



## Intercultural Information and the Role of the Ethnic Media in Italy: A Sociological Study

**Giacomo Buoncompagni\***

Department of Political Science,  
Communication and International Relations,  
University of Macerata, Italy

**\*Corresponding author:**

Giacomo Buoncompagni

✉ giacomo.buoncompagni@libero.it

Ph. D student in Sociology (Human Sciences), Department of Political Science, Communication and International Relations, University of Macerata, Italy.

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### Abstract

Digital progress has accelerated the processes of production and sharing of information and the possibility of collaboration, dialogue and negotiation.

The problem of the "different from me" has been addressed over time by many cultures.

In the new information society, ideas, technologies, people, products are intended to move from one place to another, but remaining interconnected within an environment where cultures come into contact with the need to enhance identity and differences among individuals. This is only possible through significant exchanges of opinions with others, leading to opportunities to meet.

The development of media influences our daily experience in the global world, understood as a new mediated space defined by relationships themselves, where they build the framework of our civilization.

The media are called to create social, moral and responsible spaces in a multicultural and democratic society: this means responsible information and quality as the foundation of democracy and the common good.

**Keywords:** Digital media; Intercultural journalism; Migration; Mediapolis; Multiculturalism; Ethnic media; Italy

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### Italian Journalism and Migration

The Fifth Report 2017 submitted by the Italian Journalism Association "Carta di Roma" entitled "Notizie da paura" ("Scary news"), on the theme of media and immigration, shows how in the last year, there have been peaks of anxiogenic news and alarmist television reports strongly present in the narrative produced by the Italian media in relation to migration processes, especially in relation to specific events of a chronicle, in particular black chronicle and judicial<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless, according to John Maria Bellu, journalist and President of the Association "Carta di Roma", if one analyzes the complex of journalistic production on immigration, it is possible to note how the use of legal terms has decreased: words like "migrant" and "refugee" have been replaced, in the generality of titles, by the term "clandestine".

<sup>1</sup><https://www.agensir.it/italia/2017/12/07/media-e-migranti-carta-di-roma-piu-notizie-da-paura-su-tg-e-quotidiani-e-il-clima-da-campagna-elettorale/1>.

However the need to reassess the manner in which article of news are selected and made hierarchical emerges with urgency.

Migratory movements appear increasingly multifaceted, so much so that today many places of departure you characterize, simultaneously, to also be places of landing or transit.

The political response that seems to prevail is to implement, within their own borders, safety measures to restrict migratory flows, with the sole purpose of discouraging the input of others and make it more uncertain and less easy [1].

The uncertainty and the perception of in security thus promote raising the barriers between the subjects and prevent communication, dialogue and exchange [2].

It is thus that the identity of the "migrant man" configures only and exclusively through the eyes of a country of immigration: identity that perhaps it would be more accurate to define as "no-identity": the migrant is a "no-national", he is another with respect to the whole, he is a no-social subject.

There are two important aspects: the perception and the representation of immigration in Italy within the processes of mass communication and in particular by the new media.

Maciotti [1], Italian sociologist, talks about a "strong sense of irresponsibility" on the part of the media, following the adoption of a communication which is vitiated and a language which is never neutral, about a schematic "labeling" of the phenomenon, which runs right through the lexical choices frequent in the media.

Illegal immigration is still considered as a constant threat to the national economy, labor market, religion, culture: this is the limits that the Italian mass media continue to show with regards of cultural diversity.

Now, the same situation is likely to occur in the new media [3,4].

The significant digital transformation has accelerated production processes and the sharing of information and the possibility of cooperation, dialogue and comparison/clash between individuals.

The telematic networks and new languages are changing the social, economic and cultural context, causing an adjustment and/or loss in respect of new forms of communication and exchange of knowledge.

The theorist of communication Marshall McLuhan [5] had somehow foretold the birth of a "global village", inside which ideas, technologies, people, products are intended to move from one place to another, but they remain interconnected within an ambient where different cultures come into contact and influence each other.

Thus emerges the need for modern societies to enhance the identity and the differences between individuals; this is only possible through the comparison and exchange with others: this is an opportunity for learning and meeting, in conditions that are easily accessible and manageable<sup>2</sup>.

The problem of the "different from me" has been addressed by many cultures, through models of exclusion or different integration between justified by different cultural motivations and contextualized particular historical periods [6].

Generally the awareness of a multicultural reality has unfortunately led to formulating ethnocentric models and strategies, safeguarding their own culture and their identity and activating a mechanism of the negation of the other based on the concept of "diversity"<sup>3</sup>.

The globalization of markets has also favored the formation of a network of relationships which created fewer points of reference and safety in our life [7], generating a strong sense of fear, insecurity and a "liquid society" [8,9].

## The Media-Action

The action of the media, that we can call "the media-action",

can be understood as an act of demarcation [10] which defines national and linguistic borders to construct identity and relations on the basis of common interests and styles of life shared.

The media therefore has a central role in the constitution of civic, social and moral spaces.

New conditions are occurring: "medial pluralism" and the birth of "polyphonic cultures" inside the Media-polis<sup>4</sup>.

The intercultural meeting in the online and offline environment, in the absence of education and intercultural-medial competences, creates social conflicts between peoples, greater distances and the impossibility of dialogue [11].

Nowadays the means of communication are the mirror of the diversity inherent in the European social fabric: they are not limited to reproducing diversity, but actively contribute to its proliferation [10].

It's very important nowadays to consider the study and the narration of intercultural journalism; media and ethnic minority, providing us with an alternative approach to our idea of (inter) culture.

Roidi [12] writes that "the unpreparedness, joined to the presumption, represents the largest of the problems of journalist, after that of independence".

The fragility of Italian journalism and its professional culture translates into a waiver with respect to the pedagogical role, understood as cultural counterpart and interpretive media are all called to play in the story of modern and multicultural society [13].

Acceleration, fragmentation and dilation characterize online information and this entire confused situation puts the role of the mediator of a professional journalist to the test.

The result is a production discursive emotionally engaging narrative but it's distorted and it generates strong boundaries in the social imagination legitimizing the distinction between "them" and "us", which is not useful guidance to develop policies of integration and active citizenship<sup>5</sup>.

## Intercultural Journalism and the Ethnic Media

In an interconnected and multicultural society, information has the task of promoting intercultural relations Garcea [14], involving different visions of the world, often opposed to each other, but these encourage attitudes of empathy, sensitività and involve processes of adaptation and learning, action and collaboration and seek to find an integrated solution.

Intercultural journalism arises on this road and aims to promote a process of cultural adaptation between people of different cultures and i.e.:

A complex of cognitive activities and behavior that affect both

<sup>2</sup> Bennet JM (2015) Principles of intercultural communication, Franco Angeli, Milan.

<sup>3</sup>Zanetti F (2002) Telematics and Interculture. Cultural differences in the contradictions of the global village, Editions Junior, Bergamo.

<sup>4</sup>Silverstone R (2009) Mediapolis. The responsibility of the media in global civilization, Life and Thought, Milan.

<sup>5</sup>Musarò P, Parmiggiani P (2014) Media and migration: ethics, aesthetics and politics of humanitarian narration, Franco Angeli, Milan.

our existence in the culture in which we are born, both occasions of contact with other cultures (..) the intercultural adaptation represents an intellectual acquisition that is complete in the moment in which we see in our mind the existence of worlds that are different from ours, and respect them by means of our behavior [14].

Adapting does not mean renouncing their own values and submitting to those of others, but concerns the attempt at integration, openness to others, defending their own cultural specificity<sup>6</sup>.

Journalism and information spaces must therefore be able to sustain, communicate and to accommodate this attempt at openness to diversity, recounting responsibly for a plural society through tools such as study and training, awareness of stereotypes and prejudices, opening to the newness and knowledge of the mechanisms of interpersonal communication and mass [15].

The intercultural position is not uncritical acceptance of diversity: Portera [16] highlights the need to begin a common path, not so much based on the acceptance and respect of universalistic mold, but on the possibility of identifying the real points of difference and conflict, learning to manage the latter non-violently.

Nowadays the arena of the global media is fragmented, despotic, unjust and challenged but nevertheless; it "is the place where any structure that can be made to support the culture of globalisation, must necessarily be formed" [17].

Contemporary society is still characterised by boundaries that are generators of conflict and confused reality: the admission of diversity and the capacity to make distinctions are the constituent elements of a new, solid and global ethic of communication<sup>7</sup>.

The media itself is part and fragment of this reality; the Media-polis reflects and, together, generates the multicultural space, the "voices" of these different cultures are articulated so in the means of communication by creating a "Polyphony" [10].

The process of migration has accompanied the history of the human race and has always been characterized by movements of individuals, groups and cultures, triggered by changes of a political-economic, religious-environment.

The difference between political refugees and economic migrants, security and the enhancement of the difference, are aspects which feature in the European public debate and not only.

The consequences of the phenomenon of immigration are, however, well beyond the political agenda, in that it affects the nature and character of a national culture, seriously in discussion boundaries and identity<sup>8</sup>.

The policies of the response to the phenomenon of migration are usually accompanied by problems whose etiology varies and are dealt with in a different way often, as already demonstrated the

<sup>6</sup>Bennet JM (2015) Principles of intercultural communication, Franco Angeli, Milan.

<sup>7</sup>Walzer (2000) On tolerance, Laterza, Rome – Bari.

<sup>8</sup>Husband C (2000) The Media and the public sphere in Multiethnic Societies, Cottle S (ed.) Ethnic Minorities and the Media, Open University Press, Buckingham.

tragic episodes of 2005 in the Parisian "banlieus" or the attack on the London underground in the same year<sup>9</sup>.

The recent terrorist attacks in Europe have certainly not helped to decrease the dangerous rhetoric of fears and threats, understandable if you think about living in an era of global terror, but they are counterproductive because it reproduces the logic of the difference, instead of overcoming it.

### These voltages are observed precisely in the means of communication

They clearly show the future of public culture and of the civil arena, a culture that will be marked by diversity and contrasts (...) and the result of these voltages will produce effects the moral and ethical determinants (...). The means of communication are the mirror of the diversity inherent in the European social fabric. They are not confined to reproduce this diversity, but actively contribute to its proliferation [10].

The quality of information is a foundation of every democracy and a common good.

In Italy, for example, next to the "Carta di Roma", associations and daily observers warn the Italian public opinion against the abuse of information on the theme of migration, minorities and citizenship.

Example of this variegated scenario are for example a lot of ethnic media in Italy for example: the website "Cronache di ordinario razzismo" (edited by the association Lunaria), the Center for information on racism and discrimination in Italy, edited by the association COSPE, the web site called "Redattore sociale" or even the committee "Occhio ai media" presents in Ferrara<sup>10</sup>.

Also among the many initiatives in this context, an Italian virtuous case is the memorandum of understanding on the regional intercultural communication, approved in 2008 by the Emilia Romagna Region and signed in February 2009 by many organizations in the media sector and of intercultural communication; in parallel there have been numerous actions for the promotion and enhancement of intercultural media, training activities, formative traineeships, aimed at young people of the second generation of foreign origin, trying in this way to promote their access to media space and its tools<sup>11</sup>.

The aim is to highlight the needs, problems, beauty and voice of foreign communities in the Italian territory.

### For Silverstone (2009) it is evident that

"The individual biography and history combine with one another in a relationship often polyphonic (..) new technologies make possible a new personal mobility: the individual not only moves between one nation and another, but also between different territories".

<sup>9</sup>Kepel G (2012) Suburbs of the Republic: Society, politics and religion in Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil, Gallimard, Paris.

<sup>10</sup>[http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/;](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/)

<http://www.redattoresociale.it;>

[http://www.occhioaimedia.org/.](http://www.occhioaimedia.org/)

<sup>11</sup>[http://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/agenzia-di-informazione-e-comunicazione/archivio-dei-comunicati/;](http://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/agenzia-di-informazione-e-comunicazione/archivio-dei-comunicati/)

The forms of representation of otherness promoted by the media have a fundamental significance not only for our moral dimension, but for the future of the human condition.

The question is not limited to appearing or disappearing from others in online and offline information, the importance of listening and hearing becomes fundamental as well as the process of attribution of the senses. Charles [18] defines this as "the right to be included".

The "Polyphony" highlighted by the sociologist Silverstone [10] has no sense if the items that compose it are not heard and understood.

This, according to Charles [18], the ethnic media (media ethnic or multicultural) will have a greater role in the mediated public sphere.

The facts diffused by the Italian press agencies of CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference and SIR (Religion Information Service), highlights how the ethnic media are over 100 in Italy, including radio, newspapers, website and TV.

The market for ethnic media is constantly growing and in addition to performing a service in the public interest is essential for the community: intercultural information represents now a place for debate and exchanges among migrants, promoting cultural pluralism and information.

In Italy, thanks to the NGO COSPE was established in May 2005 a national platform for multicultural Italian media was established in May 2005 which tried to develop strategies for common work<sup>12</sup>.

Since from 2006, in Italy, most of the magazines, born in recent years, have been printed monthly and they are present in many regions of the Italian territories<sup>13</sup>.

The publications have an average diffusion media that varies between 10,000 and 20,000 copies, to 5,000 for ethnic minorities.

The newspapers are concerned principally the news about rules, rights and laws on immigration and the value with different cultures.

The editorial group "Stranieri in Italia", for example, reaches every month 600,000 readers in thirteen newspapers in language dedicated to immigrants, the portal of the immigration [www.stranieriinitalia.it](http://www.stranieriinitalia.it) and numerous legal vademecum<sup>14</sup>.

Anyway the ethnic media which is the most read on the Italian territory there is "Gazeta romanesca" (Romanian, 20,000 copies), "Forum" (Russian Ukrainian, 20,000 copies) and "Nur" (in Arabic, with about 20,000 copies); other online magazines such as "Africa News", "African Trumpet International" and "Bota Shqiptare" (Albanian, winner of the Prize Mostafa Souhir in 2005)<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>12</sup>[http://www1.adnkronos.com/Archivio/AdnAgenzia/2006/01/13/Cronaca/IMMIGRATI-SONO-PIU-DI-100-I-MEDIA-ETNICI-GIA-ATTIVI-IN-ITAL\\_132548.php](http://www1.adnkronos.com/Archivio/AdnAgenzia/2006/01/13/Cronaca/IMMIGRATI-SONO-PIU-DI-100-I-MEDIA-ETNICI-GIA-ATTIVI-IN-ITAL_132548.php).

<sup>13</sup><http://www.vita.it/it/article/2006/01/13/immigrati-in-italia-piu-di-100-media-etnici/50960/18>.

<sup>14</sup>[www.stranieriinitalia.it](http://www.stranieriinitalia.it).

<sup>15</sup><http://www.vita.it/it/article/2006/01/13/immigrati-in-italia-piu-di-100-media-etnici/50960/>

The force and the amount of the information produced by multicultural media, is increasing also thanks to new spaces and languages born on the internet, through blogs, social networking, chat room, because they offer a contribution which is indispensable in the development of contemporary "Mediapolis".

## The Value of Culture and Hospitality

With respect to the mainstream system it is fundamental to note how the internet has an interactive and public-transparent nature and it is distinguished for its "hospitality" [10].

### According Derrida (2002)

The hospitality is the culture itself and is not an ethic among others. To the extent that touches the ethos, i.e. the tabernacle, the be at-of-self, the place, the way we relate to himself and to others as to their own or to strangers, ethics is hospitality, is from part to part coextensive with the experience of hospitality, in whatever way the opens or limits.

From the words of Derrida and from the equation proposed by him (ethical-hospitality), hospitality presents itself as a duty more than a law, an ethical principle that informs the world.

The means of communication of the minorities are taking on an increasingly important role within the new digital media environment and what distinguishes them, with respect to the mainstream, is their ability and willingness to please the community of reference and, at the same time, the prevailing culture will be essential for the public culture of the future<sup>16</sup>.

Recognizing cultural differences also in medial space, implies hospitality and therefore an opening toward the stranger, the willingness to extend time and spaces on the platforms of the dominant culture.

The duty of hospitality is, for Silverstone [10], the requirement necessary for building the Mediapolis and is the precondition of "justice medial" toward the stranger in terms of representation in the medial of the world: this prevents failure of communication and the production of inadequate clearance between people, cultures and news<sup>17</sup>.

Foreigners therefore, irrespective of their origin, need to be received in the medial spaces worldwide also without the presence of others (in our space) there would be an audience who presents on ear to the voice of the other, so you could not understand the differences and their presence in our reality.

Seeing (with the media and through the media) the other, means to see them and be seen as foreigners: this is because extraneousness, paradoxically, is the condition of our membership, our culture, what nourishes our memory<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup>100-media-etnici/50960/

<sup>17</sup>Christians C (2000) An intellectual history of Media Ethics, in Pattyn B. (Ed.), Media Ethics: Opening Social Dialog, Peeters, Leuven.

<sup>18</sup>Chouliakari L (2006) The Spectatorship of Suffering, Sage, London.

<sup>19</sup>Marci T (2017) The society of others. Rethinking hospitality, LeLettere, Florence.

The process of social integration among strangers, as always, oscillates between inclusion and repulsion, friendship and hostility, approval and marginalization, acceptance and rejection.

Beyond stereotypes and prejudices, migrant workers sometimes appear as a necessary resource for economic and demographic development, sometimes as a threat to national security [19].

Then rethinking new modes of representation of the phenomenon of migration to new languages and narrative techniques, integrating in the general storytelling, equires the ability to accommodate the "different".

At the same time according to Marci [20], this means to re-considering this issue in the light of a more extensive process that concerns all of us, not only as a member of the host countries, but also as the next guests to a global world that sees us, paradoxically, " ever closer in a mutual estrangement, more sharers in a singular otherness, increasingly connected because foreign and (increasingly) foreigners in a space that weaves and connects our individual lives.

Therefore the theme of foreignness, of what we socially we perceive as "stranger", assumes a particular value starting from the way the media reports the news, in particular historical contexts and social dimensions.

This does not mean that there is no "stranger" or that this is only a product of a social labeling, but it means that:

## Conclusion

The estrangement exists such as general problem and abstract, given once and for all, capable of eliciting responses and different relations in the course of history and in different social conditions. They are indeed the social relations that determine the specific meaning of what we consider a stranger, this we evaluate, good or bad, as foreign, else from us.

The recognition of the other is possible only through a critical attitude with regard to the representation of the latter, conveyed by means of communication; this depends, not only on the willingness and ability to assume this attitude, but it is also a question of care and (medial) hospitality.

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