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See: “Racism, the press and freedom of expression: A summary of ten theses” (on my website) which will be published by ECRI.

Racism and the European Press

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Research findings

International research of the last three decades has consistently found that the European news media in general, and the written press in

* Although this paper was intended as a contribution to the ECRI session, I finally decided to present a more general account of the relations between discourse and racism at the session itself, also because the observations, conclusions and recommendations of this paper are hardly new for those who have been engaged in the study of the role of the press in the reproduction of racism. More specific, especially with respect to my own earlier work on racism and the press, is the discussion here of the topic of the ECRI meeting, namely how to struggle against racism in the press without limiting press freedom. During the actual ECRI session, it appeared that at least some participants appeared to be more concerned about not limiting the freedom of the press than with the freedom to be protected against racism. Hence, also the critical perspective taken at the end of this paper — also presented during the ECRI session, where I referred to press freedom as the “holy cow” of the symbolic elites, obviously because its limitation most directly threatens their basic interests. Whereas ‘freedom’ is a general and positive value, its application in specific domains may well transform it into the sectional a criterion for the interests of powerful groups, as is also the case for the notion of ‘freedom of the market’.

particular, have been part of the problem of racism, rather than part of its solution. The major findings of this research may be summarized as follows (with the inevitable lack of detail and exceptions to the generalizations summarized here):

1. Discrimination of minority journalists.

Equally qualified journalists of ethnic minority groups are discriminated against in their professional access to the press. The major newspapers of Europe, both on the left and on the right, hardly employ minority journalists, let alone in responsible editorial positions. Even more than other organizational and institutional settings, most European newsrooms are virtually exclusively white. As private companies, newspapers generally need not (and do not) account of their employment practices to anyone, whereas discrimination in such cases of selective professional employment is hard to prove. Despite the increase of highly educated communication specialists among ethnic minority groups, this situation of institutional discrimination has not significantly improved in the last decades. Instead of giving the good example one may expect of symbolic elites, the press in most countries has remained one of the major bulwarks against equal opportunity employment and ethnic diversity.

2. Lacking diversity in news gathering.

A nearly exclusively white newsroom also contributes to lacking diversity in daily routines of news gathering, source selection, and quotation. Ethnic news events are construed from a 'white', European, perspective. News sources tend to be selected from among 'white' elite institutions: National

and local politicians, the police, scholars, and lawyers, on the one hand, and civil rights workers and NGOs on the other hand. Thus, most leaders and other spokespersons of ethnic groups, even where eminently competent and relevant, tend to be excluded from the definition and evaluation of the ethnic events of European multicultural societies. If speaking at all, immigrants are heard as passive, anonymous victims. Ethnic experiences, expertise and opinions are by definition found to be less credible than those of 'white' sources, even in situations when the latter may be characterized as biased. Apart from the general characteristics of selective news gathering among elite institutions, one of the causes of this biased news production is that white journalists have less experience and expertise to contact and communicate with ethnic minority organizations and spokespersons.

As possible explanations, if not as excuses for the lack of diversity in news gathering, it should first be mentioned that it is often difficult to contact smaller minority groups and organizations that have less organized interaction with the press through news releases, press conferences, press agencies, and so on.

Secondly, the broader social and economic situation also implies that many reporters have to work under precarious work conditions, in which deviance from editorial policies and corporate constraints might expose them to sanctions. This also means that the responsibility of biased reporting should not be equally divided over all journalists, but — following our main claim of the role of the elites in the reproduction of racism — more specifically to (chief) editors and media owners. This is also the reason why we recommend below to change racism in the press first of all by addressing the top, as we also do for politics, corporate business, science and education.

Finally, it should be stressed that racist reporting is not always intentional, but more often the consequence of other contextual conditions mentioned above (deadlines, lack of resources, more difficult contacts with minority organizations, etc.) in general, and lack of knowledge and education on the other hand. Unbiased reporting requires more explicit professional insight into details of text and talk, and especially about the consequences of media discourse on social cognitions (models, attitudes, ideologies) and social inequality. It is of course the task of leading editors to monitor reporting and opinion in view of the possibly racist effects of the discourses they publish.

3. Lacking multicultural professional education of journalists.

A multicultural society requires multicultural professional education and on-the-job training of journalists. Although some universities organize such courses, some newspapers are open to training in specialized 'ethnic' expertise, and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has consistently recommended such training, the overall situation remains one of predominantly monocultural professional education and training. Against the background of the consistent denial of racism in the press, journalists are seldom critically educated to be aware of and to avoid biased news gathering, topic selection, style and quotation. Indeed, they are probably the only profession that is never criticized in the press, so they are not used to systematic public criticism, as is the case for politicians and scholars! If at all, books of style only recommend avoiding explicitly racist labels and do not deal with more subtle and indirect forms of bias. Results of scholarly research about racism (including anti-Semitism, Eurocentrism, ethnicism, etc.) and the press are seldom used as examples to be avoided.

Self-critical ethnic awareness training is virtually absent in news organizations. Some countries and newspapers have deontological professional codes that also deal with ethnic coverage, but such recommendations are generally flouted in practice, especially in the rightwing popular press. Both in academic education and in on-the-job training there is scant attention for the possible influences of ethnically biased reporting on the formation of ethnic prejudices of the readers and for the role of the press in the reproduction of racism in society.

4. Biased news.

It should hardly come as a surprise that a nearly exclusively white newsroom and lacking diversity in professional education and newsgathering, nearly inevitably lead to the production and publication of biased news. Such news is generally characterized by a general strategy that may be summarized as follows:

Emphasize Our Good Things, and Their Bad Things

De-emphasize Our Bad Things, and Their Good Things

This polarization in the formulation of news events is an expression of familiar patterns of biased underlying mental models of ethnic events that are familiar in social psychological research on prejudice and intergroup conflict. The expression of such models in news reports has consistently been shown to have the following characteristics at all levels of news reports, editorials and opinion articles:

(a) *Negative topics.* Contrary to news about autochthonous citizens, news about immigrants, refugees and minorities is organized by a limited number of negative topics, namely

(i) Arrival and immigration of non-Europeans are defined as a fundamental problem, if not as a threat to the nation, and seldom as a positive development.

(ii) Integration of resident minorities is defined as problematic if not as impossible, especially because ‘They’ do not want to integrate — thus blaming the victim.

(iii) Immigrants and minorities are often associated with deviance, illegality, crime, violence or terrorism, and refugees and asylum seekers with abuse of social services.

On the other hand, topics that are relevant for immigrant or minority communities, or that reflect negatively on the dominant white ingroup and its elite institutions, tend to be avoided or downplayed, such as (i) white racism and discrimination, (ii) minority contributions to the economy, society, science and culture – except in such stereotypical domains as sport and pop music, (iii) experiences and the everyday lives of ethnic minority groups. To wit, racism in the press is hardly ever a topic in the press itself. Research findings about the role of the press in the reproduction of racism are consistently ignored and denied, and very seldom fairly or self-critically reported.

Perhaps most systematically lacking in the account of immigration and minorities are the numerous ways these contribute to the welfare of the host country and society. The press should not only be interested in drama and conflict, but also provide the positive messages that confirm feelings of stability and well-being among the readers. Thus, immigration can very well be systematically portrayed as a boon for the

country, and not as a threat, as we also know from the positive economic effects of immigration, not to speak of the dynamic cultural and social diversity of multicultural countries. Similarly, it would make sense to regular picture in some dramatic detail what would happen to the country if indeed suddenly all or most immigrants would ‘go back’. Part of such more positive coverage would also be more attention for prominent or successful figures among immigrants and minorities, a more selective focus on the more moderate than on the radical Others, and broader attention for national and international initiatives of bridging the gap between ethnic communities or between whole ‘civilizations’.

Obviously, the selective coverage of ‘negative’ topics is not only an effect of media bias, but partly also caused by those who feed the press with such stories, primarily the mainstream political parties. Thus, the widespread political and media panic on immigration, refugees, terrorism and Islam is largely also due to the way the press covers politicians — to which independent, critical media should take more active distance.

(b) Negative descriptions. Within such globally negative topics, news on immigration, minorities or refugees is formulated in discourse structures that emphasize the negative characteristics of the ethnic outgroup and minimizes those of the white ingroup. This happens, for instance, by such labels as ‘scroungers’ or ‘parasites’, e.g., to describe refugees especially in the rightwing popular press, by the general use of negative military or menacing metaphors such as ‘invasion’ or ‘waves’ to define the arrival of immigrants, irrelevant ethnic labels in crime reporting or well-known disclaimers in opinion articles (‘I am not a racist, but...’, ‘Of course we know the problems of Africa, but...’).

Conversely, active involvement of white ingroup members in negative actions tends to be minimized, for instance by nominalizations (such as ‘discrimination’ — where it is not made clear *who* discriminates against whom). More generally, then, *their* negative acts are prominently displayed (front page, large article, large type, etc.), in precise detail, and in hyperbolic terms, whereas *our* negative acts are ignored, excused or mitigated by euphemisms, or attributed to small right-wing fringe groups (e.g., Neonazis), that is, again to *others*. Besides the obvious textual dimensions of media bias in the press, also photos (for instance of another boat of Africans arriving in the Canary islands, or of violent West Indians in the UK) may contribute to stereotypes and prejudices.

(c) *Selective quotation.* As may be predicted from selective news gathering, ethnic minorities and their spokespersons are systematically less quoted than white elite sources, even when they would be more qualified to give their view or opinions of some ethnic event. And — unlike white sources — if minority spokespersons are quoted at all, they seldom are allowed to speak alone, so as to avoid that they are the only ones defining an ethnic event. Those of the Others that do not conform to the prevalent stereotypes (e.g., modern, tolerant, Muslim politicians and scholars) are seldom asked or cited. Similarly, dissidents of *Our* group who criticize dominant politics and media are routinely silenced or attacked as ‘ethnic’ traitors.

(d) *A characteristic example: The press coverage of the Danish Cartoon controversy.* Whereas news and opinion articles on immigration and integration of Muslims always have been negative, current coverage, especially of Islam and Arabs, is specifically influenced by the terrorist

attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. A particular telling example is the vast recent media coverage of the international controversy about the anti-Mohammed cartoons published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten* in early 2006. Analysis of that coverage shows that the media largely focused on some isolated violent reactions in Muslim countries — as if such reactions were a serious threat to the press in Europe. And most opinion articles defended the unlimited freedom of the press — as if such freedom were in serious danger. Of course, few — if any — voices were heard that criticized the Danish newspaper and its support by nearly all European newspapers, thus flouting the self-proclaimed principle of the balance of opinion in the press. At the same time, little or no background was given about rampant racism in Danish politics and the press — nor more generally about the role and responsibilities of the press in a multicultural society. On the contrary, especially also in elite newspapers age-old Orientalist stereotypes and prejudices on Muslims and Arabs (as studied by the late Edward Said) were widely reproduced, as was earlier the case in the coverage of the Rushdie Affair in 1988-1989. European history was only associated with positive values, such as human rights, tolerance and freedom of the press. Conveniently forgotten in such self-serving references to the moral superiority of Europe and the ‘West’, was a long history of slavery, colonialism, segregation, Apartheid, fascism and centuries of blatant rampant racism in politics, media, science and culture, culminating more recently in the Holocaust and genocide in Bosnia and Chechnya.

Whereas in this affair — and more generally in the coverage of Islam — the daily focus is on various aspects of Islamist terrorism, on the one hand, and Muslim ‘backwardness’, on the other hand — typically in the

selective attention for the use of scarves (often misnamed ‘veils’ or sometimes even ‘burkas’ in the press) by some Muslim women, an attention never paid to the clothes of ‘our’ catholic nuns. There is no comparison with the scant attention paid to the fundamentalist religious right in the USA, despite its influence on the decision by the ‘neocons’ to invade Iraq, and hence its shared responsibility for the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens and U.S. military — vastly more than the victims of Islamist terrorism. Nor is the same critical attention paid to the abuse of power of the Catholic church over many important aspects of the everyday lives many hundreds of millions of people in the world — such as the misery caused to the women who are not allowed to divorce violent husbands or to have an abortion, not to speak of the deaths of thousands of AIDS victims who were infected by HIV because the Catholic church prohibits the use of condoms. In sum, in such biased reporting, not only do we find the usual strategies of ingroup polarization and self-glorification, but especially also a nearly blind eye for the many fundamental problems of ‘our own’ western or European society, politics, religion and culture.

Few recent news events more clearly illustrate the general strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in the press: To define and condemn anti-Muslim cartoons, and hence a newspaper as racist or ‘ethnicist’, was simply inconceivable in this case. In other words, the coverage of this controversy was characterized by all the properties that are largely accepted as the definitions of eurocentrist prejudice and racism: Emphasizing *Our* white (European, western) moral and political superiority — freedom, tolerance, democracy, and secularism — and emphasizing and overgeneralizing *Their*

backwardness, violence, dictatorships, and religious fanaticism — and silencing or mitigating *ours*.

5. Effects on the readers.

Although media effects are a very complex issue, it is not only plausible that biased reporting on immigrants, refugees or minorities has a negative effect on the ethnic attitudes of the readers, but such effects have also been demonstrated in empirical research. Moreover, critical rejection of biased media discourse may be expected only from those readers who have positive interethnic experiences or who already have an antiracist ideology. It has been shown that once biased ethnic models of concrete ethnic events have been formed, these may in turn be generalized to more general stereotypes and prejudices of the ethnic outgroups — and even to the formation of racist ideologies. Such ideologies may even construe the interpretation of neutrally formulated news events as biased mental models that are seen to confirm the basic ideology.

Recommendations

The general conclusion of these consistent research results is that the press, just like most elite institutions in Europe, contributes in its own specific way to the reproduction of racism in society. It does so by discrimination in hiring of minority journalists, lacking multicultural training, biased newsgathering and selective source contacts, and an overall negative portrayal of immigrants, refugees and minorities, and of the multicultural

society as a whole. It does so also by its lack of historical and political consciousness about the long racist history of Europe and the renewed growth of racist ideas and forces in most EU countries today. Critical media research on this issue is routinely ignored. That is, since they thus may be expected to know the nature and the consequences of biased coverage and opinion, journalists and editors are responsible for such public discourse and its role in the reproduction of racism in society. Hence, also in this case, defense in terms of ignorance (“*wir haben es nicht gewusst*”) is unacceptable.

The recommendations that are based on this research are straightforward, and basically imply to heed its widely and repeatedly reproduced conclusions. More specifically, such research recommends the following guidelines and practices, to be systematically implemented in the everyday routines of news making — guidelines that have been formulated in many investigations, reports, meetings and fora:

- **Permanent on-the-job training** in view of ethnic reporting within multicultural societies, making use of prominent research findings. Heeding existing journalistic codes for multicultural news coverage.
- **Hiring of (more) ethnic minority journalists**, and employing them in all sections in the newspaper (not only for reporting on ‘ethnic’ events) – and not only of those whose opinions and practices are conveniently adapted to those who employ them.
- **Consideration of tighter (self-) regulations** for diverse employment (as do exist, for instance in the UK) for public broadcasting for all

organizations whose public service and diversity are crucial in a multicultural society.

- **Using more diverse news sources**, and by definition *always* including prominent and competent spokespersons of the relevant ethnic communities — as well as citing these as competent and reliable sources in the news reports themselves.
- **Selection of non-biased topics** that routinely cover all relevant and otherwise newsworthy aspects of immigration and of minority communities, and not only those contribute to a selectively negative portrayal of minorities. This implies the inclusion of topics that highlight the positive contributions of immigration and immigrants, as well as coverage of discrimination, prejudice and racism, also among white elite institutions — including the mass media themselves.
- **Avoiding prejudiced, stereotypical or racist labels**, metaphors, biased descriptions, story angles, blaming the victim, mitigation of ingroup responsibility of discrimination and racism, overgeneralizations on the basis of one or a few examples, and any other aspect of news discourse that may contribute to the formation of irrelevant and arbitrary negative mental models of ethnic events and prejudices about immigrants, refugees and ethnic minority groups.
- **Inclusion of these guidelines in style instructions** for reporting the ‘ethnic events’ of multicultural societies, to be actively enforced by responsible (chief) editors.

- **Appointment of independent ombudspersons** who may critically investigate examples of biased reporting in the newspaper, as well as a more ample right of reply in cases of obviously unbalanced, if not more blatantly racist, ethnic reporting.
- **Good examples.** Instead of limiting the freedom of the press, it is rather generally agreed upon that instead of prohibition or even codes of conduct, good examples may have more positive effects on journalists. As is also policy of the International Federation of Journalists, it is therefore to be recommended that examples of unbiased, ethnically sensitive and well-informed reporting should be highlighted and rewarded.
- **The role of the internet.** Since an increasing number of newspaper readers, and especially also the younger ones, read the press via the internet, special policies should be developed to struggle against racism and racist reporting by means that are more difficult to realize in the printed press, such as links to minority organizations, declarations of minority spokesmen, commentaries of NGOs, etc. Where in the printed press, lack of space is a major argument not to pay much information to such crucial background, no such limitations exist for the internet version of news and opinion articles.

Final remarks on racism and the freedom/power of the press

It goes without saying that the recommendations formulated above in no way should be interpreted as a limitation of the freedom of the press. On the contrary, they should be seen as a contribution to enhancing the overall professional *quality* of news reporting in multicultural societies. Following universal guidelines of the United Nations, nation states, organizations and institutions, world wide, are called to actively combat all forms of racism.

Such guidelines especially also apply to symbolic institutions such as the news media, which play a decisive role in the formation of the ethnic beliefs of citizens. Prejudice and racism are not innate but learned. They are learned from dominant public discourse, for instance in politics, textbooks, scientific publications, and especially in the news media, which are also the mediator of the other symbolic elites. In this respect, the media should also play a much more active role in the prevention, instead of the promotion, of social panics that have minor causes but that may have racist effects, as is the case for the controversy about the ‘veils’ of Muslim women. The tendency of much of the press — and not only the tabloid press — to dramatize and exaggerate in such cases is one of the major causes for the propagation of ‘ethnic panics’ that are potent conditions for the formation and confirmation of stereotypes and prejudices. In sum, journalists — as well as politicians — should be more acutely aware of the possibly negative consequences of biased text and talk in the formation of social attitudes. They should more actively criticize those among themselves who explicitly engage in discrimination, prejudice and racism — and not only at the extreme right.

In a democratic society, powerful institutions are accountable for their actions. Total freedom means absolute power, and hence is limited by the law, as well as by moral and professional responsibility. Abuse of freedom by powerful institutions means abuse of power. This is as true for the

freedom of speech and the press, as it is for the freedom of science and politics. There is general agreement about limiting the freedom of companies in producing tobacco, medicine or food, or to prevent them from polluting the environment. Corporate activity and production that threaten the lives and health of the population or that limit the basic rights of citizens is routinely put under scrutiny, if not controlled or prohibited. We readily accept the prohibition of unhealthy or poisonous food. However, especially the symbolic elites tend to radically reject to even self-regulate explicitly racist media products (e.g. of the tabloids) that poison the minds of millions, and that have been shown to (re) produce prejudices and promote racism, social inequality and political instability. That is, we should be very much aware of the consequences of *not* regulating racist ethnic coverage. Since all freedoms of powerful organizations are limited by law, and such is already the case for the freedom of expression and the press (for instance in libel laws — which typically also favor —other— elites), it should freely be examined whether or not (more) self-regulation of the press on very specific points, such as the prevention of the reproduction of ethnic prejudices, is an effective contribution to social equality, and hence to democracy. That is, we may have to decide between corporate interests and elite prerogatives on the one hand, and a more just society on the other hand. In the sometimes delicate balance that defines interethnic relations in multicultural societies, such abuse may have dire consequences, as we have seen in the Holocaust and more recently in the genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia and Chechnya.

Research shows that most ‘ethnic’ reporting in Europe is routinely characterized by sensationalist and negative coverage of the ‘invasion’ of immigrants, of ‘scrounging’ refugees, of the alleged ‘clash of civilizations’, the threat of Islamist terrorism and of Islam in general, among other

preferred topics. At the same time the long history and the everyday reality of European racism — also in the mass media — tends to be ignored or mitigated — as is also the case in textbooks.

A press cannot be free when its own racism is taboo in its coverage, and when its critics do not have access to its op-ed pages. *It is crucial to recall that the freedom of the press was acquired not to marginalize, problematize or discriminate against powerless groups, but to defend them against the powerful state or against dominant groups.* A truly free press would be able to attack the corporate misdeeds of its owners or the racism of its colleagues, instead of some ‘veiled’ Muslim girls or a few suicidal Islamist boys who feel increasingly powerless to stop a war or to prevent the daily assassination of Palestinian women and children by the Israeli army — among many other condoned violations of human rights directed against Arabs and Muslims. A free press uses the label of ‘terrorism’ for *all* political forms of violence against unarmed citizens, also when perpetrated by states. (On the other hand, the need to criticize states for their terrorism, as is the case of the Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people or of violence in Africa, should not be selectively applied, thus engaging in an indirect form of anti-Semitism or racism).

If the alarming and increasing forms of racism in Europe today, partly propagated by some of the press and hardly combated by most of the press, are not radically curbed, the multicultural future of Europe will be hardly less dramatic. A well-informed and responsible press should actively engage in combating such developments — and it should begin to do so by avoiding any form of unprofessional and biased reporting, as described above.

Emphasizing the obvious value of freedom of the press without implementing the democratic and professional responsibilities that follow

from the role of the news media in multicultural society, as recommended above, may be seen as self-serving protection of the power and the interests of the dominant ‘white’ group in society, that is, as a form of racism.

To end this brief statement on racism in the European press in a more positive tone, the good news are in the exceptions to the rules, regularities and routines summarized above. First of all, what has been said about most of the press does not always apply to television and radio. Secondly, there are of course significant differences between newspapers. Much of what has been said above — such as the use of explicitly negative labels — applies more generally and more seriously to the rightwing popular press (especially the tabloids, e.g., in the UK, Germany, Austria and Denmark) than to the — much smaller— left-leaning liberal quality press. Some newspapers, for instance in the UK, do have some minority journalists and are conscious about ethnic reporting and avoiding stereotypes and prejudice. It may be hoped that these will play the necessary role of change agents in the urgent improvement of the press in the coverage of immigration, minorities and the multicultural society.

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Bibliographical note

The scholarly literature upon which this declaration and its recommendations are based is extensive, and includes many studies in many countries and in several disciplines. There are also numerous reports, also by organizations of journalists, on the role of the press in the reproduction of (and the struggle against) racism. For brevity's sake we only cite the following prominent monographs (and not articles), and only on the written press in western Europe. For examples, theory and many analysis, see also my other books and papers on racism in the press (see my internet sight for a list of publications).

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Short biographical note Teun A. van Dijk

Teun A. van Dijk was professor of discourse studies at the University of Amsterdam until 2004, and is at present professor at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona. After earlier work on generative poetics, text grammar, and the psychology of text processing, his work since 1980 takes a more critical perspective and deals with discursive racism, news in the press, ideology, knowledge and context. He is the author of several books in most of these areas, and he edited *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (4 vols, 1985) the introductory book *Discourse Studies* (2 vols., 1997) as well as the reader *The Study of Discourse* (5 vols., 2007). He founded 6 international journals, *Poetics, Text* (now *Text & Talk*), *Discourse & Society*, *Discourse Studies*, *Discourse & Communication* and the internet journal in Spanish *Discurso & Sociedad* (www.dissoc.org), of which he still edits the latter four. His last monographs in English are *Ideology* (1998) and *Racism and discourse in Spain and Latin America* (2005), and his last edited book (with Ruth Wodak), *Racism at the Top* (2000). He is currently completing a new interdisciplinary study in 2 vols. on the theory of context, and planning a new book on discourse and knowledge. Teun van Dijk, who holds two honorary doctorates, has lectured widely in many countries, especially also in Latin America. With Adriana Bolivar he founded the *Asociación Latino-americana de Estudios del Discurso (ALED)*, in 1995. For a list of publications, recent articles, resources for discourse studies and other information, see his homepage: www.discourses.org.