

Providing an Insight into the Lives of Others

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Demographic changes, migratory flows and processes of globalisation have led to a significant increase in research on cross-cultural issues within the Swedish media field. There have also been, as Alexa Robertson underlines specific studies in cultural diversity in the news room. Against a backdrop of economic constraints and challenging recruitment policies, there is still potential according to Robertson to maximise the media's unique capacity to reach out across communities and give a voice to minority groups in the mainstream national media.

Compared to many European countries, Sweden remains socially and culturally homogenous. Only 14% of the population as a whole, and 20% of those living in the capital, Stockholm, are what is referred to as 'foreign-born' in official public parlance, i.e. born outside the country, or with parents who were born abroad. The largest immigrant groups (after Finns) come from Balkan countries, Iran and Iraq. For decades, equality between men and women, and between people of different ethnic backgrounds, have been valorized in Swedish public debate. Yet while about half of the journalistic corps has been female since the early 1990s, only 5% are immigrants, and only 2% were born outside Europe. Against this background, this article will provide a brief overview of the values associated with Swedish media, cultural diversity, and intercultural relations with a bearing on the Euro-Mediterranean region, seen from the vantage point of policy-makers, academics, and media professionals.

National Guidelines and Media Access

Swedish media legislation is based on a long tradition of press freedom. Equally established is the system of accountability on the part of both publishers and journalists, and of shared ethical guidelines. One of the rules governing Swedish press ethics stipulates that journalists must refrain from drawing attention to an individual's "ethnic origin, gender, nationality, profession, political affiliation, religious views or sexual preferences if it lacks relevance" to the issue being reported and "is disrespectful".

The border between respect for such diversity and media freedom is a source of tension, and something that is under continual negotiation. Standing sentry at the border are the Publicists' Club (an organization of publishers and journalists which has been debating the ethical conduct of the media since 1900), the Press Ombudsman, and the Broadcasting Commission, to which the public and interest groups can turn with complaints about reporting that violates the regulations and guide-lines. The Commission received a

number of complaints from Italians and others in 2005 when Swedish Television (SVT) broadcast a series of advertisements urging viewers to pay their license fees and thus support 'free television'. The advertisements ridiculed Italian premier and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi, and Italian television was depicted as the antithesis of Swedish public service television. Whatever one's views on the accuracy or suitability of the license fee campaign, SVT has been officially assigned the role of the 'major player in developing a society of ethnic and cultural diversity'. Part of its mission is 'to counteract prejudice and stereotypical thinking, as well as to increase people's awareness of one another and their understanding of persons from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds' (Robertson, 2010; SVT, 2006; SVT, 2009).

Media scholars in Sweden have responded to the demographic changes that have resulted from migration and globalization with a growing output of interdisciplinary work. An institutional basis for collaboration has been provided by the Nordic Research Network for Media, Migration and Society and the Nordic IMER association for international migration and ethnic relations. Apart from scholarship emanating from the academy, the Swedish Ministry of Justice has also commissioned a number of research reports on integration, structural discrimination and power relations, which include media studies (e.g. Djerf-Pierre and Levin, 2005). Analysis of media texts represents the largest share of research on Swedish media and cultural diversity. Horsti (2008) offers a helpful categorization of this work. Work on depictions of immigrants in film (Wright, 1998; Tigervall, 2005) provides a valuable antidote to the preoccupation with news reporting. Textual analysis is a major aspect of Swedish research in this field. Another has focused on media companies themselves - on their diversity management and implementation (Westin, 2001), and the experiences of their employees. Journalists interviewed by Hultén (2009) recounted problems encountered by media workers from other backgrounds in majority-dominated newsrooms, and emphasized a need to change newsroom cultures. Concern

has been expressed that tendencies to 'mainstream' cultural diversity in media content may have the unintended effect of excluding minority voices. A third focus of research has been on how immigrants use media, either the media of their new domiciles, or transnational media that allows them to keep in touch with their homelands and the diaspora. A result of one ongoing project (Sjöberg and Rydin, 2008) is that migrants combine information sources, and turn to global media such as Al-Jazeera to find alternative representations to those preferred in Swedish media. Whereas much other Swedish research has focused on representations of migration, refugees and racism, Sjöberg and Rydin have found, through interviews, that 'foreign-born' see the media as creating and reproducing discourses of 'the immigrant'. Gaps remain in this burgeoning scholarship. The predominant trend in Swedish research has been, perhaps ironically, to adopt a national focus, concerning how immigrants and foreign-born Swedes are portrayed in national settings. In a globalising world, where borders are becoming increasingly porous, an urgent area of inquiry is how people from beyond the borders of the nation are being portrayed, and of whether viewers are portrayed as having connections with or obligations to these.

A familiar point of departure in research on media and diversity is that journalists are in some way failing in their undertakings to report fairly. Fieldwork (Robertson, 2010) indicates that many journalists are cognizant of their responsibility, and more reflection is needed on the practical, rather than ideological, obstacles (limited resources and finite time slots, even in the age of 24/7 reporting). While Hultén's work represents an important contribution, exploring the organizational constraints on reporting, there remains a lack of research on the journalistic process and professional practices in this context (Horsti, 2008). According to recent findings (Anna Lindh / Gallup Poll 2010), only 12% of Swedish people receive information in the media that has changed or reinforced their views of people in countries bordering the southern and eastern shore of the Mediterranean in a more positive direction, less than the average for the countries of the Poll. It is unclear to what extent this may have to do with a failure on the part of the Swedish media, and studies to explore the experiences behind such figures

constitute another academic gap. The results could indicate that a majority of Swedish respondents had heard nothing at all about these countries (a not unlikely scenario, given the relative lack of geographical and cultural proximity); if, as has been suggested, media logic entails a penchant for conflict, then the maxim 'no news is good news' could apply. The more frequently mentioned sources of positive impressions are television (43%), print media (34.2%, as compared to the European average of 26.7%), other sources (15.5%), documentary films (10.8 %) and radio (7.7%, again, higher than the 5.7 European average), followed closely by books (7%). The modest number of respondents mentioning the internet (6.7%) and blogs (0%) is interesting, given the high internet penetration in Sweden. It would seem that if Swedish people are to acquire information that will improve their views of people in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, it has to be served to them: it's not something they will actively seek (unless they already have positive views of these countries, acquired in non-mediated ways, through holiday travel). If the task is to explore values conveyed by the media that impact on cultural diversity and intercultural relations, an urgent area of inquiry is popular culture. The recent debate about what could be called the cultural partition of Europe, as 'new' democracies have come to dominate the Eurovision Song Contest (a media form that could well be concealed in the aforementioned category of 'other sources'), signals that there is important work to be done when it comes to the popular dimension of cultural integration. It is a debate that has both ideological and political overtones, given that Europeans are more likely to vote in the song contest than in European Parliament elections. The contest is also of interest as the border of the European in this 'vision' is expanded to include countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

Issues, Topics and Trends

Islamophobia and racist attitudes are uniformly condemned in Swedish media reporting. There is evidence to suggest that the 'other' in much Swedish media discourse is the right-wing extremist who wants the country rid of non-ethnic Swedes. On two rather sensitive issues, however, there has been a lack

Sweden - Multilingual Radio

The public service company (SR) broadcasts news and current affairs in 16 languages, Sami, Finnish, Albanian, Assyrian, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Yiddish, Kurdish, Persian, Romanian, Russian, Somali, German, English and Arabic, aiming to provide programmes for all, regardless of their age, gender, and cultural background. At the end of October 2010, a number of language services were set to be discontinued (including Balkan languages and Assyrian), but programming would be strengthened in Arabic, identified as "the most important language for new arrivals in Sweden", in Somali, which targets "the listener groups who need it the most" and in Romani. In addition, the Swedish Radio website makes all programmes available on demand 24 hours a day for 30 days following the original FM broadcast all over the world. A particularly interesting experiment, Halal-tv, was launched by SR's sister company, the public broadcaster Swedish Television in 2008, with the aim to reverse the gaze, and depict Swedish society from the perspective of the programme presenters.

www.sverigesradio.se

of agreement, and contradictory trends in reporting. One of these has to do with the establishment of private or 'free' schools that have a religious profile. The reform behind this trend was meant to increase choice, but it has been pointed out in the media that in some immigrant communities, it has in effect curtailed choice, by denying children (and especially girls) the possibility of becoming socialised into a society in which the choice of apparel and partner is a matter for the individual, rather than her family. The other issue could be thought of as a Swedish continuation of the story begun by the Danish *Jyllands-Posten* and the furore that erupted over its publication of the Mohammed cartoons. The issue was hotly debated in Sweden, as elsewhere, and was framed as a conflict between respect for the religious sensitivities of others, and the importance of defending the right to freedom of expression. The story, and controversy, have been kept alive by the drawings of Lars Vilks, which depict Mohammed as a 'roundabout dog' (a form of street installation in Sweden, with the dogs usually depicting other figures than the Prophet). While a plurality of voices dismiss Vilks's art as provocation, and have condemned the perpetrators of the death threats received by the artist, views on whether freedom of expression should take preeminence over respect for minorities have conflicted.

A variety of initiatives to promote diversity have already been put into practice, including strategies to improve the representation of minorities and to recruit more journalists with backgrounds in different cultures, but more work is needed on this front. In Sweden, as elsewhere, there have been calls for media professionals to pursue good diversity journalistic practice by avoiding stereotypes and generalizations, and by interviewing ethnic minorities in their capacity as parents, tenants, experts, fans, employees, leaders, performers and so on - rather than as 'Moslems' or 'immigrants'. Hultén (2009) has concluded that diversity work is impeded by economic problems; recruitment difficulties; enduring hierarchies; and a lack of awareness and competence where it counts. Together with the finding that broadcasting companies set greater store by diversity work than newspapers, this suggests that work to enhance diversity in the media workplace, and in representations

of society in media output, cannot be left to market forces. As well as ensuring that responsibility is taken at the societal level, work is also needed at the level of individual consciousness-raising. Students attending schools with high proportions of 'foreign-born' pupils should be made aware that a media career is not only possible, but also of value to society, could result in enhanced recruitment.

When it comes to depictions of people from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Swedish media - not only residents of Sweden, but also people living elsewhere in Europe, the southern Mediterranean Region, and beyond - it may well be worth following the advice of prominent immigrants, who have criticized Swedish media for being too circumspect in their reporting of problems associated with ethnic minorities. Journalists in Sweden often try to avoid negative stereotyping by referring to 'a Swedish citizen' when reporting crime, for example. The phrase has in fact the opposite effect, as no ethnic Swedes are ever referred to as Swedish citizens. Reporting more directly on sensitive issues will also reduce the propensity to place all non-Swedes in one category. The point of efforts to promote cultural diversity must, of course, be to indicate that people are different, and that there is a great deal of variation within the categories of 'foreign-born', 'immigrants' and 'Moslems', for example. Diversity in news coverage has not only to do with what is reported - the negative stereotyping that results from associating immigrant youths from the southern Mediterranean with crime, or Muslims with the oppression of women, or people from regions south of Europe with violent conflict. It has more to do with how people are presented to us, so their problems and resulting actions can be better understood. In this context, the narrative technique deployed by Swedish journalists who take us, metaphorically and virtually, into the homes and workplaces of the 'others', and let them speak directly to us in their own words, is of considerable values.

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Italy - Zalab Television

Since 2007 ZaLab TV has been organizing participatory video workshops across four Mediterranean countries: Italy, Palestine, Spain, and Tunisia, led by young international media crews and targeting youth who have limited access to access to digital media. The initiative has the overarching aim to collect 'unheard stories', to bring together unknown talents from beyond the wall of the digital divide, and to use video as a creative tool for breaking social, geographical and cultural isolation, and countering media stereotypes. Through the project website, workshop participants and 'ZaLab TV focal points' have the opportunity to meet, discuss and publish their videos, a process which bridges diverse participatory video experiences from different countries. The initiative is led by the participants from the stage of project conception through to implementation and follow-up. Authorship of a group of participants means that there is control over content and freedom of expression, supporting a process of analysis at the local level.

www.zalab.tv