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GCSP Policy Brief No. 21 Xenophobia, Media Stereotyping, and Their Role in Global Insecurity

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Abstract

Xenophobic stereotyping in the media is a common and increasing phenomenon. Immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, Muslims, and Sinti and Roma are often represented as a threat to the security of longer-established populations; they are systematically portrayed as perpetrators of crime but appear very seldom as actors in other news genres. Exposure to these stereotypes often influence readers and viewers to support policy measures directed against these minorities and has led to discrimination against them, often subtle, sometimes going as far as physical violence. An extreme form of xenophobic stereotyping has been the propaganda spread by so-called hate radios that have spurred communal conflict. Another contemporary form of xenophobia in media are hate sites on the Internet. Initiatives to combat these forms of xenophobia, stereotyping, and discrimination face the challenge of not curtailing freedom of speech. Many media organizations have undertaken projects to increase awareness of these problems, to train journalists, and to increase the access of minorities to mainstream media, so that their voices are heard. However, these initiatives have to become more widely known and applied, and especially tabloid media have to be targeted. In addition, there should be a focus on education in media literacy in schools.

Policy Challenges

It is through the media that we learn most of what we know or believe we know about world affairs and politics, not through personal experience or contacts. Stereotyping in the media is as old as the media itself. A stereotype can be defined as “a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment.”¹ In today’s media, especially in Europe, there are several groups that are regularly, and even systematically, stereotyped: immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees; Roma and Sinti; and, increasingly since 9/11, Muslims. This phenomenon contributes to discrimination of these groups of people, as well as, ironically, to a feeling of insecurity among the native (and/or Christian population). Xenophobic stereotyping in the media can go as far as to constitute so-called hate speech and to contribute, if not unleash, armed communal conflict, even genocide.

Various studies have analyzed the way immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees are portrayed in today’s media. Migrants appear more frequently in certain news genres, such as crime news, than others, and these reports often follow a standard script that shows them in a negative light, as the culprits rather than the victims.² This has “become systematic and leads to ethnicisation or racialisation of crime”³ and has reached a degree where, in public discourse, immigration issues are discussed solely in terms of threats, crime, and alleged abuse of the welfare system. The reasons for immigration and the everyday living conditions of migrants are totally left out of the debate. The frequent association of migrants with crime “may reinforce the belief or perception that negative behaviour is inextricably linked to the ethnic identity features of the individual’s group belonging.”⁴ Research on British media, which can, in large part, be applied to many other countries in Europe and North America, has found “inaccurate and provocative use of language,” including “meaningless and derogatory terms” and overwhelming focus on the number of people entering the country, with numbers frequently being unsourced, exaggerated, or inadequately explained, with no contextual analysis of the relevance or meaning of the statistics being cited. Images are “dominated by the stereotype of the ‘threatening young male’”. Women and children are rarely seen, and stock images of groups of men trying to break into Britain are used repeatedly.⁵ However, issues such as root causes for migration are largely absent. Moreover, British newspapers are astonishingly similar in their selection of themes when covering immigration issues, whatever their political affiliation.⁶

Media stereotyping and portraying a negative image of immigrants are not restricted to Western Europe or North America. Other examples include, for instance, Costa Rica (against immigrants from Nicaragua⁷), the South Caucasus, and South Africa: “coverage of international migration by the South African press has been largely anti-immigrant and unanalytical. Not all reportage is negative, and newspaper coverage would appear to be improving over time, but the overwhelming majority of the comprehensive collection of

newspaper articles, editorials and letters to the editor surveyed for this research are negative about immigrants and immigration and are extremely unanalytical in nature, uncritically reproducing problematic statistics and assumptions about crossborder migration in the region.”⁸ Stereotyping of Muslims has been found in many media reports about 9/11, but one cannot speak of a generalized tendency in this regard: “In the period after September 11 certain media were identified as representing Muslims and Islam both negatively and stereotypically, sometimes as an almost necessary part of the reporting process, and (...) many of those that did change their attitudes or indeed participate in acts of aggression or violence towards Muslims, acted against visual identifiers that were essentially media-derived from the post-September 11 period.”⁹ Another report found that “the overall role played by the [North American] media in this situation is a negative one. The media consistently confuse ‘Arab’ with ‘Muslim’ and make outrageous categorizations and generalizations while neglecting differences. These almost comical errors are sometimes even committed by people presented as ‘experts’. (...) However, during the post-September 11 period some media sectors also were responsible and accountable, while others sought to remain balanced and objective. Where positive and balanced attitudes were identified in the various media, the reporting was built on dialogue with the Muslim community and a critical engagement not only with Islam, but also with topics relating more directly to September 11. In those media, Muslim voices were given a platform to be heard and a cross section of opinion was discussed.”¹⁰ Media reactions in European countries after the bomb attacks on London in July 2005 were balanced in most countries; an effort was made to let Muslims and Muslim representatives speak themselves rather than only report about them.¹¹

Why do we see this xenophobia and stereotyping in the media? One answer is that journalists’ reporting simply mirrors their own prejudices. However, this is an unsatisfactory explanation. The realities of newsmaking must also be taken into account. Not every event or story has the same news value. Negativity is thought to sell well, and so is crime. Thus, there is an incentive for media professionals to organize, or “frame,” reports around these themes.

Another reason commonly cited for negative portrayals and the focus on negative issues when reporting on immigrants is that the people used as sources are not immigrants themselves but rather authorities and officials, such as the police, who have an “innate” tendency to focus on security-related aspects and who are presented as credible, while immigrants, even when they are given time to speak, are presented as passive, reactive, and less credible. The overwhelming use of these sources and the lack of consideration of migrant organizations stems largely from the fact that there are not many strong connections between media professionals and migrants’ representatives, and the latter often lack the resources and knowledge to make their points heard and to become agenda setters in the debate.

Research has shown that exposure to media shapes the way people think about groups:¹² a study on crime news in local media, for instance, showed that viewers exposed to a news report in which a picture of a suspected perpetrator was shown, and where it was mentioned whether he was black or white, became “more supportive of capital punishment, mandatory sentencing, and other deterrent measures and exposure to this version of the script also serve[d] to substantiate negative attitudes about racial minorities.... [F]or white viewers, a brief five-second exposure to a black perpetrator in the news is sufficient to stimulate small increases in the percentage of people who believe crime is caused by individual failings and who support punitive crime policies. In addition, exposure to a black perpetrator fosters the view that African-Americans are out of step with the cultural mainstream. On the other hand, the crime script has generally the opposite effect on African-American viewers.”¹³ Thus, exposure to stereotyping in the media does influence people’s attitudes and does lead to xenophobia. It also makes people support policy measures that discriminate against the stereotyped.

Media stereotyping can in extreme cases also lead to more direct assaults on the security of those who are being stereotyped. *Radio des Mille Collines* in Rwanda is the best-known and most extreme example of hate speech on radio and its effects. But the media has also played a major negative role in other communal conflicts. *Fondation Hirondelle* and Radio Netherlands identified 11 countries where one or more “hate radios” – or TV stations – have operated, e.g., Serb TV in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁴ The existence of these types of stations often seems to occur when controls on radio broadcasting are relaxed and can therefore potentially incite violence. Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine have suggested that the “market place of ideas” that defines the idea of free media in Western societies only works if there are institutions in place that ensure the proper functioning of the market, otherwise elites, following the sudden liberalization of the media, have an incentive to play the ethnic or nationalist card, and the market will break up into ethnic segments as the elites are forced to engage in public debate in order to compete for mass allies in the struggle for power. However, many newly democratizing states lack such institutions to break up governmental and non-governmental monopolies, to professionalize journalism, and to create common public forums where individuals engage each other with diverse ideas under conditions in which erroneous arguments will be challenged.¹⁵

Jonathan Belman studied the hate propaganda used in Weimar Germany, Armenia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia and found the following seven recurring messages that “consistently appear in the fiercest and most thorough campaigns of hate propaganda:” (1) the enemy is qualitatively different from us; (2) the enemy represents some great evil and that evilness is eternal; (3) the enemy has harmed us in the past with impunity; (4) the enemy has plans to harm us again in the future; (5) we are noble and deserving of good lives that the enemy would deny us; (6) the enemy is united so we must also be: those who undermine our

unity are traitors or agents of the enemy; (7) this is the final battle; if we win we will move to a bright future free from the threat posed by enemy.

As mentioned above, another example of xenophobia in the media are so-called hate sites on the Internet, which disseminate various racist and other discriminating propaganda. The current number of Internet hate sites has been estimated at anywhere between 400 and over 2000.¹⁶ Unlike the media reports discussed above, which sometimes involuntarily portray xenophobic images because of a lack of awareness on the part of journalists, the specific purpose of these sites is to propagate hatred and intolerance, even violence in some cases.¹⁷ Given this intent, and also that the authors are individuals who cannot be reached through professional organizations, as is the case with most journalists, and because of the anarchic nature of the Internet and varying legislative frameworks regarding how far freedom of speech is protected, it is very difficult to shut down or eliminate these sites.

Responses

A number of initiatives by media organizations, states, international organizations and migrant organizations have focused on reducing xenophobic stereotyping in the media, raising journalists' awareness of the issue, and improving access by migrants to the media to make their voices heard. The International Federation of Jurists (IFJ) launched its international working group against racism and xenophobia (IMRAX) in 1995. IMRAX has organized several conferences, introduced an award called "Celebration of Tolerance" in order to raise awareness, and has produced several handbooks. In Russia and countries of the former Yugoslavia, the IFJ has supported Reporting for Diversity, an initiative that has also produced handbooks and organized numerous seminars and other training for journalists and minority groups. IFJ's Media for Democracy is a project that has produced handbooks on diversity and on covering ethnic conflict in Africa and that has also organized training seminars. Online – More Colour in the Media is a European network that aims to improve the representation of ethnic minorities in the media. It has projects in the fields of employment, training, production, research and empowerment.¹⁸

In 1997, 31 codes of conduct for journalists existed in Europe. The IFJ Declaration of Principles was amended in 1986 to include an article stating, "The journalist shall be alert to the danger of discrimination being furthered by media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discriminations based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national and social origins."¹⁹ A number of press councils have also adopted codes on intolerance and hear complaints in that area. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in minority and immigration issues have formulated guidelines for journalists.

Several media outlets have introduced new guidelines and standards relating to recruitment in order to ensure that more journalists with a migration background are included among their staff, but these are fairly isolated incidents, rather than being a general trend. Such voluntary codes of conduct and measures to ensure that diversity is reflected among staff were among the measures recommended by the Programme of Action adopted by the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.²⁰ The European Union (EU), for its part, is currently considering a proposal by EU Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini to establish a voluntary code of conduct for media organizations to counter “the false attribution of certain values and practices of Islam.”²¹

In Britain, an advertising campaign showing famous faces with a skin color different from their actual one and asking viewers questions such as “Would I be less scary?” (in the case of former Spice Girls member Scary Spice shown with lighter skin) has “received massive print coverage” and inspired “numerous talk shows, panel discussions and radio call-ins.” It has also been well received by ethnic minority newspapers and magazines.²²

The British Council Austria and the International Organization for Migration have produced a “Resource Pack for Journalists Reporting on Migration,” which was launched in April 2006.²³ This online tools “offers media experts access to a large network of journalists and organisations, a glossary on migration related topics, tips for appropriate use of images, tips for the sensitive use of language, [and] a collection of useful links.”²⁴

Within the EU, the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia runs several initiatives on media and xenophobia. It commissioned a voluminous, comprehensive and very valuable report entitled “Racism and Cultural Diversity in European Media. An overview of research and good practice in the EU Members States, 1995-2000,” published by the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER) in 2002.²⁵ The European Union Crisis Management (EUCM) recently organised a seminar for journalists and media practitioners from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East on the influence of media on intercultural relations and racism, which recommended, *inter alia*, better representation of minorities in newsrooms through targeted training and recruitment, more diversity in mainstream and non-fiction programmes, making training in intercultural understanding a standard component of journalist education, and improved self-regulation and self-initiatives that promote ethical standards in reporting.²⁶ The Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly announced in March 2006 that it is “preparing a report on the image of asylum-seekers, migrants and refugees in the media.”²⁷

As far as the relationship between hate speech, communal conflict and genocide is concerned, many international donors and NGOs have supported and even run so-called peace radios and community radios advocating harmonious community relations. However,

these efforts have so far focused mainly on post-conflict phases and/or have been linked to peacekeeping missions.²⁸ There have been very few initiatives where radio stations advocating peace have been supported specifically as a preventive measure in situations where communal conflict was ripe but had not yet erupted.²⁹ The United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recently published a list of “indicators of patterns of systematic and massive discrimination,” among which are “Grossly biased versions of historical events in school textbooks and other educational materials as well as celebrations of historical events that exacerbate tensions between groups and peoples” and “Systematic and widespread use and acceptance of speech and propaganda promoting hatred and/or inciting violence against minority groups, particularly in the media.”³⁰

The following are among the main strategies that have been used and promoted for combating hate on the Internet: legislation; self-regulation by the Internet industry, including through the adoption of codes of conduct; education of users through subscriber policies, codes of conduct, or educational websites; blocking and filtering software; rating and labeling systems; hotlines for users to alert police or Internet service providers; and active partnerships between Internet service providers and national governments.³¹ However, each of these approaches is not without problems. For example, filtering software can be over-inclusive, rating systems are a massive challenge given the number of websites in existence, voluntary codes of conduct will never cover all service providers, and hate sites are likely to be moved to providers that have not adopted such codes, etc. Legislation against hate sites exists on a national basis, but there are states that oppose such legislation on the grounds that it violates freedom of speech.³² The United States (US) is the best-known advocate of this position, but not the only one. The European Commission proposed a draft for an EU framework decision on combating racism and xenophobia in 2001,³³ but when the Council of Ministers last discussed the topic in July 2005, agreement could still not be reached because of differing views on the compatibility of such a decision with freedom of the press.³⁴

Dilemmas

There are two basic dilemmas related to the issue of xenophobia and media stereotyping. First, the media can disseminate hatred, xenophobia, prejudice, negative stereotypes, etc., but they can also teach people about other cultures and provide information to overcome stereotypes and xenophobia. The dilemma is in ensuring that it does the second but not the first. The second dilemma is related to the two basic legal norms relevant to the issue of xenophobia in the media: freedom of the press and the prohibition of the dissemination of racism and racial hatred. There is a long-standing debate over the degree to which they are compatible and, where they are not, which takes precedence.³⁵ In the United States, freedom of speech is given extensive protection under the First Amendment to the Constitution. In Europe, freedom of speech is also protected, but most countries have legislation curtailing that right with a prohibition against the incitement of racial hatred. Thus, the second dilemma

is in trying to ensure that freedom of speech is protected while also guaranteeing that the media have a positive influence on society. A further challenge is to ensure that measures taken to prevent xenophobia in the media are not used as a pretext for restricting freedom of speech in other areas not related to xenophobia and negative stereotyping.

Journalists covering minority- or migrant-related stories sometimes face a more specific dilemma, as they may find their stories relegated to less-visible parts of the newspaper or radio or television program that they are working for, and they may risk being labeled as someone interested in soft news stories that do not sell. This means that viewers, listeners, and readers who are most responsive to xenophobic stereotyping, and who could thus benefit most from these journalists' stories, are not easily exposed to them. Journalists in these situations face the dilemma of either adapting their style and even the content of their reporting in order to be able to have maximum impact on the public and maximum influence within their media outlet or staying true to their style and favorite topics but being allocated work that will mostly be noticed only by the "converted."³⁶

Implications

In the absence of a consensus on how to reconcile the prohibition of incitement to racism and xenophobia and the freedom of speech, and given that journalists cannot be forced to write a certain way, measures to combat xenophobia and stereotyping have to be addressed differently.

Apart from trying to influence the supply side, i.e., media output, by convincing journalists and media outlets of the usefulness and benefits of addressing minority issues in a fair way, emphasis has to be laid on educating the public on how to use the media, i.e. on improving its media literacy.

Future Trajectories/Scenarios

As media reporting and political agendas are intrinsically linked and influence one another, it is difficult to predict scenarios for the future of xenophobia and stereotyping in the media and their role in global insecurity. As the row over the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper has shown, the issue of press freedom and the responsibilities it entails is extremely controversial today. Events such as the printing of the cartoons in Denmark provide an opportunity for an in-depth debate about what freedom of speech means, where it ends, what it entails in terms of responsibility, and, importantly, about the fact that every culture, society, and individual, consciously or unconsciously, respects certain taboos and thus voluntarily imposes limits on its freedom of speech. There has so far not been such a debate in the wider public except for a very short period of time just after the uproar over the cartoons, and it does not seem likely to take place in the near future.³⁷

As to the portrayal of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in the media, a major change will not take place unless European political leaders decide to replace the current debate on security and policies focusing on keeping immigrants out at all costs to a debate that highlights respect and understanding for the reasons why immigrants choose to come to Europe and the benefits of immigration and policies that show acceptance of Europe as a continent of immigration. As mentioned, the media can to a certain extent influence the political agenda, but the media cannot by itself change European immigration policies and the discourses of political leaders, even if many more journalists and media outlets were committed to correcting the distorting images of immigrants that most of them currently portray. Rather, in the context of the war on terrorism, it is likely that the discourse on immigration in the context of security will continue with even more vigor. On the other hand, recent demonstrations in the US in favor of immigration indicate an acknowledgement of the important economic role played by immigrants, and a positive stance on immigration on these grounds, by large parts of the population in that country at least.

Policy Recommendations

Peace radios to counter hate radios

UN, donors: Peace radios should also be used as a preventive tool. Donors: Increase reliable funding and long-term support and sustainable strategies for peace radios. Academia, NGOs: Research should be conducted on the effect of peace radios on intercommunal images and relations. The UN Peacebuilding Commission should include media monitoring in its activities for early detection of hate speech and texts, and should in this regard take into account the research mentioned above about recurring messages in hate speech.

Counter xenophobia and teach about stereotypes in primary education and beyond

School curricula have to be updated to include education about the origins and nature of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. This should be based on the notion that there is but one human race and should include facilitation of personal contacts with minority groups. History curricula and textbooks should also, where necessary, be updated or entirely rewritten to eliminate portrayals of one nation or country as being infallible and to reflect the fact that historical accounts are always human-made and subjective. In cases of recent armed conflict, history textbooks should be written jointly by historians from all parties involved in the conflict. A good example of this is a group of 60 historians from 11 countries in the Balkans who are currently producing history materials for teachers in secondary schools in this region. These teaching materials aim to introduce students to “multiperspectiveness,” i.e. the views of different states and the fact that societies are always divided on different historical events. The Serbian editions of these new books have just been published and other language editions will follow.³⁸ Media-literacy education should be included in all school curricula and should teach pupils how to detect stereotypes.

Give minorities' voices more space in newspapers and broadcasts

Tabloid newspapers should consider publishing editorials by members of minority groups so that they can give an account of their daily lives. This would allow readers to get an entirely different view of the life of, and problems encountered by, minorities, in a style that attracts readers of tabloids more than long background reports would. TV and radio programs featuring minorities in non-stereotypical roles should be given prime-time slots. Editors should be lobbied to recognize the importance of minority audiences.

Make existing handbooks and guidelines much more widely available to journalists working in all genres

There exists a multitude of handbooks and guidelines on reporting diversity and avoiding stereotypes, but they should be much more accessible to journalists who are not actively involved in minority projects or whose media outlets do not have their own guidelines.

Use innovative advertising campaigns to raise awareness about racism and xenophobia

The example of the British anti-racism advertising campaign mentioned above shows that such campaigns reach a wide part of the population and can spark animated debate among it. Another example is a public discussion where a speaker replaced the word Gypsy in newspaper headlines with terms such as Jew, black, or Muslim, and thus raised awareness of the racist language used. This could be adapted for an advertising campaign.³⁹

Help minority organizations establish effective, professional media strategies

Minority organizations should be given financial and other support to establish media strategies that allow them to be effective partners for media outlets looking for information about minorities and for those looking for minority representatives for interviews, etc. Minority organizations should, *inter alia*, be able to provide media with sources, images, information on terminology and pitfalls in reporting, background, and contextualization of statistics. They should be trained to organize professional media conferences and publish professional press releases.⁴⁰ More training should also be given to minority journalists to help them enter mainstream journalism if they so wish.

Authorities should review their policies on the publication of statistics on crime, minorities, and immigration

Authorities should be made aware of the misinterpretations and ensuing discrimination that can result from the way statistics on crime, minorities, or immigration are presented. In particular, they need to be convinced to provide more context and background when publishing figures, such as comparisons with other, extra-European countries, or information

on those asylum seekers who were judged to fulfill the criteria to be granted asylum, not just on those who were not.⁴¹

Media councils should deal with xenophobia, racism, and related discrimination by the media

Media councils should promote dialogue and establish guidelines on how to report on minorities and what constitutes unacceptable reporting. Based on this, they should accept complaints against xenophobia, racism, stereotyping, and related discrimination by the media.⁴²

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Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security

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The GCSP policy brief series publishes papers in order to assess the policy challenges, dilemmas, and policy recommendations in *all aspects* of transnational security and globalization. The series was created and is edited by Dr. Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan, Senior Scholar in Geostrategy and Director of the Program on the Geopolitical Implications of Globalization and Transnational Security.

Editorial of GCSP Policy Brief No. 21 Xenophobia, Media Stereotyping, and Their Role in Global Insecurity

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Review and Critique

As Jan Aart Scholte has commented, “The more that distance and borders have disintegrated, the more national differences have seemed precious.”¹ Faced with increased migration and economic uncertainty within a globalizing economy, intolerance of non-citizens and refugees, as well as of minorities, can sometimes be pervasive as people seek to stave off perceived dangers to their national identity. In the worst-case scenario, this can lead to abuse of migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities. Perceived as a cause, as well as a symptom, of many such risks, globalization seems to have prompted nationalists to rally to the defense of the cherished values that are perceived as being under siege. Cris Shore even goes so far as to state that, “[I]ike decapitating the mythical hydra, the break-up of old nation-states may simply replace them with a plethora of new nationalisms often more xenophobic and ethnically exclusivist than that from which they seceded.”²

The defense of national groups against the perceived threats of “others” is a significant source of insecurity for many. The media is central to this process of “other-ing.” Bo Petersson describes images as “cognitive and affective conceptual lenses, organizing devices and information filters.” These images, as Petersson notes, are socially constructed. To this end, they can be confirmed or reconstructed. Images of people may become entrenched or they be malleable, changing either in a positive or negative direction, depending on how we filter and interpret information.³ Most stereotypes are formed on the basis of little first-hand knowledge and are often based on hearsay. This implies that negative images have very little opportunity of being deconstructed and reconstructed in a more positive light.

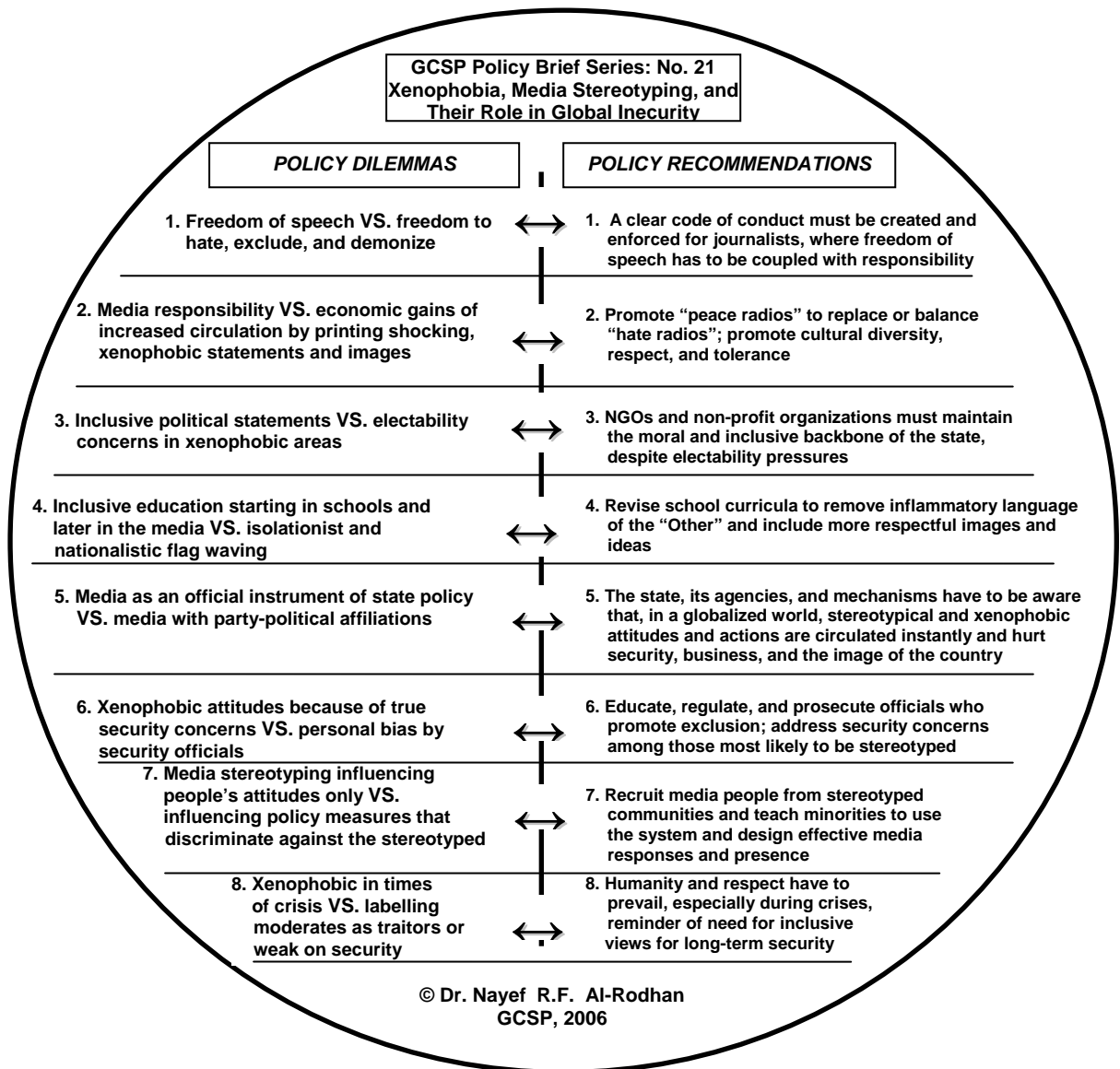
Exposure to stereotyping in the media influences the way that people view the groups being represented. As Katja Flückiger explains in her brief, Muslims, Sinti and Roma (often referred to as “gypsies”) are often represented as constituting a threat to the security of more established populations.⁴ They tend to be portrayed as sinister and often as the perpetrators of crime. In fact, the discourse on immigrant groups, as well as on refugees, is often framed almost solely in terms of their profiting from welfare systems and criminality. Images of these groups as an enemy may lead members of a national group, for example, to take pre-emptory action against what they perceive as a growing threat. Those that are the victims of stereotyping may find themselves the target of suspicion and aggression. If the media does nothing to contradict negative stereotypes, they are likely to serve to feed xenophobia and to legitimize populist policies.⁵

As Flückiger argues, the role of the media in nurturing either negative or positive images of people other than the established population must be taken into account by journalists and their representative bodies. Indeed, a number of measures have been taken by media organizations, states, international organizations, and migrant organizations in an effort to reduce xenophobic stereotyping in the media. Yet, initiatives aimed at curbing xenophobic

stereotyping are confronted with the dilemma of doing so without curtailing freedom of speech and expression.

Dilemmas and Our Recommendations

The policy challenges posed by the role of the media in either promoting negative or positive images of people are primarily associated with encouraging the media to take steps to curtail xenophobic stereotyping, while at the same time preserving freedom of speech. We suggest eight dilemmas or challenges facing policy makers, as well as eight corresponding recommendations.



The principal dilemma related to responding appropriately to xenophobic stereotyping is limiting the freedom to hate, demonize, and exclude without curbing freedom of speech. We suggest that a clear code of conduct for journalists should be created and enforced, coupling freedom of speech with responsibility.

Some commentators argue that xenophobic stereotyping simply reflects dominant views within societies. This being the case, it represents a considerable challenge. Media responsibility effectively competes with the economic gains of increased circulation as a result of printing shocking, xenophobic statements or images. Ultimately, underlying prejudices within societies need to be confronted and changed. Long-term measures should be taken to promote more inclusive societies. In order to balance “hate radios,” for example, “peace radios” should be promoted, along with cultural diversity, respect, and tolerance.

Another balance that needs to be struck is between making the media an official instrument of state policy or an entity with specific political-party affiliations. Both of these extremes render the media incapable of serving the people effectively. The state, its agencies, and mechanisms have to be aware that, in a globalized world, stereotypical and xenophobic attitudes and actions are circulated instantly and hurt security, business, and the image of the country.

Xenophobic sentiments may increase in times of crisis. This has been perceptible in many countries in relation to immigration and asylum seekers, as well as international terrorism, for example. In such instances, moderates who speak out against this may be labeled as either traitors or weak on security. Yet, humanity and respect must prevail, especially during times of crisis. We need to be reminded of the need for inclusivity as an investment in long-term security. Xenophobia and racism are only likely to generate alienation and frustration, which can only lead to further problems of security and stability.

An additional challenge is to distinguish between xenophobic attitudes related to true security concerns and those generated from the personal bias of security officials. While both are equally reprehensible and ought to be minimized, the latter should be treated separately. Officials who promote exclusion should be educated, regulated, and prosecuted. The security concerns of those most likely to be stereotyped should also be addressed.

The problem is that media stereotyping influences not only people’s attitudes but also policies that discriminate against the stereotyped. One way to address this issue is to better represent the cultural diversity of societies in the media establishment itself. Journalists and those working in media organizations ought to be recruited from stereotyped communities. Minorities should also be encouraged and taught how to use the system and to design effective media responses and presence.

Conclusion

Xenophobic media stereotyping should be taken seriously, since it increases insecurity among targeted groups. This can lead to discriminatory policies, tension, and even physical

violence and genocide. A decrease in opportunities for xenophobic stereotyping needs to be accompanied by long-term educational measures that encourage tolerance and inclusivity within societies, even during times of crisis.

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