting on immigration and ethnic relations in its bimonthly journal, *Migrations société*. A weekly selection of press articles in this field is published by the *Agence pour le Développement des Relations Interculturelles* (Agency for the Development of Intercultural Relations) (ADRI) in ADRI *Presse*. Smaller amounts of research have been conducted into the salience of ethnicity in media production methods as well as in media consumption patterns. There has also been a running debate (though little substantive research) on the possible role of the media in generating or curbing support for the extreme Right.

4.6.2.2   MEDIA FRAMES

During the 1980s, news and current affairs coverage of migrants and minorities was most commonly featured under the broad heading of 'immigration', a media framing device which, in often unspoken but important ways, worked to the disadvantage of those concerned (Bonnafous 1991, Battegay and Boubeker 1993). This was partly because, with the rise of the extreme Right, 'immigration' became widely connotated in very negative terms, for it was generally portrayed as a 'problem' troubling French society even if the 'solutions' advocated by the FN were not directly supported by the media. Beyond these generally negative connotations, 'immigration' was also a very misleading label for many of the phenomena to which it was applied, which frequently involved second- and sometimes third-generation members of migrant groups and minorities. Far from being immigrants, these younger generations were natives and in most cases, citizens of France, but their status as fully fledged members of French society was often lost sight of or positively undermined by the 'immigration' label, with its connotations

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of foreignness and/or limited rights of residence. It is also important to note that in media and other public discourses, the 'immigration' label has come to serve overwhelmingly to denote minorities of Third World origin. It is seldom applied to Europeans. To speak of 'immigration' in the context of the French media is therefore to speak primarily of minorities originating in former French colonies, above all Maghrebis (North Africans) and Sub-Saharan Africans who are distinguished from most of the majority ethnic population by skin colour and other somatic features and in many cases also by differences of cultural heritage.

During the 1990s, many mainstream politicians (excluding the extreme Right) tried to move the debate forward by speaking of 'integration' rather than of 'immigration'. At the same time, recognising that post-colonial immigrant minorities were now a structural feature of French society, the media made less use of the 'immigration' label while constructing a new journalistic category, that of the '*banlieues*'. As a number of researchers have shown, the refashioning of this term offers a particularly clear example of how the media can shape public perceptions of ethnicity even when not apparently addressing this issue directly. Until recently, the word '*banlieue*' was commonly applied to any suburban area in France, but during the last ten years heavy media usage has narrowed and, in an almost literal sense, coloured the term so that it now denotes socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods with a reputation for lawlessness containing dense concentrations of post-colonial minorities. As news events in other, more affluent suburbs containing fewer minority ethnic residents are not normally reported under the '*banlieue*' label, this has in practice become a byword for ethnic alterity and criminality. In this way, the French media have to a large extent replicated during the 1990s the kind of negatively connoted amalgam created by the British media during the 1970s in their treatment of 'inner-city' areas in the UK (Hall et al., 1978; Hargreaves, 1996; Boyer and Lochard, 1998; *Forum Français pour la Sécurité* Urbaine, 1999).

While 'immigration' and the '*banlieues*' continue to dominate the framing devices used by the French media in their treatment of migrants and minorities, their generally negative connotations

have been somewhat attenuated during the last few years by the growing use of a number of other labels. One of these is '*sans-papiers*', which in many (but not all) contexts has replaced 'clandestins' as a label for migrants who lack the necessary permits to reside legally in France. '*Sans-papiers*' has a far less sinister ring than '*clandestins*'. Its general adoption by the media during the mid-1990s in their reporting of the humanitarian crisis and protest movements triggered by the Pasqua laws of 1993[54] may have been one of the factors which has helped to slightly soften public opinion towards illegal immigrants (Rosello, 1998). Since 1997, the priority given by the Government to anti-discrimination initiatives and the escalating number of court cases brought by voluntary organisations such as SOS-Racisme against employers, night-club owners and others on the grounds of racial or ethnic discrimination have been reflected in growing media coverage of the unfair treatment suffered by migrants and minorities. Although there is as yet no reliable research on the effects of this, it is possible that the increasing prominence given to 'discrimination' as a media framing device may help to attenuate some of the negative connotations associated with 'immigration' and the '*banlieues*'. Another recent development, which has certainly worked in this direction, has been the prominent media coverage given to the minority ethnic origins of some of France's most successful sporting representatives, most obviously in the 1998 World Cup. Here, minority ethnic footballers such as Zinedine Ziddane were framed in a context of sporting success that was almost completely detached from the journalistic fields of 'immigration' and the '*banlieues*', and which by the same token implicitly served to undercut those more negative constructions of post-colonial minorities (Perotti, 1998).

4.6.2.3   ETHNIC CATEGORIES AND IMBALANCES

Public agencies in France have traditionally often refused to collect ethnically based data, on the grounds that this would be at odds

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54   These laws drastically tightened the regulations governing the admission of foreigners to France and prohibited the regularization of illegal immigrants. They resulted in numerous anomalies, including growing numbers of immigrants who could neither be regularized nor deported, as well as fierce protests over forcible deportations. The Pasqua laws were largely repealed in 1997.

with the 'republican' concept of integration and the associated project of national cohesion. In theory, the only distinction recognised by the state is that between French nationals and foreigners. When immigrants naturalise (as about a third of them do), they become part of the French nation and their foreign origins cease to have any legal significance. The same applies to the descendants of immigrants, most of whom automatically enjoy French citizenship. That at least is the theory. In reality, ethnically based distinctions frequently inform the behaviour of social actors, including media professionals.

Labels such as '*Maghrébins*' (North Africans) and '*Africains*' ('black' or sub-Saharan Africans) are commonly used, though they do not directly correlate with nationally defined boundaries. It is true that Maghrebis may in principle be defined as having their origins in a set of nationally defined states (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), but as the term is commonly applied not only to immigrants in the true sense, but also to second- and third-generation members of the minority ethnic population, almost all of whom are French nationals, it clearly signifies an ethnic category which is only indirectly related to the boundaries of formal citizenship. '*Maghrébin*' is often used more or less interchangeably with '*Arabe*', which is not in any sense nationally anchored. Both terms are commonly applied on the basis of physical appearance or others markers such as family names taken (not always correctly) to signify North African origins. Similarly, '*Africains*' are labelled as such primarily on the basis of skin colour. To a very large extent, post-colonial minorities are effectively defined as non-whites. While the French state officially refuses to recognise distinctions based on skin colour, in practice distinctions drawn in this way inform many aspects of media coverage as well as the everyday actions of many majority ethnic citizens, sizeable numbers of who engage in discriminatory practices against post-colonial minorities (Bataille, 1997; Haut Conseil à l'Intégration, 1998).

Media content analyses have shown that there are significant imbalances in media representations of different migrants and minorities. While the ethnic categories used in these studies may vary to a certain extent, making precise comparisons difficult, they

consistently show that migrants and minorities are underrepresented in certain media genres and overrepresented in others. In this respect, the CSA's recent analysis of prime time French television (CSA, 2000) differs little from the quantitative survey carried out almost a decade ago by the CIEMI on behalf of the state-funded *Association Rencontres Audiovisuelles* (ARA) (Perotti, 1991a; Hargreaves and Perotti, 1993). Both studies counted the frequency with which different migrant groups and minorities were seen during sample periods on France's main private and public service terrestrial TV channels. The results show that post-colonial minorities are overrepresented in news and current affairs coverage (where the main emphasis is on socially conflictual phenomena), while they are underrepresented in light entertainment programmes such as television quiz shows and sitcoms (where the atmosphere is generally more convivial).

The methodology used in the CSA report was based directly on that employed by the CIEMI almost ten years earlier, and the results were not very different. However, unlike the ARA, a relatively minor public agency which provided the funding for the CIEMI's 1991 report, the CSA is by far the most powerful public body in the French communications industry, with an explicit responsibility for setting standards and monitoring the performance of the nation's media operators. The CSA's decision to finance a quantitative study of the minority ethnic presence on French TV was deeply shocking to many proponents of France's official 'republican' discourse, who feared that it signaled a radical change in French media policy.

The CSA study operated on the basis of a few simple categories which, for the first time in a research project funded by a major agency of the French state, were explicitly referred to as 'visible minorities', a term borrowed from the anglophone world but operationalised in a combination of categories reflecting the specificities of France: 'Blacks', 'Maghrebis/Arabs' (the two terms were used as virtual synonyms), and 'Asians'. It found that while visible minorities could be seen in almost 40 per cent of news reports, they were present in very few French-made drama programmes. And the visible minorities who appeared in French drama and light entertainment programmes, such as music shows, were overwhelmingly 'Black', with Maghrebis/Arabs relegated to a very marginal pres-

ence, despite the fact that they are far more numerous than 'Blacks' among the general population of France. A similar pattern was found in TV commercials and other genres.

By their nature, news and current affairs coverage in both print and electronic media tends to concentrate on social conflicts, whereas television commercials and leisure-oriented genres such as travel or cookery pages in the press, TV and radio quiz shows, etc., generally revolve around more convivial activities. The disproportional presence of migrants and minorities in articles and programmes focusing on conflictual social phenomena tends therefore to mark them more negatively than the majority ethnic population, which is present across the full range of media genres, including those most directly geared towards convivial forms of social interaction.

Within the genres where they are most heavily present, migrants and minorities tend to be further disadvantaged by disproportionately heavy coverage of them in negatively connoted roles. The results of a content analysis of regional newspapers undertaken in the mid-1990s by the *Centre de Formation et de Perfectionnement des Journalistes* (Training and Skills Centre for Journalists) (Charon, Giroud and Villain, 1995) are in this respect similar to the findings of Seguret (1981) concerning the late 1970s. In press and other media reports, minority ethnic actors appear much more frequently in the roles of aggressors or defendants than as victims or plaintiffs. And in the sources drawn on by journalists, the voices of minority ethnic actors are generally underrepresented compared with those of majority ethnic actors, particularly those (such as the police and public officials) in positions of authority. Imbalances of this kind were very evident during media coverage of the so-called Islamic headscarf affairs (Perotti and Thépaut, 1990).

4.6.3 MEDIA EFFECTS

4.6.3.1 *CONFLICTING VIEWS*

Ever since the FN's electoral breakthrough in the mid-1980s, there has been an ongoing debate concerning the possible or actual role

of the media in shaping the level of popular support for the extreme Right. This and other aspects of the wider debate concerning the methods most likely to prove effective in combating the extreme Right are summarised by Taguieff (1995), who distinguishes seven main strategies: demonisation, silence, fellow-travelling, non-alliance, republican frontism, intellectual harassment and socio-economic intervention. Three of these revolve primarily around contrasting views concerning the effectiveness of different types of discourse and media coverage in the struggle against extreme Right racism. Those who demonise Le Pen believe that by maximising alarmist discourse about the FN with the aid of the media, they will succeed in turning the electorate away from the party. By contrast, those who argue in favour of saying nothing about Le Pen do so on the grounds that any publicity works to his benefit. Those who favour intellectual harassment put their hopes in reasoned arguments designed to demonstrate to the public via appropriate media coverage that the FN's ideology and policy platform are fatally flawed. No systematic research over a sustained period has yet been undertaken into the possible correlation between the amount and type of media coverage accorded to the FN and the party's electoral scores. The arguments, which have raged around this question, have been informed mainly by anecdotal evidence and/or gut feelings on the part of journalists and political analysts. Empirical evidence against which to test rival views is both fragmentary and mixed.

4.6.3.2   MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF 'IMMIGRATION' AS A BENEFIT FOR THE FN

My own review of the available evidence (Hargreaves, 2001) indicates a number of findings. Firstly, it seems clear that there is no direct correlation between the sheer quantity of media coverage accorded to the FN and the level of popularity enjoyed by the party. Since 1984, opinion pollsters have accumulated a run of data at regular intervals on the popularity of the FN and its leader. These indicate that support for Le Pen's ideas peaked in October 1991, when 32 per cent of those questioned said they agreed somewhat or completely with him (SOFRES, 1993, 1997). With print and broadcast news outlets dominated during much of the previous year by

the Gulf War and its aftermath, Le Pen had enjoyed relatively little media coverage in the months leading up to this poll. Shortly before it, however, leading figures in other parties had hit the headlines with inflammatory statements about the 'problem' of immigration (Perotti, 1991b; Perotti and Thépaut, 1991). It would appear therefore that media coverage of 'immigration' - which in the French context is journalistic shorthand for minorities of Third World, and more particularly Arab, origin - has been at least as if not more important as direct media access for the FN in generating support for the party.

Another example which supports this finding is the massive media coverage of the first Islamic headscarf affair in 1989 (Perotti and Thépaut, 1990), which culminated in the FN winning a parliamentary by-election in the town of Dreux, to the west of Paris, with 61 per cent of the second-round vote. The FN played a relatively minor role in the intensively reported - if not indeed media-created - headscarf affair (Gaspard and Khosrokhavar, 1995), in which the main voices relayed by the media were those of mainstream politicians and intellectuals who took up opposing positions on what virtually all agreed to be the 'problem' of Islam. In this and other instances, support for Le Pen's party has surged when the media have focused on anxieties aroused among the majority ethnic population by the presence of Arab and other Third World immigrants, without the FN necessarily being at the forefront of these stories.

4.6.4   ACTIONS TO PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND COMBAT RACISM

4.6.4.1   *THE FONDS D'ACTION SOCIALE (FAS)*

Until recently, there have been few high-level initiatives in France aimed at improving media handling of cultural diversity and combating racism. The institutional actor with the longest record of involvement in such initiatives is the *Fonds d'Action Sociale pour les travailleurs immigrés et leurs familles (FAS)*, the main public agency responsible for the 'integration' of immigrant minorities. Significantly, the FAS is not itself a media organisation. While the

FAS have attempted to influence the media from the outside, there has seldom been any comparable level of commitment within media organisations themselves. Moreover, the FAS's own policy has not always worked unequivocally towards a more culturally diverse society.

The FAS first began to commit funds in support of media projects during the 1970s, when it paid for a new television programme, '*Mosaïque*', broadcast on the state-owned channel FR3 (now renamed F3). As initially conceived, the programme had two main purposes: to help prepare immigrants and their descendants for repatriation by maintaining cultural links with their countries of origin and, while they remained in France, to help them adapt to the dominant culture. Neither objective aimed at making France a more multi-cultural society. During the 1980s, when repatriation was abandoned as an official policy objective, '*Mosaïque*' was replaced by new FAS-funded programmes, which now aimed at helping immigrant minorities to fit into French society, partly by presenting 'positive' images of them to majority ethnic viewers. These programmes attracted only tiny audiences, and were scrapped during the 1990s (Hargreaves, 1993). Today, the main TV programme financed by the FAS is *'Saga-Cités'*, a factual magazine that was created during the early 1990s with the aim of offering more 'positive' media images of the 'banlieues', partly by giving greater space to minority ethnic voices. Although 'Saga-Cités' generally enjoys a good reputation among minority ethnic viewers, it has been squeezed by F3 into late-night slots, generating low audience figures and thereby limiting its potential contribution to a more sensitive awareness of ethnic diversity among the majority ethnic population (Humblot, 2000).

4.6.4.2   THE CSA'S REPORT

In mainstream programming, minority ethnic professionals seldom occupy anything more than marginal roles. This very visible fact was the starting point for a piece of investigative reporting by Bosc and Sénécal (1995), which won the International Federation of Journalists' 1996 prize for the Celebration of Tolerance in Journalism, supported by the Council of Europe, the European

Commission and the International Media Working Group Against Racism and Xenophobia. Minority ethnic professionals (actors, journalists, etc.) interviewed by Bosc and Sénécal frequently complained that programme commissioners and producers were reluctant to give prominent roles to members of visible minorities and said that such work as they were offered was confined to ethnically stereotyped roles. Many of those interviewed asserted that programming controllers were worried that majority ethnic audiences would fall if minority ethnic professionals were given greater screen exposure.

Production Company and channel controllers interviewed by Bosc and Sénécal denied that there was any bias against minority ethnic professionals and claimed that their low on-air presence reflected a lack of suitably qualified or sufficiently talented minority ethnic candidates. In the absence of any system of ethnic monitoring concerning media employment practices, it was impossible to prove these claims one way or the other. Significantly, however, the interviews conducted among channel and production company controllers clearly revealed a general lack of commitment on their part to addressing this issue. Statements reflect the fact that, unlike a number of other countries such as the UK, where the BBC and other media organisations have introduced pro-active equal opportunities and training policies, there are no comparable measures in France designed to improve the recruitment of minority ethnic media professionals. This point was highlighted in the report of the EC-sponsored 'More Colour in the Media' project on minority ethnic employment in the television industry, coordinated by the European Institute for the Media in Düsseldorf (Ouaj, 1999).

It is only very recently that significant steps have been taken to shake the general indifference of senior media professionals towards these issues. Fundamental to the context in which these developments have occurred has been a major shift in the overall direction of public policy towards immigrant minorities, which since 1998 has accorded far greater priority than in the past to anti-discrimination initiatives. Spearheaded by Social Affairs Minister Martine Aubry and Interior Minister Jean-Piere Chevènement , this new thrust was backed by Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, who by

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1999 was calling on all Government ministries to identify clear lines of action designed to combat discrimination and improve the participation of migrants and minorities (Hargreaves, forthcoming). It was in this context that a newly formed pressure group called Collectif Egalité (*Equality Collective*), led by Camerounian-born novelist Calixthe Beyala, began campaigning for more and higher profile employment of minority ethnic professionals on French TV.

Hervé Bourges, President of the CSA, set up the CSA-sponsored research project on the representation of visible minorities on French TV and announced that he would consider requiring media organisations to represent migrants and minorities more fairly (Humblot and Labé, 1999). A few months later Trautmann's successor as Culture and Communications Minister, Catherine Tasca, announced that F2 and F3, France's main public service channels, would in future be required to take more fully into account France's ethnic and cultural diversity as well as the importance of combating racial discrimination. Almost simultaneously, the CSA said it was introducing similar requirements for privately owned TV channels (CSA, 2000b) and shortly afterwards it published a summary of the findings of its research project on TV representations of visible minorities (CSA, 2000a). The research findings attracted a barrage of mainly adverse media publicity (see, for example, Conan, 2000).

4.6.5   CONCLUSION

French public policy in relation to the media has been far more preoccupied with protecting the national language from English-language imports (mainly of American origin) than with the needs of migrants and minorities. These priorities are evident in a recent report on the media prepared for France's official planning agency (Dagnaud, 2000). The title of the report, *Médias: promouvoir la diversité culturelle* (Promoting Cultural Diversity in the Media), may appear superficially similar to that of the EUMC's own project on Racism and Cultural Diversity in the Media. But as commonly understood in the French policy-making community, promoting 'cultural diversity' means first and foremost protecting the French language in the face of the global domination of English. Minority ethnic cultures enjoy less protection. While the CSA's recent initia-

tives have begun to move the agenda forward, these developments are still fragile, and without a system of ethnic monitoring, it will be very difficult to make them effective.

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