

# **Reporting ethnic minorities and ethnic conflict**

**beyond good or evil**

Edited by

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## Acknowledgements

*Urte Sonnenberg*

In September 1997, the European Journalism Centre with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences brought together a group of journalists and journalism trainers from 10 Eastern and Western European countries in order to start a discussion on how to assist journalists in reporting ethnic minorities and ethnic conflicts. Based on our very rewarding experience with the case study approach to journalistic ethics, we asked the experts to bring with them case studies dealing with ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting. Unlike the ethics handbook, however, we asked for both positive and negative examples. The aim was to collect training material with which to show very concretely why there are problems when reporting about ethnic minorities and ethnic conflicts.

Most tangible result of the discussion at the EJC in Maastricht in September 1997 is this booklet. Presenting concrete cases from various countries in Europe, the EJC teaching handbook *Reporting ethnic minorities and ethnic conflict* shows where reporting facts and giving opinion get confused. It also shows where facts may be presented truthfully and still do not serve to convey political or social realities. The handbook also

helps to understand why.

In the meantime, we would like to give our thanks to the many contributors to this project. This booklet would not have been possible without the contribution of our 11 experts. They did not only chew on the various problems presented by this project for all of three days, they also revised their case studies on the basis of the discussion and provided us in many cases with copies of the original articles or programmes. Our thanks go to all of them and especially to Anna Sharogradskaia and Michael Bromley, who consented to take the lead in the discussion. Our special thanks go to the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sciences without whose unstinting support many of the ambitious EJC training projects in the field of journalism could not be realised - including this one.

Authors of single contribution are indicated by name. Where no names are given, the EJC takes responsibility. The overall concept, outline and arrangement of the cases study collection remains in the responsibility of the EJC.

*Maastricht, June 1998*



## Introduction

*Michael Bromley*

Since the late 1980s nationalism, nationality, identity, migration, ethnicity and race have re-emerged as major issues in Europe. Items about them appear almost daily in the media. The journalists assigned to such stories often find them difficult to cover. There is confusion over how to describe and address individuals and groups, while the pressures to stereotype and conform to prejudice can be strong. Some of this uncertainty probably arises from the journalists' own perspectives: the media may be either themselves part of, or at least closely associated with, specific groups. Yet the multicultural nature of Europe as a whole is undeniable. The question to be asked of journalists is how sensitive to cultural diversity is their reporting?

One factor which connects most of the various strands of European culture is the persistence of attitudes which make outsiders and targets of anyone perceived as somehow 'different'. The prominence of identity as a topic in the media has coincided, of course, with the rise again of the extreme right and racism and intolerance in European politics. It must be acknowledged, that for the most part European journalism cannot be accused of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism or

intolerance. In practice, however, reporting and commentaries too regularly resort to stereotyping and display ignorance and bias.

The kind of poor journalism may amount to no more than isolated incidences of misjudgement in the heat of the newsroom. Journalists' mistakes, however, are made in public and are likely to have an impact on both opinion and policy. Too many errors, even if unrelated, can have a cumulative effect. Journalism can rapidly turn, even if unwittingly, into propaganda. One way of insuring against this is to devise ways of identifying what is wrong, and of preventing mistakes being repeated, as well as recognising good journalism and encouraging its practice.

The increasing liberalisation, deregulation and commercialisation of the media have begun to shift primary responsibility for regulating journalism from the courts (and even in some instances, the State) to voluntary systems. This means there is even greater reason for journalists to discuss issues surrounding the reporting of ethnic minorities, and to consider what actions to take to ensure all individuals and groups, whatever their cultures, are fairly represented. The

emphasis is now firmly on newsroom decision-making, journalism practices and ethics.

Journalists properly remain vigorous in defence of their 'freedoms'. They are suspicious of attempts by States, intergovernmental organisations and others outside journalism to either prescribe or proscribe for journalism.

Across Europe - East no less than West - new and revised codes governing the practices of journalism and the media have been introduced at a considerable rate. Nevertheless, codes (whatever their source and good intentions) may guide without changing attitudes; they may even suggest ways of getting around their own prohibitions. They may contain internal contradictions between the letter and the spirit of what they say. They certainly offer the opportunity to argue that each individual case is an exception to any rule, so that in the end there may be so many exceptions the rule becomes virtually useless.

At the same time, in practice journalists in Europe appear to adhere to a broadly uniform sense of what is right and wrong in journalism. The ways in which journalists do their jobs and the kinds of objectives they pursue have much in common, despite otherwise enormous differences

in cultural, political, social and economic circumstances. There is general agreement that journalists occupy a privileged and important position between authority and the mass of citizens, and that the methods of journalism are vital for discriminating between what is genuinely in the popular interest and what is manipulative populism.

In short, European journalists believe for the most part in 'good' journalism, although no-one claims to have a magic formula for producing it. The most important components of this 'good' journalism are seen to be freedom of expression; a sense of responsibility; accuracy and fairness; and adequate access to both information and to the media.

The experience of many seminars organised by the European Journalism Centre bringing journalists together from all over Europe has been that journalists have a great deal to learn from each other, and that exchanges of information and the sharing of experiences are enormously beneficial.

Given the routine pressures of journalism it is usually difficult for journalists to reflect critically on newsroom practices and decision-making. Bad practices may be perpetuated by default, and

good practice may simply go unrecognised.

This handbook is about good journalism. Good journalism is as relevant in a multicultural society as it is in a culturally homogeneous one. Cultural diversity and examples of intolerance differ in character and extent across Europe. Good journalism should be a constant.

No attempt has been made to propose a single, universal model of good journalism. Nor is this a catalogue of racist reporting, xenophobic editorials, anti-Semitic stereotyping or intolerant commentaries. Rather it is an attempt to present - warts and all - a cross-section of European journalism handling, more or less successfully, the complex issues raised by the realities of cultural diversity.

There is no argument here for censorship, imposed either from outside or within. As the Working Group on Migrants and the Media of the Association of Journalists in The Netherlands (NVJ) argues, fair, accurate, responsible and, above all, full reporting remains the cornerstone of good journalism. The question journalists need to keep in mind is whether they are using or *abusing* freedom of expression.

It seems obvious that for journalism to meet these

requirements it must also be *inclusive*. The journalism read, listened to and watched daily should reflect the societies in which it is produced. The group Public Broadcasting for a Multicultural Europe (PBME) has noted that “If the host white Europeans do not see black, migrant, refugee people reflected in everyday programming, this serves to confirm the view of them as outsiders”.

This applies to all so-called minorities. An American report, based on a year-long monitoring of news output, suggested imagining ‘picking up the newspaper or tuning into the news each day without expecting to see yourself or people like you there’. This is the daily reality for many Europeans, whether it is imposed on them or entered into voluntarily. They have become more or less invisible.

Where they are represented, too often it is as stereotypes. As the American journalist Walter Lippman pointed out more than 70 years ago, stereotyping and generalising are virtually inescapable in journalism. There simply is not enough time - for readers, listeners and viewers, as well as journalists - “to see all things freshly and in detail” all the time.

Lippman also insisted, however, that stereotypes



should be seen for what they are, and modified “gladly” after being subjected to “the test of evidence”. A question journalists might ask themselves is whether a particular, perhaps routine way of referring to people, however benign it may seem, is really justifiable? Even if such stereotypes are not published, are they used in the newsroom?

Just as importantly, do they impact on coverage because so-called ethnic minorities are excluded both from the newsroom itself and from the sources which journalists use? If journalists have limited sources and contacts, and some communities do not have reasonable access to the pages of newspapers and magazines or to radio and television air-time, it seems logical to conclude that this will shape the news agenda.

Getting the story right, with full, accurate information which takes equitable account of all aspects of the event or issue, stands, as the American Society of Professional Journalists recognises, “at the very heart of journalism”. This belief is reflected in almost every European code of journalism practice. Accuracy is not just a matter of getting “the facts”, however.

Facts need to be cross-checked. Claims should be supported by evidence. Misinterpretation needs to be avoided. Context has to be provided. All these dimensions of publishing or broadcasting “the facts” are acknowledged in various European media and journalism codes. They are also established as ideals.

This handbook of case studies looks at the ways in which journalists in a multicultural Europe meet these ideals at the crucial point where majority and minority communities should be communicating with each other. Of course, not all journalists fulfil all their obligations all the time. Many do so for much of the time. We can - and should - be willing to learn from them both.

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## **The epitome of ethnic minority reporting problems - examples of Sinti and Roma reporting from Britain, Bulgaria, and Germany**

There are hardly two other groups of people who are so discriminated against on a pan-European scale than Sinti and Roma. The three following case studies will provide only a glimpse into a problem that is far larger. At the root of the problem stands the perception of “them” as opposed to “us” as the case from Britain shows and a complex mixture of common stereotypes, professional negligence, boring simplifications and simple malice as the Bulgarian case shows, while the German case shows that the usual techniques of good reporting work, regardless of the subject of the report.

### **“Us” against “them” - the wrong question to ask**

*Michael Bromley*

#### **The set-up**

Over a period of two or three years in the mid 1990s, two or three families of Romany people (gypsies) per week sought asylum in the United Kingdom from alleged persecution in their own countries of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Albania. Their arrival in England attracted no media attention. In the autumn of 1997 these refugees began arriving in considerably larger numbers. In one week in early October it was said that 150 people had arrived seeking asylum. By mid-October the most conservative estimate was that about 400 were being housed in the port town of Dover where they had landed after the sea crossing from mainland Europe. This apparently sudden acceleration in arrivals prompted a large amount of media coverage - in

the press, and on television and radio.

#### **The case**

On October 26 the mid-market tabloid London newspaper the *Mail on Sunday* carried an illustrated feature article by its social affairs editor, headlined “*Who comes first? A 65-year-old invalid English pensioner and hundreds like her? Or 'refugee gypsies' from Eastern Europe, here because our benefits are generous?*”

After the numbers of arrivals increased, debate focused on the question of how far the refugees were genuine asylum seekers and how far they were economic migrants looking to benefit from the UK's welfare system. The situation was complicated by the fact that the small Dover

community (30,000) was expected to accommodate hundreds of impoverished arrivals without any specific assistance from the British government, which led to feelings of resentment among the local population. This aspect of the story attracted a great deal of media coverage. Perhaps not surprisingly, the actual numbers involved were themselves a matter of contention: the quasi-official estimate was 400; some organisations said it was 800, and others insisted that the final figures would be as many as 3,000.

### **Analysis**

The case arose at a time when the media, along with other UK institutions, had begun seriously addressing declines in public spending and the entire future of the Welfare State. Severe cuts in welfare spending had been implemented under both Conservative and Labour governments since the 1980s. Similarly, the demands on welfare budgets and public services in general made by refugees led in the 1980s to reviews of the legislation on asylum seeking in an attempt to prevent “bogus” applicants from entering the UK supposedly merely to claim welfare support. Much of the London (national) press, which is made up of rightist papers, including the *Mail on Sunday*, had been instrumental in shaping public debates about the impact of the presence of refugees and migrants of all kinds on finite

welfare budgets.

The tone of the *Mail on Sunday* article is set by the headline. It pitches “us” - “people who were born and bred in Britain” - against “them” (“foreigners”), using the story of Ms Jenkins to illustrate the situation in Dover. In fact, much of the article focuses on the dispute between the local authorities in Kent (the administrative area in which Dover lies) and the government over the provision of welfare for asylum seekers. It connects this to the more general, unrelated cut-backs in welfare provision affecting UK citizens as a whole. Local dissatisfaction at being required to bear a financial burden for what might legitimately be considered a national issue which ought to be dealt with by the government; resentment at unrelated progressive reductions in welfare provisions which hit the elderly, infirm and disadvantaged; and residual xenophobic sentiments are put together to create an atmosphere of hostility towards migrants. It is even suggested that the refugees in question were not subject to persecution in their countries of origin and were simply trying to take advantage of “all manner of services” the UK offers them. In this light, “Britain’s generous immigration laws” are seen as a weakness.

## **Interpretation**

In keeping with newspaper reporting in the UK, the *Mail on Sunday* article set out to relate a particular part of the story of the Romany refugees. Other parts of the story - including the extent to which Romanies were suffering discrimination in their countries of origin, and their own views, and those of welfare groups working on their behalf, of their treatment in the UK - had been published elsewhere. These articles often balanced out expressions of resentment and anger by both officials and citizens in Dover. The *Mail on Sunday* clearly wanted to go beyond such exchanges and explore some of the concrete circumstances behind them.

Nevertheless, while none of the major elements in the article is necessarily inaccurate, the various strands of the story have been linked to create hostility towards both the refugees themselves and the UK's official attitude towards asylum seekers. No attempt has been made to establish the precise connections between the wider cuts in welfare provisions and the ways in which the welfare of asylum seekers is funded. The fact that this case has exposed weaknesses in the system for funding the welfare of refugees is utilised not to call for

action over this issue, but to argue that the government is prioritising the funding of asylum seekers ahead of the welfare of its own citizens. This is not supported by any detailed description or analysis of the mechanisms by which such funding is made. Nor does the article examine other relevant aspects of the situation, such as the extent to which the refugees might benefit the UK. The asylum seekers are viewed exclusively as a drain on the economy. No questions are raised about the workings of the official UK migration services - what contribution they make towards the smooth assimilation of asylum seekers.

The use of the term “gypsies” could reasonably be objected to, otherwise there are few overly racist undertones in the article. The overall tone of the article, however, is anti-foreigner. The view of one Romany woman that the UK does not practise discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity is presented in an unfavourable light. It is implied that money spent on refugees reduces the amount available to UK citizens. Further, the article suggests that if there is any money available, it should be allocated to UK citizens rather than “foreigners”.

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## **Facts rather than fiction, please**

*Ivan Bedrov*

### **The set-up**

The Roma people are the second biggest minority group in Bulgaria after the Turks. According to the latest census in 1992 there are around half a million Roma but in fact their real number may be close to one million, because many of them, especially the ones who speak Turkish and follow Islam, prefer considering themselves Turks. Of the whole population in Bulgaria around 10% are Roma people. Poverty, illiteracy, and their image in the media are their biggest problems.

Till 1989-90 the media in Bulgaria were state-owned and fully controlled by the communist party. The ideology of the party in the late 80s was that there were no minorities in Bulgaria, so the Roma people were not present in the media. The very words "Roma" or "gypsy" could not be found in any report. Instead the absurd expression "our dark-skinned brothers" which meant Roma people was used. Even then their few media appearances presented them as people who beat their wives, buy their brides, travel without tickets and steal a lot.

Things really started to become difficult for Roma people and their image in the media in

1990, when the first independent and private newspapers appeared. Since then the situation has constantly worsened. Nowadays Roma people, according to the newspapers, are all murderers, rapists, and drunks. They are present mainly on the pages called "13 fatal", "Blue light" or "Crimi" - all of them specialising in crime news; or on the pages given over to curious events. To give an example: "A gypsy man drinks ten bottles of poisonous alcohol and lives".

There is a tendency to assume Roma participation whenever there is an unsolved crime. If a murder has happened and the murderer is still unknown, the reporters often write about their so-called investigation that always leads to a Roma man.

### **The case**

This is a typical example of such a case from 1997. Three Eastern European tourists and one Bulgarian were killed in a car crash when a tourist bus and a fuel tanker collided near the north-eastern Bulgarian town of Shumen on August 13. The next day this was a leading topic for all newspapers in Bulgaria. A group of Roma pedestrians was mentioned as the possible cause

of the accident.

This case study covers articles from four Bulgarian newspapers of August 14: *Trud*, *Standart*, *Democratia* and *Duma*. *Trud* has a circulation of about 250,000 copies, and is owned by the German publishing group WAZ. It targets the broadest possible readership, and is a tabloid but not overly scandalous. *Standart* sells about 35,000 copies. It is a liberal newspaper supporting the reforms in the country and targets the general public. *Democratia* also sells about 35,000 copies and is the daily of the Union of Democratic Forces - the neo-conservative political party ruling the country. *Duma* has a circulation of about 40,000 copies and is the daily of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the successor of the communist party.

*Trud* - the article about the accident is prominent on the front page and continues on the back-page which specialises in crime news. In the article we read: "The crash was caused by pedestrians who appeared unexpectedly on the road, according to the police. A gypsy from Razgrad was arrested, who together with his wife and a small baby crossed the path of the bus SETRA PP7791AA, driven by Ardinch Aliev, 31 years old from Razgrad. Now it is being clarified whether the Roma people intended to hitch-hike or just

crossed against regulations."

The topic is also the leading article of the front page of *Standart* and continues on an inside page: "In the dark the tanker driver saw two human shadows crossing the road. According to him, this was a gypsy family with a small baby."

The other two papers did not carry the accident on their front pages. *Democratia* writes: "A drunken gypsy who used to sober up while walking with his wife is reported as being the most probable cause of the crash." And *Duma*: "Yesterday, the survivors were questioned and according to the police the tragedy was caused by a gypsy family. The woman was carrying a small baby in her arms and they unexpectedly appeared in front of the bus to hitch-hike."

Ten days later the police announced the results of their investigation: no pedestrians at all were involved in the accident. But this was mentioned by only a few newspapers where it appeared at the bottom of the back pages.

### **Analysis**

This case is about the fact that in Bulgaria it is more important for reporters that the person who commits a crime may be a Roma than the facts about the crime itself. The problem is not the

reporting of such incidents - if something happens, the readers have a right to know about it. The problem is that the reporters turn ethnic affiliation into the most important fact. When a crime is commonplace, which happens almost daily, reporters use ethnicity as a way of sensationalising their story. The word “gypsy” is put in the headlines. There is a well-known and true saying in Bulgaria - you can read everyday “A gypsy stole a hen” but you can never read “A Bulgarian robbed a bank”. Reporters habitually turn even the smallest event in which a Roma participates into something worthwhile to write about.

One interesting fact in this particular case is that the articles and the way they were written had nothing to do with the general political leanings of the papers in question. *Trud* is closer in tone to the 'yellow press', but *Standart* and *Democratia* are liberal papers and rarely publish pro-nationalistic or racist comments. *Duma* presents the socialists' policy and is often chauvinistic and nationalistic - but in this case all the articles looked as if they were written by one and the same person.

The discrimination therefore does not follow a particular political line. It is probably not even intentional. None of the authors chose which

word to use - “gypsy” or “Roma” - they all used both expressions indiscriminately, clearly indicating that they followed popular beliefs and attitudes, rather than the political line of their paper.

### **Interpretation**

The connection made between specific cases and the image of the whole group is a difficult problem in the Bulgarian press. It is very hard to escape suggestions concerning the whole Roma population when there are five crime stories daily with the word “gypsy” in the headline. This association is made subconsciously; the articles only mirror this.

Such articles create the image of Roma people in the media because there are no other articles containing the words “Roma” or “gypsy”. None of the newspapers from the mainstream media pay attention to Roma problems and none of them trains journalists to write about these minority problems. So, the majority of readers becomes acquainted with the Roma people only through crime reports and the result is clear - the media image of Roma people is not a pleasant one.

In Bulgaria there is no strong public opinion about this issue. No letters-to-the-editor or

protests respond to articles like these. The basic prejudice is clear from the fact that an honest man from the Roma minority is regarded as exceptional: “He is not like other Roma”, people say. But no one says: “He is the exception” about a Roma criminal.

Are there any feasible ways to change this situation? The education and training of journalists and the public is perhaps the way out. In some countries mentioning ethnic affiliation is an offence. If a similar law was adopted in Bulgaria, the reporters still would find a way to publish ethnic affiliation. Maybe again the expression “our dark-skinned brothers” would be used. So, the only way out is to strive for a better public understanding of and more tolerance towards people who are different.

It is necessary to organise training courses for journalists or realise projects including such training. Most of the journalists in Bulgaria are badly paid. They have to write every day in order to earn their small salaries, so they do not have the time that is necessary for real investigation and research or just researching the subject properly. That time has to be made in order to

improve the quality of the journalistic work in Bulgarian media.

*Ivan Bedrov is a journalist and member of the Journalists for Tolerance-Foundation in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.*



## **Only an invisible gypsy is a good gypsy - a report in a women's magazine**

*Barbara Thomaß*

The following example is from *Brigitte*, one of the main German women's magazines, with a bi-weekly circulation of 1,038 million. It is a typical women's magazine with fashion, cosmetics, cooking, life style, and some articles on issues of general interest in current German society. The article about the life of Sinti in Germany will not be understandable without some background concerning the history and situation of this ethnic minority in Germany.

### **The set-up**

Sinti have been living in Germany for centuries. Before 1933 they were clerks and workers, traders, craftsmen, artists, and soldiers in the German army in the First World War. However, in general, most of them had simple or old fashioned occupations e.g. as basket-weavers, horse-dealers or cutlers. Most of them were travelling the whole year as part of their culture.

Germans kept a keen track of these foreigners. Before 1933 there was a card filing system of travelling people in Munich, which was later used by the Nazis. The Nazis aimed at systematic and complete extermination of Sinti and Roma in Europe. In 1935, the "Race Laws" of Nuremberg

defined Jews and Sinti ("gypsies") as races to be extinguished. In 1937, work was forbidden for Sinti and Roma. In 1938, the deportation of Sinti and Roma to concentration camps started. School attendance was also forbidden for Sinti and Roma from then on. The Nazis killed ca. 500,000 Sinti and Roma in the whole of Europe.

After 1945, the few surviving Sinti were totally uprooted: They had no education, no jobs, no social structures and had lived through traumatic experiences. For a long time and in distinction to the Jewish people in Germany, they received no compensation, and discrimination continued, concerning, for example, finding places to stay while travelling, or finding work. The Sinti took up traditional ambulant trades like begging and peddling which reinforced prejudices.

No social integration, no attempts at integration policies can be found in Germany even today. One example is their present situation in Hamburg: Most of the Sinti clans live in three areas in the outskirts of the city. Few have a permanent job. Many are living on welfare, are traders or have only occasional work. Sinti stick firmly to family relations and customs, and regard

themselves as Germans.

### **The case - description and analysis**

The report is about the everyday life of a Sinti family which travels during the summer time, occasionally living in the outskirts of big cities like Berlin. The description deals with the worries and hopes of the Sinti, their values, their ways of earning their living and their family life. It helps to make understandable a culture which still seems strange to Germans and whose image is burdened with prejudice.

The report mostly contains observations the reporter makes while she lives with the Sinti. There are many quotes from the people the reporter has spoken to and which are given in the particular dialect the Sinti use in German.

The report addresses obvious clichés, and thus questions the German value system, opening the way to another culture for the reader: “Mr. Weiß is ‘Sprechero’, the one who decides what is law in his clan. Like most of the elder Sinti he cannot write and read. He is a wise man” (p.104).

At the same time, the report shows areas in which the Sinti family shares values that are thought to be typically German - like cleanliness: “Regina, the second eldest daughter, is busy doing the

laundry. Three loads for the washing machine every day: ‘What sort of life it would be if there was no cleanliness’” (p.106).

It was difficult for the reporter to get in contact with the Sinti and she describes this difficulty in the report, thus connecting the real experience with historical facts: “Everything written lasts. Is suitable as proof for something which might cost your life. Every family has had this experience. It always started with something taken down in writing, registered, noted. Even if it was only a name or a number. Burned into the skin” (p.104).

The reader also gets to know how Sinti cope with the experience of the genocide. A son of the family has the name Adolf: “How did the youngest get his name? Mrs. Rosenbach acts astonished: ‘I wanted to show that we don't bear any hatred in our minds’” (p. 108).

The report describes the situation without comment, from the perspective of the Sinti: “They (Mrs. Rosenbach and her husband) had travelled with horse and wagon. All year long, not just from May to November as nowadays. Then cars came into fashion. Soon they became resident. ‘This is because of the bureaucracy. Things are easier when they know where we are.’ She had not married him in a German way. So

she does not get any pension as a widow. If it was not for the children she would have to live on welfare” (p.106).

And describes common prejudices amongst Germans: “Every morning Mr. Weiß goes with his van, equipped like a small craftsman-enterprise, to the rich districts: Zehlendorf, Dahlem, Steglitz, Wannsee. He has been going there for years and has regular customers as a roofer. If they knew why he came only during the summer they would not ask for him any more. Of that he is sure” (p.104).

### **Interpretation**

This report shows that time and space has to be invested for a solid and profound report on ethnic minorities. The reporters needed time to get in contact with the Sinti, time to gain their trust in order to make them speak about their situation. Giving them a voice was the purpose of the reportage which is a valuable example of ethnic minority reporting.

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## **Everybody is a foreigner somewhere - examples of ethnic minority and ethnic majority reporting from Russia, Latvia, and Ukraine**

Having problems with ethnic minority groups themselves, as the case from Russia shows, Russians today are ethnic minorities in a considerable number of countries of the former USSR, including Latvia and Ukraine. The case study from Latvia shows that “even” stereotypes about “Russians” are still that, stereotypes, which therefore need to be treated with care and caution. The case from Ukraine shows how difficult things get when one country’s ethnic minority is another country’s ethnic majority, which might be tempted to try and influence things across the border. This case indicates that minorities are not the victims of discrimination by definition. It also helps us to focus on the real issue at stake: the necessity for a certain fundamental respect for each other. This is what human rights are all about after all.

The selection of cases presented here show two more things. The case from Russia shows that even well-meaning publications can do harm, while the last case from Latvia shows, like the Sinti case from Germany before, that reporting can benefit from not following common perceptions but looking at a story from different rather than the obvious angles.

### **Asking the wrong questions for the right reasons still is discrimination**

*Anna Sharogradskaia*

#### **The set-up**

Russia is a country of many different ethnic groups. In the Soviet Union all the nations shared a belief in essential equality. After the Soviet Empire collapsed it became obvious that there was a wide gap between this ideal and reality. Members of ethnic groups are seen as outsiders by the Russians who enjoy all the rights and benefits of the majority group. For ethnic minorities it is becoming difficult to retain their traditional ways

of life, their languages and their cultural heritage. Their human rights are often violated, and their voices are not heard.

A public debate has begun about what is better, yesterday’s hypocrisy or today’s cynicism. It is expected that the media can generate a radical transformation of the nation from a ‘homogeneous’ one, into a state which recognises and respects diversity.

The Russian language magazine *Armenia I Mir* (Armenia and the World, AIM), published in Moscow, claims to contribute to the understanding of the new society with its diverse sub-communities. One example of such diversity coverage is Ruben Ajrapetian's interview with the head of the organised crime police department of the city of Moscow, M.V. Suntsov. Following you will find a translation of the interview from AIM, no.1-2, Moscow, 1996. The title of the article is *Newcomers Should not Break the Rules of Hospitality*.

### **The case**

"A person of Caucasian<sup>1</sup> nationality." This notorious expression has found widespread dissemination in the Russian press. Arising originally from someone's off-hand comment, it can frequently be heard from governmental and political figures, and has won popularity with the inhabitants of Russia. One-sided propaganda has led to the point where immigrants from the Caucasus in Russia are associated with the world of organised crime.

Our interview subject was not an arbitrary choice. This person deals directly with Caucasian gangs,

because he is in charge of the ethnic criminal gang section of the city of Moscow. He is police lieutenant-colonel Mikhail Vasilievich Suntsov.

AIM: Mikhail Vasilievich, what is your attitude toward the expression 'a person of Caucasian nationality?'

Mikhail Suntsov: I understand the subtext of your question and will try to answer concretely. I personally have some friends from the Caucasus, among them your compatriot and my former colleague, the now extremely successful businessman Yuri Panian. But, as you say, in the performance of my duties dealing with the Caucasian criminal world in Moscow, I call into question my romantic notion of brave, noble mountain men. As a result of bloody ethnic wars and economic collapse in the Trans-Caucasus and the republics of the Northern Caucasus, local criminal gangs under protection from high-placed officials established spheres of influence. It became clear that they could not 'all fit under one roof', and some had no choice but to 'emigrate'. Some of these people moved to Moscow. In total, more than one hundred organised criminal gangs and groups have gathered here.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Russian context, the word "Caucasian" refers to any member of various cultures originating in the area around the Caucasus. Whereas the American reader might associate this word with light-skinned people, in Russia the term refers to dark-skinned people, and generally has a pejorative connotation.

AIM: And so they require special ways and means to fight them? Why exactly do your co-workers deal with Caucasian criminals?

MS: Let's start with the fact that members of organised criminal gangs from the Caucasus are not inhabitants of this region. In other words, they are immigrants. Keeping track of people living in a semi-legal status is extremely difficult. If anything, one has to practically search the entire world for them. (...)

AIM: Do you consider the increasingly widespread 'caucasophobia' in Russia and especially in Moscow to be a consequence of criminal activity?

MS: The problem is much larger: certain factors, such as political manoeuvres which divert the attention of Russians from social problems (the question of employment, etc.), the everyday life of Caucasians - Caucasians love to show off their material well-being - , and others, are obvious. But I think, and our research shows, that enmity towards Caucasians comes from their, to put it mildly, disrespectful attitude towards the local population. When you come to visit, and instead of respecting our customs and way of life, you

start robbing, murdering, coercing, extorting, etc., there comes a point when that unreceptiveness you so dislike pops up. Crimes committed by Caucasians make up 15% of all crimes. You can say that criminals also come here from Yekaterinburg<sup>2</sup>, but that's our problem.

AIM: But do the actions of ethnic criminal gangs have their own 'specific' character?

MS: The range of crimes committed by organised gangs is very wide, starting with robbing apartments and extortion and ending with control of mercantile trade and large-scale financial operations. 'Specialisation' in these crimes occurs, however; say, your compatriots (Armenians) love gold and diamonds, Georgians prefer robbing apartments and kidnapping people, Azerbaijanis prefer drug dealing, etc.

AIM: It is well known that many criminals also moved to Moscow because local powers, for example, in Armenia, took it upon themselves to deal seriously with crime.

MS: Moscow is a super-city, with ten million inhabitants, where the governmental, social, private, and international structures are

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<sup>2</sup> Yekaterinburg is a city with a mostly Russian population.

concentrated, where the incipient democracy is under pressure from public opinion, and clashes with powerful interests of different social strata. In this megapolis, during the transitional period, even co-ordinating the operations of law enforcement organisations is very difficult. In the provinces the problems are more down-to-earth. In certain provincial cities they can clean up an entire gang problem in one night. Just as Armenia in a short period of time succeeded in finding the ways and means to fight crime and unite their efforts, they threw out the national refuse. To my great regret, on the whole, that refuse came to Moscow.

Moscow can protect itself with political, economic and legislative measures. Let's say, by introducing different kinds of residential status, by regulating the migration process, etc. But in conditions of vast corruption, many of the steps taken don't result in the necessary effect. For the time being, we find ourselves in a specific socio-political, moral and ethical vice. Just look at the enormous public resonance provoked by regular examinations of Moscow markets by law enforcement organisations. Today, when even inveterate killers have learned to demand human rights, undertaking wide-ranging operations against one part of the city's population, no matter which part, involves considerable

complications. No one should think that some campaign is being conducted against Caucasians in Moscow. We understand that, in one of the largest cities in the world, the population cannot be homogeneous. We are for all national minorities having their own cultural, religious, social and educational centres and institutions here. The only thing we demand is respect for our country and its people."

### **Analysis**

The interview raises a number of questions:

1. Did the interviewer have a fully defined goal in arranging a conversation with the man in charge of the ethnic crimes section of the police in Moscow? Was this goal connected with the defence of human rights, fighting organised crime, or some other aspect of the capital's public life? To what extent was the interviewer successful in completing his task?
2. Is the understanding of the term "ethnic criminal gangs" as used by both people in the interview fair or prejudicial? Was it useful for understanding the situation? How do you evaluate the policeman's answer to the question exactly why his section deals with "Caucasian criminals?" Does such terminology correspond with the declaration of human rights?
3. What is your attitude towards the statement

that the interviewee has no personal prejudices against “persons of Caucasian nationality” inasmuch as several of his friends are Caucasian immigrants? Do you find any indications to the contrary in the text? Consider that in the United States, a man who announces that he has “Blacks” and “Jews” as friends is correspondingly considered a racist or an anti-Semite.

4. In your view, does the policeman's declaration concerning the absence of “any campaign against Caucasians” in Moscow correspond with his arguments in general and in particular with the assertion that “the enmity towards Caucasians comes from their, to put it mildly, disrespectful attitude towards the local population?”
5. What role, in your opinion, might this interview play in the development of relations between the Russian population and people of other ethnic origin living in Moscow? First and foremost, will it facilitate the diminution of *caucasophobia* or will it, on the contrary, strengthen the anti-Caucasian mood amongst the local population?
6. If you were to interview the man in charge of a section for so-called “ethnic” criminal gangs,

what questions would you ask him?

### **Interpretation**

In my opinion, the interviewer failed to ask relevant questions which might expose the anti-social nature of the ethnic criminal gang section of the Moscow police. The journalist seems to be unaware of his own position on so-called “ethnic crime”. He does not realise that when the interviewee alleged that specific ethnic groups were linked to particular crimes such statements might be perceived by the readers as true in fact, and result in the formation and confirmation of prejudice against these groups. The headline *Newcomers Should not Break the Rules of Hospitality* contrasts “us” and “them” and may lead to more tension in the community. The interview is full of stereotypes about ethnic groups and the reporter makes no attempt to expose the stereotypical nature of these comments by asking additional questions or commenting on the answers.

The interview shows how essential professional competence is when dealing with as sensitive a subject matter as ethnic diversity.

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## Generalisations are the enemies of fair reporting

*Sergey Kruks*

It is often suggested that only right-wing and yellow journalism is responsible for prejudiced and hostile reporting of ethnicity. In this review I shall show how even a quality newspaper can treat a certain ethnic group abusively.

### **The set-up**

*Diena* is the largest newspaper in Latvia with an edition translated into Russian. *Diena* was founded in 1990 as the first Western-type quality newspaper. However, during 1992 considerable intra-institutional changes took place: the newspaper was privatised, it changed its staff and slightly moved to the right.

Currently there are more than half-million inhabitants without citizenship in Latvia, mostly Russians who migrated to Latvia between 1950 and 1980, and their descendants. The decision to exclude them from political life was taken immediately after the restoration of independence in August 1991. Officially this step was explained as a need to preserve Lettish culture and independence: "If Russians will be given the right to vote they will vote for joining Russia". As a result, the russophone population was alienated from the public sphere, it was ignored in Latvian-

language media: the process of integration and identification with Latvia was impeded.

### **The case**

*Diena* failed to open an unconstrained discussion about possible integration, too. The newspaper totally avoided the problem, or indirectly expressed negative stereotypical attitudes. Some examples:

On November 17, 1992, on the eve of the independence national holiday *Diena* published an advertisement by the newly-founded populist party of Joachim Siegerist which was part of Siegerist's PR campaign before the next Parliamentary elections. The ad occupied half of page 3 and contained the following statements: "Russia for Russians, Latvia for Latvians" in large letters and underlined. The ad also claimed that "Russians oppress Latvians." The editor explained later that the content of the ad was known only to the sales department which does not deal with the content.

On November 24, 1994 *Diena* interviewed Bruno Megret, chairman of the General Council of the French National Front. The title of this

article was: *Every Nation Must Live On Its Own Territory*. Since this did not appear in quotation marks it could be interpreted as a statement of the newspaper itself.

On November 21, 1994 the page “Comments and Opinions” contained an article written by an academic who criticised the consequences of the liberal economic policy in Latvia. He pointed out that big business developed at the expense of small and medium business, creating an impediment for the development of a middle-class which was the stronghold of democracy. At the end of the article the problem was given an ethnic dimension: “Among big businessmen, bankers and rich people in general, there is only small number of ethnic Latvians... The trend towards big capital means that the discrimination and oppression of Latvians which started during the occupation is still continuing.” The author did not support his reflections with facts and statistics; he used a popular stereotype about Russian-dominated business and economic oppression of ethnic Latvians. The simplified image of the hostile other that exists in popular discourse is used to explain the economic failures of the current government.

On November 8, 1994 *Diena* published a letter-to-the-editor which protests against demands of

the European Union to soften the Law on Citizenship. The author uses terms like “civil occupants”, “fifth column” when referring to non-citizens: “Deliberately Latvia was flooded with a hostile and aggressive mass of citizens of the superpower. The demand to ‘integrate’ them is of a criminal nature, it will preserve the consequences of the genocide... Russia calls this mass a ‘minority’ and tries to convince all the world.”

### **Analysis**

These four published examples show that the newspaper sympathises with the expectations of the mass audience. Popular, every-day stereotypes and prejudices are used. The role of the newspaper in this is quite ambiguous. On the one hand, it presents a variety of opinions - all four incidents describe “people's voices”, not those of the journalists themselves; on the other hand, do such statements amplify and cultivate a hostile attitude and negative opinions, by putting such popular opinions into the headlines and by picking up such ideas as: our economy is controlled by aliens, our culture is threatened, “they” are hostile to Latvia, etc.? This activates Soviet-time privately held, but not publicly expressed nationalism/anti-Communism and leads the further perception of the message of the newspaper in a certain direction. It does not

promote a dialogue.

### **Interpretation**

One could say that formally the “quality” newspaper cannot be blamed for deliberate misreporting: this is just an opinion of a reader, just an ad by somebody, just an interview, etc. after all. However, the examination of the socio-political context leads me to the conclusion that these were not mere coincidences. The ethnic question in Latvia revolves around the problem of citizenship. The use of nationalistic language and accompanying restrictions concerning political participation were used by liberal politicians in order to compete with right-wing nationalist parties to disperse their electorate. The nationalistic attitude was adopted by the liberal-oriented *Diena* as well.

Now, in autumn 1997, the situation is changing: under the pressure of the EU, liberal politicians try to soften their stand on citizenship and ethnicity, and so do the mainstream media. Political changes in Eastern Europe allowed borders to open; cultural horizons have expanded also. “We” must rediscover “them”, experience the “other” positively, be tolerant towards the “other”.

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## **Beyond the minority-majority paradigm - respect is the real issue**

*Oksana Kuts*

### **The set-up**

In Ukraine, the Russian minority constitutes 22% of the population. Most of the schools before independence taught in Russian and many government officials could not speak Ukrainian, the official language. The Ukrainian language was and still is being discriminated against. That is why the law about the Ukrainian language envisaged, for example, TV and radio transmission in Ukrainian, the opening of new Ukrainian schools, especially in the south-east provinces in Ukraine where the whole education system was Russian. Such steps of the young Ukrainian state were immediately interpreted as a forced Ukrainisation and discrimination against the Russian speaking population.

It had been official Soviet policy to mix the multinational population of the USSR in different ways - people from Russia were encouraged to move and settle in Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltics; workers and specialists from Ukraine were invited to work and live in Siberia and Kazakhstan; and the families of retired military officers were expected to settle for the rest of their lives on the territory of Ukraine and other Western parts of the Soviet Union after

completion of their service somewhere in the far eastern parts of the Russian Federation. They felt at home anywhere while the USSR was still one state. But after the collapse of the USSR the situation changed for the ethnic Russian population in the newly independent states: they found themselves moved from the position of “elderly brothers” into the position of “ethnic minority”.

In fact, after the official recognition of Ukraine's independence many Russian officials did not want to accept the existence of independent Ukraine and made an effort to interpret this political reality as a temporary event. For this reason they tried and continue to try to manipulate the Russian ethnic minority settled in Ukraine through the media. They have made numerous efforts to influence the minds of Russians living in Ukraine, pushing them not to be loyal to the country where they live, to organise protests and to press their specific case to the government and people of Ukraine.

The work on a state agreement between Ukraine and Russia which started almost six years ago shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was

one of the most difficult diplomatic exercises between Ukraine and Russia. The issue of the ethnic Russian minority in Ukraine and the ethnic Ukrainian minority in Russia, as well as the issues of the Black Sea Fleet and its base in the Ukrainian city of Sebastopol, were in the centre of a very difficult controversy and the object of much political manipulation of both politicians and journalists.

On May 24 1997, on the eve of the Russian President Boris Yeltsyn's long-awaited official visit to Ukraine the article *Kiev has to stop* was published in the Moscow-based newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (Independent Newspaper) which is read also in Ukraine especially by the ethnic Russians living there. This was the last editorial article in a series of four under the common title *Chechnia, Belarus, NATO, Ukraine*. The author of the article is Vitali Tretiakov who is the editor-in-chief of this newspaper. Following you will find a translation of the article.

### **The case**

“The Ukrainian issue in Russian policy is, perhaps, the most complex question. The main issues of concern are the Crimea, Sebastopol, and the Black Sea Fleet. However, this is only a facade

behind which is hidden a huge question for Russia: ‘From anybody else but from you, Ukraine, would I have expected such a hurry’ And there is also a not small amount of Ukrainian anti-Moscow state nationalism: ‘We will do anything in order not to follow the wish of Moscow.’

What does Russia have to do? To flirt with the biggest broken piece of the country? Or to wait till the Russian and the Russian speaking population of Ukraine become not only an electoral power which can be easily caught with pre-election promises but a real political power? It will certainly become that but when? Policy has to be made today, tomorrow, every day. Moreover, one can notice a maximum stake in a geopolitical game of the West: Russia without Ukraine is still Russia but a handicapped one: without one hand and one leg. From the Black Sea and Mediterranean basin Russia is blocked off completely by Ukraine. The West does not spare strength and money in order to extend and widen the gap<sup>3</sup>.

In fact, one can imagine a real reunion of Ukraine with Russia only as a fantastic scenario: A nice guy wins the next presidential election in Russia

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<sup>3</sup> Between Ukraine and Russia, that is.

and a nice girl wins the elections in Ukraine. Then they get married. But I am afraid that even the keenest optimists do not believe in such a scenario.

According to the motto 'Advance to the West and retreat to the East' it seems that Russia has nothing left to do than to entice Kiev back into its arms, by means of flattery, concessions, and privileges. But Kiev is not Minsk. For Kiev delights to reject when being flattered; the more is on offer, the bigger the appetite gets. It is necessary to give Kiev the possibility to try everything till the end: When it burns itself it will come back. If it does not burn itself, then farewell! I am not afraid of an old saying: It is impossible to force or to persuade Ukraine. The only possible way is to deceive Ukraine. Even a song says so as if giving a concrete direction: 'You have cheated me, you have let me down<sup>4</sup>.'

As for me, I would push Ukraine in her back - into the arms of the West. In other words, I would fix in a strict agreement (without words about everlasting friendship and fraternity) the whole present problem with Russia (this is yours

and that is ours), including all disputable and potentially disputable issues which would be very serious for Ukraine. In the fashion: Crimea is yours but everything that you owe Russia is ours. Give it back quickly and on time, because we borrow from others - what do we have that we could lend to you<sup>5</sup> ? (...)

That is why the agreement with Ukraine, about which one knows less than about the agreement with NATO (and it has to be signed this week) must be definite: Full and unconditional division of property, return of debts, the borders closed. As it goes between two normal independent states which do not enter any coalition or union with each other. (...).

Certainly, do not forget, guys, that you have some dozen or two million of pure Russians. You can teach them either the Ukraine language or English, but they are our compatriots<sup>6</sup> who are different from Ukrainians, as you have proven to us. That is why we will watch very carefully about their rights and freedoms - ourselves, and through the OSCE, PACE and other sound organisations. Of course, one can hardly call such an agreement

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<sup>4</sup> Humorous Ukrainian folk song about a girl who was fixing a place for a meeting with a lad and never came.

<sup>5</sup> This refers to Ukrainian debt for Russian oil.

<sup>6</sup> Russian compatriots, this is.

an agreement about peace and friendship although war and hatred are not envisaged. But the document will be honest and extremely profitable for Russia. At the same time it will also not encroach upon Ukraine. But I can envisage that the work on its text moves exactly in the opposite direction: strict but honest formulations are being replaced by streamline ones in order to sign and to kiss each other afterwards. The decision of Boris Yeltsyn to take the problem of the Black Sea Fleet out of the agreement is absolutely right. But then it will be logical to take out all other difficult problems. As a result we will have approximately the same kind of agreement as between Moscow and Grozny<sup>7</sup>: five articles, three of which state that this agreement is the basis for all following ones, that the agreement is written in Russian and Ukraine and that both versions have an equal power and that the agreement enters into power after its ratification by the parliaments (in case with Chechnia - immediately after signing). That's it.

With Ukraine we have a classic example of the fact that Russia in order to advance to the West has to demonstrate full and decisive readiness to retreat to the East if necessary. Any other agreement with Ukraine I would not sign if I

were Boris Yeltsyn. On the other hand, why sign any agreement at all - sometimes it is necessary to stop. At least for a time. Of course, the President of Russia must go on a state visit to Ukraine. At the time planned. For example, the king of Spain recently visited Moscow on a state visit. No agreements were signed but the world has not fallen apart.

One has to hurry when catching fleas. But Ukraine is not a flea. Although it jumps quickly. From side to side.”

### **Analysis**

The case taken from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* demonstrates an extremely provocative style of writing. To start with, the title of the article itself, *Chechnia, Belarus, NATO, Ukraine*, has a strange logic: Ukraine which is famous for its peaceful transition period is put in line with Chechnia where Russia conducted a war. The imperative of the subtitle *Kiev has to stop* also does not promise much good.

What is more, the journalist uses very colloquial words when writing about Ukrainian politicians, for example “khlopsy” - a very colloquial Russian version of a Ukrainian word for a young guy, in

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<sup>7</sup> Capital of Chechnia.

order to express his irony. The same irony, even sarcasm one can clearly detect when Tretiakov writes about the Ukrainian language.

When the issue of the Russian minority in Ukraine is raised the issue of language is usually touched on. The article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* is no exception. Tretiakov ironically says: "You can teach them either the Ukrainian language or English, but they are our compatriots who are different... from Ukrainians. Tretiakov drives at "Ukrainisation" which started in Ukraine after the law on Ukrainian language was passed by Parliament in 1991, and since has at times been criticised as a means of discrimination against the Russian minority in Ukraine.

### **Interpretation**

There was not a very strong reaction from the Ukrainian audience to the article by Tretiakov, first of all because similar anti-Ukrainian articles became very usual during the years of independence. Second, Moscow newspapers are not so widely distributed in Ukraine now as they were during the Soviet time.

However, the article did raise a negative reaction

in Ukraine and provoked the article-in-reply *Russia without Ukraine is, certainly, still Russia but a handicapped one* in the Ukrainian newspaper *Tchas* (Time) which is also far from being an example of balanced ethnic reporting.

It is articles like these that make it so difficult to always defend the rights of ethnic minorities, because the ethnic minority in one country is often the majority in another country, and may as such be perceived as a threat. Confronted with this kind of provocation, it is easy to answer also in a provocative manner and resort to stereotypes and simplifications: "If one Russian writes so, all Russians think so." The difficult task for good, professional journalism is to understand the provocation and not become its victim but its antidote. Political aspirations may be legitimate, but using provocative and insulting language based on ethnic/racial slurs and stereotypes is not. This case shows the necessity of a certain fundamental respect for each others' positions and existence. Critical journalism can be no excuse for the lack of this respect. Good critical journalism respects the difference.

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## **“We” instead of “us” and “them”**

*Sergey Kruks*

### **The case**

On May 18 1996 the weekly supplement to *Diena* published the article *My neighbour is a Russian*. It is an article about Russians living in Latvia. The article is accompanied by a picture of the anatomy of two bodies and the text read: "This is the scheme of differences between the most common nationalities in the Republic of Latvia. No 1 Latvian, No 2 Russian. According to statistics of the people living in Latvia 56.5% are Latvians, 30.3% Russians, and 4% Belarussians. However, in every day life we do not meet the 1,400,000 Latvians or 750,000 Russians". The author implies that people live completely separate lives. The article presents statistical data about changing attitudes amongst the Russians. Opinion polls showed that during the period from 1990 positive identification with independent Latvia has gradually been increasing. The journalist explains, that the "Russian speaking population" was not a homogenous entity, that Russians settled in Latvia already in the 17th century, that the contemporary group consisted of different layers: intelligentsia, workers, peasants, with different cultural backgrounds. The article also points out that there was a trend to generalise the behaviour of

less-educated, marginalised people and ascribe it to the whole ethnic group.

The journalist describes that there were different values spread among non-Latvians, for example that they valued ethnicity less than individual achievement ("My mother is Kalmyk, my father is an engineer", said one interviewee). The journalist concludes that there were practically two communicative communities in Latvia distinguished by language. However, lack of awareness and/or non-admission of differences separated the two communities. Each of them used the media in its own language; they did not know about the reality, interests, and values etc. of the other language community. Stereotypes and prejudices filled a knowledge gap and further strengthened it. The journalist writes: "General statistics demonstrate a positive trend, which, however, is oppressed by an official ideology. I doubt, that a Russian language school teacher would tell a Lettish journalist her true opinion. Teachers have to pass the certification procedure, they probably are afraid to be critical... Well, nationalism has become a state doctrine".

The journalist points out that there is a Human

Rights Bureau in Latvia, and that the president's advisory board on minority policy is to be established. That, however, was “a political action, not one dictated by necessity”.

The journalist argues that at the same time non-Latvians privately said that the current politics of exclusion made them feel abandoned, targets of prejudice, not wanted in Latvia.

### **Analysis and interpretation**

This article is an attempt to give up some popular stereotypes and prejudices and to start a dialogue about the constitution of society and the state, not of a particular ethnic group. Emphasis is put on the present needs, not on the bad experience of the past. In post-Soviet societies it is important to find a new collective identity, which can fit the demands of a democratic society. Therefore it is not enough just not to (mis-)report ethnicity (“criminal X is ethnic Russian”) or present balanced reporting (“courageous policeman Ivanov is ethnic Russian”). The status of ethnic Russians as a social group has changed, but it is not yet clearly defined. This is a problem for all people in Latvia: to redefine the attitude towards each other as neighbours not as “aliens”.

Collective memory is selective and usually negative towards others. It even tends to ignore or minimise current positive experiences. Social integration is possible if there is intensive and unbiased communication among different social groups. It therefore is important to re-assess the popular stories about the past, to destroy stereotypes and to draw a new picture of the present.

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## **Political instrumentalisation of the media - examples from Serbia, France, and Slovakia**

The instrumentalisation of the media is another mechanism that often leads to extremely problematic media coverage in ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting. Sometimes the media are willing partners in this process, as the following two cases from former Yugoslavia and France show. The French case especially points out how problematic a situation can be when a large number of media are condoning its instrumentalisation for a certain political purpose. All three cases underline the importance of fair and accurate reporting, even and especially when the media have decided to be partisan. In addition, the case from Slovakia provides an example of how reporting can either follow the obvious, or try to empower the readers to judge for themselves what to think about a certain incident.

### **Conflict of interest and unfair reporting destroy more than one family**

*Sasa Mirkovic*

#### **The set-up**

The territory of former Yugoslavia provides numerous examples of abuse of the media for purposes which are inappropriate in professional journalism. That is why many people say that the truth was the first victim of war in the Balkans, and humans became its victims later. This bestial war with its catastrophic consequences would not have been possible had it not been for some well-planned preparations.

It was with the help of the state media, national radio and TV and the newspapers with the largest circulation and greatest privileges, that people got convinced that they could no longer live together,

that they were threatened by their neighbours with whom they had had perfect relations for decades. Ethnic origin became important overnight, and it marked the destinies of hundreds of thousands of people from former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, there were numerous professionals who did not agree with this and who tried to change it.

The end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina marked a new era and a change of the editorial approach of a lot of the media. As if they were carrying out orders, after the signing of the Dayton Agreement, the greatest war-mongers suddenly became the biggest peacemakers who

were giving lectures about how the war could have been avoided, how peace was essential, how ethnic origin was of no actual importance. Editorial policies, especially of local media, also changed under the impression of the massive protests in the streets of Serbia and became much more acceptable as far as human rights are concerned. Unfortunately, there are examples of the opposite, too.

One of these examples is the case of the Barbalic family. It shows the abuse of a municipal newspaper by an ultra-right political party and its leader. Zemun is a suburb in Belgrade where citizens of various ethnic origins lived in peace and harmony for centuries. In the November 1996 local elections, the Serb Radical Party (SRS) and its leader, Vojislav Seselj, gained power in this municipality. The period of abuse of the municipal magazine *Zemunske Novine* began then.

### **The case - description and analysis**

After a few months of SRS being in power in Zemun, the first major incident happened. Local municipal authorities broke into the apartment of the Barbalic family, while the family members were out of town on vacation and took away the furniture and appliances. The background to this was that the family was of Croat nationality and

that some family members had Croatian passports. The SRS planned to give the family's apartment to the editor-in-chief of *Zemunske Novine*, which makes the whole case even more interesting. It is not just about ethnic discrimination, it is also about conflict of interest on the part of the editor-in-chief of *Zemunske Novine*, as well as personal and political corruption by both the editor-in-chief as well as by the police and local authorities.

The case attracted the attention of the public and some of the media. While the pro-regime media mostly ignored the case, the independent media defended the interests of the Barbalic family. *Zemunske Novine*, however, began a bitter campaign against those whose opinion of the case differed from its own.

In the July 20 1997 issue of the magazine, 13 pages were dedicated to an "explanation" of the case of the Barbalic family, with photocopies of documents ostensibly found in the apartment and given to the media, including *Zemunske Novine*, by the local authorities. The SRS claimed that these were photocopies of original documents found in the apartment, while the Barbalic family and their lawyer several times expressed their doubts about the authenticity of the documents.

On the front page of the magazine, there was the passport of the seven year old child of the family (Dario Barbalic) as proof that this family did not belong to the municipality. The Barbalic family was not given any chance to offer its side of the story. There was only one version of the truth, only one point of view, only one opinion. A municipal magazine, financed from the municipal budget, should be an open medium for all those political parties which had their representatives in the local municipal assembly, but it was used as the medium of only one party and its policy.

The case of the Barbalic family continued on BK television. BK television is the most popular TV channel in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This TV channel is owned by Bogoljub Karic, one of the richest persons in the country, who has strong business connections with Canada, Russia and several other countries. It is assumed that Bogoljub Karic enjoys very close relations with the family of President Milosevic.

The leader of the SRS, Vojislav Seselj, and the lawyer for the Barbalic family, Nikola Barovic, were guests on a BK TV show. The discussion was very heated, and it culminated in open insults, when Nikola Barovic poured a glass of water over Seselj. The show was interrupted when this incident happened, but the conflict

continued outside the studio.

Vojislav Seselj called his bodyguard, and the bodyguard hit Nikola Barovic several times on the head. The talk show host witnessed the beating. The beating stopped when Seselj said: "This was enough for him for tonight." Nikola Barovic was severely injured, his nose broken, and surgery was necessary. The next day, Vojislav Seselj stated in a news conference that "Barovic had slipped on a banana skin" and that the claims of an attack on Barovic by a bodyguard were untrue. The talk show host had witnessed the incident, but he was too scared to say anything. To date, the incident has not been cleared up. The only reaction of the official authorities was to begin an "investigation concerning the unknown perpetrator".

The Chamber of Lawyers pressed charges against Petar Panic, the bodyguard of Mr. Seselj, for inflicting severe physical injuries on Mr. Barovic, as well as against Vojislav Seselj, as the person who had ordered and encourage the act. Petar Panic stated in court that he had not been in Belgrade when the incident at BK TV happened. Mr. Seselj brought a banana skin to the courtroom as proof that "Nikola Barovic had slipped on a banana skin and fell down the stairs" and the court accepted the banana skin as evidence. After the court session, Mr. Seselj told

journalists “off the record” that there had been no banana skin during the incident, and that such “witty things” were not to be considered as lies.

The investigation concerning the “unknown perpetrator” came to nothing, and this raises at least two questions:

1. Should the public prosecutor have responded to the media campaign against the Barbalic family on the grounds that it was spreading ethnic hatred?
2. Why did the police and other officials not react?

### **Interpretation**

There are numerous reasons for this. One of the characteristics of countries like former Yugoslavia is the legal insecurity people are exposed to, because state institutions, including courts of law, are fragile and corrupt, and are often only carrying out the authorities' will. The people in former Yugoslavia live in a country where there may be evidence and proof about certain criminal acts, but the perpetrator of the crime is still free, and will not be held responsible for what he did.

The SRS has been formed with great organisational and material help from the governing Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). “The

Radicals” have been used for the dirtiest jobs: their para-military units participated in war operations in Croatia and Bosnia, and the Radicals have openly bragged about it all these years. The state controlled media contributed to the increasing popularity of this party by ostracising other political options. In the past few years, Vojislav Seselj invited as guests ultra right-wing, nationalist politicians like Vladimir Zirinovski and Jean Marie Le Pen.

Seselj used media space and populist rhetoric for his campaign against the family in order to strengthen and increase the popularity of the SRS. The ruling party helped him continuously, and the latest Serbian elections showed that the popularity of this politician is constantly increasing. The middle- and working-classes which are badly affected by the war see a miracle worker in Seselj. They see him as the person to solve their problems by a magic wand. He is seen as having the cure for all the ills of the country which has been under UN sanctions for several years. The bureaucracy, the army and the police see him as the person who will give them back their dignity which they lost in a needless war and crisis caused by suicidal policies.

This Serbian example is important. The treatment of one family reflects a much more important

political issue and shows how events develop. It shows in what way the media can be vulnerable to political manipulation. An editor who behaves like this and a paper that can be instrumentalised like this for one person's political and personal advantage has to be denounced by the other media, as doctors would denounce a quack. Journalists can find themselves in great dangers when trying to expose such manipulation. It shows how necessary it is for a journalist to report fairly and accurately.

Therefore it is important to draw attention to cases like this. A spade should be called a spade, because sooner or later silence will produce tragedy with unmeasurable consequences. There are too many examples from the near past.

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## Using ethnic conflict for political self-interests - Northern Ireland in the French communist press<sup>1</sup>

Maurice Goldring

### The set-up

In 1981, the Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland went on hunger strike in order to obtain the status of political prisoners. Ten of them died and this movement caused an international uproar.

### The case

In France, the Communist Party launched a high level campaign, a committee was organised with communist militants and left-wing catholics. An appeal to Margaret Thatcher circulated among intellectuals. Telegrams were sent, deputations to the British Embassy, street demonstrations and public meetings organised, city councils named streets after Bobby Sands. The film "Patriot Game" was shown and circulated.

The first theme of the campaign was the fight against "British colonialism". "The British governments have behaved and still behave as real colonisers terrorising the whole of the country" (Comité de défense des libertés, 1980). Northern Ireland was the "last colony in Europe" (Yves Moreau, *L'Humanité*, April 20 1981). The call for

the demonstration in front of the British Embassy said: "Mrs Thatcher and all English colonialists have their hands covered with blood... Down with British colonialism! Freedom for the Irish!" (May 6 1981). In reply to a message from Tony Hughes, a prisoner in Long Kesh and the brother of Francis Hughes, one the hunger strikers, the French Communist Party wrote: "In front of the picture of Bobby Sands, we swore to carry on and to develop our fight against English colonialists, for your rights, the freedom of all Irishmen... we shall stand by your side till victory!", *L'Humanité*, May 9 1981).

If Northern Ireland was the last colony of Europe, the British troops were an occupying force and the IRA waged a war of national liberation. People might not have been aware of it, but others in France knew better. "It is a fight against colonialism, even though it takes the form of a fratricidal war between two communities" (Richard Michel, *Révolution*, May 1 1981). Sometimes, the anti-colonial war became a "class war", "even though the conflict is concealed in a religious war, even if the victims are willing to

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<sup>1</sup> Comp. P. Brennan, M. Goldring, R. Deutsch and E. Gaudin. "The Northern Ireland Conflict in the French Press", in: J. Darby, N. Dodge and A.C. Hepburn, Belfast 1990. pp. 103-129.

stick to this false issue" (George Girard, *Révolution*, May 1981). The message was clear: "We, in France, are going to tell you, in Ireland, what you are really fighting for".

The second theme of this campaign was human rights. "Ireland is one of the countries in the world where discrimination and brutal methods of repression are condoned by a police state" (Henri Alleg, *l'Humanité*, April 15 1980). "The rights of men are violated by governments who claim to defend them" (Comité de défense des libertés, December 15 1980). "Let us imagine for a minute a car of the Polish army crashing into a demonstration and shooting young people. What headlines! What horrified comments!" (Jean-Emile Vidal, *l'Humanité*, April 21 1981). In the call for the May 6 demonstration: "The supporters of the so-called free world...refer to human rights only for certain countries. Imagine that in some capital without capitalism a dissident goes on hunger strike for 66 days..." (André Wurmser, *l'Humanité*, May 7 1981. To understand those elements, one should bear in mind that in those days, the French Communist Party claimed its allegiance to the Soviet bloc and denounced a campaign against socialism based on the human rights theme.

Last but not least, in the political situation in Spring 1981, the French Communist Party, after

a long period of alliance with the Socialist Party of François Mitterrand, decided to split up in order to regain lost ground on a "hardline", leftist policy. Anything that went towards proving that the Socialists were betraying their left-wing programme was welcome. Northern Ireland was used to "prove" that the Communist Party was the only party to fight British colonialism and the violation of human rights. So, at the European Parliament, "conservatives and Socialists voted together to prevent any discussion of human rights in Northern Ireland" (Jean-Emile Vidal, *l'Humanité*, December 20 1980).

*L'Humanité* made it an important point that only the Communist Party and the Confédération Générale du Travail seemed to care, while everybody else in France including the two candidates for the second round of the presidential elections, offered no comment. The two candidates were Giscard d'Estaing and François Mitterrand.

When Bobby Sands died, *l'Humanité* accused the Tory government of murder and the Labour party as an accomplice to bloodshed.

On May 10 1981, François Mitterrand was elected president. The result was considered as a success and the French Communist Party decided

to be part of a left-wing government. The change was immediately visible in the wording and in the tone of the Communist daily. On May 13, the leading article on Northern Ireland centred on the hunger strikers' demands only. There was no further mention of Mitterrand's silence, or of his party either. The blame for passivity was placed on the press ("In France, with the exception of *L'Humanité*, what paper is moved by the death of Francis Hughes?") and on foreign labour parties: "Helmut Schmidt has just spent two days with Mrs Thatcher in a relaxed atmosphere". The direct demands or appeals to François Mitterrand and the Socialist Party disappeared overnight.

Various of the hunger strikers died during that month. The deaths were reported about, but no demands to the French government were made. The British Labour Party had utterly faded out. On May 29, Lord Carrington came to Paris. *L'Humanité* published an "open letter" to the Foreign Minister asking the British to meet the five demands of the Republican prisoners. The climax came on the same day: Lord Carrington met with Claude Cheysson, the French Foreign Minister, *L'Humanité* published without the slightest comment the final statement: "Between France and Britain, there is a series of common fundamental elements: one of them is the respect for democratic values". Obviously a leaf had been

turned and the French Communist Party had taken seriously the entry of four of its members into the government of François Mitterrand. There is no need to add that the solemn promise "We shall stand by your fight till your victory" turned sour. As far as the French Communist Party was concerned, the national war of liberation and the "class war" were over.

### **Analysis and interpretation**

One might say that this is a blatant example of instrumental use of a foreign conflict for internal political purposes, so clearly obvious that it borders on caricature. But the most extreme examples may be revealing of more subtle and more profound attitudes.

One is struck by the fundamental selfishness of political interpretations of foreign conflicts. France is culturally and historically a catholic country. Britain has been its arch enemy for centuries and the reverse is true, too. So the spontaneous reaction is to blame the British and to sympathise with the catholic minority in Northern Ireland as exploited and victimised by the English and their "agents in the North". The Committee for Ireland, a pro-republican organisation in the eighties, stated that it "was not satisfied with the coverage of the conflict by the French press", but added that "a strictly pro-

British point of view is hardly ever presented by the media” (Comité Irlande libre, 1980). Even the right-wing paper *Le Figaro* assumed an anti-British and pro-IRA stance, and Bernadette Devlin, in her moment of glory, was often compared to Joan of Arc (June 23 1969). The protestants were regularly presented as a minority. Northern Ireland was seen as a place where an occupied country fights the troops of British colonialism. A protestant majority did not fit the image. Consequently it was “reinterpreted” as minority. It was more satisfactory to have the colonisers fighting the colonised. The picture was false, but clear.

When Bobby Sands died, the only adverse reaction came in a short provocative article by Delfeil de Ton in *Libération* who wrote an article entitled *I'm sick of heroes*. There was such a wave of anger by readers that the journalist had to leave the paper. During the hunger strike, I tried to explain that Bobby Sands had not been arrested for stealing a bar of chocolate in a supermarket. I lost a few friends then. My articles were refused, not only in the Communist press. Who was going to go against the general sentiment in the media, ready to lose not friends, but customers, for a principled stand?

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## Two different ways of dealing with political provocation

Jan Babarik

### The set-up

On Saturday 12 April 1997, leaflets with a text in Hungarian were found in Rimavska Sobota in southern Slovakia. The leaflets appealed to citizens of Hungarian ethnic origin to encourage southern Slovakia to split and join Hungary. This case attracted widespread public interest. In Rimavska Sobota the population is ethnically divided. 49% of the population are of Hungarian descent and 51% Slovak.

Obviously the leaflet was either a targeted provocation from the Slovak side, or a naive attempt of a small group of people from the Hungarian side, who do not know what the real situation is.

The first respondents to the leaflet were national mass media. They asked politicians for their opinion. Some of them charged the Slovak Information Service (SIS) with provocation, mostly using the expression “a secret service working in the Slovak language”. Others accused Hungarians of continuous dissatisfaction and of efforts to disturb the territorial integrity of Slovakia. The national media provided incomplete information, so that only a well-

informed reader, who understood the wider context, could draw an objective conclusion.

### Case I: The story of an anonymous leaflet in Slovenska Republika

Here is an example from the pro-government daily newspaper *Slovenska Republika*, from April 17, 1997. An article titled *A provocative leaflet in southern Slovakia* started with a brief interview with a leader of one of the ethnic Hungarian political parties in Slovakia, who dissociated ethnic Hungarians from the leaflet and declared that they, the political leaders of ethnic Hungarians, had asked the police to find out the name of the culprit.

He accused “a secret service working in the Slovak language<sup>2</sup>” of provocation, though there was “no direct evidence.” The article ended with selected quotations from the leaflet, which stated that Slovakia occupied “the Upper Land” of Hungary and should give it back.

Anyone who knows about the situation in Slovakia knows that such an article would cause anger on both sides. Those who had disliked Hungarians before would dislike them a little bit

more after reading this. They do not believe what Hungarian politicians say anyway, and they would take this case as further justification for their dislike. On the other hand, Hungarian readers, even though this paper would not have many, would be irritated that a service, which is connected with the Government (the SIS) to whom they pay taxes, was working against them.

Another article about the case published one week later in the same paper dealt with the opinion of the regional council of the Slovak National Party in Rimavska Sobota. According to the council the idea of adding Slovak regions to another country with reference to love for the ancestors' homeland was most dangerous: "The Slovak nation has settled in this region far longer than Hungarians and they know about the love for their ancestors' homeland, too", the article read.

Both articles have something in common: there is no chance for the reader to reflect and come to his own point of view. According to both articles the motive of the culprits was to fight against the other side of the argument, and the guilty party is generalised - either the SIS working under control of the Slovak government or the ethnic Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Even though the journalists did not give their own opinions, this

kind of reporting of ethnic problems incites further antipathies by overrating a provocation which would remain harmless if not taken as important.

### **Case II: The story of an anonymous leaflet in Gemerske Noviny**

The example of the regional newspaper *Gemerske Noviny* shows that it is possible to report about such a sensitive issue in a responsible way. The paper tackled the story of the mysterious leaflet from different angles. The material was presented in four small parts. The first one was the literal translation of the leaflet from Hungarian into Slovak. According to the leaflet Slovakia occupies a part of Hungary, which was given back to Hungary in the Vienna Arbitrage in 1938.

The paper identified the author of the leaflet, the so-called "Upper-Land Civil Movement" which in the leaflet challenged the governments of Slovakia and Hungary to do everything possible to secure the peaceful addition of this region to Hungary. The text appealed to the national feelings of Hungarians, as well as those of Slovaks but in a negative way, with emotion-evoking words like "oppression, occupation etc.". Presenting the text in Slovak helped to show the leaflet and its content in its total absurdity.

In the second part, the result of a survey was presented. The two questions asked in this survey had been:

1. What do you think about the text itself?
2. Who could be the author?

The six respondents were representatives of both the Slovak and Hungarian parties and organisations. Such a wide spectrum of regional authorities from both sides guaranteed that no side could feel disadvantaged or preferred. The respondents believed in different motivations for writing the leaflet but they agreed in finding the author/s irresponsible and in fearing the possibility of undesired results.

The third part was a short article with an overview over the most important historical events, which had led to the settlement of territorial disputes between Hungary and Slovakia (Czechoslovakia) some but not all of which were mentioned in the original leaflet:

- The Trianon Treaty (1920),
- The Vienna Arbitrage (1938) and
- The Peace Treaty with Hungary (1945).

This was aimed to help readers feel well-informed and to know exactly what this was all about. The

leaflet originally did not report the content of the Trianon Treaty correctly but claimed that “the separation from Hungary by the Trianon Treaty was unjust and incorrect” and it claimed that “the Upper Land” was given back to Hungary by the Vienna Arbitrage in 1938. The leaflet failed to mention the Peace Treaty with Hungary, Paragraph 19 of which proclaimed the Vienna Arbitrage to be null and void.

As a conclusion and fourth part there was a comment, not by a journalist or by a politician, but written by a clinical psychologist, generally acknowledged to be a specialist. In it the psychologist explained the psychological context of the leaflet and stressed his impression that the case of the leaflet was not a Slovak-Hungarian ethnic problem but a problem between citizens and irresponsible provocateurs. He pointed out that the authors expected and needed publicity and public attention. This issue of *Gemerske Noviny* calmed the situation down, because it changed the focus from the obvious antagonists - Slovaks and Hungarians - to unknown culprits whose nationality was not important. Such a wide range of information narrowed the room for possible speculation and misinterpretations which could become a source of tension.

## Interpretation

There is no question that there are problems between the Hungarian minority and the Slovak majority in Slovakia. The problem is partly territorial, artificially fed by both Hungarian and Slovak politicians. Partly lingual: a dislike of Hungarian language among a significant group of Slovaks, related to attempts in the past to hungarify Slovakia. And partly a civil rights problem: the lack of opportunities for using the Hungarian language officially, the lack of support of Hungarian culture, schools etc. by the government.

About 600,000 inhabitants of the Southern regions of Slovakia regard themselves as Hungarian, which is more than 10% of the population. The coexistence of these nationalities, which in the past had always been somewhat antagonistic, was from the end of the second World War until 1989 quite friendly and peaceful. It still is in the ethnically mixed regions, though public perception differs from reality on this. Paradoxically, tensions over questions of ethnicity are especially strong in those areas where no ethnic Hungarians live.

Recently it would not have been advisable for an ethnic Hungarian to go to, for example, a pub in

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some regions of Slovakia, mostly the northern ones, as they could run into unpleasant situations, caused mostly by ignorance. Since 1989, extremists on both sides have built their political careers on the basis of this ethnic problem. The easiest way to describe the substance of the problem is with an example from daily life.

A Slovak says to another in a pub:

- I don't like Hungarians. Someone should put them in order.

The other asks:

- Who do you not like? Oskar (Oskar was his colleague from work.)?

- No, Oskar is a good bloke.

- So who? Gyulla (another colleague)?

- Gyulla is a good bloke too.

- So tell me who. Laci (Laci was a friend who he knew, liked, and trusted)?

- No, Laci is good.

- Do you know any other Hungarians?

- Yes.

- Tell me who do you dislike.

- I was thinking generally. Not particular guys.

This example shows that peaceful coexistence is possible. It just needs time and favourable political conditions, that Slovakia does not have at present.





## Facts alone do not ensure truthful reporting - an example from Germany

Fairness and accuracy is one of the important elements of good journalism. It does however, entail more than just reporting facts. Fair and accurate reporting can afford to give the full picture - and does not rely on information selection as an instrument to disregard what does not fit into the picture. The following case study from Germany shows that good reporting suffers when proving a point is the object.

### The failure of the multicultural society - a self-fulfilling prophecy?

*Barbara Thomaß*

#### The set-up

The following example was published in *Der Spiegel*, the famous German news magazine with a weekly circulation of 1,072 million. A report in *Der Spiegel* is often done by different reporters and authors are on principal not identified. Authors have the habit of writing a story along a presumed hypothesis, a method of producing a news magazine story which has been developed in Germany by *Der Spiegel*.

But ethical problems arise with this style: Facts are constructed in a new context which may alienate them from reality. The more standardised the form of a medium, the bigger the danger of ethical misconduct. The danger is that facts which do not fit the hypothesis are not noted or reported.

#### The case

In the following example the idea that the multicultural society has failed is underlined by the arrangement of a huge number of facts. The story is the cover story of the magazine: *Foreigners and Germans: Dangerously Strange. The Failure of the Multicultural Society*.

One of the cover lines concerns an article on a court sentence in a trial against Moslems, underlining the popular image that foreigners are criminals and thus potentially dangerous. The headline of another of the articles in this issue is *Time Bombs in the Suburbs*, and starts with the lead "The integration of foreigners has failed. Everywhere in the country an explosive tension is gathering. Within Turks and 'Aussiedlern' , fringe groups without perspective, there is a growing

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<sup>1</sup> From Siberia and Kazakhstan.

tendency to take with violence what society refuses them.”

The article starts with six examples of violent Turkish and Russian people, and gives four quotes of people who are concerned (p. 78 and 79). In the text, the reported opinions and the statistics complement each other:

- 40% of the population in a big town in Northrhine Westphalia believes Germans have to defend themselves against foreigners.
- Romanian gangs have broken into 45 safes in the last four weeks.
- Eastern Europeans and Turkish people compete for the control of the red-light district in Hamburg: 20 dead and 40 injured in shootings in one year.
- A Turkish person is expelled from Germany because he illegally brought 90,000 Kurds to Germany with his gang of 500 men.
- The Chamber of Commerce of Kiel is informing its members with a flyer how to cope with racketeers.

So the facts seem to suggest that the opinions of the quoted interviewees are legitimate.

Pictures are important for a story, too, and even more the captions to the pictures:

- “Turkish-Kurd Gang in Berlin-Kreuzberg: The boys are ready for anything” (p. 78).
- “Controversy over foreigners committing crimes: Diffuse fears and statistical details” (p. 79).
- “Weapons check at a dance evening for “Aussiedler” in Hamburg-Barmbek: Things might explode here again at any time” (p. 84).
- “Members of the youth-gang ‘Warriors’ in Berlin: Streetfight of the hopeless” (p. 87).
- “Rapper Durmus: In former times I always had a knife with me” (p. 88).

Some quotes from the articles: “Researchers, policemen and social workers think that it is especially the two largest groups which are the time bombs in the suburbs: the ca. 600,000 young Turks of the second and third generation of foreign workers as well as the half a million young returnees, who came to Germany out of the disintegrating Soviet Empire after 1990” (p. 84).

Young foreigners are all described as violent and their behaviour as not understandable for “normal” people: “The hopeless find out in street fights who is the underdog in the social order. Obvious police presence as at the Youth Centre in Hamburg-Barmbek is supposed to protect the country against civil war-like scenes, after Turks

and returnees beat each other up not only in Hamburg, but also in Gifhorn (Lower Saxony) and Frankfurt/Main. The reasons for ethnic fighting are banal, often a wrong look is sufficient, a wrong word and honour has been violated - sometimes with unforeseeable consequences for the adversaries" (p. 84 f.).

"Due to the poor prospects for quick economic integration (...), frustrated juveniles take illegally what they cannot afford legally. The case of a gang of returnees at a school in Charlottenburger Street in Hamburg-Jenfeld shows how brutally even 14-year olds proceed. For half a year they blackmailed and bullied their fellow pupils Sebastian and Kevin (names altered). First, the Russian-Germans were content with pencils, rubbers and text markers, then they demanded money (...). Three times Sebastian had to see a doctor because of heavy contusions and a broken rib" (p. 89).

### **Analysis and interpretation**

The individual facts and observations are probably reported correctly. But their combination, without checking the underlying hypothesis for opposite trends, leads to a

distorted picture. Although some background explaining the situation and its problems is given, the main impression created is: Foreigners are a violent threat to Germans and the danger is growing. There is no escape. It is destiny.

This issue of *Der Spiegel* coincides with the results of a study from the public service media commission about foreign cultures on the second public service TV channel ZDF<sup>2</sup> :

- Germans are basically open to foreigners.
- Germans appreciate countries with a similar culture and life style.
- Islamic cultures are not understandable for Germans.
- Turkey is a strange country for Germans. Turkish people seem to be strange and threatening for Germans.
- German and Turkish TV-viewers think that the presentation of Turkish people on German TV is dominated by images of criminals or victims.
- The criminals are drug dealers, pimps or inferior scroungers of jobs.
- One quarter of the Turkish people in this survey thinks that this one-sided image may

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2 Josef Eckhard, Immer Horn: Fremde Kulturen im Fernsehen. Ergebnisse einer qualitativen ARD/ZDF-Grundlagenstudie. In: Media Perspektiven Nr. 1/1995, S. 2-10.

strengthen prejudices.

- Every second person in this survey asks for a more differentiated presentation of foreign cultures.

The above example from *Der Spiegel* shows to what extent German media violate this last - from an ethical point of view reasonable - demand.

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## **The failure to identify the real issue - two examples from the Danish media**

The following examples from Denmark show that one of the problems connected with ethnic minorities and ethnic conflict today is that modern Europe has lost the consensus about keeping as little distance as possible between two fundamentally different concepts of citizenship. They also show that while the media get involved and caught up in campaigns and superficial discussions of the benefits of more or less foreigners they neglect to launch the debate of the real issue at stake in Europe today: Is citizenship an obligation to homogenise or is citizenship a right to exist within the confines of a state, but with different communities?

### **The ugly duckling - Denmark and ethnic immigrants in the media<sup>1</sup>**

*Hans-Henrik Holm*

The image of Denmark in other countries is often one of tolerance and openness. The reality is different. The famous fairy tale author H.C. Andersen did not believe that Denmark was a tolerant country towards people who were different. He considered Denmark a small country with provincial people who did not really appreciate things from the outside. His most eloquent expression of this was the story: The Ugly Duckling. The story of an ugly duckling that is harassed and beaten, because it is different from the other ducks. In the end, it turns out to be a swan. It is a moral story. Difference is an asset, and sameness can be a liability. But have the Danes learnt the lesson from their famous countryman? Do they cherish differences? Do

they realise that the ugly duckling may be a swan?

#### **The set-up**

The dominant issue in present day Denmark is the issue of foreign immigration. An intense discussion has been taking place in the media during the last couple of years. At local and national elections it has become a major issue.

It is easy to point to the stereotypical representation that ethnic minorities have in the media. It is easy to demonstrate that the media tend to focus on negative reporting. In Denmark, a recent survey showed that most of the stories in the Danish press about immigrants are about immigration policy (26%) or about crime

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<sup>1</sup> This is an edited and reduced version of a longer article.

(23%)<sup>2</sup>. It is also easy to demonstrate that ethnic minorities are underrepresented as sources to stories or as authors of stories. They tend to be absent<sup>3</sup>. It is less easy to identify what should be done.

The first steps suggest themselves: Avoid stereotypes and change the nature of reporting. Further down the road, the difficulties arise: What are we reporting about? Is integration the goal? - Is a multi-ethnic society the goal? What are the implications for the media?

#### **Case I: “The foreigners” - a tabloid campaign to discuss the “real issues”**

Although Denmark does not have tabloids like Britain or even Germany, the “enfant terrible” of the Danish press is a tabloid named *Ekstrabladet*. Published by the liberal publishing house *Politiken* that also publishes a social liberal daily newspaper with a more intellectual bend, *Ekstrabladet* has for years been one of the best selling papers in Denmark. During the last 10 years, however, its circulation has been dropping steadily. In 1989 it was 240,000. Today it is around 160,000 copies.

The motto for the newspaper has been “We dare

where others are silent”, and the paper has often seen itself as the advocate of the ordinary man in the street against bureaucrats, politicians or the cultural or intellectual elite of society. The paper has a tradition for conducting campaigns - against rich people who cheat on their taxes, against “desk pope” bureaucrats who misuse power.

In March 1997, the paper started a media campaign called : “De fremmede” - (In English - “the foreigners” or “the strangers”). The marketing for the campaign carried several slogans: “The readers dare where the politicians give in.” And the ad is then stamped with an ENTRY stamp from the border. The other is a play on the fact that the words maybe and mosque are very close in their pronunciation in Danish: the Slogan then is “Mosque - maybe not.” The third one says: “Where is the border of tolerance.” The final one uses the logo of the newspaper in Arabic and says: “We must be able to speak the same language.”

A TV commercial for the campaign showed Muslim immigrants moving towards the border and the music was the Danish national anthem. The editor-in-chief said in his first editorial that the background of the campaign was the fact that

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<sup>2</sup> Togeby, Lise (1997). “Er vi ved at vende ‘os’ til ‘dem’”, *Politica*, nr. 1, p.23.

<sup>3</sup> Franchon, Claire and Vargaftig, Marion (eds. 1995). *European Television. Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities*, London: JLC. p. 9.

“Denmark from being a harmonious, understandable society is to an increasing extent being shaped by people with another ethnic and religious background”. The open Danish policy in terms of receiving immigrants was creating a new situation. “Will we continue to let Denmark develop into a multi-cultural society?” The purpose of the campaign, he wrote, was to find out where the limits to tolerance in Denmark were.

From March 31 to June 8, the paper ran stories every day on different aspects of the problem: The quality of the Danish language classes. The immigrants who came to Denmark and made it as successful translators, and the others who came and became drug lords. They ran stories on how much the immigrants cost Danish society. Their result was 11 billion DKK, about 1.1% of GDP. And they ran stories on extended Somali families who were able to get almost 100,000 dollars in welfare support.

The campaign was controversial from the beginning and produced protests: A small demonstration outside the newspaper office on the town square in Copenhagen where copies of the newspaper were burned to protest the treatment of immigrants in the paper. Some organisations tried to organise a boycott of the

paper and one organisation even produced a counter campaign using the same images but with a different message.

Finally, disagreement broke out within the newspaper publishing house. The newspaper *Politiken* refused to accept ads from its sister paper, and wrote strong editorials condemning *Ekstrabladet's* campaign. In its rebuttal *Ekstrabladet* pointed out that *Politiken* was losing money and that if it had not been for the surplus generated by the tabloid *Ekstrabladet* then *Politiken* could not be published.

A huge debate in the rest of the press and on TV ensued that focused on how to cover these issues, and to some extent on the issues at hand. Reader reaction in *Ekstrabladet* seemed to be predominantly on the side of clamping down on immigration: “Put them in internment camps” said one reader. “Send them all back” said another. The newspaper followed up on these reactions by interviewing the people who wrote letters to the editor. Subsequently the paper reproduced most of the articles and the letters in a special edition of 88 pages that was published later together with the newspaper.

What were the effects of this campaign? A study done of the attitudes among Danes show that the



campaign had boosted the public's attention towards this issue to reach a new peak of attention. Additionally, research showed that there was a slight growth in negative attitudes. But Danish attitudes towards foreigners are relatively stable. Ethnocentrism co-varies with the usual variables of age, education and urbanisation. Longitudinal studies seem to indicate that the more contact Danes have with foreigners the more pronounced the variation<sup>4</sup>.

So did *Ekstrabladet* achieve what they wanted? Is there now a broader and better informed debate than before?

The main effect has been to increase the attention of the Danes towards this problem, and, at the same time, a higher degree of polarisation has been created within society. So taken at face value - campaigns like these create public attention, but the side effect is that it does not necessarily become easier to discuss it, because opinions become polarised.

### **Case II: Bosnians on the way**

"We want to transgress the stereotypical refugee picture which is normally painted in the media: That refugees are either a bad thing or a good thing, we wanted to put faces on a large group of

people who are becoming part of our everyday life - and they are welcome to join in with us - we have included a small summary in their own language at the bottom of each article". Thus, the editor for *Jyllands-Posten* - the largest Danish daily - presented a special section of the newspaper, a 16-page broadsheet about the group of 17,000 Bosnian refugees who were granted asylum in Denmark (*Jyllands-Posten*, September 23, 1995).

The stories were about their integration into Danish society and they were written through collaboration between the journalists and a number of the Bosnian refugees themselves. The articles told about the difficulties in getting integrated, and covered the views of some of the people in Denmark who are against the integration of the Bosnians into Danish society. The main tone, however, was to stress the difficulties and the terrible situation the refugees fled from. Stories also highlighted that many of the refugees proved to be assets to Danish society. One of the articles also pointed out that the Bosnians really were privileged compared to other groups of immigrants: they were still European, they looked the same as Danes and many had an education when they came to the country.

The special edition was very well received and

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<sup>4</sup> Togeby, Lise (1997). "Er vi ved at vende 'os' til 'dem'", *Politica*, nr 1. pp. 70-89.

even used by the Danish Red Cross as a teaching tool for foreigners. *Jyllands-Posten* followed up on this reporting by other innovative types of reporting. They placed a journalist and a photographer for a three-week period in one of the immigrant neighbourhoods in Copenhagen to get close to the people living in the area. The idea was that if immigrants had a chance to get to know the journalist they would then feel safer in participating in the news process as sources and consumers. This experiment is currently ongoing.

### **Analysis of both cases**

Press reports on immigrants influence public opinion first and foremost in creating increased attention to the issue. In Denmark, this has clearly been the result of the media campaigns run. The negative campaign seems to have a more direct effect than the positive, but the effect of both types is to increase attention.

Traditionally, media effects have been said to be more reinforcing of than actually changing people's attitudes. These results were later modified to say that the media had a primary function in setting the agenda. The media would determine the content of the agenda through

highlighting certain issues. On the ethnic issue this has clearly been the case. Recent research concludes that when people become aware of an issue - like immigration - it is also often the time when their attitudes and opinions are shaped<sup>5</sup>.

The immigration/ethnic issues in Denmark are a clear demonstration of this according to the opinion studies published recently. The number of people who are "very worried" about the immigration issue has increased from 18% in June 1996 to 35% in September 1997. The figure has gone up steadily since June 1996<sup>6</sup>.

The rise in the numbers in the period from March 1997 to September 1997 must be attributed to the *Ekstrabladet* campaign, and the ensuing debate in other media and in Parliament. Among the readers of *Ekstrabladet*, 52% say that they are very worried. The corresponding number for *Politiken* is 25%. Typically, it is among the older and less educated that the worry is predominant. Among 50-61 year olds, 41% say that they are worried. Among the people with the lowest education 43% are worried.

The conclusion seems to be that the data lend

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<sup>5</sup> Togeby, Lise (1997). "Er vi ved at vende "os" til "dem"", *Politica*, nr.1, pp.70-89;

Zaller, John R. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> IFKA (1997). Published in: *Aktuelt* Sept. 11, 1997.

preliminary support to the theoretical idea that the media have both an opinion creating and an agenda setting function with respect to the issue of “The Foreigners”.

### **Interpretation**

The question of ethnic reporting and the media is a complicated one that goes to the heart of the question of what constitutes a community and a state. Bottomore's distinction between formal and substantive citizenship illustrates the difficulty in the media issue<sup>7</sup>. Formal citizenship is the simple membership of a state. Substantive citizenship involves civil, political and social rights, and some sort of participation in government. The historical process of state building and nationalism in European states endeavoured to ensure that there was as little difference as possible between these two forms of citizenship. In fact the democratic ideals and the ideals of the press both came together in the conception of an enlightened participatory public that through the watchful eye of the press, served to take part in government.

In modern Danish society, this ideal does not

meet reality in several respects. The existing Danish state and its definition of community is defined by the control of one group over others. In the Danish case, language and culture are used as the selection criteria. This national identity is “invented heritage”, reflecting the historical development of society. Consequently the integration of immigrants into a homogeneous society like the Danish require them to disregard their own culture and submerge themselves into and accepting without question the new culture.

In contrast to this form of integration stands the idea of a multi-ethnic state. This raises the question of who defines the community and who defines the mode of participation in that society<sup>8</sup>.

This, it seems, is where the battle is presently being fought. Is citizenship an obligation to homogenise or is citizenship a right to exist within the confines of a state, but with different communities? Unfortunately, most of the media debate seems to resort to finger pointing and campaigning rather than really opening up for this discussion.

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<sup>7</sup> Bottomore, T. (1992). *Citizenship and Social Class*, London: Pluto Press. p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> Husband, Charles (1994). *A Richer Vision*, Paris: UNESCO Publ. p. 8.

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## **The importance of a subjective approach to ethnic conflict reporting - examples from former Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland**

The following two stories from former Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland emphasise one of the important points when discussing ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting: That it may make a case for a subjective approach in reporting. In order to overcome prevailing stereotypes and go beyond common images, it may be important to step back and show real people with real lives and real hopes and real problems. The journalist's task then is to set the scene and set the tone for such subjective approach, a task that in itself will require major sensitivity and great circumspection from the journalist and his or her team. The hidden agenda in this approach? To create understanding what the conflict is about without judging and pointing fingers.

The case studies also describe the professional preconditions for this approach: the willingness to learn about the subject area, the necessity of building a relationship of confidence with the people involved in the report, the necessity to respect them and last but not least, the necessity to be able to spend time on this.

### **Building bridges of understanding; what ethnic conflict really does to people**

*Serge Gordey*

#### **The set-up**

The goal of the videobridge project was to bring together, through video connection, people that distance and circumstances had separated. In the case that occupies us, the case of former Yugoslavia, we were dealing with people who had been separated by the historical tragedy that had divided their country.

There used to be a Yugoslav television system that co-ordinated the various TV stations of the former Yugoslavia. This system cracked more and

more from pressures towards "independence" or "nationalism" (depending on one's point of view) in the eighties. Television then became more and more a stake in a political struggle. When Yugoslavia collapsed, television tended to become a tool for national mobilisation (and hate speech) in each of the republics. All this time, since the territory is not that big, people in each of the territories could often watch television from the other side. In other words, each "side" had its own television.

When we started the videobridge process, we broke with this situation in the sense that people were seeing the "other side" on their own side's television. These videobridges<sup>1</sup> were finally seen extensively both in Serbia and Bosnia (both on the "Muslim" side as well as recently in Republika Srpska).

What precisely did these videobridges aim at? They aimed at re-establishing a dialogue. But what kind of dialogue? That was the heart of the matter.

### **Case I: In the mood**

This videobridge was filmed in October 1996. It was broadcast throughout Bosnia, and later in Serbia. It showed a video exchange between Goran Bregovic, a very talented music composer, originally from Sarajevo, who now lives in Paris and New York and has a workshop in Belgrade. He is the son of a Serb-Croat mixed couple, and his wife is a Muslim. During the exchange, he was in Belgrade and was talking with Davorin Popovic, a very well known pop music singer in the former Yugoslavia now living in Sarajevo.

Davorin Popovic is a Bosnian of Croatian origin. The third person in the exchange was Abdulla Sidran, a so-called Bosnian Muslim also living in Sarajevo.

This dialogue between Sarajevans therefore brought together a man who had left the city, and even betrayed it according to some people, and two other men who had stayed, whether by choice or necessity.

This exchange united people who had not talked to each other for six years. The war had separated them not only physically but also mentally. But at the same time, they were friends: they knew each other very well, they had been very fond of each other in the past, they had partied together on many occasions, they had worked together.

These men had mutually chosen each other to take part in this dialogue. Each one of them had done it for his own complex reasons, intimate and strategic at the same time. As they were friends, they were able to find the right words to converse in a sincere and honest manner, without

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<sup>1</sup> These videobridges, produced by Internews Europe in former Yugoslavia, form part of a series titled *Novi mostrovi* (New Bridges). The series' producer was Paul Greenberg. Serge Gordey was the chief producer of *In the mood* and a co-producer of the second film. These programmes constitute a sequel to *Face to Face*, a videobridge format document originally conceived by Patrice Barrat and Kim Spencer.

their words immediately being suspected of concealing some secret, evil intention. Therefore, conditions existed for a dialogue where every party was able to express his reasons and listen to the other party's viewpoint. This was what made their exchange so meaningful.

From this angle, we found ourselves beyond the usual problem of “reporting”, since in this case, the actors themselves were the speakers. One could say that their speech was performative, in the sense that the mere fact that the words were being spoken already sent out a message (while “reporting” in the strict sense of the word consists in relaying already existing words and actions).

In the exchange, each character spoke in his own name. We witnessed three individuals - not three spokespersons representing different communities - truly talking to each other. But at the same time, their conversation was public. Viewers were waiting for it, and the three men were aware of this, because each one of them was very famous and could be recognised by a large public. The establishment of a bridge, or maybe the crossing of this bridge, was thus a challenge that went beyond them as individuals. It was a public event, maybe even a political one.

This context means that such an event had

nothing spontaneous about it. With the actors' consent, the producers of the programme had taken the responsibility for this type of confrontation, and it was this responsibility that was at stake. There was a certain amount of calculated risk in it. The danger in this case was to play the part of the sorcerer's apprentice ...

Following are some details about the production of this type of film - one could even say, of this event. When we found ourselves back in the editing room and had to agree on a shorter version of the dialogue (the final version lasts 40 minutes, whereas the dialogue itself lasted two hours), we agreed to respect three criteria and the questions to be answered were: “Is the programme honest, that is to say, does it accurately recount what unites the characters as well as what separates them? Is the programme good? Is it useful, that is to say, does it increase the chances of dialogue or does it reduce them?”

### **Case II - When we said good bye**

This second videobridge consists in a dialogue that took place in March 1997. It did not involve famous people, but two unknown young people. Their dialogue was filmed on the eve of the elections of 13 April, which would officially mark Croatia's annexation of Vukovar. We had decided that the time had come for us to return to the

very place where the war in Yugoslavia had started.

*When we said good bye* is the closest, most intimate look into the divisions that are tearing former Yugoslavia apart. In this exchange, two young lovers, separated by the war, were able to express their emotions: one of them is a Serb and the other one a Croat.

One remembers the context: before the expression “ethnic cleansing” became a new concept world-wide, the city of Vukovar had already been ethnically cleansed. In September 1991, Serbian militia besieged the city where 200,000 Croats, Serbs and other Yugoslavs of various origins lived together. Three months later, the city surrendered. All non-Serbian inhabitants were forcefully evicted from their homes, or murdered. This is the moment when history tipped over: Yugoslavia ceased to be the common land of various communities to become a chaotic mass of ethnically pure entities. This was also maybe the beginning of the end of a certain image of Europe.

While we were filming, Vukovar was considered as one of the open wounds in the painstaking peace process that the former Yugoslavia is still undergoing.

Six years ago, Tanja, a seventeen year old Croatian girl, and her Serbian friend Igor, saw their love torn apart when the Serbs took over Slovenia. When the war began, Igor lived with Tanja and her parents in Osijek. But Igor gave in to his own parents' request and joined them in Vukovar when the city was conquered. Tanja and Igor said good bye in Osijek railway station never to see each other again.

In *When we said good bye*, we gave Tanja and Igor the possibility to communicate again for the first time, thanks to a satellite connection. In this exchange, they recall their separation, tell each other what happened to their lives, what became of their friends. Together they look at archive pictures and relive what Croats call the invasion of the city and what Serbs call its liberation.

The film combines the satellite exchange, archive documents and reporters' pictures about the continuing conflict between Serbs and Croats. One suddenly realises that what separates the two lovers is not only a matter of feelings and emotions but also the pressure of political and war events.

At the end of the film, it is clear that Igor has finally succeeded in facing the hardships that have marked his passage into adulthood. “I feel some

kind of relief,” he says. “All these years I felt guilty, as if I would never be able to find myself again. This feeling never left me. But now, I am glad to see that she has understood me and that she accepts what happened.”

As for Tanja, her conversation with Igor has made her become more clear-sighted: “When I saw him, everything came back to me, but I don't think that Igor would find his place back in Croatia. Maybe in a few years. One day, I will be able to see him as a friend. The first days of the war were really dramatic as much for him as for me. I took everything on myself, but now I realise that he still needs more time to recover.”

### **Analysis**

What is the common point between this film and the first one? Once again, we witness individuals expressing themselves, but through them, it is a collective and historical tragedy that is being presented. It is the well-known story of Romeo and Juliet. As a matter of fact, they never talk about politics, they talk only about their feelings, and about what happened in their lives since they parted. It is a love story that resembles all love stories. It involves the attraction between two human beings, but also betrayal, disappointment, sorrow, sadness... How can we explain that so many people phoned the television station in

Belgrade, to say in trembling voices how much they had been moved by this film? The answer may lie in the fact that each character, while recounting his/her own story, enabled the viewers, not necessarily on purpose, to take a measure of the extent of the disaster... All nationalistic speeches lose their arrogant certainty, when confronted with the language of romantic feelings.

### **Interpretation of both cases**

Let us come back to the choice of the characters in *In the mood* and *When we said good bye*. In each case, the goal was to find the right strategy that would create the conditions for a sincere and significant exchange. It was not enough that the characters should talk. They had to truly talk. In such a situation, only truly personal words could convey a more general meaning and vice versa.

The difficulty for the broadcast was that every broadcaster tended to believe that it had to endorse what the characters had to say, especially those of the “other side”. The reactions of the audience tended to be very positive: people were eager to see some kind of dialogue starting and to see the “other side” directly talking to them. People seem to have been generally moved in a personal manner, rather than in a collective political one.



We still have to question ourselves on the actual purpose of these videobridges. In my opinion, we made it possible for people to start listening to each other again, that is to say, to find out what united them and what separated them. By making a conversation public, we performed an act. This act was in itself a reality, it marked an important step forward. And at the same time, it was a metaphor that led the viewer to ask himself whether he could also engage in such an act of communication.

What matters at the end is that each party understands the other party's reasons, and finally realises that the other party is a different, and yet similar human being. We must realise that we can and must go beyond a monolithic vision of the world, so as to be able to discover its nuances, contradictions, and complexities.

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## Giving people in a conflict a voice to talk about themselves

*Maurice Goldring*

### **The set-up**

A TV crew (“Point du jour”) filmed an integrated college (protestant and catholic) in Belfast, from 19 September to 2 December 1994. Every day, the edited filming of the day was shown on Channel 4 in the UK for three minutes. The programme was called *Belfast Lessons*. The students and staff could see themselves on TV and if they wanted to react, their reaction was filmed and shown the next day. Thus a continuous dialogue was established between the media and the protagonists.

The time was that of the cease-fire (August 31): A period of euphoria and questioning, a period during which people began to “talk”. The location was that of a school that refused to admit to the fundamental cleavage of the Northern Irish society. Location and time were two elements encouraging talk. The assumption of “Point du jour” was that time and place thus chosen would allow the utterance of conflicting opinion without ruining the basis of a political community: the will to live together and accept certain common rules. The peace process and the “integration” should enable the utterance of conflicts as a normal condition of existence of a pluralist

society. The choice was no longer between silence and physical violence.

### **The case**

People in Hazelwood consider their school as an autonomous society, a haven of peace in a society torn by strife. “These children leave their areas to come here and they leave behind their fear and really we stand as a beacon of light as to what is possible for the future” (Noreen, teacher, 28 November). Hazelwood is thus a utopia. The participants live in a contradiction. They live in a conflictual society and work in an institution that seems to have abolished that conflict. The tendency is thus to consider that Northern Ireland could become peaceful by becoming a generalised Hazelwood. Others, however, think that the fundamental rift should be expressed within the school. A history teacher, Drew, uses what he calls “locally produced books” in order to make his pupils understand the other point of view. Thus, he would ask a catholic to write a speech by a unionist, or a protestant to be Pearse before the Easter rebellion (Drew, 5 October). The point of view of the TV crew is to break a harmony that seems false, and to create events that will make people talk. For example, they

show a debate between Gerry Adams and Ken Maginnis and make the pupils react, or they invite two ex-prisoners to the school, a republican and a loyalist. Adverse opinions then come to light. The assumption that Northern Ireland is a civilised society in which everybody would get on well together if it were not for the trouble makers, the paramilitaries, the politicians, etc. is shattered: the whole of society is profoundly divided and those divisions are inscribed in the most “tolerant” minds.

Thus, every school boy and girl in Hazelwood has a sharp consciousness of borders and territory. Karen invites two catholic friends and says that her friends were afraid to be on “foreign territory”. Another protestant, Angela, creates an uproar simply by saying aloud what was never mentioned, but known by everybody: this bus stop would make the way to school quicker, but is not used because “there's catholics waiting to go to school” (Angela, 19 September). Ciara prefers the black taxis, because she knows the people and can talk to them ( Ciara, October 24). The young people all complain in fact that they are prisoners of their own areas (Aoden, September 25) and thus deprived of the freedom to go where one likes.

It is often said that Northern Irish people see the

“troubles” through TV. *Belfast Lessons* show that nearly all the young people were actual witnesses of attacks, murders, bombings, or have had kin wounded or killed. Clearly, the population does not live in “normal” surroundings. At the same time, the denial of the war or of its consequences express an enormous yearning for normality. Belfast is a “nice place to live” (Andrew, October 23), Anna-Maria “doesn't pay attention to the troubles”, she just carries on her own life (October 23). Warren wants to go to England but is annoyed when people think it is because he cannot bear living in Belfast.

To talk or not to talk. That is the big question. “If you become friendly with a catholic, maybe you don't want to start up an argument because sometimes stupid arguments start out of nothing” (Susan, September 29). The young loyalist Karen caused a major scandal when she expressed strong loyalist views: “If Dublin got their way, they would have us following the Pope” (Karen, November 8). She did not welcome the cease-fire which she considered as an IRA victory. This last opinion was particularly upsetting for Hazelwood: Integrated schools were for peace. Some think that though this “programme is to show everybody's point of view”, the last opinion was “a bit too strong” (Angela, November 13) although the practice in Hazelwood is to

encourage debate. One of the teachers said: "The children in my classroom have experienced politics ... emotionally, physically, mentally in a way, they've been hurt in a way that perhaps children in Bonn, Paris, haven't. Politics is real live issue here in Northern Ireland" (Denise, November 21). So, politics comes out in *Belfast Lessons* in a way that is unusual. "Whatever you say, say nothing" is a well-known motto in Belfast. Adult reaction is sometimes grateful for this openness of expression. "What we watch ... is very different from what we're used to watching... Children ... feel they can speak freely..." (Noreen, October 16). But other reactions are very negative and even hostile. The constant search for the conflict within a harmonious school is considered as destructive of harmony. "Introducing a television camera to this situation raises sensitive issues" (Codagh, October 2). Because, if TV shows "somebody saying something on television and a lot of people disagree ... you then stir up some conflict that maybe wasn't ...that could be dangerous" Rosemary, October 2). Mary Fitzpatrick was one of the most vociferous, she considered the TV crew as "outsiders" who do not understand the seriousness of the situation. For example, Karen was put at risk after her opinion on the cease-fire. She was insulted at school. After the departure of the reporters, Hazelwood will pick up the broken pieces.

## **Analysis**

To obtain such results, one has to establish relations of confidence, based on in-depth knowledge of the scene and a style of reporting that respects the personalities of the interviewees.

Relations of confidence were established first by the length of the stay: September to December, four months of daily presence. Then by showing day after day the result of the work, the participants could judge the work. Relations of confidence through a reflection on the effect of the presence of a TV crew in the institution. For example, David, a schoolboy, says he understood it was a different programme when he realised that the journalists were willing to film characters with pimples. This remark started a discussion among the crew, one of the directors wondering if unconsciously, they tolerated boys with a rash on their faces, but not girls.

Relations of confidence. In a sociological research, a basic method of protecting the subjects of enquiry is to change names of people and of location. Impossible to achieve for a TV programme. The characters may be put in jeopardy by their public utterances. One of the characters, Harry, was attacked the next day after appearing on the show. Crisis aboard: was the shooting related to the film? As one the directors

put it: our aim is to make good television, while our characters aim at remaining alive.

Respecting the people means trying to understand them without judging, without jibes or hostility. It means taking people as they are, and making clear the network of necessities that make them what they are. This respect implies a lot of work: learning about the situation, history, sociology, psychology, reading and talking to people. It takes time. Being conscious of the intrusion of the media into the daily lives of the people. A television crew with cameras, lighting, technicians and journalists, is heavy going. What is more, the journalist is always considered as socially superior, and often considers him- or herself as "superior": because he or she knows, is aware, whereas his/her "material" is sometimes considered as mere puppets of events.

In order to overcome those pitfalls, what is required above all is time, time to learn, time to have the paraphernalia accepted and familiar, time to exchange opinions with the subjects of work. Time to get rid of preconceived ideas. Time is expensive.

### **Interpretation**

*Belfast Lessons* is an example of what can be achieved in this direction. Even though it cannot avoid all consequences of its intervention. The sheer presence of TV in a school is an event, and it created events. But it was so much integrated into the school life that for many people, it became "their show", "our show". Generally, TV simplifies complexities, here we have a complication of the "simple". No wonder academics can watch the show with the feeling of a certain harmony between their own work and the work of the authors of this TV production. The trouble is that the producers went bankrupt.

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## The pain of ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting - an example from France

Ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting is about pain. The cases here presented show that the line on which to tread in order to produce what we want to call good journalism is extremely thin. The following case from France is another such example that defies categorisation whether it is a case of good or bad reporting. Pain is shown, but pain is also created. The case also shows that pain may lead to some positive reactions.

### Suburbs<sup>1</sup>

*Serge Gordey*

#### The set-up

The film we will analyse here defines its approach fairly well in the first words of the commentary: “Gennevilliers is located 12 kilometres but also a few light years from Paris”.

The film attempts at showing the “reality” of the suburbs that were becoming a subject of numerous public debates in France at the beginning of the eighties. The film was first broadcast in June 1989, on the private channel Canal +. It provoked so many reactions that it was shown again in February 1990 on FR3, a public channel, and was then followed by a debate between the then Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, and the mayors of four French cities, among them the mayor of Gennevilliers, where

this film was made.

#### The case

The film is a kind of travelogue into a territory which, in some ways, is the hidden part of the otherwise quiet and prosperous France. It suddenly brings viewers face-to-face with the problems of juvenile delinquency, insecurity, material and moral misery, drugs, and alcohol.

The camera team used the techniques of direct reporting and filmed real-life situations, interviews, and also followed a few characters in their daily lives. The soundtrack of the film combines background music, tense and somewhat frightening, as well as a rap song performed by one the main characters. This musical aspect is

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<sup>1</sup> This film was directed by Gilles de Maistre, a journalist-cameraman, and Hervé Chabalier. It was produced by VI Presse, which is now known as Agence Capa, one of the most famous audio-visual press agencies in France.

also used in some of the scenes that are filmed in “videoclip” format.

### **Analysis**

From the moment it was broadcast, this film provoked very strong reactions. “Trip to hell”, “the city of Barbarians” newspaper headlines announced. In Gennevilliers itself, the left-wing municipality and local associations voiced the outrage of many inhabitants. Recurrent in their criticisms were expressions such as “caricature” and “humiliating and injuring pictures”. They also claimed that some ethical principles had not been respected: according to them, some of the characters had been paid to commit offences in front of the camera, children had been interviewed without their parents' consent, some of the pictures were deliberately shocking. But more fundamentally, it was clear that the inhabitants did not recognise themselves in the way they were being shown. The film focused only on “negative” aspects, they said, not on the “positive” ones. A social worker even wrote an open letter to the “bear leaders”, the authors. He claimed that the characters of the film were displayed like animals in a zoo. He pointed out that if the inhabitants of Gennevilliers could use their right to answer, they would also show the

authors of Suburbs in their daily lives, washing their teeth, unshaven in the bleak morning light. In reply to the critics, a representative of Canal + explained during a debate with a few inhabitants that “journalism generally consists in reporting when trains are late and not when they are on time.”

### **Interpretation**

What was at stake here was the difficulty of reporting tricky social situations: the inhabitants were probably not too keen on looking in the mirror that was being handed to them in a somewhat aggressive way. Moreover, how could we avoid the trap of sensationalism, which is often the easiest manner to turn an often dull and prosaic reality into an “interesting” topic?

However, not surprisingly, the film also gave rise to a very animated debate on the extent of the “ills affecting the suburbs”. There were even some secondary effects: the image that had been given of Gennevilliers was so appalling that the city consequently received some very large state subsidies to help improve its inhabitants' standard of life.

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## Conclusion

*Urte Sonnenberg*

“It is difficult to present a ‘good’ case or a ‘bad’ case”: with this Serge Gordey began the presentation of his case studies at the EJC seminar on “Ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting” in September 1997 in Maastricht. “According to which criteria are they ‘good’ or ‘bad’? One could say that a good case is a case which sticks to the usual criteria of honest journalism or respectable writing. However, in the following examples, things may be more complicated than usual. Indeed, whose point of view should we take when dealing with minorities? It would certainly not be very wise to pretend to be like God and take a universal standpoint, because the very words of ‘good’, ‘evil’ and ‘minority’ already raise problems.”

The consequent discussion in the EJC seminar in September 1998 showed that ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting is indeed an extremely complex area, even more complicated than ethics in journalism which itself is not exactly a straightforward field of dos and don'ts.

Ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting is like stepping into a mine field of common perceptions, prevailing stereotypes, political

malice and human naiveté. Journalists are culprits and victims at the same time. They may intentionally or unwittingly serve somebody's political or personal interest, but even then the result of the coverage is totally unpredictable. It may serve the purpose. Or it may trigger a huge public debate leading to directly opposite results than intended. Or it leads to both results at the same time, but with different people. Good intentions equally may lead to unintended negative results. One of the important results from the seminar is that it is almost impossible to talk about good or bad ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting. The complexity of the issue and its emotional charge defy easy categorisation.

So, what to do then? Is there no other way than to tell people that they should not hate, should not stereotype, should not simplify, should not discriminate? Interestingly enough: Even though our 11 experts found many points of disagreement, in their disagreement they were joined in the understanding that the work on concrete examples helps to clarify the edges. The edges of the problem, the edges of how far the influence of journalists can reach, the edges of



how far to reach inside oneself to critically examine long held convictions and social experience. Because identifying a certain group of people as the root of social problems, scandals or even personal problems, psychologically is an easier way out than looking for the real source of the problem or accepting that a situation might be dissatisfying even though nobody is to be blamed for it.

In politically tense situations, ethnic conflicts are particularly prone to polarise public opinion. Interestingly, this collection of case studies also shows that talking about ethnic minorities may only make limited sense, as an ethnic minority in one country may be the majority in another, influencing the seemingly internal conflict. The collection also indicates that minorities are not the victims of discrimination by definition. And it shows that even well-meaning publications may contribute to strengthen popular beliefs and unjust stereotypes.

Presenting a cross section of European journalism handling the realities of cultural diversity, this handbook is, as my co-author Michael Bromley puts it in his introduction, about good journalism. With the handbook as a basis, the

European Journalism Centre will provide journalists with a chance to train their instincts against the traps their profession and the environment in which the media operate provide. With this, the EJC wants to contribute to the practice of good journalism in Europe.

What we hope to achieve with this handbook is:

- to help define what ethnic minority and ethnic conflict reporting is
- to show the wide range and complex nature of the problems connected with this kind of reporting; and
- to provide a few ideas of which approach to choose and which common mistakes to avoid when tackling an issue connected with ethnic minorities and ethnic conflict.

The handbook presented here deliberately does not give a final verdict on which of our cases show “good” journalism and which do not. Even if that would be possible, it is not the aim of this handbook. We are not interested in judging. What we are interested in is helping to provide a safer ground for good judgement, to help journalists to go beyond the temptation of taking sides in a conflict.

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Journalistic ethics are a permanent source of debate: general principles have to be applied in concrete cases. This is not easy and an often underrated aspect of the journalistic decision-taking process. This booklet reviews a number of recent, problematic cases, in both eastern and western Europe.

pp. 52

**Organising media accountability - experiences in Europe**

This publication describes the various forms of media accountability: legal provisions and self-regulation by the profession (press-ombudsmen and media councils). It pays special attention to the situation in eastern Europe where the media still have to structure the concept of journalistic responsibility.

pp. 68

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