

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
(EUMC)

by

European Research Centre
on Migration and Ethnic Relations
(ERCOMER)

Edited by Jessika ter Wal

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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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4.8 ITALY (IT)

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In the 1990s, Italian press coverage on immigration was dominated by negative themes of illegal immigration, crime, problems related to housing and ethnic relations, and political conflicts. The division between legal ('good') and illegal ('bad') immigrants often preceded the exclusion of immigrants from Italian 'territory', be it at the borders or in metropolitan areas. Indeed, the solution to the most prominent immigration problems were reported as public order and military-type interventions, which clearly did not favour a positive perception and attitude towards groups of people who gradually integrated into Italian society. Reports on racist violence often tended to minimise the acts or even hold the victims, or the group to which they belonged, somehow responsible; at the same time, editorialists claimed that 'racism' would decline if harsher immigration policies were introduced. Pernicious stereotypes were also identified in the coverage of Islam. Examples of less negative, neutral, or even positive coverage that approached the immigration issue from a different angle were found only rarely. Positive initiatives to combat racism and promote cultural diversity in the media are found especially among NGOs and radio at the local and (more marginally) national level. The Italian Federation of Journalists has also drawn up recommendations for reporting on ethnic issues and some journalists specialised in the field show a more than average awareness. The overall picture is one in which more opportunities for improvement still has to be created.

The report will first present general practices in newsmaking that were observed in a large number of the studies considered in the following sections. Then, the main themes and forms of portrayal are discussed on the basis of research published between 1995 and 2000. Finally, a short overview is given of actions to combat racism and promote cultural diversity in the media.

4.8.1 GENERAL MEDIA PRACTICES

Almost all the empirical studies on the Italian media (particularly press) coverage on immigration and racism published in 1995-2000 identified the recurrence of a number of general content features related to news making routines:

- The media rely heavily on the use of political and institutional sources in reporting on immigrants. This results in an emphasis on the political-institutional dimension, also when events have an impact primarily on everyday social relations at the local level.
- In the selection and definition of issues (such as specifying the numbers of immigrants present) media and politics work closely together and often jointly construct social alarm and consensus, and media more frequently justify than oppose official solutions to the 'immigration problem'.
- The media are oriented mostly towards covering political and social 'emergency situations', which leads to biased representations of immigrants and ethnic relations.
- The dependence on routine genres of political and crime news implies a certain degree of sensationalism (though not in all media) and leads to negative stereotypical portrayals of immigrants as marginal and deviant, without any attention to immigrants' daily lives. Sensationalism and distortion of facts is found most frequently in headlines reporting on negative aspects of immigration, such as reports on arrivals, housing problems, crime and problematic ethnic relations.
- Background reporting and investigations on the less visible (more positive and non-stereotypical) aspects of immigration or the underlying causes of social exclusion, hostility and particular forms of racism is completely missing or very scarce.
- The most widely used denominations for immigrants, even after ten years of coverage on the immigration issue, still emphasise their exclusion. The apparently neutral *extracomunitari* (also called the 'extra') and *clandestini* (illegal immigrants) define immigrants by what they are not (not EC and not legal) and acquire strongly negative connotations in most news contexts.

The empirical studies each report one or more of these general features of news making and their impact on the image of migrants, the debate on racism and the selection of immigration-related themes in Italian media reporting. The more concrete articulations and features of these themes and the media image of migrants, as well as their development over time are discussed in the following section.

4.8.2 MAIN THEMES AND PORTRAYAL

4.8.2.1 *THE IMMIGRANT 'THREAT' ON THE 'TERRITORY'*

One of the most prominent portrayals of immigrant issues in the early 1990s was related to coverage on housing problems. This issue hit the headlines only when popular protests against the presence of immigrants started to arise. This happened in particular after inadequate or missing policy responses to the settlement of immigrants in metropolitan areas, and in other coastal regions that faced a massive arrival of refugees. In the first three months of 1991, 26 per cent of the articles on immigration in major newspapers dealt with housing problems and in the first six months of 1991, 17.2 per cent of articles dealt with anti-immigrant acts (ter Wal, 1997)⁵⁵.

During this period an emblematic case was the coverage about the police interventions to displace a large informal immigrant settlement in Rome (ter Wal, 1996, 1997). The discourse of *La Repubblica*, the most widely read newspaper at the time, helped to construct an anti-immigrant consensus and provided a justification to the solution of the 'problem' in public order terms. First, the detailed descriptions of the miserable living conditions of the immigrants, and the focus on health and sanitary risks created an image of immigrants as a 'social pathology'. This negative representation

55 Based on a sample of the two most widely read newspapers, *La Repubblica* (liberal), and *Il Corriere della Sera* (conservative), and the alternative left-wing newspaper *Il Manifesto*. In the first three months of 1992, the percentage of articles dealing with anti-immigrant acts had increased to 24.5 per cent, and that for restrictive immigration policies to 18.2 per cent in these newspapers.

was reinforced by reports on clashes and violence within the immigrant community (e.g. between groups of African and Asian immigrants) and by headlines which frequently contained numbers specifying the growing proportion of 'undocumented' aliens and problems of deviance in the area. Added to this were expressions of overt hostility by 'locals' concerning the presumed negative economic effects and sanitary risks produced by the settlement, as well as the fear of a ('symbolic') take-over of the area by immigrants? Following the perspective of protesters, the press typically reproduced the idea that it was not the immigrants, but instead the poor people in the affected neighbourhoods who were the victims of the policies directed at regulating immigration and integration. Finally, immigrants were only given voice in a prominent way (e.g. in headlines) when they could be framed as posing demands, talking in an aggressive way, or expressing despair. They were generally not treated as credible or reliable news sources.

Most importantly, the intensification of police checks on the immigrants and their eventual eviction coincided with the outbreak of the Gulf war. Hence, official statements that associated the settlement with a concrete war-threat and security risks articulated and channelled a widespread anti-Arab sentiment. In the end, the 'bad' (illegal) immigrants were separated from the 'good' ones, the former were expelled and the latter segregated, with the excuse that this would root out the causes for an intolerance problem in the Capital (ter Wal, 1996).

An analysis of local press coverage in the Emilia Romagna region for three months in 1991 yielded more positive findings (Grossi, 1995a). The author observed: a constructive institutional response; less attention to public order interventions and popular protest (as opposed to most studies with other samples); a neutral perspective on immigration, with the exception of a more negative attitude towards Albanians; the absence of pejorative denominations such as '*vù cumprà*'⁵⁶ and the rare use of the term 'blacks'; a predomi-

56 This derogatory term stems from the early discourses on immigration and is a dialectic or badly pronounced version of '*vuoi comprare*', which means 'do you want to buy', a reference to the first African (esp. Senegalese) immigrants who settled in Italy and mainly started working as street vendors. See also Rivera (1997).

nance of articles with a positive but pragmatic view on cohabitation with respect of ethnic and cultural diversity; more reports on supportive (local) institutional actions than on repressive (national) institutional measures. From a comparison with national press coverage in the same period, Grossi (1995b) concluded that the local (Emilia Romagna) press offered a more positive picture of immigration. The former used stereotypical distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' immigrants and expressed a fear of 'their' difference from 'us', particularly in international news and representations of Islam. The sample is really too small to draw any conclusions, and at the time the number of immigrants in the region and in Italy was low. Nevertheless, Grossi's aim is to show that the local dimension may allow for more positive portrayals, especially when migrant integration is met with positive institutional support⁵⁷. The author notes that media picked up these positive frames, but unfortunately did not actively promote them in other contexts where cohabitation turned out to be problematic.

In the period 1990-95 and beyond, anti-immigrant protests and political and public order interventions were a favoured press theme (Belluati, 1998; Dal Lago, 1999; Maneri, 1995, 1998a; Mazzara, 1998). Besides the authorities, protest committees became preferential sources for news coverage on the management of housing and public order problems (Belluati, 1998; Maneri, 1995, 1998a). Maneri reconstructed the reports on 'law and order' issues in 1988-1990 and 1992-93, and found that these followed a typical 'script' of alarm construction and acquiescence (Maneri, 1995). In a study on anti-immigrant campaigns in Milan, Maneri (1998b) claims that police tend to increasingly legitimise their actions by appealing to common sense and public 'requests', rather than by referring to definitions by other elite actors. Also, in the production of news the police are found to tune into the expectations of the news-making industry, whereas journalists tend to reformulate information received from the police, at the same time

57 At the time the region of Emilia Romagna was among the first to witness a partial integration of immigrants in the registered labour market (for example in factory work) as opposed to the largely informal and unregistered employment of immigrants in central and southern Italy.

reproducing and partly (re)shaping common sense perceptions and opinions. That they also do without police information altogether, results from the observation that it is the journalists who often take the initiative to 'invent' stories on illegal settlements and anti-immigrant mobilisation. Media reporting thus becomes an - biased because self-fed - indicator for public unrest, which is however used by the police to measure the seriousness of the situation. While keeping to their own institutional goals and instrumental ends, some of the official actors - prone to reciprocal pressures and discursive influences - thus unconsciously collaborate in the criminalisation of migrants.

Belluati (1998) analysed the local coverage on neighbourhood mobilisations against immigrants and petty crime in the *San Salvario* district of Turin by the newspapers *La Stampa*⁵⁸ and *La Repubblica* from 1990 until September 1995. The author shows how journalists helped to construct a social alarm and provoked feelings of insecurity among the population, by reporting shopkeepers' statements about the lack of security and public order, and the drug traffic in the area. In the press reports, immigrants were blamed for a presumed increase in petty crime and represented as trespassers who had taken over 'territory' that by right belonged to 'us'. They were also held responsible for increasing urban decay and declining living conditions in the area, and thus became the scapegoats for pre-existing problems and frustrations, which their presence had only made more visible (Belluati, 1998).

In 1995, the press also covered and supported mobilisations against Roma settlements in various cities: demonstrations and popular referenda were organised mainly by right-wing parties⁵⁹.

58 *La Stampa*, owned by the Rizzoli group (Fiat) is based in Turin. It has a moderately conservative orientation.

59 The coverage on these mobilisations (in among other cities Florence, Rome, Turin and Genoa) overlapped with peaking media coverage in autumn 1995, which resulted in an 'alarm' over immigrant crime and urban insecurity. This alarm combined well with the discourse on the introduction of a new immigration policy, that also contained measures to expel immigrants who had committed crimes and to crack down illegal immigration (an aspect emphasised by the media). All this created a juxtaposition of the phenomena of illegal immigration and immigrant crime (Ghirelli and Valenti, 1996; Naldi, 2000).

Basagni (1998) analysed the coverage on this issue in Tuscany (Florence and other cities), in the period July 1995-June 1996⁶⁰. In reporting about local opposition to new Roma encampments, newspaper headlines fuelled an unjustified alarm by using the language of war, revolt and embattled cities and a framework of conflict. Similarly, the superlatives used in 1996 press accounts to describe Roma camps, in Rome and other parts of Italy, compared Roma people to a social pathology, a contagion that might corrupt the urban area. This led to calls for action in the form of police checks, defences, arrests, and other hard line interventions (Delle Donne, 1998).

4.8.2.2 THE CRIMINALISATION OF IMMIGRANTS

The association of immigrants with (petty) crime is not surprising given the number of articles published on this issue.

- On the basis of an analysis of articles published in nine dailies *between 15 February and 15 May 1992*, De Florio La Rocca (1995) found that journalists pay attention to foreigners mostly when they are involved in *crime*, either as victims or more frequently as aggressors or criminals.
- During *July 1992 - June 1993*, 47 per cent of articles from six different dailies dealt with either crimes committed by immigrants or public order interventions on immigrants (Maneri, 1995, 1998c)⁶¹. Only eight per cent treated episodes of racist violence.
- A headline analysis of newspapers in the Rome area by Bracalenti and Rossi (1998) found that prevalent themes during the period *May - July 1996* were crime (26 per cent), the exploitation of minors (11 per cent), and prostitution (7 per cent)⁶². In general, positive themes were under-repre-

60 Basagni (1998) examined the coverage in one left-wing party newspaper (L'Unità), one conservative local paper (La Nazione) and one liberal daily (La Repubblica).

61 Selecting only the first week of each month, the author analysed articles from seven national dailies from July 1992 to June 1993: Il Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Giornale, L'Indipendente, L'Unità, and Il Manifesto. The conclusions in Maneri (1998c) exclude the discourse of Il Manifesto, which is alternative and pro-immigrant.

62 From 17 different newspapers 396 articles concerning the area of Rome were analysed.

sented. *The total of articles about security and public order themes was 46 per cent.*

- A semantic analysis on the coverage about the Roma in two mainstream quality newspapers, *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera* for the year 1996 found that the only news genre reporting about them was that of '*cronaca*'. That is, reports about violence, marginalisation, lawbreaking, deviant or unacceptable moral behaviour (Delle Donne, 1998).
- In 1991-92, news discourse tended to represent the criminal or deviant actions of immigrants as a natural propensity of the group as a whole, and in editorial comments and headlines, skin colour was explicitly associated with danger and crime (ter Wal, 1997).
- The majority of crime reports specified the origin or (legal) status of immigrants. However, these details were often not mentioned when immigrants were the victims of crime. The press often referred to the status of illegal immigrant as an element of deviance in itself. The media also frequently initiated 'special' issue coverage on crime in metropolitan areas (Maneri, 1998a).

Following the UK research on 'moral panics' (Hall et al, 1978), Maneri (1998ab) claimed that media interaction with privileged sources, such as politicians, intellectuals, church representatives, the police, the judiciary, and protest committees, helped to reproduce a 'common sense' perception of immigrants as 'miserable deviants' and as the primary source of urban insecurity. The newspapers not only built 'moral panics' about the perceived emergence of so-called 'new' types of crime caused by immigration, they also provided protesters with the language and expressions that offered a concrete, 'objectifying' and often simplified description for an otherwise complex reality (Maneri, 1998a).

Newspaper accounts often alleged that immigrant children and women were ill treated and used as slaves by their fellow countrymen. Vehbiu and Devole (1996: 175) report one particular case where, in their opinion, such negative reports were used instrumentally to discredit Albania on the occasion of an official visit of

the Albanian president to Italy. Negative stereotypes about Roma people, and in particular, children reduced to slavery, were also frequently found in the Italian press (Delle Donne, 1998), and were not always dismissed. Indeed, they were sometimes reinforced by official statements (ter Wal, 1997).

Dal Lago (1999) analysed the press discourse for the period after 1995. He found that the association of immigrants with crime became particularly prominent in 1997-98 (Dal Lago, 1999: 72). The ethnic, national or racial backgrounds constituted a constant reference in the depiction of migrants stopped or arrested for an infraction or criminal offence. Each ethnic group thus became associated with a petty crime 'specialisation'; for example, the image of Moroccan and Tunisian men was juxtaposed with that of potential drugs dealers, that of African (Nigerian) women was linked to (potential) prostitutes. These generalisations produced a process of 'racialisation' in the representation of immigrants and crime by which deviant actions were represented as the inherent features of an entire group.

In addition, Dal Lago found that the representations of deviance and crime, for example of Albanian refugees, did not need any factual basis; the media transformed non-existent 'facts' into indicators of social risk whenever foreigners were concerned. A striking example was an article that used the depiction of one Albanian immigrant to generalise about 'suspicious' behaviour of 'illegal immigrants' with cell phones, 'Many illegal immigrants have a cell-phone and do not even bother to hide it. Some even use it to talk to who knows who ...', (*La Repubblica*, 11 September 1997, quoted in Dal Lago, 1999).

The campaigns against immigrants were favoured particularly in the summer season, when political news is slow and the difference between 'us' and 'them' is experienced in a different dimension, that of 'our' beach tourism and immigrants' work. In the summer of 1996, the local press of Rimini launched a distorting campaign against immigrant beach vendors. The headlines and reports suggested that all immigrants were engaged in illegal activities, were organised into a violent 'army' that had attacked and assaulted the

beach resort along with those who tried to stop them (Riccio, 1997). In the summer of 1997, the situation got even worse as the press launched special coverage on sexual crimes in Rimini, describing these with extreme repulsion while reproducing stigmatising images of immigrants. Consequently, intervention against the danger of immigrants' deviance was justified by the media and politicians, this time without the mobilisation of popular protests (Dal Lago, 1999).

Maneri (1998b) compared the local press coverage on sexual crimes in Rimini and Bologna⁶³. He found that exaggerated press coverage suggested a particular pattern and increase in the occurrence of sexual crimes committed by immigrants. This resulted in heightened public 'alarm', which was maintained and extended by searching for more information and reports on similar cases.

Only in the case of Rimini did the coverage lead to the construction of a moral panic by media and local politicians. Strikingly, the most prominent theme in the Rimini coverage was that of 'immigrants', so that the 'violence emergency' was extended to an 'immigrant emergency' *tout court*. The Rimini press focused exclusively on reports where the perpetrators were immigrants (e.g. 'Russians', 9 August 1997; 'Moroccans', 11 August 1997; 'Moroccan', 12 August 1997). The headlines and reports ignored facts about sexual offences by Italian and EU citizens; for instance, while assessing the 'escalation' of violence or counting the number of crimes, only those committed by immigrants were included. Moreover, with the extension of the coverage to the general immigration issue, other news items were reported only because they represented immigrants as criminals and thus added new examples to what was considered the 'issue of the month'. Also, the solutions subsequently proposed revealed that in Rimini, the aim was first of all to identify suspects and combat the 'immigration danger'⁶⁴ rather than to

63 Maneri selected the coverage in *La Repubblica*, *Mattina*, and *Il Resto del Carlino* (edition of Bologna) for the period April-July 1997, and the editions of Rimini for *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Mattina* and *Il Resto del Carlino* for the period July-August 1997. His analysis focused on cycles in event coverage and the semantics of headlines.

64 The local authorities introduced police checks, lights on beaches at night, special permits for legal immigrants and faster expulsion measures for illegal ones.

offer specific solutions to the problem of sexual violence. Instead, the Bologna reports focused more on the position of the victims and on (the lack of) public safety. The focus on the victims' perspective, also in the solutions proposed, indicated the influence of women's organisations and associations on the definition of the issue (Maneri, 1998b). The results of this study seem to suggest that a definition of the issue in negative terms and its explanation (as if caused exclusively by immigration) depended primarily on source use, as well as on the general political and news context.

In January 1999, reporting on a series of murder cases against bar and tobacco shop tenants in Milan indicated that negative media frames had obtained greater space and become more vicious. The murders were immediately represented as the consequence of a too lenient immigration policy and the inability of the police to fight 'new' (immigrant) crime, before it was even known who the culprits were (in one case they were Italian and in another the suspects were of Southern Italian origin). Ironically, however, solidarity organisations had to prove that these murders were not the results of fights between immigrant gangs. With these events, the immigrant crime genre that had been developed in routine news coverage over the previous seven years acquired front-page status. The RAI1 talk show *Porta a Porta* (13 January 1999), dedicated to these events, was entitled 'Crime emergency', but again, touched mainly upon immigration issues, as if this link was somehow implicit in the word 'crime' itself (Maneri, 1999).

4.8.2.3 THE ARRIVAL OF IMMIGRANTS

Ghirelli (1999) marks out the contradiction between the television images of immigrants as objects of social exclusion with an unstable temporary position and the reality that more and more immigrants integrate into Italian society. Moreover, the press speaks of immigrants' arrival using a military imagery. Immigrants 'invade', hardly ever arrive alone, but are part of an 'army' or 'hordes' with vague connotations of barbarity. This applies in particular to illegal immigrants, but legal immigrants are also sometimes represented in this way. For example, with the arrival of Albanians, war metaphors were used, as well as water metaphors comparing

immigration to a natural disaster: a 'flux' and 'floods' that had to be stopped (*La Repubblica*, 7 March 1991); 'no end to the river of people' and 'city on the verge of drowning' (*Il Corriere*, 9 March 1991); another city 'submerged by 2,600 refugees' (*La Repubblica*, 14 June 1991). Such descriptions of immigrants that concentrate on the impersonal and the uncountable, are typically followed by (and actually justify) actions to 'close the tap and dry the water', or 'embank the flood' suggesting an agency capable of stopping the natural disaster (ter Wal, 1999). Also in 1997, the same headlines popped up again with words like 'the nightmare of the invasion', 'alarm', 'chaos', 'damages to tourist industry', 'risk of epidemics', suggesting the arrival of people from a war-torn country where there are no rules (Devole, 1997). With the use of these invasion metaphors, subsequent military interventions could be justified, since the 'invasion' needed to be blocked.

The Albanian issue

The most exemplary case of a media panic over the arrival of 'illegal immigrants' is formed by the Albanian refugee crises of 1991 and 1997. Many studies are very critical of the role played by political institutions, and the legitimisation of their actions given by the media in this affair. As of March 1991, and for the following six months, newspaper headlines and front pages were dominated by news about the arrival of large numbers of refugees from Albania (ter Wal, 1997; 1999). Although initially the 'boat people' were welcomed and commiserated with, soon after the press adopted the official discourse, which changed their denomination from 'refugees' in that of 'illegal immigrants'. Similarly, public attitudes voiced by the press changed from an initially somewhat benevolent attitude towards the 'brothers' from neighbouring Albania to overt hostility by the summer of 1991. By then, the Albanians were represented as an ungrateful, unreliable, disloyal, violent, criminal and lazy folk. The Italian government used economic arguments (of economic superiority) and the negative behaviour of some Albanians to justify the decision to send new emigrants back home and to assist Albanians 'in their own country' (ter Wal, 1999). Even ordinarily progressive media and editorialists joined in the anti-Albanian chorus (ter Wal, 1997). Albanians were associated with

assaults, crime, thefts, deception, Mafia practises and prostitution, also evident in the news discourse of the following years (Vehbiu and Devole, 1996). Even documentaries and magazine articles on Albania published in 1994-95, despite notable exceptions, tended to emphasise the distance between the two countries and the differential traits of Albanians, for example, by presenting them as presumed illiterates or victims of a sort of tribal culture (Vehbiu and Devole, 1996).

The social alarm built around the 1991 arrivals flared up again in the spring and summer of 1997 as a new 'invasion' of Albanians was registered by the media (Devole, 1997; 1998)⁶⁵. A research group at the University of Rome published a report on the coverage of events in January-April 1997 (Pozzi, 1997)⁶⁶. The authors concluded that the Italian State (including the Italian army and Foreign Ministry) used this issue for political self-legitimation *vis-à-vis* Europe. The attention paid to the political indeed exceeded that on humanitarian considerations. The Albanian tragedy was represented not from a personalised perspective, but at an abstract social level which maintained a safe distance between 'us' and 'them'. The media stressed the few possibilities for change in Albania, represented as a passive 'patient' that needed an Italian (humanitarian) cure. The researchers further noticed that besides the discourse on 'invasion', little attention was given to episodes of intolerance towards Albanians. After the events of 1997, the arrival of refugees - such as those from Kurdistan and Kosovo in the summer of 1998 - was still referred to as an 'invasion' (Perrone, 1998) and this time even falsely identified as the entry of 'illegal immigrants' (Pittau, 2000).

65 During the spring of 1997, increasing financial and political crises faced Albania; this situation unleashed an armed revolt, a massive disorder that was represented by the media as a situation of 'civil war' and complete chaos. It also produced an ongoing flight towards neighbouring Italy: in the first six days, 10,619 Albanians crossed the Adriatic Sea to land in the South of Italy. On 29 March 1997, 83 refugees died in a collision between an Albanian refugee-boat and a corvette of the Italian Marine (Pozzi, 1997). In April 1997 the Italian government, motivated also by internal political (electoral) motives, decided to take the lead in a military humanitarian mission (Operation Alba) (Perlmutter, 1998).

66 Analysing articles published in six national dailies, three regional newspapers, and three weeklies, representative of different readership.

4.8.2.5 REPRESENTATIONS OF ISLAM

A study commissioned by the Italian public television RAI examined the media coverage of events and themes related to Islam (both in Italy and abroad), from September 1992 until May 1993 (Marletti, 1995)⁶⁷. The quantitative analysis of this material showed a large number of interventions, in particular in news casts, but of very short duration, and related to political events of the day. Longer (more in-depth) news services, which allowed for proper information or an analysis of the problems concerned, were rare, and the few ethnographic or religious programmes were confined to marginal time slots. The contents of the short news interventions was almost entirely restricted to the close relationship between religion and politics, producing images of 'fundamentalism' (a word which recurred with extreme frequency), fanaticism of threatening crowds, instigated by charismatic and aggressive leaders, and the dictatorial denial of rights, in particular to women. Entirely absent were historical, economic, social, and cultural analyses.

The result was a very poor message based on stereotypical simplifications: Arabs and Muslims were treated (mentioned) without distinction, Islam was depicted as an Arabic tribal religion, and its global dimension was denied. Generalisations were used which did not acknowledge the variety and complexities of situations within and between different Islamic countries. News discourse perpetuated the colonialist image of Islamic peoples as backward, traditional, outside history, and blocked. When they did acquire aspects of modernity, it was shown that they were incapable of managing it. From this treatment emerged an incapacity on the part of the Italian culture to comprehend the widespread reach of Islam; reduced to an obscure and threatening ideology, completely extraneous and alternative to the enlightened secularity of the West (Marletti, 1995).

67 This included broadcasting during all hours of the national programming on the three channels of RAI, three channels of private (Berlusconi-owned) Fininvest channels (Rete4, Canale5, and Italia1), and the private-owned Telemontecarlo (TMC), including news and fiction programmes, commercials, talk shows and entertainment. Besides television programmes, a collection of articles from the main newspapers and two weeklies, *Espresso* and *Panorama*, were also examined.

Another study on the image of Islam, commissioned by the Italian Ministry of Social Affairs, largely confirmed Marletti's findings (Soravia, 2000)⁶⁸. The common perception of the Islamic world (in particular after the fall of the Berlin wall) was one of an enemy that could only resolve problems through use of force and warfare. Violence was thus presented as a constituent element of Islam. In addition, the study identified media representations of Islam as incompatible with any form of democracy, anti-feminist, repressive, reactionary, and so on. Soravia also denounced the use of ethnicity or citizenship references in headlines reporting facts about crime. Reports about immigration were also associated with anti-illegal immigrant and in particular, anti-Islamic mobilisations by the *Lega Nord*⁶⁹. Although the party's position was treated unfavourably by most media, rather than opposing the *Lega Nord* outright, by correcting their claims with more precise background information, for example, reporters chose a less direct method, using irony or reporting the reproaches of others (e.g. by church representatives) to criticise campaign organisers, who, in turn, were accused of generalising on the basis of single and sometimes dubious (crime) events.

4.8.2.6 RACIST VIOLENCE IN THE PRESS⁷⁰

The coverage about incidents of racist violence increased sharply in autumn and winter 1991-92 (Demichelis, 1995; ter Wal, 1997). The phenomenon and its perpetrators - so-called 'Nazi skinheads' - were closely analysed and debated, and the (anti-racist) response and analyses of Italian society and authorities was given ample coverage. Demichelis (1995)⁷¹ found that the press concentrated on factual reporting about the acts of Nazi skinheads, and that journalists

68 Using methods of content analysis, Soravia and his team analysed the coverage of main TV news and current affairs programmes, radio programmes and four among the most widely read national and six regional newspapers for the period 15 January - 1 April 1999. Overall, they found more reports on Islam in the press than on television.

69 This political party of the populist radical right has been defending the independence northern Italy and since 1995, is heavily mobilising against immigrants.

70 A few quantitative studies, which used the press as empirical sources to examine the incidence of racist violence in Italy in 1994-1996, are not considered here, because they did not deal with the role of the media and their results were unreliable (Buso, 1996, 1997; Gentiloni, 1995; Manconi, 1995; Saccà and Marinelli, 1996).

refrained from investigating about the neo-Nazi and skinhead sub-culture from the inside, e.g. through interviews or comparisons with (the history of) these movements elsewhere in Europe.

Initially, reports focused on racist violence as being a phenomenon that was widespread abroad⁷². The coverage on the problem of racist violence in Italy peaked in November 1992 as a result of the proposal of a new law aimed at banning the organisations responsible for propagating racist violence and anti-Semitism. This proposal led to an intense debate about what the roots of the problem were and how these could best be opposed. Journalists mostly reported authoritative opinions about the political weight of the movement and the political area to which it could be assigned, rather than investigating the motivations of the groups themselves (Demichelis, 1995).

An analysis of the debate on the 'Nazi skinheads' issue in the national press during November-December 1992 showed the contradictory positions in mainstream news discourse (ter Wal, 1997)⁷³. Although widespread concern was voiced about a reemergence of right-wing radicalism and anti-Semitism, editorials suggesting that immigration restrictions were the right answer to racism were published without any further comment or criticism (ter Wal, 1997). What is more, the view that such restrictions would avoid the situations that gave way to the racist excesses, - namely, illegal and irregular immigration, and the social distress caused by it, - was repeated by replies signed by the chief editor of *La Repubblica* in the letter section. It is paradoxical that the very victims of racist violence were thus in a way claimed to be the cause of the trouble.

71 Demichelis analysed coverage in two national newspapers, *La Stampa* for the north and *La Repubblica* for central Italy, two political newspapers, the right-wing *Il Giornale* and the left-wing *Il Manifesto*, and two weeklies (*Panorama* and *Espresso*) for the period September 1992 - January 1993.

72 Confirmed also for television in Belluati (1995).

73 The newspaper sample consisted of right-wing politically affiliated dailies (*Il Giornale* and *L'Indipendente*), two conservative papers (*Il Tempo* and *Il Corriere della Sera*), three 'mainstream' or 'liberal' newspapers (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, *La Stampa*, and *La Repubblica*) and two left-wing ones (*L'Unità* and *Il Manifesto*).

The study also signalled a political polarisation between those supporting and those opposing the anti-Nazi skinheads bill. Right-wing newspapers and editorialists denied the existence of organised racist violence in Italy and dismissed that the attackers were inspired by neo-Nazi or fascist ideologies. They thus refuted the necessity of the bill with this denial, which they enacted through the redefinition and mitigation of racism, the use of understatement, excuses and justification in talk about the Nazi skinheads, the use of immigrants as scapegoats, and accusations and counter-attacks aimed at political opponents. Instead, officials presented Italy as the positive example, by presenting the new anti-racist legislation, expressing support for anti-racist demonstrations and programmes, and stating that the situation in Germany was more serious while in Italy things were basically under control (ter Wal, 1997).

According to Dal Lago (1999), in 1995-96 the press often ignored or minimised racist aggressions and murders. In fact, these incidents were represented as 'accidents' or treated as part of routine crime coverage that did not warrant special attention. In addition, authorities often questioned the racist nature of aggressions. Journalists underestimated the incidents, and introduced contextual factors, which criminalised (or blamed) the victims, for example, by reporting official statements that interpreted a racist murder as 'the tragic conclusion of a fight between drunken men'⁷⁴. Press articles also tended to downplay the seriousness of the facts and the role of racism in these, for example, by publishing statements made by the police or relatives of the aggressors (rather than the victims)⁷⁵. Similarly, the report on a Roma child who was shot dead by a police officer while in custody was represented in such a way that the Roma were blamed ('condemned to death by his parents', *La Stampa*, 4 September 1995). On these and other occasions, the

74 This happened with a fatal attack in Turin in July 1997 against a Moroccan man, reported by Dal Lago (1999: 37).

75 However, in 1992 a *La Repubblica* editorial criticised the light sentences meted out to a group of presumed Nazi skinheads or hooligans who were convicted of viciously attacking two North-African men. The news on the attack itself coincided with a national anti-racist demonstration and had received widespread media and political attention (ter Wal, 1997).

press thus supported the denial of 'our' responsibility in these 'accidents'. Similarly, on TV news attacks against immigrants were sometimes ignored completely or the racial motivation of such crimes was dismissed (Belluati, 1995).

4.8.2.7 *ATTITUDES TOWARDS RACISM AND ANTI-RACISM*

The opinions among Italian social scientists about the orientation of media on racism and anti-racism are highly divergent. On the basis of one analysis it is claimed that media has been indifferent towards 'xenophobia' (Dal Lago, 1999), while in another essay the indifference of media towards the 'social stress' endured by ordinary citizens is denounced and attributed to the increasing presence of immigrants (Marletti, 1998). The two authors thus adopt a different interpretation of xenophobia, but they agree, however, that the conduct of the media has helped to fuel more racism, without giving any consistent empirical material to sustain this claim. Some research groups, such as the one guided by Marletti, start from basic assumptions about the legitimate 'existence' of 'social distress' or 'conflict' caused by immigration, and argue that the media cannot ignore this 'fact'⁷⁶. This distinguishes them from other researchers who believe that these 'moral panics' are constructed by the media and do not just exist 'out there' but are largely the result of selective media representations and bias towards negative events associated with immigration (Maneri, 1995; ter Wal, 1997). Alternatively, Marletti claims that stereotypes are reinforced by media routines and rhetorical 'pseudo-thematisations' which fail to raise the problems experienced in inter-ethnic relations as social and political 'issues' which are debated at length in the public arena.

76 An example of this thesis is found in Marletti (1998). Similarly, the research by Cotesta (1998, 1999a,b) uses media contents to examine and classify different forms of 'ethnic conflict'. In his view, the coverage during the years 1991-97 has seen an increase in 'ethnic conflict'. Over time the media increasingly identified the cause of these 'conflicts' in deviance, whereas 'conflicts' over housing and jobs actually decreased. The author also observed that conflicts of identity increasingly became important in the newspaper sample, as opposed to conflicts based on materialistic needs. The nature of the conceptual framework adopted in this research is prone to reproducing negative beliefs about the effects of immigration on host societies, which makes it unreliable in my view. On the other hand, Cotesta's work for the most part confirms findings from earlier studies concerning the media's construction of positive 'us' vs. negative 'them' dichotomies.

Regarding the definition of racism used in the media, Dal Lago (1999) holds that new forms of racism are not recognised as such. Instead, new racism is often legitimised in the media, and given that racism is limited to the notion of biological superiority, anti-racism is declared the motivation even when harsh measures and police controls against immigrants are enacted. According to ter Wal (1997), the frequent explanation and labelling of the early 1990s protest mobilisations in political discourse in terms of 'war between the poor' has several functions:

- racism is defined mainly as popular (a racism of the lower classes);
- the causes of racism are sought in 'relative deprivation' and a 'competition over scarce resources';
- elite representatives can present themselves as non- or anti-racist, when the problem to be faced was the 'reactions of the people' and not more complex structural causes.
- the word 'war' suggests that there are two parties (immigrants and 'the people') involved in a conflict, when in reality there was a one-sided mobilisation against immigrants which victimised the immigrants only.

The media reproduced these definitions, as well as theories of 'tolerance thresholds', which claim that after a certain number is reached ('too many'), intolerance towards immigrants is inevitable. The media 'alarms' built around popular protests provided legitimisation of policy measures that, in turn, could be presented as a response to the 'will of the people' and a need to acquiesce alarm.

Belluati (1995) identified three different forms of anti-racism in television coverage in February 1992⁷⁷. First, a 'facile anti-racism' was observed in defensive reactions to reports on the violation of immigrants' rights, responses that only proclaimed anti-racism without researching the problem. This approach dominated in both routine and factual news reporting. Second, an ideological anti-racism was

77 Belluati reviewed three weeks coverage of evening news services, information and news background services of the three RAI, three Fininvest and TeleMontecarlo channels.

identified in the increasingly overt condemnation of racism and xenophobia in media that stressed the positive effects of immigration, and solidarity organisations' and civil society's initiatives to promote cultural diversity. A third form of 'cautious anti-racism' was applied to cases where actors were more reluctant to openly level charges of racism when discussing everyday social tensions, criminality, the defence of economic, institutional or territorial resources. In this case the information was ambivalent and moved between expressions of compassion towards the victims of racism, and sensationalist formats in stories about immigrant criminality. Also in accusations of racism, journalists reported generalising claims starting from individual stories, which they tended to dramatise so that objectivity was completely lost. Even in talk shows and current affair programmes sensationalism prevailed over in-depth analyses of events. Nevertheless, the author mentioned a certain degree of normalisation as immigrants appeared more often as participants in the news and in entertainment programmes and background images.

Modest signs of a positive pro-immigrant stance are observed in reports on the preparation of a new policy introduced in 1998 by the left-wing government, and in voices of active defence of immigrants by (a large part) of the Catholic Church (Caritas, bishops, priests), reported by the media (Pittau, 1999). The need to attract immigrant labour and the positive contribution of immigrants to Italian society was emphasised in reports in support of the new political directions taken. However, these have also generated scepticism and opposition both in the media and politics. Hence, the political polarisation around the issue, as well as the press campaigns against illegal immigrants and petty crime in metropolitan areas, the increasingly harsh mobilisations of the *Lega Nord*, and the sensationalist reporting on new arrivals continued to be prominent press themes in 1998-99 (Pittau, 1999).

4.8.3 INITIATIVES TO COMBAT RACISM AND PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY

4.8.3.1 JOURNALISTS' AWARENESS AND CODES OF PRACTICE

In a press code of 1993, the '*Carta dei doveri del giornalista*', the National Press Federation adopted the principle of non-discrimination 'on the basis of 'race', religion, sex, colour, physical or mental conditions, and political opinions' (Naldi, 2000: 143). However, it does not explicitly forbid these. Moreover, it states that 'the non-discriminatory, pejorative and inferiorising reference to these characteristics of the private sphere of persons is admitted only when relevant for public interest' (*ibid*). The 'relevance for public interest' is of course open to multiple interpretations.

A joint declaration of journalists and the Ministry of Social Affairs, containing 'Recommendations for a non-racist information', was presented at the National Press Federation on 21 March 1996. Referring back to the principles of other press codes, this list contained the usual recommendations to avoid (unintentional) discrimination, which are found in many press codes in other nations. Particularly noteworthy are the recommendations based on concrete examples, such as the usage of 'Italian' rather than 'our language', and the avoidance of expressions such as 'the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and the immigrants' as if the latter were not members of the neighbourhood too. It is also recommended that journalists question prejudiced or racist opinions and avoid giving the impression that the majority shares these attitudes, thus inadvertently giving resonance or legitimisation to racist slogans and statements. Italian journalists evidently ignore the existing indications, but it remains difficult for NGOs to hold newspapers legally responsible for false reports when there are no other legal mechanisms to enforce the code (Ghirelli, 1995).

4.8.3.2 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

The Florence-based organisation COSPE (*Cooperazione allo sviluppo dei paesi emergenti*, Development Cooperation for Developing Countries) has launched and continues to develop numerous initiatives to promote cultural diversity in the media, also by linking with other NGOs in the field at the national and international level (Cospe, 2001). For example, in 2000, a course on social communication trained migrants in the production of multilingual media. Participants produced the first two issues of a multilingual newspaper, and contributed to the production of the radio programme *Mondo Babele* (World of Babylon), a special service for migrants which is broadcast every Saturday afternoon on *Controradio* (Counteradio), a local Florence station, and on eight other stations which cover the entire Tuscany region.⁷⁸

A second project, supported by the Regional Council of Tuscany, was aimed at promoting equal opportunities in communication, information and public services for a multicultural and multilingual society. As part of this project, named *Parlamondo* (World Talk), COSPE conducted a survey on information demand and supply for migrants.^{79 80}

Finally, COSPE is one of the NGOs managing the project *Radio MMC 2000*, an independent Internet radio, which produces programmes in 20 languages with the focus on news and current affairs, interviews, and documentaries⁸¹. It is based on a network of radio stations in Spain, Sweden and Italy (the aforementioned *Controradio*), and NGOs in several European countries⁸². Another project concerned consumption patterns among migrant communities of local, national and minority media in the Tuscany region.

78 More information available at <http://www.cospe.it>.

79 A study commissioned by the national television RAI about media consumption patterns among migrant communities in Italy is Mauri, Raffi, Cologna, Salamon and Brusati (1999).

80 Detailed results available at <http://www.rete.toscana.it/sett/polsoc/parlamondo/attprimidati.htm>

81 <http://www.mmc2000.net/partnereng.htm>

82 Including also Sverige Radio, Spanish Contrabanda, Dutch STOA, English ARA and Greek DIMITRA.

The Rome-based *Archivio dell'immigrazione* (Immigration archive) was set up by the co-producer of the TV programme *Nonsolonerò*, which was broadcast by RAI2 in 1988-1994. The archive organises training courses for migrants. It is linked to the *Osservatorio su informazione e diritti umani* (Monitoring Centre on Information and Human Rights) (Villa and Patruno, 1998), and publishes a monthly journal to promote multicultural literature named Caffè. Another type of alternative media targeted at immigrants are the newspapers distributed by and for the homeless in the larger cities, written in part for and also (although to a far lesser extent) by immigrants (Federici, 1997).

Finally, an important initiative is that of the Milan-based research centre ISMU (*Iniziative e Studio della Multietnicità*)⁸³, which organised regular meetings with media professionals (including producers of TV documentaries) to reflect upon the opportunities and constraints to promote cultural diversity in the media, particularly in international news making and documentaries on development countries. The proceedings of these meetings are published in the volumes 'United Colours of Media' and include examples of positive practice (Alliata di Villafranca, 1998, 1999; Bargellini and Caldara, 1996; Bargellini, 1997).

4.8.3.3 SPECIAL MEDIA PROGRAMMES

Most visible in the area of programmes targeted at migrants are the many local radio stations in areas with large immigrant communities⁸⁴. The public broadcasting company RAI has a radio programme transmitted on Sunday mornings, *Permesso di soggiorno. Dialogo aperto sul mondo dell'immigrazione* (Residence permit/Permitted to stay. Open dialogue on the world of immigration), in which immigrants are the main actors (Gnisci, Chiabri and Genovese, 1998; Martinetti, de Lourdes Jesus, and Genovese, 1998).

83 <http://www.ismu.org>

84 See also <http://www.cospe.it>

In addition, the RAI2 TV channel two times a week in the morning broadcasts an educational programme called *Un mondo a colori* (A world full of colours). Unfortunately, the TV programme *NonSoloNero* was taken off the air in 1994. The TV channel RAI3 has also incidentally broadcast late night programmes based on in-depth interviews with immigrants and their employers (for example, with women immigrants working as domestic servants or caretakers of the elderly and living in the house of their employer, about their daily lives and difficulties).

4.8.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research discussed above shows that the Italian press coverage about ethnic relations, deviance and protests in the 1990s indicates many similarities with that of the UK in the 1970s. However, this is also due partly to the use of the conceptual framework developed in the UK literature. In order for future developments in Italy to move in a more positive direction, many conditions of news and programme making will still have to change. At the moment, research suggests that the mainstream press, with notable exceptions, has reproduced subtle forms of ethnic prejudice in its routine and issue-based reporting, whereas the right-wing press was at times blatantly racist in its selection and presentation of news and commentaries. In addition, the alternative press that actively opposes racism and discrimination has a limited reach.

Some signs of deteriorated reporting are observed, for example in the omnipresent representation of immigrants as illegal deviants, an image to which the political campaigns started by the right-wing has not done any good. At first sight, over the last ten years the denominations used to label immigrants have improved, in that the use of pejorative and discriminating terms has decreased. However, this has also produced a hidden shift in meaning of the terms, which only seem more neutral but contain the same negative associations (for example, *extracomunitari*). The most widespread and pernicious negative stereotypes are directed at Albanians and Moroccans, who represent the most numerous groups.

A shortcoming of much of the existing research is that theoretical differences seem to depend more strongly on ideological orientations than on an informed debate over theory itself. Moreover, sometimes the studies do not go beyond mapping media contents and do not reveal new insights into the role played by the media. In fact, the main events are merely reconstructed, for example, by citing headlines or reporting frequency counts of words appearing in headlines. In other cases, media contents are taken as a primary source to analyse social phenomena, but not the functioning of media as such. However, qualitative studies that focus on social representation and the role of discourse in a more systematic way do exist too. In addition, at times research in Italy depends upon institutional support (such as the public broadcasting company RAI or local authorities), which may in turn affect the conclusions drawn, when the actors who support the research also appear as one of the main elements in the research data.

Despite these weaknesses, the available research is sufficient in number to get an idea of the main themes and issues in media reporting, and to see that these themes have remained negative (or have blended out more positive themes) and overall have been approached too superficially by the media. On the other hand, at different times over the last 12 years the media have adjusted to an agenda aimed at fighting racial discrimination. However, mainstream media, and particularly television, have done so mostly with a focus on (political) controversy and on attitudes of compassion, paternalism and alarm, which increase rather than challenge the perception of difference.

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