

# **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

Vienna, February 2002

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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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## 4.15 UNITED KINGDOM (UK)

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This report summarises recent research on the media and 'race' and cultural diversity in Britain<sup>125</sup>. Overall the general impression is that there has been an improvement in standards of journalism regarding the representation of minorities relative to previous decades. There is a broad range of coverage of issues relating to immigration and ethnic relations across the full spectrum of broadcasting and print media. Even tabloid newspapers give significant news space to minorities as sources and claims-makers. Although about three quarters of all media coverage carries broadly anti-racist themes, some newspapers, and in particular the Daily Mail, take an anti-immigrant stance that sometimes becomes expressed in images that stigmatise migrants and refugees. Regarding institutional initiatives, public and private sector broadcasting has implemented self-monitoring of output and attempted to monitor and address the under-representation of minorities employed in the media, with mixed results. The institutional structure of newspapers, which are heavily top-down in authority, hinders such developments.

### 4.15.1 INTRODUCTION - RESEARCH CONTEXT IN BRITAIN

#### 4.15.1.1 CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE 'RACIST MEDIA' THESIS

Prior to the 1995-2000 period, much research on racism in the British media focused specifically on the use of language and images by the media, which were seen as both representing and

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125 Although this is a British case, its actual focus tends to be England-centric, as England tends to be the focus of the national media as well as the part of the UK where a large proportion of ethnic minorities live, and on which research in this field is concentrated. In principle we cover England Scotland and Wales, whereas Northern Ireland is excluded altogether due to the specifically different conditions and policies in that part of the country in relation to the sectarian divide and ethnic conflict

reproducing racism within British society. Taking a cue from the seminal work of Stuart Hall, several accounts of racism in the media that appeared from cultural studies in the 1980s took up an activist anti-racist position and strongly condemned the representation of minorities by the British media (e.g. Gordon and Rosengren, 1989; Searle, 1989; Murray, 1989; Jones, 1982). Seeing British 'race relations' politics as inherently racist and a symptom of a crisis of hegemony in the postcolonial epoch, the media in general and the press in particular were selected as a principal culprit in the reproduction of this 'racist Britain'. For example, Gordon and Rosenberg's conclusions leave little doubt as to who is to blame in their eyes (1989:68):

'The implications of a racist press for society in general and for threatened minorities in particular are extremely serious. As a major opinion-former, acting both on policy-makers and upon those for whom policy is made and practised, a racist press plays a very significant role in maintaining, strengthening and justifying racism at all levels of society, providing a cover for racist activity, especially racist violence. In press reporting of 'race' matters we have seen the manipulation of 'popular' fears and suspicions and the creation of a climate of opinion where such racists activity becomes normalised and encouraged.'

Such claims that the press is inherently racist, and a perpetuator of racism to the extent of even being a potential cause of racist violence, and promoter of 'popular' racist beliefs are highly contentious. Furthermore, they were often made on the basis of scant empirical evidence, and at best, by repeating the same well known examples, without information on the extent to which such cases were representative of the norm. Although such perspectives were influential in British studies of the media and 'race' in the 1980s, their limited theoretical perspective of the role of the media in everyday life and their anti-racist campaigning agenda, provide few empirical research materials for assessing the actual 'state of affairs' of media coverage and representation of ethnic minorities. This makes it difficult to use them to compare the past situation to today, and to gauge whether there have been significant improvements. Instead perhaps the major impact of this research was a political rather than an academic one - it popularised the message

in the British 'race relations' and liberal-thinking circles that the media was strongly causally linked to the perpetuation of racism in society.

#### 4.15.1.2 TOWARD AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AGENDA ON RACIAL, CULTURAL, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN THE MEDIA?

Escaping the tautological proposition perpetuated by cultural studies that 'the media is always racist' would require reference to empirical studies, that over time and by media type, charted and analysed the thematic contents of the messages carried by the media when covering issues relating to migrants and minorities. In addition, to address even more complex questions relating to society, such as whether media coverage and representation contributes to the level of racial violence in a society, or the perceptions held by the public, would require a much more sophisticated type of analysis than simply looking at media messages. For example, it would require studying the relevant actors and processes of cognition. As the level and depth of existing research in Britain on the media reporting of 'race-related' issues has been somewhat limited in recent times, the trends and indications outlined in this report are drawn from the available evidence that is collated from a rather patchy and unsystematic field.<sup>126</sup>

One factor about which most commentators agree is that there has been a *general overall improvement in the media coverage and representation of migrants and minorities in Britain*. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, a journalist at the *Independent* newspaper and researcher at the Institute of Public Policy Research, sums up the current state of affairs (1998: 116):

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126 Omitted from this overview will be the important recent theoretical work by Charles Husband (1998) on the 'multi-ethnic' public sphere and citizenship. This report is self-consciously biased toward the available empirically based research and does not report on theoretical developments in the field. Also case studies which typically focus on a single minority group and make general claims about the role of media in minority identity formation are omitted as their findings tend to be theoretically speculative rather than empirically grounded.

'Many features of the earlier period remain stubbornly in place. Immigration is still discussed in terms of numbers and problems, 'black' families are still pathologised and 'Asians' in general only considered worthy of media interest if they can be shown to be 'culturally backward', if they are victims of racism or, less frequently, if they have made good as hard working immigrants.... But even in the 1990s only the most pessimistic would argue that nothing has changed. Most obviously it has, and in the direction that was sought by those who were campaigning back in the 1970s and 1980s.'

Moving beyond such informed insider-hearsay, other more substantive empirical research on the media coverage of issues of immigration, 'race' and ethnic minorities has pointed toward the following findings: an overall 'not guilty' verdict from a study that aimed to judge the contents of media reporting on 'race' in the 1997 British election against the charges of reproducing racial stereotypes and marginalising minority and anti-racist voices (Law, et al. 1997); British migrants and minorities receiving significant news space to make their own political claims in the press (Statham, 1999); a greater level of representation of minorities on British television programmes compared to earlier times (Cumberbatch, 1996); but difficulties in producing ethnic minority programming (Cottle, 1997) and limitations in employing minorities at senior levels within the broadcasting industry (Ouaj, 1999), in part due to the increasing market-driven commercial pressures facing public and independent broadcasting. Key findings of this empirical research deserve highlighting and will be drawn together to form the basis of this report. As we are forced to draw from secondary research sources, there are of course limitations to the scope of the report. We cannot report on missing information, but a concerted effort has been made to tie the research, which does exist into a coherent overall picture. The report on media and cultural diversity is in three sections: coverage, topics and sources; themes, framing and labelling; and media initiatives for promoting cultural diversity.

## 4.15.2 COVERAGE, TOPICS AND SOURCES

### 4.15.2.1 NEWS COVERAGE

Within the time span under consideration, the Law et al. study (1997), commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) provides an overview of the levels and types of coverage of issues relating to immigration and ethnic relations across a broad spectrum of newsprint media and broadcasting. Here a content analysis was undertaken for six months from November 1996 to May 1997, covering the main television news programmes and/or commentary programmes on the four terrestrial channels (BBC1 news, ITN news, C4 news, BBC2 *Newsnight*) and a satellite channel (SKY news); the main news bulletins and/or programmes on radio (BBC Radio 1 news, BBC Radio 4 Today, BBC Radio 5 news, INR news); and seven national daily newspapers and their Sunday equivalents (*Times / Sunday Times, Guardian / Observer, Telegraph / Sunday Telegraph, Independent / Independent on Sunday, Mail / Mail on Sunday, Sun / News of the World, Mirror / People*) and two regional dailies (*London Evening Standard, Yorkshire Evening Post*). Although this study covered a wide range of media sources, an important caveat to bear in mind when evaluating the findings is that it was drawn from a period of six months. The time period was special in that it encompassed the reporting in the run up to the national election of 1997, and so may differ from that of more 'normal' periods of politics, and secondly, it may be unrepresentative of general reporting due to the effects of particular important events in the field which occurred by chance during the selected time span. Nonetheless, the Law et al. report analysed the main themes and interpretative frames in 1,295 news items, and so remains an important source of information for this summary, as it is both quantitative and qualitative and falls in the middle of the time period under review.<sup>127</sup>

Regarding the overall levels of coverage on 'race' and immigration, for radio broadcasting the overwhelming source of coverage on the topic is the BBC Radio 4 Today programme which had 142 items, compared to 29 on BBC Radio 5, 17 on BBC Radio 1, and only four

on the Independent Radio News. For television broadcasting, the public broadcaster's main TV news programme on BBC1 accounts for the highest proportion of coverage on immigration and ethnic relations issues, with 42 items in the period, followed by Channel 4's 34 items, BBC2 *Newsnight's* 33 items, and then by the Satellite SKY News' 23 items, and lastly, the main news programme on ITV with only 16 (Law et al., 1997:7). Although it is difficult to compare these programmes directly due to their different functions in the news agenda, and the length of time and news space which they have available, it is nonetheless possible to draw some general observations. First, it seems that *public broadcasting (BBC) in general gives more coverage to ethnic relations and immigration issues than independent broadcasting*. In part this may be due to the official obligation of all state bodies in Britain under the Race Relations Acts to promote equal opportunities, which indirectly affects the state broadcaster in its self-definition of its duties. A second point to observe is that *specialised news programmes which are more likely to be watched or heard by political elites -BBC Radio 4 Today, BBC1 News, BBC2 Newsnight and the Independent Channel 4 News- are also likely to have a higher proportion of coverage on these issues than the other more populist formats of broadcasting such as Radio 1 or SKY news*.

Regarding coverage by the news print media, the same study found that the highest proportion of coverage on race/immigration was by the *Guardian / Observer with 211 items*, which is significantly higher than the *Mail / Sunday Mail (142)*, *Independent / Sunday Independent (138)*, *Telegraph / Sunday Telegraph (130)*, *Times /*

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127 A six months sample is obviously not as definitive as a five-year sample, but it is a sufficiently long time-span to have confidence about the accuracy of the findings relating to the differences in media representation. Also the fact that it was an pre-election period holds for all the different media types. They are all likely to follow election topics more closely, and so is not going to distort differences in the representation of the race and immigration issues. Regarding distortions due to specific high profile events in the six months period, it is worth noting that even when key events from the race/immigration issue field become high on the mainstream political agenda -such as the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry- this may have an effect on the overall quantity of reporting compared to other times, and influence the topical focus (e.g. racial attacks instead of asylum) compared to other times, but it should not alter the different ways in which different media report about such issues.

*Sunday Times* (127), and three and four times higher than the tabloids *Mirror / Sunday Mirror* (61) and *Sun / News of the World* (49) and the local papers *London Evening Standard* (68) and *Yorkshire Evening Post* (29) (Law et al., 1997:7). This distribution shows that in crude terms *broadsheet newspapers carry more coverage than the tabloids and local newspapers*. In addition, the high level of attention for this type of issue by the *Guardian / Observer* may be indicative of the newspaper taking an editorial lead on such issues, which fit into the newspaper's own self definition of a centre-left liberal agenda.

#### 4.15.2.2 NEWS TOPICS

The Law et al. findings give a similar distribution to those of a study funded by the eEconomic Social Research Council 'Racist Sentiments Movements and the Mass Media' and conducted by Paul Statham and David Morrison at the Institute of Communications Studies at the University of Leeds (ESRC Final Report 1999). Although principally focused on the political mobilisation of minorities, anti-racist, and xenophobic movements, from a social movements perspective, this study also conducted a detailed comparative content analysis of the national press coverage of migrations and ethnic relations issues in six national newspapers (Monday, Wednesday, Friday editions) for the whole year 1995, resulting in an overall sample of 1,264 articles. As part of a much broader study, the aim was to determine whether tabloid versus broadsheet or political affiliation-left/right-were factors in determining the levels and topics of reporting on migration and ethnic relations. General findings of the Racist Sentiments project can be summarised with reference to Table 1, which gives the coverage of the newspapers in relation to general aggregate categories of main topics in the news.



**Table 1.** Newspaper coverage of migration and ethnic relations in national daily newspapers, 1995.

	Guardian	Times	Mail	Express	Sun	Mirror
Immigration/ Asylum issues	36.7%	46.4%	54.6%	40.7%	31.6%	16.8%
EU Common borders	1.6%	1.1%	2.5%	2.0%	5.2%	2.1%
UK National borders	2.9%	4.9%	5.0%	6.2%	1.7%	-
Policies for foreigners/i mmigrants	15.4%	23.5%	29.3%	19.1%	20.1%	10.5%
Policies for refugees/ asylum	16.8%	16.9%	17.8%	13.4%	4.6%	4.2%
<b>Institutional minority issues</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>24.4%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>33.4%</b>	<b>31.6%</b>
Judicial provision for minorities	1.6%	3.8%	9.1%	9.3%	6.9%	14.7%
State provision for minorities	5.6%	6.6%	9.5%	7.7%	19.0%	4.2%
Police control	6.4%	3.8%	2.9%	1.6%	2.3%	3.2%
Crime and minorities	2.4%	3.3%	2.9%	4.1%	5.2%	9.5
<b>Racist/anti-racist activism issues</b>	<b>39.8%</b>	<b>29.5%</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>34.5%</b>	<b>28.1%</b>	<b>51.6%</b>
Racial attacks/ violence	9.3%	3.8%	6.6%	5.2%	5.2%	7.3%
Racial abuse	21.5%	12.6%	3.7%	12.4%	10.9%	15.8%
Extreme right/ activism	5.9%	6.0%	2.1%	8.8%	6.9%	21.1%
Ethnic minority activism	1.3%	5.5%	3.7%	5.1%	4.0%	5.3%
Anti-racist activism	0.5%	0.5%	-	0.5%	-	-
Minority extremist activism	1.3%	1.1%	1.2%	2.5%	1.1%	2.1%
<b>National Identity (majority/minority) cleavage issues</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Other issues</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>N (articles)</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>95</b>

A first point to note from Table 1 is that *issues relating to immigration and asylum politics are a strong thematic focus for all newspapers except the left-wing tabloid Mirror, which in any case, had a*

much lower level of reporting than the other newspapers. This was particularly the case for the centre-right broadsheets *Times* and *Mail* where this topic accounted for about a half of all reporting, and was principally focused on policy issues pertaining to the treatment of immigrants and foreigners (*Times* 23.5%, *Mail* 29.3%). It would appear that *the Mail in particular takes immigration and asylum as a campaign issue*, as 11.6% of all its articles were editorials compared to only 1.6% in the *Times*. In contrast, the centre-left broadsheet, *Guardian*, focused more attention on issues relating to racist and anti-racist activism in civil society (39.8%), and among these on racial abuse and anti-Semitism in particular (21.5%). This shows a difference in internal focus by the broadsheet newspapers on themes in the migration field: *the centre-right affiliated newspapers are more likely to report on immigration and asylum issues, and the centre-left broadsheets more on the civil society issues of combating racist acts in the public domain, and campaigning by minorities themselves toward such aims.*

With the exception of the *Daily Mail*, stories about racial attacks and violence and incidents of racial abuse are the main topic of more than 15% of the coverage of all the other newspapers. This indicates that *racial attacks, violence, and incidents of racial abuse are treated in such a way that they achieve a prominent place on the news agenda*. However, activism by anti-racist movements in the public domain was hardly the main topic of any news, whereas -again with the exception of the *Mail*- ethnic minority activism was less likely to be a main news topic than extreme right activism in all newspapers. However, this should not be taken as an indication that ethnic minorities do not receive news space for articulating their demands when they are reported in the news, or that they receive less space than the extreme Right (see below).

Regarding the tabloid newspapers, the right-leaning *Sun* carried twice as much coverage as the left-leaning *Mirror*. Indeed the *Sun* had the same overall level of coverage as the broadsheet *Times*. Half of the coverage of the *Mirror* focused on issues of activism in civil society relation to the immigration/race field, and more than a fifth of its coverage (21.1%) focused on the activities of the extreme Right. This may be taken as an indication of the *Mirror* newspaper

taking this as a campaign issue. In contrast to the Mirror, the Sun has a more complete overall coverage of the range of themes in the race/immigration issue-field. The Sun focuses a third of its attention on the institutional questions of provision for minorities, and in particular, state provision for minorities (19.0%), which can be seen as an issue on which the newspaper takes a lead - though not necessarily a pro-minority one. It is worth pointing out that issues of crime and minorities were not significantly more prominent as a topic in the news coverage of the Sun than in other newspapers. This seems to contradict conventional interpretations put forward by previous research in the 1980s -specifically that from a cultural studies background described earlier-, which blamed the Sun in particular for linking minorities with crime.<sup>128</sup>

Interviews with editors and journalists indicated that *differences in newspaper reporting on race and immigration were the likely outcomes of the different general editorial positions and institutional self-understandings of the newspapers own position*. Newspapers do not have specialist reporters who cover a 'race' beat<sup>129</sup> in the same way that they have an 'environmental' beat. Issues relating to immigration and ethnic relations are subsumed into the general reporting practices and covered by Home Affairs, Crime and Law correspondents. Thus that a paper sees itself as a 'pro-Police' newspaper or has good relationships and sources within the Home Office affects the way that issues relating to 'race' are reported. Barriers to more positive representations of minorities may be an outcome of general institutionalised and established reporting practices that are more open to views expressed by other types of actors, and official sources in particular.

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128 This could of course be due to an 'improvement' of reporting by the Sun compared to earlier times. This was the reason given by a Sun journalist in response to this query.

129 Lowe and Morrison (1984) showed how a group or 'news beat' of environmental reporters emerged in response to the salience of environmental issues in the 1980s. The beginnings of such a process may be witnessed in the increasing sections on 'race' within British newspapers since the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. As yet however, this has been limited to certain newspapers and reporters, such as Gary Younge in the Guardian, and is not a general trend, though it may become one if race remains high on the political agenda.

#### 4.15.2.3 NEWS SOURCES

A further aim of the Racist Sentiments Project was to determine the relative amount of space given to different types of actors (institutional; civil society; movement activist) to make political claims as 'sources' in news reports, in order to understand whether or not the newspapers favoured representing specific sources. *The major substantive finding was that although the newspapers varied considerably in the ways they themselves presented 'race' and immigration issues, there was considerable similarity in the proportion of space that was given to 'sources' to make claims about the topic in news reports.* This finding is rather counterintuitive. It is demonstrated by comparing two very different types of newspaper. According to the findings, although the overall level of reporting in the centre-left broadsheet *Guardian* was more than twice as high as for the right-leaning tabloid *Sun*, both newspapers attributed proportionally similar amounts of space to different types of 'source' claims-makers: e.g., government/executive source claims - *Guardian* 21.1%, *Sun* 23.3%; ethnic minority source claims - *Guardian* 18.6%, *Sun* 16.3%; extreme right source claims - *Guardian* 1.7%, *Sun* 2.3%. Thus, it is not the case that minorities are not given news space in a populist paper such as the *Sun* to voice their own demands. On the contrary, they were the second highest category of actors who were given space to voice their own political demands (16.3% of all demands) in news reports, receiving less than only the government (23.3%), and more than legislative actors (13.9%), the judiciary (9.3%), police (5.8%), and state race relations bodies (5.8%), and even eight times more than the extreme Right and racist actors (2.3%). This finding can be taken as evidence for a probable improvement in the news coverage by the *Sun*<sup>130</sup>, whereby regardless of the newspaper's own editorial position, it maintains a sufficient level of objectivity that minority actors are able to be heard on the set of issues about them. It is not the case that the *Sun* simply brackets the opinions of minorities out of the public domain.

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130 It is of course only possible to make suppositions here in the absence of detailed substantive comparative work on the qualitative aspects of media representation. The available qualitative detail from the Law et al. study is described below.

Another finding is that although the extreme Right activism was a more prominent news topic for reporting than minority activism in five of the six newspapers (see above), the trend is significantly reversed when considering the actual amount of space allowed to both actors to voice their demands. In all six newspapers, *ethnic minorities were the sources of political claims between four and ten times more often than the extreme Right*. This confirms that the pariah status of the extreme Right within the public domain is one that is upheld by the newsprint media. Conversely, it indicates that ethnic minorities in Britain are treated by the media as a significant and legitimate source for making claims in relation to the political issues about them. A similar finding which confirms this is in the research by the Law et al. which found that ethnic minorities and related organisations were the primary actors in 23% of the news items that were studied (1997: 37).

Lastly, we turn to anti-racist organisations; that is, organisations from the majority society who mobilise against racism and discrimination. *Anti-racist organisations were very rarely used as sources, however this is most likely related to the specialist function that the anti-racist movement plays in the public domain*. In comparison to other European countries, the relatively small size of the British anti-racist movement proper, should be seen against the background of a general state-sponsored climate of mainstream anti-racism that is embodied in the state-sponsored concept of Race Relations and racial equality.<sup>131</sup>

### 4.15.3 THEMES, FRAMING AND LABELLING

Turning now to the important qualitative aspect of how the news media portray issues relating to the field of immigration and ethnic relations, Law et al. present as a key finding of their research that *three quarters of the news items which they analysed conveyed a broadly anti-racist message; that is, were news items with media frames 'which seek to expose and criticise racist attitudes, statements, actions and policies, which address the concerns of immi-*

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<sup>131</sup> See Statham, (2001), on British antiracism; Koopmans and Statham, (2000), for a comparison of anti-racism in Britain and Germany.

*grant and minority ethnic groups and show their contribution to British society, and which embrace an inclusive view of multi-cultural British identity* (Law et al., 1997:18). This study sees the dominant frame in the messages produced by the British media, as '*Racism is wrong*', whereby the impartiality of the journalist does not prevent the basic message getting across that racism is morally wrong. The repetition of this basic tenet occurred across the news in different types of media, and across a wide range of different types of stories referring to different political, social, and institutional dimensions of the race/immigration issue field. Clearly, such findings indicate that *the standard norm for British media reporting is in general to perpetuate anti-racist stances that are in fact in line with the official policy stance of the state on Race Relations*. A more detailed breakdown of findings is given in Table 2, which has been constructed from the Law et al. data.

The key finding here is that almost four tenths of all coverage (37.6%) of all news items actively exposed racism and racial discrimination, and that this high figure holds across broadcasting and print media, with the popular tabloid press having the highest proportion of coverage that exposed racism (44.7%). This last point confirms the earlier finding that the British tabloid press no longer seem to merit the overtly racist tag that they were given by studies in the early 1980s. Nonetheless, tabloids do still carry a higher proportion of negative items than the other forms of media (33.3% compared to 23.6% for broadsheets, 16.1% for radio, and 12.9% for TV) , but in part this higher level of both pro- and anti- positions may be due to the polemical style of the tabloid news genre. Overall it is clear that the tabloid press takes a general anti-racist position, and that only a few tabloid news items constituted a 'denial discourse' denying the existence of racism (1.6%) as their main theme, a figure that was even lower than the broadsheets (2.4%).

This overall anti-racist position of the tabloid press, however, appears to relate principally to British ethnic minorities and does not extend to immigrants and asylum-seekers. Indeed the only variation across the overall pattern of media positions is that *tabloids take up a strongly anti-immigrant stance (11.6% anti-immigrant themes versus 2.8% pro-immigrant themes) whereas the broad-*

*sheet press, radio and television carry more pro- than anti-immigrant themes.*

Of the anti-immigrant themes carried by the media about a quarter were stories demanding the reduction of migrant rights, whereas a further quarter claimed that they were a burden on the welfare state, and an eighth identified migrants themselves as being dishonest (e.g. using false passports) and 'bogus'. Here surveying some of the headlines shows that the overall anti-racist tones of the media are not extended by some of the press to migrants:

**Table 2.** Thematic framing in news coverage (adapted from Law et al. data, 1997:18,21).

	Tabloid	Broadsheet	Radio	Television	All
<b>Immigration</b>					
+ Pro-immigrant	2.8%	7.4%	22.4%	14.9%	9.3%
- Anti-immigrant	11.6%	4.3%	5.2%	4.7%	6.3%
<b>General election</b>					
+ Pro-minorities	10.0%	15.7%	9.9%	20.9%	14.1%
- Anti-minorities	3.4%	2.8%	0.5%	2.7%	2.6%
<b>Racism</b>					
+ Exposing	44.7%	34.2%	39.1%	35.1%	37.6%
- Denying	1.6%	2.4%	2.6%	1.4%	2.1%
<b>Social Value</b>					
+ Assets	3.8%	6.5%	2.1%	0.7%	4.5%
- Problems	14.1%	12.3%	7.8%	4.1%	11.1%
<b>Multicultural Britain</b>					
+ For	1.9%	3.9%	2.1%	1.4%	2.9%
- Against	1.3%	1.3%	-	-	0.9%
<b>Opportunities</b>					
+ Improve	3.1%	5.7%	5.2%	10.8%	5.6%
- Restrict	1.3%	0.5%	-	-	0.5%
<b>Other</b>					
	0.6%	3.2%	3.2%	3.4%	6.4%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.0%
<b>Overall Proportion of Negative Items</b>	33.3%	23.6%	16.1%	12.9%	23.6%

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*You Pay, a scrounger stays - Daily Mail 15/4/97*

*£250,000 bill for aids immigrant 'too ill to leave' - Daily Telegraph 15/4/97*

*Bogus refugees who plane-hop to Britain - Daily Mail 7/4/97*

*Cheating migrants grave fiddle - News of the World 30/3/97*

In this anti-immigrant discourse, the migrants themselves are often stigmatised as 'cheats', 'bogus', ungrateful, and as 'scroungers' with scant elaboration given to the conditions which bring about refugees and the need for migrants to move to Britain. In many cases this amounts to 'blaming the victim'. Especially *the Daily Mail takes a clear anti-immigration (the process) stance that in populist formats of representation often translates into an anti-immigrant (the people) stance*. It is worth pointing out that in the run up to the last election, 'race' and immigration were not issues that became overtly politicised and subject to party competition. The study by Law et al. even shows that general election coverage was a strongly pro-minority (14.1% of themes pro- compared to only 2.1% anti-minority) discourse, with political parties aiming to attract the minority vote (1997: 27). More recently, the Opposition Conservative Party under leader William Hague has publicly thematised issues relating to immigration and asylum by taking an anti-asylum-seeker position. As Labour were forced to respond, this has led to populist stances being taken up by some politicians of both major parties, expressing anti-immigration sentiments and using the same language and metaphors as those which have resonated in some sections of the press over the last years. To a certain extent, it appears that immigrants and asylum-seekers now receive the same type of stigmatising coverage, which 'Black' and 'Asian' minorities received fifteen years ago. This suggests that *the criteria for newspapers to include groups within their vision of the British community has changed over time and is now applied on the basis of citizenship, so that British minorities are no longer an 'outgroup' but to a certain extent are included in the 'we' who are defined in opposition to 'them' the foreigners*. This highlights that despite a relative level of autonomy, the media agenda in the long term very much follows the political agenda in its evaluation of 'race' and immigration.

There are, of course, still exceptions to the overall improvements in the media representation of British ethnic minorities. Law et al. (1997:31) found that in cases of particularly heinous crimes where minorities are involved, some reporting still falls back into the now apparently 'outdated' mode of stigmatisation that to a certain extent implies a causal link between ethnic background and the



crime. Thus for example, the Daily Mail under the headlines reported the gang rape of a tourist by a group of ethnic minority youths:

*Trophy rape by teenage jackals - Daily Mail 12/4/97*

*Spawning the teenage savages - Daily Mail 19/4/97*

One wonders whether white rapists would have been referred to as 'jackals' or 'savages'. In general, however, such forms of representation seem to be present in only a minority of cases, and by a small number of newspapers.

A further point is that according to Law et al., there were relatively few themes referring to multiculturalism in Britain. Among these multicultural themes, they found three times as many valuing Islam as those that were anti-Islam. As the overall sample numbers are low, not too much should be read into this, but the available evidence suggests that *the British media is not a promoter of Islamophobia as has been suggested in some quarters* (see e.g. Brown, 2000). Of course, it may be that multicultural issues appear in other issue fields, such as education, and that Muslims are problematised by the media in relation to such issues, and that this has not been captured by the Law study. Further research is necessary on the media treatment of Islam before it is possible to draw concrete conclusions on this.

Lastly, concerning the labels given to minorities, according to the Law et al. study (1997: 39), groups were most often referred to by racial references, with most references being to 'black' or white. 'Asian' was a more common usage than religious references, such as Muslim, Hindu or Sikh, and there was very little usage of homeland national identities, such as Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi. Afro-Caribbean and West Indian were hardly used at all. These findings simply underline that the *officially sponsored categories in British Race Relations politics of 'black' and 'Asian' are the predominant forms of identification for minorities that are used by the media.*

## 4.15.4 MEDIA INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY

### 4.15.4.1 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK, SELF-REGULATORY MECHANISMS, AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES

In Britain, the regulatory framework has given greater priority to curbing racially offensive items in recent years. *Most fields of media and public relations now have established codes of practice.* Members of the public can make complaints to regulatory bodies over issues involving negative or objectionable portrayals of 'race', that are, in turn, judged against codes of practice. Statutory bodies including the Independent Television Commission (ITC), Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC), Radio Authority, and the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) internal complaints process for broadcasting, and the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) for the newsprint media, have a duty to ensure that such codes of practice are met. In 1995, both the Advertising Standards Authority and the Institute of Public Relations included specific references to racial offence in their codes of practice. Establishing such codes of conduct has been a key area of activity by the Commission for Racial Equality and should be seen in a positive light. However, despite pronouncements by Lord Wakeman, Chair of the PCC, that his body 'won't tolerate newspapers that treat racial minorities in an offensive manner' (cited CRE web page), such bodies remain rather toothless. As far as the law may affect journalists, they may be prosecuted under the 1986 Public Order Act for displaying, publishing, or distributing 'written material that is threatening, abusive, or insulting if he (the journalist) intends thereby to stir up racial hatred or if, having regard to all circumstances, racial hatred is likely to be stirred up thereby' (Welsh and Greenwood, 1999). Clearly such *legal provisions do not extend toward influencing how minorities are represented in the press beyond the most extreme cases, such as overtly racist propaganda.*

The National Union of Journalists does have a set of guidelines, which it expects its members to keep. However, in interviews by the author with several journalists and editors from the British press,

none actually referred to the NUJ guidelines. In fact, *most journalists fall back on what they called professional 'common sense' that was acquired from previously writing about immigration and 'race' issues, and gaining knowledge about the subject matter as part of the investigative process.*

In general, most journalists and editors from a wide range of newspapers agreed that the overall portrayal of minorities had improved from the 1980s, and saw this as related to general processes of change within British society. For example, a *Sun* journalist pointed out that as many *Sun* readers were 'black', and that since the newspaper saw itself now as the paper of the 'working man' rather than the 'white working class', it was no longer likely to stigmatise 'black' people unless colour or 'race' was an important element in the story. Furthermore, he stated that the marriage of the owner Rupert Murdoch's daughter to a 'black' man probably had an effect. Similarly, another newspaper with a reputation for stigmatising 'black' people, the *Daily Mail*, was the newspaper that took the lead in naming and exposing the alleged perpetrators of the murdered 'black' youth Stephen Lawrence. Several journalists told me by the anecdote, that Stephen Lawrence's father was decorating the house of the editor of the *Daily Mail*, and that as a result the editor came to the decision that these were ordinary people who had been done a great injustice explained this out of character step by the *Mail*.

Whatever the truth behind such claims, it is clear that newspaper organisations do not have a 'democratic' institutional structure when it comes to editorial decisions. *Power comes very much from the top-down, which means that owners and editors need to be influenced to bring about changes.* Although this means that there can be at times St. Paul-style dramatic conversions in newspaper positions on 'race', in general it is very difficult for changes in newspaper and editorial stances to be brought about from bottom-up initiatives by journalists. Instead, incremental change in reporting appears to have simply kept apace with (or a pace behind) general changes and perceptions that have occurred within British society. It is also worth pointing out that the *Mail's* position on the Lawrence case was exceptional, and is more likely to turn out to be 'an excep-

tion that proves the rule' rather than a new dawn of 'race-conscious' sensitivity in reporting by the newspaper.

The broadcasting media have taken internal initiatives to address improving the presentation of minorities. For example, the renewed licence issued to Channel 4 by the ITC in 1998 includes a commitment for at least three hours multicultural programming a week, some at peak times (ITC notes No.36 December 1998). In addition, some independent television companies such as Granada and London Weekend Television have implemented their own programme portrayal policies that are monitored by working groups. The BBC has implemented similar internal initiatives. However, market-driven commercial changes affecting the industry have created a difficult climate for producers wishing to advance minority programming (Cottle, 1997). Although the 1990 Broadcasting Act does not refer to the representation of ethnic minorities in general programming, both the ITC and BBC have sponsored research to assess such issues. The 1996 report found a higher representation of minorities than in 1989/90. Six per cent of all characters in UK productions were from ethnic minorities and this rose to 26% for serious factual programming. In fiction, 39 per cent of characters were from minorities, but more than four times as many were Afro-Caribbeans than 'Asians'. Lastly, although minorities were more likely to be represented as unemployed or working class, they were less likely to be represented as criminals than whites (Cumberbatch, 1996). In 1999, the ITC and BBC jointly commissioned a further report from the University of Leicester, which indicates at least a degree of ongoing commitment for independent research that monitors performance on minority representation. Lastly, in October 2000, BBC, ITV, and Channels 4 and 5 launched the 'Cultural Diversity Network', aiming to increase minority representation both on screen and behind the scenes (Guardian 13th October, 2000). *To be effective and move beyond mere exhortation such initiatives will have to be given weight within the broadcasting institutions.*

#### 4.15.4.2 EMPLOYMENT IN THE MEDIA

*As yet there have been virtually no initiatives to recruit journalists from ethnic minorities.* In 1995, out of approximately 5,000 staff journalists on national newspapers, fewer than thirty came from minority backgrounds, and there were no 'black' or 'Asian' editors, regular critics, or columnists. Since then, there have been a few limited changes, with the Financial Times, *Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and the *Guardian / Observer* now having a number of 'black' and 'Asian' staff (Alibhai-Brown, 1998:118). This can in part be accounted for by the fact that recruitment of journalists for national newspapers tends to be done on an informal basis, rather than through formal advertisements and interviews, which makes journalism somewhat of an insider clique that is difficult to penetrate.

The public broadcasting corporation BBC is by far the industry's largest employer and undertakes a special obligation to reflect the diversity of British society. One way to achieve this is by employing minorities, and *since 1989 the BBC has been setting targets for the proportion of staff that should come from ethnic minorities for each directorate.* Initially the aim was to reach a target of 8% by the year 2000, which would reflect the projected composition of British minorities. Network Television, Radio, and News and Current Affairs, and the World Service (English language) should reflect the 'ethnic composition' of the nation, regional broadcasting that of the specific region, and non-output directorates the composition of the areas from which they recruit staff (Ouaj, 1999: 44-5). At first, it appears that *these attempts achieved some limited successes in increasing the numbers of ethnic minorities employed by the BBC, however the drastic reductions in the overall number of staff brought about by changes in the industry affected these initiatives; consequently, between the 1995/6 and 1996/7 year, many of the directorates showed an actual decline in the proportion of minority employees* (BBC Annual Report 1996/7). Nonetheless, these findings are somewhat tempered by those on the proportion of ethnic minorities in management positions at the BBC. According to the annual report 1997/8 figures, these show at least some potential to approach their proposed targets, with Home Services employing 7.4% (target 8%), World Service 21.8% (target 8%), and in the

Regions: Scotland 1.3% (target 2%), Wales 1.5% (target 2%), North 3% (target 4%), South 2.8 (target 4.7%), Midlands & East 5.1% (target 6%) (Ouaj, 1999:46).

**Table 3.** Minorities among Staff of Independent Television Companies.

Independent Television Companies	Ethnic Minorities at Management Level 1999		Ethnic Minorities in Total Staff 1995	Ethnic Minorities in Total Staff 1999	
	No.	% of	% of staff managers	No.	% of staff
Anglia	0	0	1.5	14	2.3
Border	0	0	0.9	1	0
Carlton	3	3.2	6.5	54	9.6
Central	0	0	4.2	34	3.8
Channel	0	0	1.0	3	4
Grampian	0	0	1.1	1	0.8
Granada	1	1	1.8	51	3
HTV	1	2.3	3.0	9	2
LWT	24	7.9	8.0	89	8.3
Meridian	1	1.8	3.0	8	1.9
Scottish	3	2.1	1.7	8	1.4
Tyne Tees	0	0	1.7	3	1.3
Ulster	0	0	1.3	0	0
Westcountry	1	3.3	1.8	2	1.1
Yorkshire	1	1.6	1.4	20	2
GMTV	3	3	5.3	22	7.3
Channel 4	37	7.6	9.0	77	9.4
Channel 5	5	4.5	-	18	7.4

source: adapted from ITC web page for 1999 (<http://www.itc.org.uk>), and Ouaj, 1999: 48 for 1995.

*Independent Television companies have also enacted monitoring initiatives.* As Table 3 shows, there is a broad regional difference in the extent to which independent television companies have been successful in raising their proportion of minority employees. Those in London areas, which have the highest concentration of minority populations, such as Carlton and LWT, have increased their overall minority staff levels to approaching ten per cent. Indeed in 1999, LWT won the Diverse Broadcaster of the Year award at the Windrush Achievement Awards for ethnic minority productions. Carlton, Granada, LWT, and Meridian have ethnic minority training

schemes. According to the ITC, though, ethnic minorities in general are still heavily concentrated in non-managerial and non-programme positions and are still represented well below population levels.

#### *4.15.4.3 GOOD PRACTICES AWARDS AND EVENTS*

In 1992, the Commission for Racial Equality launched its Race in the Media Awards to 'encourage more informed coverage of race relations issues' (Ross, 1996: 148). The CRE continues with an annual set of awards to encourage good journalistic practice, but this is, of course, more of a symbolic ritual than an effective measure toward achieving such aims. Finally, in late 2000, the charity presswise (<http://www.presswise.org.uk>) set up the Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass Media (RAM) programme. This issues guidelines to journalists for covering sensitive topics relating to asylum and produces an e-mail bulletin monitoring recent incidents of reporting, and in 2001 will hold events that are designed to raise awareness (<http://www.ramproject.org.uk>). This initiative has also been backed by the NUJ which is encouraging its 30,000 members to spend time with refugee organisations, and report sympathetically on the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. However noble and worthy such initiatives are, they remain voluntary and would only become really effective if they received the backing of the media institutions themselves.

#### **4.15.5 THE NEED FOR POLITICALLY RELEVANT RESEARCH ON MEDIA AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

This report has attempted to merge the various strands of secondary information that are available on media and cultural diversity in Britain into a coherent picture of the current 'state of affairs'. As I have already summarised the main findings at the beginning of the report, I propose in these concluding remarks to point out the need for a future research agenda that will produce practical and politically relevant contributions to our knowledge of this field.

At present there has been little recent systematic research on the mediated contents and messages that appear in the public domain.

A significant contribution would be made to our understanding if an ongoing system of monitoring were undertaken, based on a sample across different types of media, and that provided a data-set that charted the thematic contents of topics, and the qualitative way in which they were reported, over time. Such an undertaking would require substantial funding, but with correct sampling need not be excessively expensive. Only by knowing what is actually empirically present in the media landscape at the macro-level will we be in a position of knowing whether it is a problem that needs addressing. At present we run the risk of having a plethora of case studies about individual topics, but being unable to place where these pieces fit within the overall jigsaw. Without adequate scientific information it is difficult to make the correct policy proposals. A second point worth making is that it is important that research also moves beyond simply looking at media messages. Our knowledge of the topic would be seriously strengthened by research projects that linked media messages systematically to actors and social relationships, whether this relates to production (media institutions, journalistic practices, source relations etc.) or reception (audience cognition).

Thirdly, and following on from the second point, an important advance would be made by a research agenda that was structured to study the relationship between media agendas and the political agenda. Much current research has been overly media-centric in its approach, and has tended to fall back on rather simplistic stimulus/response models of cognition when referring to the impact of media coverage on either audiences or alternatively on the political domain. New innovative theoretical steps need to be taken which link up the media and political agendas, and the role of the public sphere, and then such advances should be backed up by empirical investigation.

A fourth area for further potential exploitation is systematic cross-national comparative research. Greater understanding of the peculiarities of the British case could be gained by comparing experiences with those of other countries. This is particularly important in the field of migration and ethnic relations where there are clearly very different conceptions of the topic in different countries, that



arise from different forms of attributing citizenship, as well as different media and political traditions.

There is still a lot of improvement to be made in many aspects regarding media and cultural diversity in Britain. In taking the necessary steps forward the academic world has an important role to play in providing the basis of knowledge from which politicians can draw to take action.

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