The clash of civilizations in the spanish press
O conflito de civilizações na imprensa espanhola

INGRID SCHULZE SCHNEIDER*

RESUMO
Este artigo trata dos modos de percepção e julgamento da globalização por parte da imprensa espanhola. A autora analisa a cobertura de eventos e a postura crítica de jornalistas ante o capitalismo neoliberal e seus opositores.
Palavras-chave: globalização, imprensa, capitalismo neoliberal, esquerda.

ABSTRACT
This article deals with the modes of perception and evaluation of the globalization by the Spanish press. The author analyses the coverage of events and the journalists’ critical attitude regarding neo-liberal capitalism and its opposers.
Key-words: globalization, press, neo-liberal capitalism, left-wing parties.

INTRODUCTION
During the last years, the developments towards multicultural societies in Europe and the fear of the possible consequences, as well as the menace of a “clash of civilizations” announced by Huntington, have been constant topics in the Spanish press, which were generally presented wrapped up in complicated discourses about advantages and disadvantages of the different ways of

* The author of this article is responsible for the translation of the original Spanish texts.
Profa. dra. da Faculdade de Ciências da Informação, Universidade Complutense, Madrid, Espanha. E-mail: ingrid@ccinf.umc.es
“globalisations”. An analysis of the two most important Spanish dailies, El País and El Mundo reveals some interesting information about the dominant political trend in the country and its public opinion, which – probably – differs slightly from that of other members of the European Community. In order to understand the Spanish attitude, one has to remember its geographical position on the edge of Europe – facing Africa – and its historical background: the more than seven hundred year’s battle against the Islamic invaders. The remembrance of this period and a certain fear of a new – this time peaceful – invasion of the Moroccans are always present in the minds of the Spanish people. Certainly, advertisements like the following are not well suited for reassuring them, that bygones are bygones for ever:

Rogad a Dios por e Alma de Abu AmirMuhammad, ALMANZOR. Visir de Andalucía, que falleció victorioso en Medinaceli (Soria) el 9 de agosto de 2002.
Las huellas que ha dejado sobre la tierra te enseñarán su historia como si la vieras con sus propios ojos. Por Dios, que jamás los tiempos vieron otro semejante a él, ni que como él defienda nuestras fronteras.

In spite of the inevitable influences the Arabs left behind after their ultimate defeat in 1492 in the Spanish culture and language, these influences are usually not acknowledged by journalists and modern Spanish writers – with a few exceptions like Juan Goytisolo and some specialists in Arabic culture – who prefer looking to Latin America when talking about common roots. Even Felipe Gonzalez, former socialist President of the Spanish government claims the existence of a “public Hispanic space”, “much more extensive than the Anglo – American one, though less powerful in political and economical terms” (GONZÁLEZ, 2000: 4) These are his arguments:

1. This advertisement was published in El Mundo on the 9 August 2002, without any signature. The English translation would be: “Pray to God for the soul of Abu Amir Muhammad, ALMANZOR, vizier of Andalusia, who died victoriously in Medinaceli (Soria) on the 9 August 2002. “The marks he left on earth will show you his history as if you could see it with his own eyes. By God, times have never seen any one like him nor one who defends our frontiers as he did.”
English is the *lingua franca* of our times (...). But the Anglo-American cultural space is smaller than the Hispanic one. When a personality of our Hispanic domain receives a public distinction, the nationality does not matter: Colombian, Mexican, Argentinean or Spaniard, the whole world of Hispanic culture considers it hers. The same phenomenon occurs in Cinema, Sports or Music. The competition between “You” and “We” appears when different nationalities compete in the same cultural space and it is transformed in “us” against “them” when the competition takes place with another cultural space, be it Anglo-Saxon or Asiatic.

On the contrary, a writer, actor or sportsman of English language, even of origin, will not be considered English and less Anglo-American, if he has not this ethnic and cultural origin. (...)

Therefore, once we have established the differences between common language and culture as an identity among identities, which define a “we” in the case of the Spanish and the Hispanic, we may explore the possibilities in the field of communication, cultural creativity in a wide sense, in economics and politics. (...)

The distinction of a Hispanic identity within the globalisation movement, proclaimed by no one less than the man who took Spain to enter the European Community, cannot only be contemplated as a circumstantial rhetoric recourse, but is well anchored in the Spanish society and influences directly her relationship with other countries.

Along the years 2001 and 2002 different political and social events have turned the encounter with other cultures – especially of Muslim faith – into the subject of permanent debates in the newspapers and the audiovisual media. These discussions deal especially with a) all aspects concerning globalisation; b) the relationship of Spain and Morocco and the unsolved problems between them; c) the conflict in the Middle East; d) the war on international terrorism, including the role of the United States in world affairs and the possible war in Iraq. Actually, all these topics are connected through a fine thread, and their analysis gives evidence of particular features and contradictions existing in the Spanish public opinion, which to a great extent are maintained and fostered by the mass media. The aim of this article is to summarize
some of the most important contents of the topics mentioned and to discuss, how the media could possibly help to change certain prejudices, which are affecting in a negative way the understanding and interpretation of political and social events in our – whether we want it or not – already “globalised” world.

1. Globalisation

Most of the articles published in the Spanish press relate “globalisation” only to the misdoings of capitalism, pointing out all negative aspects of the liberal economy based on high technology and forgetting about the positive ones. Very seldom do El País and El Mundo stress the benefits for fields like Education, Culture, Tourism, etc. The mentioned newspapers have treated mainly those aspects of “globalisation” which are related to scandal, and which are supposed to attract the general interest of the readership. Even the “Letters to the Director” section only publishes complaints about painful personal experiences with multinationals.

The actions of alternative movements against the World Economic Forum or the Summit of the Americas were narrated with every detail in the “International” or “Economy” sections. El País titled a news item about the former with these words: “The poor countries say in Davos that globalisation is the worst ‘genocide’ known”. The photo which illustrated the text, shows the moment when the police upholds a train with anti-global demonstrators who try to enter the city. On the other hand, the efforts to find alternative solutions, as has been tried by ‘the other’ global movement ‘anti-davos’ in Porto Alegre were only mentioned briefly in the “Opinion” pages.

Strangely enough, when multinational enterprises are accused of ruining individuals’ and peoples’ lives, the newspapers never talk about the media mega-enterprises, affected very directly by national and international mergers, thus menacing directly the necessary plurality of information sources. It looks like a contradiction, that the “globalisation of the media” is hoped to become an important tool in the hands of the poor countries to get out of their misery. On the whole, the Spanish press seems to share the opinion of Timothy Garton Ash who argues, that the general protests are useful for calling the attention of the international public opinion about the
serious problems suffered by the underdeveloped countries, but does not expect any other viable solution to come off the meetings of the alternative movements. In opinion of Garton Ash, only the economic world leaders are in a position to find proper strategies to improve the situation (GARTON Ash, 2001: 11).

1.1. Immigration problems

The comments about the problems arisen by the globalisation of the migration to Europe and – in the case of Spain – about the massive entry of North African and sub-Saharan immigrants appear continuously in the press and, due to the complexity of the subject, cannot be summarized into two opposite opinions in favour or against the right of people’s free circulation in Europe. Nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes are hidden among multiple arguments apparently based on rational considerations. While liberal thinkers defend the necessity to open the door widely to immigrants who want to escape hunger and political and social misery in their countries, without analysing the problems already caused by the uncontrolled “black market” of women and men smuggled into Spain by international mafias, conservatives underline the dangers for public order and national identity. The well known left-wing intellectual and journalist Joseph Ramoneda, director of Le Monde Diplomatique, declared enemy of the new technologies wrote some time ago in *El País* about the hypocrisy with which the subject is treated in the media (RAMONEDA, 2001: 17):

(...) The choir of the marvels of globalisation looses its joy when talking about the circulation of individuals. With respect to immigration, the poets of the end of History turn silent (...) The fables about globalisation and the fears of immigration are the expression of the same anguish, the same taboo: the Western world forms the rich minority of humanity, there are some thousands of Millions of people who look at us from their misery. Such a situation terrifies, because it is unsustainable. Globalisation is the fantasy, that this breach might be mended: the fear of immigration is the fear to be seen, to be recognized as rich and to be forced to share our belongings. This explains the dominant schizophrenia respecting immigration: the
surveys say it, xenophobia is growing, but people feel sorry for the illegals who are returned by force to their countries; the labour market asks for immigrant workers, but the citizens demand firmness from their governments; immigrants are needed and rejected; globalisation means universal markets but, at the same time, boundaries are being reconstructed.

The paradox of “globalisation” interpretations is also denounced by Federico Jiménez Losantos, the extremely conservative columnist of *El Mundo*. He argues, that many defendants of the illegal immigrants are at the same time enemies of the globalisation movement, which is considered by them as the latest invention of the capitalist conspiracy, meant to deny the poor the right to access to prosperity (JIMENEZ LOSANTOS, 2001: 5)

Many of those who back up the Third World are against freedom of commerce between them and the developed countries (...).

Many of those who defend the use of alternative energies, object to transgenical plant cultivation and obstruct the export of genetically transformed seeds which could help to eradicate the hunger of the poorest (...).

Generally speaking, a closer analysis of the “immigration” subject reveals, that most of the arguments put forward in favour or against it, are based on egoistic interests disguised by well sounding phrases. At the same time, it seems rather shocking, that some of the worst consequences of the clandestine immigration – the human trade of women and children – only receive the attention of the media on rare occasions, when the circumstances of a especially morbid affair are treated primarily by the yellow press.

2. Spain and Morocco

The immigration from Islamic countries has received a heavy blow after the 11 September. The recent crisis in Latin American states and Eastern countries like Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, have pushed thousands of people to leave their homes, in order to seek fortune in EC countries. Before this immigration wave, nume-
rous Moroccan men and women had found employment in Spain. But after the beginning of the “War on Terrorism”, immigrants of Islamic faith – legal and illegal – face serious difficulties in finding work. This applies especially to the Moroccan people. Apart from xenophobic reasons, which were the cause of several confrontations in the hothouse region of Almería, where Moroccan workers are being substituted by Polish and Romanian immigrants, the terrorist attacks have re-awakened in many Spaniards the historic mistrust against the “moros”. This mistrust finds expression in numerous minor questions, which challenge the Spanish way of life, putting on permanent trial the limits of tolerance of the Spanish society.

In the months of February, March and April 2002, the mass media engaged in a large debate about the wearing of headscarves by Muslim girls in schools and offices, which ended with a considerable increase in xenophobia. Basically three arguments were adduced: a) the necessity of Islamic immigrants to respect the laws and customs of the country in which they live; b) the fact that the Islamic faith discriminates women and does not accept equality of gender; therefore tolerance respecting the hijab would mean the acceptance of this discrimination; c) concerning the demand of the Muslim community in Spain that the government should finance the teaching of Islam in official schools: the lack of reciprocity respecting the teaching of Christian religions in official Moroccan schools.

Though moderate intellectuals tried to calm down the general excitement with sagacious recommendations of tolerance and common sense, the public opinion did by no means accept the reasoning, and the Moroccan women dressed in the traditional way, were more than ever treated like outcasts when they appeared in public. A large number of articles denouncing social habits in Islamic countries, like the “selling” of minor daughters in matrimony, contributed to the growth of prejudice against Moroccan people and their social and religious customs. Gabriel Albiac, journalist of El Mundo whose points of view are always extreme, wrote, for instance, in his column under the headline “Today chador and tomorrow clitoris” paragraphs like this one (ALBIAC, 2002: 5):
(...) In questions of religion there is no distinction between symbolic and material acts. The symbolic is the material, and no act does exist without the mediation of the purifying liturgy. Chador and the amputation of the clitoris are no different. They are liturgical moments of equal dogmatic significance for the brain – in case he has one – of the believer. It is not culture, but Barbarie. Today chador, tomorrow clitoris.

Representatives of the Spanish Church and the Vatican expressed in the media with cautious words their opinion about the dangers and insecurity which the irruption of the Islamic faith could possibly introduce among the Catholic believers. Certainly, the Catholic Church in this country is not used to compete with other beliefs. She has had for centuries the absolute monopoly in religious matters and would only very unwillingly transfer part of that right. This attitude receives firm support from conservative newspapers like ABC or La Razón.

Mikel Azurmendi, the President of the Spanish “Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants” (Foro para la Integración Social de los Inmigrantes) added more virulence to the polemic when he stated in public, that “multiculturalism is not desirable, because it injures the values of equality and human rights. Azurmendi’s opinion was shared by other politicians (RIDAO, 2002: 19), who all put the emphasis on the importance of a complete integration of the immigrants into democratic societies.

2.1. Official controversies

The gap between Spanish and Moroccan people was also widened by the tense relationship between their governments. Madrid accuses Rabat of indifference regarding the illegal immigration to the Peninsula, by not stopping the human traffic organized by mafias across the strait of Gibraltar, which has caused already a great number of casualties, because of to the unseaworthy conditions of the pateras used for the crossing. Furthermore the recent prohibition for the Spanish fishing fleet to operate in Moroccan’s territorial waters had already caused considerable political friction.
In 2002, another incident between Morocco and Spain added more drama to the crisis. On the 11 July a dozen Moroccan troops disembarked on the Mediterranean island of Perejil, putting up two tents and planting two poles bearing the Moroccan flag. The small, one square kilometre sized, island of Perejil is located just about 200 meters from the Moroccan coast inside Moroccan territorial waters. It is said to have belonged to Spain since 1668, but Morocco disputes this on historical grounds, arguing that the island was liberated from the Spanish protectorate in 1956, and adding, that it was not the first time that Morocco conducted such military exercises on the island, which is customarily used by Moroccan farmers for farming and cattle-breeding activities. The European Union condemned the Moroccan invasion, calling it a serious violation of Spain’s territorial integrity. Six days later special Spanish army units “re-conquered” the tiny island, backed by combat helicopters, navy ships and swimmers, capturing the six Moroccan remaining and returned them to their government.

The whole affair was blown up by the media and presented by the Spanish newspapers as a new evidence of the insidious behaviour of the Islamic neighbour, while the Moroccan political class condemned the Spanish move, considering it a true declaration of war and advocating severance of all economic and diplomatic ties with a country that had betrayed the friendship that existed between the two nations.

Now (December 2002), after a change of the Foreign Ministers of both countries, the heated minds are calming down, but the damage caused in the Spanish public opinion will not be easy to repair, and the animadversion against the African neighbour is far from diminishing.

3. The Conflict in the Middle East

More or less at the same time when the Spanish public opinion argued about her future relationship with Islamic culture, the debate turned – especially from April 2002 – to the conflict in the Middle East. In this case the sympathies of most of the Spanish media were clearly on the side of the Palestinians. The Israeli invasions of two West Bank refugee camps and the military attacks on Palestinian
government and security buildings were represented as an abuse of power against an disarmed enemy. Initially, even the Palestinian terror acts received only slight critics. Their increase of the bloodshed against civilians, especially Israeli scholars and children moderated the Spanish support, but Sharon’s explanations, that Israel was only responding with a war against the terror organizations within the framework of its right to self-defence, was not accepted by the media. The historian David Solar (SOLAR 2002:4) even argues about Israel’s right to occupy Palestinian territory: “How would we like an Islamic reoccupation of the Iberian Peninsula? The historical presence of Islam in Spain is not very inferior to that of the Jews in the territory they are claiming today”.

In his visit to the occupied Palestinian territories at the end of March, Jose Saramago the Nobel prize winning Portuguese writer, compared the Israeli government’s crimes with that of the Nazis in Auschwitz, provoking with his words heavy debates in the public space. Though El País and El Mundo call Saramago’s statement an exaggeration which cannot be accepted, they nevertheless put the blame of Israel’s bad image on Sharon and on Bush. As some known writers tried to explain, the anti-Semitism in Spain like the anti-Arabic feelings form part of the History of the country. They have not been altered by a sense of guilt – like for instance in Germany – because of the holocaust, but are being reinforced by the unconditional support that Washington is granting Israel.

An article signed by the correspondent of El Mundo in New York, Carlos Fresneda, published on the 15 April 2002 (Fresneda 2002: 24), tries to explain the enormous power of the Zionist lobby in the United States, which covers the whole range of American politics, including the Democratic party. He says that, though the population of Arab origin is twice the size of the Jewish one, the Palestinians get a sore throat by shouting their demands on the streets, while the Jews “hiss directly into the ears of the members of Congress in the hall of the Capitol”.

On the 9 June 2002, about 600 people demonstrated in Madrid in front of the Israeli Embassy in order to protest against the Palestine terrorism and the pro-Palestinian attitude of the Spanish television and newspapers. The demonstration was headed by the
director of the Cervantes Institute, Jon Juaristi, who read a declaration, in which he pledged solidarity with Israel and peace, and appealed to Spanish politicians and media to present the facts of the conflict to the public opinion with impartiality and without making racist comments. His word received immediate sharp replies, especially from the left wing historian Antonio Elorza who criticised Juaristi calling Israel a “nation who infringes the international law committing crimes against humanity, which cannot be justified as self defence against terrorism” (ELORZA, 2002: 11).

The Palestinian professor Edward W. Said, social and literature scientist who is now working as Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University/USA, and who has been granted the prestigious Spanish “Príncipe of Asturias” Price 2002 in the category of “Concord”, is a permanent collaborator of El País, where he tries, over and over again to eradicate Western prejudices against Oriental cultures and religions. With respect to Sharon’s aggression on the Palestinian territories, he believes that Israel may act without any restrictions against his fatherland, because the Palestinians are not protected by any lobby or leading group of public opinion. As an example he mentions the enormous capacity of CNN to reproduce and distribute texts and images, repeating, for instance, more than a hundred times per hour the expression “suicide terrorist”. Said complains about the fact, that the Palestinians do not dispose of a Public-Relation-Team in Washington, willing to go to the studios of CNN or other world-wide channels and tell them the History of their people within a positive context, thus offering the Americans new points of view about the conflict. At the same time he denounces the incompetence of the Palestinian media, their ignorance of the American culture and the English language as an important handicap in the battle for public opinion (SAID, 2002: 13).

Among the typical retrospective views of the year, that appear these days (end of December) in all the newspapers, El Mundo has published in the weekly supplement Cronica a long article titled “The new wall of shame”, in which it criticises the defence walls constructed by Israel, which are leaving Palestinian villages divided or isolated, saying that this procedure is recalling inevitably the nazi-ghettoes where the Jews were tortured (ESPINOSA, 2002: 1-3).
The imminent peril of war between the United States and Iraq does not contribute to create a more peaceful atmosphere. *El Mundo* and *El País* equally denounce the United States’ intention to establish at any price – a new Empire, ignoring deliberately international laws and agreements.

4. The role of the United States in World Affairs

The anniversary of the 11 September was celebrated in Spain, like in all democratic countries with emotional acts in memory of the victims of the barbaric attack of Al Qaeda in 2001. The solidarity with the United States was absolute. The Spanish media left no doubt about their position against terrorism of all kinds. But posterior articles made it clear, that a preventive offensive against Iraq is not considered the same way as war against international terror. Recent surveys have confirmed, that a significant majority of the Spanish society rejects the idea of this war, in spite the fact that the President of the Government, José María Aznar, has offered Bush the maximum support in case of an armed conflict. Few Spaniards really believe, that Saddam Hussein owns hidden nuclear weapons, but think, that the real reason for the American position is the existence in Iraq of huge unexploited oil deposits, which can be produced at an extremely low cost, about one dollar per barrel; while the expense of oil exploiting in the Black Sea region amounts up to $12 or even $15 per barrel. This means, that control over Iraqi oil deposits would yield very high profits, even when international oil prices are low.

The critics of the Bush administration in *El Mundo* and *El País* are going much further. Some of the essays published express the fear, that the effects of a new war would change profoundly all human communications, which have ruled the life of peoples and countries ever since the beginning of the history of international relations:

(...)

The campaign which has been announced by the United States, is a great war, meant to force the simplification of the world. It proposes finishing with all the inconveniences of adaptation between men, cultures and nations, their power and their interests; those inconveniences and frictions which have always been an
inexhaustible fountain of wisdom and sensibility, of which Ivo Andric talked in his ‘Bridge over the river Drina’, and which can be resumed in the word ‘civilization’. Others have had before the aim to impose harmony by force. They always failed. But the consequences of this absurd adventure can turn out as terrible as irreversible (...).

We have the right to doubt, that the way taken under the pretext of a violent geo-statistical reorganization in the Middle East – which could extend to whole Central Asia and affect fatally Russia and Europe, set India on flame and dynamite Asia like a discotheque in Bali – would signify any other than a humanitarian Hecatomb and the end of a culture of law and wisdom, capable to put a stop to the instincts of arrogance and violence. A culture, which – we must remember – has produced great men like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington (TERTSCH, 2002: 14).

Other observers, like Andres Ortega, express the same reservations with respect to the ambitions of the United States less poetically:

The United States pretend becoming an Empire, that will not be subdued by any law. They need to control space, as the sea was controlled by the hegemonic Empires in the 18th and 19th century and the air in a substantial part of the 20th. The doctrine Bush is based on the military superiority of the USA, and others, like the European, have to accept that (ORTEGA, 2002: 1-2).

Anti-American feelings are not new in Spain. The large majority of the Spaniards have never accepted the American way of life. The reasons for this attitude are not quite clear. Some historians remember the war of 1898, when Spain lost her last colonial possessions to the USA; others mention the fact, that Franco received important support from Washington during the Cold War. Probably, besides the US politics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the display of arrogance, power and wealth as well as the contempt shown lately for all international conventions, have at least as much weight as historic experiences.
5. Remedies for international lack of communication and misunderstandings?

What can journalists and professionals of communication do to improve international relationships and what should they not do?

The permanent dedication of specialists to create and verify valid media effects theories is an acknowledgment of the overall importance of social communication. The Media-Dependency Theory developed by De Fleur and Ball Rokeach (DE FLEUR, MELVIN and BALL-ROKEACH: 1982) sustains, that the degree of dependence is influenced by: 1) The number and centrality of information functions; 2) Social stability. When social change and conflicts are high, and established institutions, beliefs, and practices are challenged, people make new evaluations and choices. In such cases of instability, reliance on media may increase. Undoubtedly, Europe is now living a period of instability and uncertainty with respect to the future. In consequence, the role of journalists is a very important one. Probably most of them are not quite aware of that fact.

5.1. Spanish journalism

Before I proceed to discuss the recommendations of how the work of journalists in international matters could be improved, I consider it necessary to offer some details concerning the situation of the profession in Spain.

A review of a recent study about the Spanish professional journalists (CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIOLÓGICAS: 1998) shows us, that the self-judgment of their work has little to do with the ideals they cherished when they first entered the editorial staff of a newspaper. Very few are free enough to choose the agenda and to write as they wish. It is not a question of censorship, but of business. Economical conditions and political tendencies marked by the chief editor and the owners of the newspaper are usually limiting their capacity to develop their potentials. It is generally accepted, that nowadays newspapers and private broadcasting enterprises are just like any other company, whose primary goals are to sell a merchandise and to maximise profits. The agenda and the style of writing depend on the likings of the audience.
Economical considerations have introduced in Spanish media another negative habit: in order to save salaries, every year a considerable number of journalism students are allowed to gain work experience at newspapers, especially during the summer holidays. But very often, the “training” consists in exploiting these young people in different sections, without really teaching them the profession.

On the other hand, Spanish journalism owns some features which are different from Anglo-Saxon customs. Facts and opinion are not that clearly separated like in German or English newspapers. Short news are very rare and do not appear in special sections. The habit of “relating” facts, rather than “stating” them, gives the journalist the opportunity to write “stories”. This means, that he may articulate large phrases using literary and adverbial expressions which shape decisively the final meaning of the message. Unfortunately, not all the journalists are talented enough to be aware of the importance of this fact. The educational training in the use of the Spanish language is clearly insufficient. Teaching in schools and colleges is at a rather low level, and when the students reach the Faculties of Journalism, the knowledge of their mother-tongue is frequently poor. The use of colloquial idioms in the audiovisual media further hinders the correct application of vocabulary.

Another handicap for journalism candidates is the lack of historical and cultural knowledge of other nations. The Faculties try to remedy the gaps, but obviously, the excessive number of students in the classes makes it very difficult to achieve satisfactory results. The statement of these negative aspects of the Spanish journalism is not meant to discredit the profession and the professionals, but to denounce the actual deficits in teaching and training, the correction of which I consider absolutely necessary, in order to enable the future journalists to be better prepared for the difficult task of communication in a global world.

The shortcomings in the writing of common news in the Spanish press are brilliantly emended in the “Opinion” pages and also in other sections by means of the contributions of specialists in the respective subjects, and by the genius of the columnists. Especially El País, dedicates much space of its daily edition and
the weekend supplements to offer the readers articles which reflect the opinions of permanent and casual correspondents and collaborators. Well known historians, writers, political analysts, artists, etc. argue about topical events or general questions of public interest, thus adding with their signature prestige to the medium by attracting to it the focus of public opinion and debate.

Some steps to ameliorate the sensibility of journalists with respect to racism and xenophobia have already been taken by the Spanish General Director of Immigration, Tomás Vera. After the press campaign against Moroccan culture in February 2002, he accused the media of creating a xenophobic climate in the public opinion and announced the celebration of a special course for journalists, in order to make them more “sensitive”, and to “teach them – from ethic and moral points of view- to assume their responsibility when they are talking about ‘immigration‘ and ‘integration’. Vera said, that the media are fundamentally responsible for the possible outcome of a headline; references to nationalities of criminals, for instance, lead to accusations against the whole collective (SERRANO, 2002: 5).

A good way to change improper journalistic habits would be the reform of the newspapers’ “Libros de estilo” (Handbooks of style), which offer the editors grammatical help and stylistic recommendations for their work. My review of the handbooks of El País and El Mundo have shown, that neither of them dedicates special attention to the problem of xenophobia or racism. El País simply mentions in paragraph 1.41: “Words or phrases which might be offensive for a community should never be used” (El País 1992: 29). These recommendations fall quite short of the necessities of today’s journalism and are far from those established in the European Code on Ethics of Journalism.

The recent visit of the president of Iran Mohamed Jatamí to Madrid made it evident, that also the head of the Spanish Government has become aware of the necessity to improve international relations with Islamic countries. Jatamí’s discourse held at the University Complutense of Madrid about “The imagination of Cervantes and the reality of our time”, was much commented by the press. The Iranian President concluded his speech with the following comparison:
Don Quijote saw evil giants instead of windmills. All those who contemplate the course of History as a chain of decadent sequences and see a world dominated by the devil, turning around an axe of evil, are following the same road as Don Quijote and will find as much enemies as he did (GIL, 2002: 3).

In order to surmount misunderstandings caused by cultural differences in the relationship between Spain and Iran, José Maria Aznar and Jatami agreed to name governmental commissions entrusted with organizing a permanent “dialogue between civilizations” (EGURBIDE, 2002: 21).

5.2. European recommendations

On European level, there is no lack in declarations and recommendations aimed at avoiding intentional or unconscious promotion of hate between civilizations. Paragraph seven of the Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists says:

The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins (International Federation of Journalists: 1986).

The Council of Europe has also published several “Resolutions on the ethics of journalism”, containing ethical principles which should be applied by the profession throughout Europe. Our topic is detailed in the “Explanatory Memorandum on the media and the promotion of a culture of tolerance”, which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 30 October 1997 at the 607th meeting of the Minister’s Deputies.

In the paragraphs 3-5 we may read:

3. At the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe member States held in Vienna from 8-9 October 1993, alarm was expressed about the resurgence of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, the development of a climate of intolerance, the
increase in acts of violence, notable against migrants and persons of immigrant origin, and the development of new expressions of xenophobia in the form of aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism. The Heads of State and Government expressed their conviction that these manifestations of intolerance threatened democratic societies and their fundamental values.

4 – At the Vienna Summit, a Plan of Action on combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance was adopted. The Plan of Action set out a broad range of measures to mobilise the public and improve and effectively implement guarantees and policies aimed at combating these phenomena. The media sector is one of the sectors covered by the Plan of Action. In paragraph five of the Plan, the media professions were requested ‘to report and comment on acts of racism and intolerance factually and responsibly, and to continue to develop professional codes of ethics which reflect these requirements’.

5 – The relevance of the media to the fight against racism and intolerance was also stressed in Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1277 (1995) on migrants, ethnic minorities and media. Paragraph two of this recommendation stated: “Media presentation of subjects connected with immigrants and ethnic minorities has a significant impact on public opinion. Although the media constitute an important means of combating racist and xenophobic views, prejudices and preconceived ideas, they can also have a role in the emergence or strengthening of such views.

In the “Operative part of the recommendation”, the options offered for a solution of the problems are rather vague, “having regard to the autonomy and independence of the media”:

18. (...)Apart from such action as the media and the various media sectors may take on their own, the measures which governments can take will consist mainly of aid and incentives to the media. This recommendation should be understood in this light.

19. Such incentives and measures of encouragement may take different forms depending, inter alia, on the media sector concerned. The dissemination of relevant information, in particular about this recommendation, is one example, but there are others: the
organisation of public campaigns, the commissioning, publication, dissemination and exchange of studies and research which might help initiate debate within the media sectors; provision of support for organisations which seek to raise awareness in media circles of the need to promote tolerance (...) (COUNCIL OF EUROPE: 1997).

The Appendix to the recommendation insists on the importance of the training of journalists, and the decisive role of journalism schools or other media training institutes in “instilling awareness of the significance of the media’s involvement in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies, and especially the contribution which the media and media professionals can make to the promotion of a culture of tolerance.

Some of the remaining paragraphs refer to the part played by Media enterprises in the daily application of the lessons learned in the training-period, to the essence and the mission of private and public broadcasting and to the potential of advertisements for perpetuating negative stereotypes, which should be prevented.

Another report on Media Ethics in Europe edited by Kaarle Nordenstreng in 1995, presents a study of how media professionals and proprietors deal with aspects of racism, xenophobia and intolerance. After analysing the codes on ethics of a representative number of European countries, the conclusion of the report is very similar to that of the European Council: The recommendations are to “place responsibility for ‘effectiveness’ and ‘viability’ in consciousness-raising and improving media performance with regard to minority issues, racism and xenophobia on the shoulders of press councils, publishers, broadcasters and journalism institutions” (LEE, 1996: 2).

Barbara Thomass (THOMASS, 1996: 1), writes in the Introduction to the handbook “Journalistic decision-taking in Europe” about the question of Ethics in journalism, that the applications of these and other recommendations to fight cultural hatred and to avoid a “clash of civilizations” depend ultimately on the attitude of each journalist and each medium:

Spotting the issue and leading a sound debate to come to a well balanced decision is the ethical responsibility of every single
journalist. Defending this decision will become more and more difficult as a market driven journalism expands. The ability of finding and defending ethical standards must be acquired and promoted within the institution where journalists learn their professional skills. Ethics must not be looked upon as a luxury separated from professional skills but as an integrated part.

I quite agree with her. But there is no doubt, that in a “market-driven” globalised world, the application of “ethics” is rather difficult to achieve. In order to alter prejudices of people and nations it would be equally necessary to promote the role of public education in changing the political, social and cultural ethos of nations. As Philip Lee states in his review of Nordenstreng’s book: “Codes of ethics should not be confined to the arena of public communication alone but should surely form part of the fabric of public life” (LEE, 1996: 2).

REFERENCES

NEWSPAPERS ANALYSED:
El País
El Mundo

BOOKS, ARTICLES AND DOCUMENTS: