

Mainstream Media vs. Ethnic Minority Media: Integration in Crisis

1. Introduction

For all segments of French society, the media are at the center of political, economic and cultural concerns. They are cultivated by politicians in their quest for power, while companies pursue them as a means of making money. The force of such pursuit is hardly surprising and is readily apparent in the concentration of the media in the hands of manufacturers and arms dealers. The collusion between politics and business is a major characteristic of our era. In France, any control over the media exercised by politicians and businessmen has always been under scrutiny; however, the last presidential election (2007) did reveal a mutual corruption of sorts in the relations between the current president and some owners of French media. The Berlusconi media in Italy indicate a similar conflation. The business world is increasingly interested in the media because they provide opportunities to amass money and power, make and remake opinions with one sweep. Magnates enhance their existing economic power with the power to produce, diffuse or censor a program, an opinion or some information according to the principle of supply and demand.

Eighty-five percent of the Socpresse Group, with its concentration on the written press, belongs to Serge Dassault, the famous manufacturer of cannons. Socpresse includes *Le Figaro*, *L'Express*, *L'Expansion*, etc. Hachette Filipacchi Médias has belonged to Lagardère since 2004. Worth 2.1 billion euros, he is the owner of, for example, *Télé 7 jours*, *Paris Match*, *Elle*, *Nice-Matin*, *Choc*, *Public*, and *La Provence*. In sum, Lagardère owns 200 press groups all over the world. The group Ouest-France is worth 953 million euros. *Le Monde*, the fourth major press syndicate, was worth 639 million euros in 2004 and controls *Télérama*, *La Vie*, *Courier International*, *Le Monde des religions*, *Le Monde de l'Education*, *Midi Libre*, *Les cahiers du Cinéma*. The Amaury group, with 25% owned by Lagardère, consists of *Le Parisien* and *L'Equipe*. The Hersant family runs the France Antilles group, owner of the free *Paru Vendu*, published in 240 editions. France Antilles is estimated to be worth 618 million euros. Prisma Presse, held by the German Bertelsmann corporation, controls *Prima*, and *Femme Actuelle* at a total of 567 million euros. Finally, Emap France, which publishes 28 titles, controls *Télé-Poche*, *Téléstar*, *Biba*, *Max*, and *Science et Vie*, among others, at a total of 437 million euros. Bouygues, the king of concrete

and employer of millions of workers of African descent, also controls Channel *TF1*. Vincent Bolloré exploits transportation networks in Africa and is a vendor of cocoa, coffee, rubber, palm oil and wood. The activities of his 70 companies in Africa are the source of his wealth. A friend of president Sarkozy, he has invested 10% of his assets in various mass media.¹ The mainstream media, then, are a sphere involving huge amounts of capital and occupy a central position in the world of business (*Observatoire français des media* 2005, p. 95-96).

In the face of such an audiovisual landscape controlled exclusively by large-scale corporations, the media of the minorities, more often referred to as “community media” (or as the media of ethnic minorities), have been active since 2000. These are media created by French people of foreign origin, not to be confused with foreign media in France. Today, there are hundreds of such magazines, FM radio stations, Internet radio stations, and Internet television stations in France. Compared to the mainstream media, their capital, which varies from 400 to 4000 euros, is practically negligible. The owners are individuals, groups, associations or small publishing houses. Even so, they are far from inefficient. They make information in reaction to the monologue or monopoly of the dominant forms of information and, in particular, to contest their own negative representation in the mainstream media. Minority media are the consequence of a rejection of information from a direction that makes French people of foreign origin the anti-heroes of the ‘news-in-brief’ columns, of violence, or of fundamentalism. Such mainstream media reports are often

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- 1 Compare Daniel Sauveget: „Vincent Bolloré: l'ex-roi du papier à cigarettes, nouvel empereur des médias?“, November 17, 2004. One can read here: „1. Audiovisual production and provisions since the privatization of SFP (2001), acquisition made with Euromédia: Bolloré holds 30% of the SFP, Euromédia 70% – but Bolloré possesses 24% of Euromédia. The group Euromédia Télévision (EMT) have the studios of Saint-Denis and of Arpajon, and run the previous studios of the Victorine in Nice. SFP has its studios Bry sur Marne, Saint Ouen, and Boulogne-Billancourt as well as its power of reporting and filming. 2. VCF (Video Communication de France), resold in 2003: technical provisions. 3. Streampower: video and Internet. 4. A movie theater in Paris, the Mac Mahon. 5. Direct 8, digital television station currently being created, approved by the CSA within the grouping of free digital channels (director: Philippe Labro), and specializing in direct broadcast, as its name implies. 6. RNT, (la Radio des Nouveaux Talents), AM radio and Internet created in 2004. 7. 10% of Gaumont, TV and cinema production, distribution and exploitation. 8. A small percentage of RCS Media, in Italy – but Bolloré also holds shares in the bank Mediobanca which plays an important role in the reorganization of the press section of Rizzoli-Corriere della Sera. 9. More than 22% (end of October) of Havas, an advertising group detached from Vivendi after the fusion of the no longer existing group Havas with Vivendi.“

told with disregard for these people, their culture, and especially, for their status as full-fledged French citizens.

Internet media have encouraged thousands of people to engage in reading texts on the Web, and are a genuine democratic revolution in terms of letting French people of foreign origin speak their minds. Never before was there production on such a scale related to minority society and their connection with the media. The influx of factors related to ideological confrontation on the network is also without precedent with regards to their number, insistence and presence. Minorities use the Internet as an identity establishing network to be able to hold their position against the fortresses of the mainstream media. The more heated the debates are, the greater is the interactivity of the agents. This interactivity continues to be fed by the ever-increasing alternation of statements and actions on the parts of politicians and the dominant press. The events of 9/11 facilitated a renunciation of the French republic's former taboos involving a torrent of essentialist criticisms of Arabs and Muslims in the dominant press. Six years later, the left and right have met halfway on this point. The anti-religious tradition of the left has converged with the anti-Arab passion of the right. French society has not managed to put this behind itself; on the contrary, a competitiveness of sorts can be noticed in this domain. From 2001 to the present, there have constantly been confrontations between the dominant and minority media related to discrimination, racism and xenophobia, all revived by a "Le Pen-ization" of popular opinion.

A public, political and democratic move to the right has been a major part of Nicolas Sarkozy's agenda in his climb to power. The spirit of the right, now allegedly freed from its complexes, has revived traumas, anxieties and fears in the hearts of French people of foreign origin. Hence, an analysis of the minority press is the key to understanding the ever-widening schism not only between the two types of media, but between their respective target groups as well.

2. From the French audiovisual landscape to that of the minority media

The minority media landscape in France is dominated by two main components: African/Caribbean media and Arab/Muslim media. This corresponds to the two main groups of French people of foreign origin, who are, respectively, the principal target groups. These media include approximately a hundred magazines, journals and Internet sites of African origin, and thirty of Arabic origin. The specific feature of these media is their focus on a group for which they homogenize cultural references, harmonize a

specific vision of the world, and in particular, facilitate the group's presence in the media. Ethnic media transform readers, listeners and spectators into components of the media, into active sources of information, and most importantly, into constant recipients. The work of constructing a community readership and audience in a minority situation depends on the ability of the initiators to combine various ideological components of interest to the group. As a consequence, community, culture, religion and politics all mix in editorial policy making. In other words, a single magazine allocates space to the religious, political and ideological sensibilities of the community. This defining principle is similar to a large net which captures the diverse interests of a maximum number of people. A minority medium which addressed itself only to the "Shiites of the community", or the "Tunisians of Marseille", to the "natives of Djerba in Ile-de-France", or the "Nigerians of Bordeaux", the "Guyanan people of Lille" etc. would take as its starting point only a very restricted perspective. Thus, the need to interest a number of people as large as possible leads the minority media to deal with subjects that the mainstream media do not cover, and to give voice to people boycotted by the major public media.

The Internet revolution has given a preponderant role to the media in the lives of its users. A site such as *Oumma.com* is a point of reference for the French and francophone 'Muslim community'. When Tariq Ramadan, the Swiss specialist on Islam, was banned from the mass media in France, *Oumma.com* gave him coverage. *Beur FM*, *Radio Orient de Paris* and *Radio Gazelle* did the same with others ignored by the mainstream media. At this point, the question arises as to how the mainstream media's opposition to the minority media is constructed. Which interests govern the mediatization of 'Arabs' and 'blacks' in France? In what way is this media coverage connected with the integration crisis involving these populations in France? How can the media landscape of minority media best be characterized? Can these media be automatically associated with communities residing in France? Is there a systematic oppositional relationship between these new media and the mainstream media? How far does the relationship between the two call integration (insofar as this means that the various parts of French society function better together) into question, especially for those whose familial origins lie beyond the borders?

The representations of social groups often correspond to existing social configurations and correlate exactly to structures of established forms of domination. These are aggravated in France by its colonial history with an ideology based on racial hierarchy. This heritage intensifies the power of stereotypes on French populations from the former colonies and their descendants.

3. Contradictory paradigms and functions

A major problem related to the dominant media in France has to do not only with their method of producing information, but also with their culture of class and of complicity. These two aspects significantly attribute a fixed role in the media to each component of society. More precisely, there is a specific way of speaking of Arabs and blacks on the radio, on television and in the press. Any “normal” treatment is therefore practically impossible because of the petrified image of the “Other” and the underlying ideology.

The leader of a Parisian group in an impoverished neighborhood stated in front of journalists and researchers: “Whenever I watch television, I look to see in which distorting light we will be shown this time, to see how they will treat the information on the poor areas, our neighborhoods and the people that live in them.” This statement demonstrates the discontent with how these populations and neighborhoods are treated as topics of information. Many people from these areas recall one or more broadcasts in which Arabs and blacks were shown in a negative light, confined to specific, predefined roles by the newsmaker journalists. Apparently, a class culture maintains in which the mainstream media produce information which is advantageous to the dominant group.

Information disseminated in *Le Figaro*, *l'Express* or *Le Point* typically depicts Arabs as “suspicious, violent, terrorist and macho”, while blacks are often portrayed as “illegal aliens”, as dancers, or as being athletic and corrupted by economic misery. Such reductionism leads to the stigmatization of individuals. The prevailing atmosphere associated with these people reveals a sense of anxiety. The media speak of “youth”, of “the neighborhoods”, the “susceptible areas”, “the dwellers of troubled areas”, of “bands”, of “young Muslims” of “fanatics” and of “fundamentalists”. In other words, the context is one of problems for the dominant society. There is even more cause for concern, as these people are spoken of as bodies foreign to the society at large.

Whenever the media relates negative news events, it is responsive to these paradigms of production and uses them for its aims. The wording and staging of news events is not only a technical procedure, but is also always ideologically and politically oriented. Composing information clearly consists in examining and disseminating locations, in attributing values and significance, and in sending messages. None of these operations is neutral; they are profoundly ideological and, indeed, prone to being ideologized. When Nicolas Sarkozy speaks of “scum” and of “karcher” (highly pressurized water pistols), such vocabulary promotes the sale of newspapers. The media’s perpetual quest for show and sensation zeroes in on the political spectacle of the candidate. Media communication has become an irreplaceable political tool in a country

in the midst of a permanent election campaign. The use of such words in the public sphere reveals a 'special' treatment for the populations of poor areas.

Since 2001, French society has undergone a systematic and progressive loosening of the limits of acceptable verbal expression. Essentialist and stigmatizing ways of thinking are manifested and relayed by the media. The words of media intellectuals converge with those of politicians, and, as a result, xenophobia and racism become the norm in their discourse. Which symptomatic themes of the confrontations between mainstream and minority media reflect socio-economic, political or cultural problems? How and why do these confrontations occur? What are the effects of this confrontation on integration *à la française*, or even on respect for human rights and living together?

In order to answer these questions, I will examine two important French Internet sites: *Afrikara.com* and *Oumma.com*. The first was created by a group of African/Caribbean journalists to defend the black community in France. *Oumma.com* is a communal Islamic site created in 1999 and dedicated to an "Islam of freedom". *Oumma.com* and *Afrikara.com* are both francophone encounter sites run by people who wish to make their mark towards a humanistic France. *Oumma.com* registers approximately 65 million visits per month. *Afrikara* is one of the best-regarded sites of the African community in France because of the direct, compelling language it employs when addressing subjects related to Africa and to the black diasporas of France, the Caribbean, and the Americas. Cases of discrimination are presented in full detail, the stakes and possible outcomes involved well explained. The same degree of commitment is present at *Oumma.com*, which answers to attacks against Islam and the Muslims of France. The events of 9/11 were a turning point for this community site, which responds daily to articles, reports and statements made by media intellectuals, politicians or journalists. Support for the Palestinian cause is one of its main focuses, just as support for Africa is one of the main focuses of *Afrikara*. These commitments influence the treatment and follow-up of information. Journalists who contribute to these sites are obliged to scrutinize as much information disseminated by the dominant media as possible – a fastidious task whose practical completion is supported by their long-term vision. Their reactions are sometimes immediate, almost instantaneous. This is a journalism charged by urgency, far removed from the comforts of mainstream media. Both sites insist on justice and equality in the treatment of information on French populations of foreign origin.

3.1 *Oumma.com* and the specter of 9/11

The events of September 11, 2001 constituted the framework of a new relationship between the media and Islam, and dealing with the topic of Islam in media production became increasingly questionable. Before this dramatic incident, French media coverage of Islam focused on Algeria, and its Islamists and military. The French media took part in an occidental trend of misinformation and over-information, setting a very questionable backdrop for ensuing debates. The media coverage was disastrous for the image of Muslims and Arabs in the world. Within a period of two years, the press wrongly established a link between Islam and violence, terrorism and war. The French press engaged in a form of symbolic warfare through reports, forums, articles, and interviews with specialists, etc. The question I will address here concerns how and why dealing with such topics generally proceeds in much the same way and with the use of the same terms.

This is the context in which *Oumma.com* was obliged to take a stand against attacks on Muslims; thus, the articles from this site should be read with this context in mind. After 9/11, certain journalists of the dominant media published articles employing especially violent language which ran contrary to the established notions of professional standards. *Oumma.com* had to then simultaneously condemn the attacks, and to unswervingly refute the link between Islam and terrorism and the allegation that Muslims are loyal to the cause and instigators of these attacks. Furthermore, it was necessary to answer to a French press which, on the one hand, sympathized with the suffering of the Americans, and on the other, allowed itself to oversimplify matters, confuse various issues, and disseminate stereotypes and even lies. Many important figures of French journalism, politics and media urged caution against these anti-Arab and anti-Muslim statements.

Yet, within two years, this atmosphere made a strange way of being racist and of affirming and proclaiming racism publicly acceptable. From this point on, populations of foreign origin began to feel that a lamentable era was on the rise, insofar as it progressively did away with the achievements of the French model of integration. The aims of certain politicians fell on fertile ground here. French Arabs, Muslims and Africans who were in no way linked to terrorism made the front pages of *Libération*, *Figaro*, *Le Point*, *L'Express* and *Le Monde*. Media workers engaged in making events out of non-events. This created and continues to create the impression that the media are focused on some sort of local, regional and national symbolic geopolitics.

The law passed on 15 March 2004 regulating women's use of the veil marks the culmination of this atmosphere, in which all political colors fuse into one. The media presentation of the veil issue is uniformly negative, and many

title pages of magazines indicated profound ideological problems. The reaction of *Oumma.com* corresponded precisely to the avalanche of articles from the dominant press.² There was much direct confrontation on both sides. This is a continuous, direct and massive confrontation, in which the implication of politicians, media, intellectuals and experts has given rise to especially lengthy media coverage and deepened the schism between the identities of French people of the Muslim faith and those of the “others”.

Apart from the question of the necessity of such a law, this political and media consensus should be examined in its own right. I find the apparent unanimity on this issue troubling because the motivations of the various groups are not one and the same. The convergence between racists and anti-Arabs of the extreme right and Republican secularists is alarming and shows that French society is taking a dangerous turn in terms of its views of minorities. The disastrous media coverage of 9/11 has made this all possible. Furthermore, sensationalism is becoming ever more salient in news reporting. Xenophobic phraseology is used to stage the news and make events “worthy” of media coverage.

3.2 Phraseology in the media

On October 24, 2004, the director of the magazine *Le Point* openly declared on Channel LCI: “I am slightly Islamophobic. I’m not embarrassed to admit it. [...] I have the right, I think (and I am not alone in this country), to say that Islam, (and I specify Islam, I’m not even speaking of Islamists) as a religion has about it a certain irrationality [...] which does in fact make me Islamophobic [...] There is no reason, under the pretext of tolerance, to lower oneself to the

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- 2 Yahya Michot, “Le voile jaune”, November 3, 2003; Eric Vandorpe, “Suspension d’un an sans salaire pour une fonctionnaire voile!”, November 18, 2003; Felwine Sarr, “Le port du voile: un rapport à sa propre corporalité”, December 18, 2003; Francis Moury, “La question du voile dans l’Islam et le monde moderne”, December 29, 2003; Liliane Bénard, “Des valeurs universelles et du voile...”, September 22, 2003; Nouredine Aoussat, “Affaire du voile: Le Cheikh Tantaoui d’Al-Azhar désavoué par les autres savants de cette institution”, January 1, 2004; Eric Vandorpe, “Retour sur le rapport Stasi et ses dérives islamophobes”, January 18, 2004; Zine El Abiddine Omar, “La symbolique du combat de la République contre le foulard”, January 31, 2004; Asma Lamrabet, “Au-delà du voile...”, February 2, 2004; Françoise Lorcerie, “L’affaire du voile sous le projecteur de la science politique: une analyse renouvelée de l’affaire en France et de son écho à l’étranger”, July 5, 2005; Pierre Tévanian, “L’affaire du voile, deux ans après: un consensus lourd de conséquences”, March 15, 2006 (All these articles come from *Oumma.com*).

point of denying one's own deep convictions." This statement provoked intense indignation on the part of the Muslim communities in France. *Oumma.com*, also target of this affront, responded in this way: "This injurious statement is unacceptable from the mouth of the founder and editor of an important French weekly, who displays, proclaims and justifies his visceral racism against Muslims. This is all the more unacceptable in that it is participating in a frightening and intolerable banalization of Islamophobia, whose backdrop is the hatred of Arab-Muslim populations." Claude Imbert was the next person to inaugurate a series of Islamophobic or Arabophobic phrases and expressions, engaging in behavior which, up to this point, had been exclusively reserved for the extreme right. Such phrases have been extremely successful in the media sphere, sparking audience interest while leaving the collective conscience cold. They are not uttered involuntarily; on the contrary, their authors are well aware of their media impact.

Fath Allah Mezziane says (Mezziane 2003), "Mr. Imbert is unconcerned with the possibility of sanctions, reprobation or condemnation. His Islamophobia is respectable, coming, as it does from on high. He is opposed to the vulgar and impolite racism of the French low-culture bistros."

The counterattacks of *Oumma.com* are, in every case, without concession. Its journalists read and re-read the editorials of Claude Imbert in which he congratulated the Italian pamphleteer Oriana Fallaci. *Le Point* published a dozen pages of these scathing articles. It was the thing of the moment. In a 10-page spread, *Le Point* represented her as "the woman who said no to Islam" (*Le Point*, May 24, 2002). *Oumma.com* published protests of the MRAP and of the Muslim Youth of France. The editors share the viewpoint of their readers and religious colleagues.

The same effect is produced when Alain Finkelkraut explains "the ethno-religious causes of the riots in the depressed suburbs" in the Israeli journal *Haaretz*, when Hélène Carrère D'Encausse identifies their cause in polygamy, and when Georges Frêche, president of the Regional Council of Languedoc-Roussillon speaks of the Harkis (Algerian soldiers who fought on the French side) as "subhuman". Of course, this train of thought is only reinforced when Sarkozy, in his quest for power, calls the youth of the poor neighborhoods "scum" to be best handled with "a pressurized water gun", etc.

This verbal abuse was a source of anxiety and disquiet for the targeted populations, for such words directly counteract the integration of the groups into French society. Moreover, these statements were not at all justified by any actions of Muslims in France. What would the media have written if France had been the victim of a terrorist act? Was there not perhaps an orchestrated need for scandals, provocations, discord and flagrant offences? Without *Oumma.com*, the reactions to these allegations and instances of defamation

would have remained largely unknown. The Internet de-territorialized the outcry from *Oumma.com*, taking it into North and sub-Saharan francophone Africa. The image of a France which continuously hounds Muslims is becoming disseminated throughout the francophone Muslim world, one of the important segments of the “French-speaking world”, with which the values of peace, equality and diversity have long been associated.

The interconnection between the intellectual and political scene and the media is noteworthy. The comments made by a politician with electoral aims are used to the greatest advantage by the media. The central significance accorded to communication in French politics can explain this phenomenon. The overlap between the world of the media and that of politics, between owners of media and political leaders, makes the dimensions and scope of the media impact of these populist phrases apparent. They are at the heart of a strategy for the conquest of political, media and economic power. The major effect detrimental to integration is that the authors attack from as many vantages as possible the most vulnerable populations, those who are incapable of deterring or penalizing them. Striving to increase popularity among audiences and the electorate by attacking one section of the French population can only lead to further resentment, hate, fear and reactionary behavior in that group. Sacrificing one part of the French population in the conquest for power is irresponsible. Society is taking a far-reaching ideological and political turn backwards. In this sense, this development is a serious hindrance to integration.

3.3 *Oumma.com* in the face of complacent reporting

A further matter to be examined here is the relationship of information to television. Television combines image and sound (Deltombe 2005, p. 382). The effect of documentary broadcasts is extremely complex, involving an interplay of elements on symbolic and physical levels. Yet, it is easy to cut an interview and manipulate the images, that is, to display something as reality which is, in fact, a fake. This practice has even been sanctioned by the charter of journalism signed in Munich in 1971, and implemented, for example, in the broadcast “*la marche du siècle*”, hosted by Jean-Marie Cavada in 1995. Images were retouched so that a supposed Islamist could appear with a beard to satisfy audience expectations of stereotyped representations.

In the context of these issues, Tariq Ramadan has been portrayed in a negative light in the major media of France. On 16 November 2003, Karl Zéro broadcasts on *Canal Plus* an ‘interview’ with this Swiss scholar, who is of Egyptian descent. It was manifestly clear that the host was searching for

‘double meaning’ and especially for anti-Semitism in the words of Tariq Ramadan. The broadcast, then, distorted the interview’s content, according to *Oumma.com*, which immediately sprang to the defense of one of its own writers and mentors.

“The method”, writes Yamin Makri (Makri 2003), “is very simple: interview Tariq Ramadan, then cut his statements into smaller sequences and re-arrange them to demonstrate the ‘double meaning’ of his responses, his duplicity and his eminently dangerous character.” Tariq Ramadan remained in the headlines, even though no evidence was ever found to support his alleged ties to Islamic extremists. On *Oumma.com*, Mohsin Mouedin wrote (Mouedin 2003): “We are all Tariq Ramadan”, in allusion to media headlines after 9/11 (“We are all Americans”).

The controversial debate between Tariq Ramadan and Sarkozy of 20 November 2003, broadcast on the program “100 minutes pour convaincre” on *France 2*, stimulated a number of reactions in the press (Sarkozy 2003). It was the culminating point of the new ideological communion between the political and intellectual scenes on the one hand and the media on the other. Objectively, the debate between the Minister of the Interior and a Swiss citizen was of little interest. But a better cast was not to be had. Sarkozy gained an immense symbolic advantage from the debate as the person who ‘unveiled the fundamentalist’ in a France ready to abandon social taboos. This communion between spheres united in their aim to sensationalize information warrants further examination.

On December 2, 2004, *France 2* broadcasts a “special report” on Tariq Ramadan by Mohammed Sifaoui. The report was presented as an excursion into the center of the Islamist ‘network’ in France. The report shows Tariq Ramadan followed by a hidden camera. The author promises his audience an outstanding account. In reality, not only is nothing ‘discovered’, but also the splicing and taping of the filmed sequences is clearly visible. This provoked a general outcry among the Muslim population. The Algerian nationality of the “reporter” only stoked the fire over the fabrication which was evident in the story. Subsequently, the author refused to participate in a broadcast focused on demystifying the media “Arrêt sur l’image (Stop. Image check!)”, planned for December 3, 2004. In an article published by *Oumma.com*, Tariq Ramadan went to his own defense by denouncing Sifaoui’s work. Several other journalists and researchers also harshly criticized the widely disseminated broadcast and the public channel responsible, reflecting the general indignation among professional journalists.

It is the shame and repugnance of sharing the same profession with Mohammed Sifaoui that pushes me to react after the broadcast of the

‘portrait’ of Tariq Ramadan on *France 2*. [...] There is a lack of new information, incorrect supposition, malicious interpretation, manipulated quotes of interviewees, and a litany of double, triple, and quadruple meaning which continue to pursue Tariq Ramadan. Nothing can justify the angle chosen by the reporter. [...] It is true that Ramadan is a subject that sells. But the denunciation of Islamists and fundamentalists, of which there is a consensus, in no way justifies turning a blind eye to the absence of any sense of ethics in this case (Dolé 2004).

The Internet site received texts from writers sharing a certain ethical standpoint who directly attacked the stigmatizations and instances of discrimination proffered in the broadcast (ibid.). The open editorial policy allows those who are not Muslim, but who share the political commitments of *Oumma.com*, to air their views. This approach also crosses the borders of religion, community and identity and is a genuine indication of an integration which favors solidarity and good rapport.

In 2004, the media event of the year was, without a doubt, the affair of the fictional assault on Marie-Léonie. The young woman claimed to have been attacked by “6 blacks and 7 Arabs” on a suburban train. The uproar was all the greater since Marie-Léonie was carrying her baby and a swastika was drawn on her clothes. The signs of misogyny and anti-Semitism were concentrated into hyper-charged negative media coverage. In the end, the ostensible attack emerged as having been imagined by the young mother. But by that point, politicians, intellectuals and the editorial staff of the major media had already jumped on the bandwagon, indistinctly and invariably taking up and employing the same xenophobic categories and repertoires. Within only a few hours, one could no longer keep count of the ways to stigmatize the “youth of the poor neighborhoods”. The writers seemed to be engaged in a competition of sorts, each one searching for the best way to formulate the stereotypical phrases.

This pathetic episode casts a cold light on the Islamophobic and Arab-phobic climate in this country. [...] The most remarkable observation is the strange unanimity of the media and the political parties, which put them all – in differing proportions of course – into the same pot, snubbing traditional ideological divergences. (Koues 2004)

The reactions indicate what could happen if a similar or worse situation actually occurred. The reluctance to run the risk of being left an outsider only amplifies such tensions. Hopefully, the media have learned their lesson from this incident.

3.4 Dominant media, minority media and the emergence of the black question in France

The 'black question' became a major media topic with the adoption of the Taubira law³, which condemns slavery as a crime against humanity. The law officially documents the transatlantic slave trade in which France participated. This was the beginning of the media coverage of an issue that had up to that point been largely ignored. The Internet revolution has brought many aspects of such issues to light. The connections between peoples of African descent have furthered their interests in how other communities of African origin, in particular African Americans, establish their identity. The American model functions as a paradigm of better opportunity for blacks, while France is seen as a location of elementary struggle for recognition. *Afrikara* is one of the most assertive African/Caribbean sites. Created in 1997, it is establishing itself as a militant and alternative site with a major focus on Africa, France, and blacks in the world. Reporting on instances of discrimination is one of the major focuses of its articles. Analysis of the political and economic situation in Africa constitutes another. Articles focusing on blacks in the world also have a broader impact. Information is often staged in such a way as to highlight the contrast between the situation of blacks in France and their situation in the USA. In the context of the resurgence of post-9/11 xenophobic ideas, much the same scheme can be observed in the treatment of information: sensationalist and racist statements, individuals targeted and condemned by the media, and corresponding reactions.

Here, the year 2003 is an important point of reference. In a program on channel *France 3*, Marc-Olivier Fogiel sent an SMS to the Franco-Cameroonian comedian Dieudonné in these words: "Would it be funny if we did a sketch on the odors of blacks?" The scandal surrounding this SMS led to weekly demonstrations of groups of blacks in front of the headquarters of *France 3*. In 2005, the TV host was brought to trial.

Afrikara stresses that: "Marc-Olivier Fogiel acknowledges both the SMS which failed to shock a soul in the high-end of France nor in the French media, and his violent and gratuitous gesture to the person Dieudonné. At this point, references were made to an "American-Zionist theme" of the comedian where he was dressed in a costume "that recalled without ambiguity that of an orthodox Jew disguised as a terrorist" (Akamayong 2004). While Dieudonné was accused of anti-Semitism, Fogiel was accused of anti-black racism. Several groups demanded Fogiel's resignation. When there were protest actions in the middle of the program, this triggered open tension between the public

3 See <http://www.christiane-taubira.net/cms/index.php?page=loi-taubira>.

television service and groups of blacks. A demonstration on October 9, 2005 protested against what was seen as the perversion of the public broadcasting service's obligations. The Internet played a decisive role in the coordination and the dissemination of information on the subject. In the end, the TV host and the director of France Television were found guilty of promoting racism, but notwithstanding, the host retained his position. This, in turn, led to more demonstrations, which did, in fact, lead to Fogiel's resignation. With this media event, blacks made their mark on the French audiovisual landscape, so that, in contrast to earlier coverage, the opening story now regularly features blacks.

This affair was soon to be eclipsed by the question of slavery, of memory and of the 'competition among victims' in the French media. The question of slavery became a subject of debate following media reports on Pétré-Grenouilleau's book entitled *Les traites négrières* (Pétré-Grenouilleau 2002). The author speaks of an "African slave trade", and the media set the stage for public debate by giving preeminence to this theory. Afrikara documented the indignation of the black community. A communiqué by the "Collectif Dom" (a group of people of Caribbean and African descent) reads as follows (Le Collectif DOM 2005):

Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau suggests the subject of slavery should have remained mute, and not been declared a crime against humanity, in order not to be "compared with the Shoah". He also suggests that this law is responsible for further anti-Semitism. Where does this unjustified indictment come from? In what way can the recognition of the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity be seen as anti-Semitic? Should we now renounce the qualification of other crimes against humanity such as those against the Armenians, the Yugoslavians or the Rwandans? In intellectual perversity, Pétré-Grenouilleau considers the suffering of blacks at the hands of slavery to have been less than the suffering of the Jews of the Holocaust, rightly recognized for its atrocities. Is it because slaves were supposedly objects without souls? All the while proclaiming "there is no Richter scale of suffering", Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau is author of a strange comparison which gives rise to a competition of victimization, and continues to unleash hatred between communities.

Afrikara added (Afrikara 2006b):

The slavery question, whether referring to memory or to history, discharges an irrepressible release and eruption of racial hatred onto the French audiovisual landscape which is far from having been expunged of colonial nostalgia and of a particularly profound form of color phobia: the commemoration of crimes perpetuated against

blacks, Africans and their descendants, and other non-whites is perceived by many groups of intellectuals, journalists, politicians and the makers of opinion as a form of humiliation. An indignity to which, as though pushed on by a higher mission, they do not hesitate to respond, hardly hiding a hypersensitive racism, a hierarchy of suffering, and an unconscious attitude of individual and racial superiority. All this for the worse of the country, dissertating the length and breadth of their editorials.

History and its interpretation would remain one of the main issues for protest at *Afrikara*. A further text there reads (ibid.): “In France, some of the best-respected journalists advance insane and injurious theses regarding the history of blacks without any strong media or political reaction.”

Many utterances in the media have specific ideological functions and promote a specific way of thinking. On 17 November 2005, the philosopher Alain Finkelkraut said the following about the French soccer team: “They say that the French team is admired because it is black, white and Arab [...]. In fact, today it is black, black, and black, and we are made fun of all over Europe.” His words were to travel around the globe, and to start a compilation of racist statements made by media intellectuals. This was certainly a premeditated act. The philosopher alluded to the words of Georges Frêche, who thought there were too many blacks on the French team. Staging information constantly follows the same pattern, in which the media are used to pass along the message. Media such as *Afrikara* consider such utterances to be an expression of Negrophobia. Many African/Caribbean sites express similar views and also ask: Why now?

One is surprised to hear comments like that of Roger Hanin, who was invited to speak on *Europe 1* by Jean-Marc Morandini (Akamayong 2006):

Roger Hanin: What drives me nuts is to hear: ‘There aren’t enough blacks!’ Enough already! Stop crying! When I look at TV, all I see are black singers! I don’t give a damn. It’s fine! But don’t tell me that blacks are penalized.

Morandini: But there is a problem after all in terms of visible access to TV for minorities.

Roger Hanin: That’s a load of bull: why not stutterers, homos or dwarfs. [...] When they say that blacks can’t express themselves it’s a bunch of bull! Look at soccer, they can express themselves. If you look at it that way, what about the whites, they can’t express themselves. There are 8 blacks out of 11 and that’s fine! You could

say to a trainer: ‘You couldn’t find a white player?’ But it would be stupid, he just takes the best.

Afrikara answers him in these terms (ibid.): “The presence of blacks and their representation in current French society? He reduces them to music and soccer. Another brilliant mind of our times!”

Eric Zemmour, a columnist, affirms in the broadcast “Ca se dispute (Leave no stone unturned)” of *I-Télé* on May 12, 2006: “It’s colonization that put a stop to slavery! I’m tired of hearing of people talking about France being guilty of a crime against humanity because it used slaves. First of all, that’s wrong – there were never any slaves on French territory.” On the channel *Paris première*, March 26, 2006, on the broadcast “93 Faubourg Saint-Honoré”, he had already said: “Black slavery was invented by blacks. In Africa, they were the ones selling other blacks, because there is no such thing as black brotherhood – it doesn’t exist.”

But the pinnacle of such racist media utterances was reached when Pascal Sevran, the television host, wrote in his book, *Le privilège des jonquilles* (Sevran 2007, p. 207): “The black prick is responsible for the famine in Africa.” When asked to clarify his stance by *Nice Matin*, he insisted, “It’s the truth! Africa is finishing itself off with all those children born with parents who have nothing to feed them. I’m not the only one to say it. We should sterilize half the planet.” The journalist also had much to say in his book about the case of Niger, where authorities have commenced with prosecuting the crime of defamation of a people. *Afrikara*’s response was as follows (Da Siva/Elinga 2007):

France has recently become a textbook case in terms of the democratization of racist discourse and of concrete practices translating into the inferiorization of blacks in all acts of daily life. The political theater of anti-immigration or housing expulsions have, for about a decade now, displayed and socialized an image of a population who can take the most implacable violence from politics and police, without soliciting any kind of reprobation or ethic consideration. This is physical violence in the name of the fight against clandestine immigration, and verbal violence paired with public insult on prime time media in front of giant audiences.

The same tone is, however, not to be perceived in the principal mainstream media, which empathize with the TV host. “Is Pascal Sevran racist?” (*Le Figaro*, December 7, 2007), “The TV host Pascal Sevran accused of promoting racism and of praising eugenics” (*Le Monde*, December 6, 2006), “Pascal Sevran attacked for inciting racial hatred” (*Libération*, December 13, 2006). None of these headlines actually accuse the TV host. Instead, they either simply state a

question or deliberate the accusations. The two types of media converge neither in their perception nor in their understanding of the issue.

Journalists at *Afrikara* attempt to respond to any wayward comments made towards Islam, Muslims and Arabs. The debates on the positive effects of colonization have reinforced the distinction between mainstream and minority media. Analysis of the responses reveals that the concepts employed are often taken from social criticism and from the American experience, its success and ideas. The French system is directly confronted with its ostensible long-term values of freedom, equality and brotherhood.

Reference is made to François Xavier Verschaves' work on *françafrique* (French Africa) to explain French neo-colonialism's methods of domination. But this work cannot explain why journalists, politicians and intellectuals suddenly abandon all pretense of respect for one another. The explanation for this is to be found in the ideological staging of information.

If, indeed, there are many articles and interviews in *Oumma.com* from researchers and friends of the 'Arab world', similar texts are not to be found on *Afrikara.com*. Solidarity with African/Caribbeans is much too complicated. African specialists are more or less absent from African sites, whereas specialists of Islam are numerous on *Oumma.com*. This is true despite the fact that studies of Islam and of Africa stem from the same colonial inspiration. 'Orientalism' and 'Africanism' function with the same basic paradigms, those of a study of populations demeaned by a fundamental disciplinary essentialism. Apparently, society is not yet prepared to deal with diverging collective memories. In this context, the question of the media's role in 'restructuring' or 'de-structuring' society is certainly a legitimate one.

What will become of integration if the confrontation between the two media persists, and how is the ideological turnaround formulated on a global scale? In order to understand the nature of this confrontation, its content and its objectives, the actors should not be isolated from their actions, but should be seen as part of a global, coherent and integrated symbolic system. Statements originating from the national press make sense within a specific vision and ideology of the world, just as everyday political and cultural actions do. The "abandonment of taboos" (Lindenberg 2002, p. 90) in French society proceeds from what Daniel Lindenberg has called the new reactionaries. The new era has firmly established the public vindication of racism, authoritarianism, a specific 'moral order', and security forces at the service of business.

Behind the statements against Islam, Arabs and Blacks, is the condemnation of equality, brotherhood, freedom and human rights through public statements of certain intellectuals. These people, who freely admit their own xenophobia, also warn against European decadence, the deterioration of the values of knowledge and authority at school, and the loss of excellence and

competitiveness in society. They criminalize the poor and accuse them of willful dependency. The renaissance of the state is seen as a struggle against permissiveness and entails the reconstruction of political authoritarianism. These people praise an America at war with Iraq and are indignant at France's refusal to interfere in an unjustified war. To sum up, there is a coherence exhibited by these phrases and actions connecting these media-hyped statements to a specific worldview. In his *Rappel à l'ordre*, Daniel Lindenberg writes (Lindenberg 2002, p. 12):

The impulse to counteraction is now expanding in broad daylight in different areas: that of May 1968, that of mass culture, that of the rights of mankind, that of anti-racism, and most recently that of Islam. So many untouchable totems are now being toppled one after the other by an iconoclastic verve which is progressively losing its sense of guilt. *Progressively*, because we are speaking of a mechanism; each procedure favors the freeing-up of the next, all the while making opinions acceptable which were formerly judged intolerable. Therefore, the assault on the events of May '68 makes all the easier the attacks against schools and the university, and make the expression of 'anti-youth' points of view banalities. In the same way, the trial of anti-racism allows xenophobic discourse to become everyday as well, going beyond its traditional limits, as the recent wave of Islamophobia shows. In total, the destruction is weighty: open reflection itself is suddenly paralyzed in the face of passions hereto considered inadmissible.

France, then, takes on the colors of American neo-conservatism without the elements of religious revival. Is this only due to the 'negative influence' of the neo-conservative United States? Can all of this be accounted for by American mercantile, ultra-religious, political neo-conservatism? It is necessary to consider the ideological heritage of France's colonial past in this context. Colonial archives on the Muslim policy of colonial France reveal that the current concepts are to be found at the center of the colonial machine. In colonial literature, the Muslim and the 'Negro' are associated with barbarism and non-civilization in caricatured, stereotyped and, in particular, racist terms. In re-reading colonial archives, one finds 'un-thinkables' which currently express the shift to the right in French thought. When Georges Frêche speaks of "sub-human", Pascal Sevran of the "black prick", and Fogiel of the "odors of blacks", there is a direct link to the colonial theories on the 'noble savage'. In much the same way, the link between Islam and fanaticism and violence has its ideological roots in the dark night of colonialism. The connection to American neo-conservatives complements an ideological conception nurtured in part by

colonial literature. Yet, this return to colonial theory proves to be even more reactionary than American conservatism. Recourse to these colonial ‘un-thinkables’ nurtures the ideological turnabout with its abandonment of social taboos. Hence, the individual statements appearing in widely scattered media settings can be interpreted on a global scale by resituating them in their historical context.

Although many observers of the media have perceived an almost ‘born-again’ dimension in Sarkozy, there are other sources of his ideology. “I am a new man,” he declared when he accepted the candidacy of the UMP on January 14, 2007. During his campaign, he strongly insisted on the Christian roots of France. Yet, the greater affinity to the reactionary ideology just mentioned is not to be seen in religion, but in values related to ‘moral order’, security forces, the ideal of excellence, authority at school and in society, and in the condemnation of May ’68. Less than two years after 9/11, the intellectual, media and political groundwork for this ideological turnaround had already been laid. Writers, philosophers, journalists and politicians profited from a well-prepared situation.

Community media also look to the USA and attempt to emulate the gains made by African Americans in civil rights conflicts. At *Afrikara*, hundreds of pages deal with African American personalities and their progress in areas of equality, civil rights and everyday matters. Here, the American experience provides a counterexample to France, and the USA is seen as a model of integration. Still, this does not prevent community media from criticizing American hegemony in the world much as the mainstream media does. African/Caribbean media also adopt the American cult of excellence to promote business and see success as achieved through wealth and prosperity. The doctrine of prosperity transforms the rich into the mouthpiece of the black community in a world abandoned to the market. At this level, the principles of American Pentecostal thought are expressed through the ideology of prosperity. “African leadership”, “ethnic management”, “ethnic networking”, and the “gospelization of the black identity” are concepts that mobilize African/Caribbean media in France. These activities are intimately linked to a certain form of Pentecostalism, which, once entrenched in the group’s identity, inevitably leads to a struggle between good and evil, a war against the devil.

3.5 A black anchor on the 8 pm news: channel *TF1*, Harry Roselmarck and African/Caribbean media

On July 17, 2006, a 34-year-old black journalist replaced the star anchor Patrick Poirre d’Arvor for a month. This was met with great surprise in

France, and was a gesture contrasting with the discriminatory and racist phrases which had led to the opposition between mainstream and community media. France is a country of interesting paradoxes. Several elements converged at this juncture: business, common sense, and an emphasis on the sensational. Interestingly, this did not happen within the context of the public television network, but, as mentioned above, on the private channel *TF1*.

The overwhelming media coverage of this event reveals the cultural schisms in this country and, at the same time, a surprising voluntarism. Several black journalists from cable stations, Christine Kelly of channel *M6*, Karine Lemarchand, Sylvère Cissé, and Arsène Valère, expressed their satisfaction and high expectations regarding Harry's nomination. "I crossed my fingers and said: Let's hope that everything goes right, that he doesn't fall on his face, that he succeeds! Because I knew without a doubt that if he failed, they would have had no pity for him. Because the difficulties associated with our origins means we don't have any margin of error. He absolutely has to succeed", said Sylvère Cissé. This unexpected event provided a surface for projection and led to identification with the first French black anchor in the black communities of France – an emotional event involving a new sense of belonging. The excitement evoked by this event reflects how little headway had actually been made in terms of promoting equality and diversity in society. The African/Caribbean press warmly welcomed the news and did not fail to recall that the U.S.A. and Great Britain, in contrast to France, had been implementing corresponding policies for more than 30 years. Roselmarck himself commented (Roselmarck 2006):

I unabashedly admit that my color had played a role. And I say all the better! It was time for a TV station to make this gesture. [...] *TF1* did this voluntarily; they took the lead and said: We'll take him. We'll put him on at 8 o'clock. I find this simply fantastic. If being black was one of the factors involved in their choosing me – I mean, I don't have any problem at all with that in so far that I know that I have the capacity to fill the position. [...] And it's a positive signal. If it had been negative, I wouldn't have taken it [...].

Harry Roselmarck's 8 o'clock news hour was perceived as a collective effort of the black community of France. The community apparently now had to demonstrate whether a black presenter of the evening news was acceptable.

Afrikara organized a survey within the French black community that revealed that more than 85% of those interviewed supported the nomination. This figure reflects both the experience of minorities with negative representations and their fear that failure could mean another wave of destructive and

racist comments. After ratings showed that viewer loyalty had remained constant, a wave of satisfaction traversed the French black community. The original uproar was easily forgotten, and Roselmarck became a media star with a new dimension. The situation inspired *Afrikara* to note (Afrikara 2006c):

The pilot study was a stroke of genius because, in spite of the many professionals who spoke in its favor, many were those who anticipated, and still do, a turn-about of affairs. Harry certainly has no need for our advice in the managing of his career, nor even of his mission, which at times can certainly be just a little too close for comfort, but we wish in any case to wish him all the best in his endeavors - for that which he is, and for that which others see in him.

There is probably no revolution at Bouygues⁴, but the important thing lies elsewhere. In terms of the impact on the French sense of representation, whether of young blacks who finally witness the widening of their imagined horizon of possibilities, or of Whites brought up on the milk of prejudice and ignorance and shivering at the face of otherness, the discovery of a competent fellow-citizen will awaken a new reference in their hopes and dreams.

The establishment of the *Conseil representative des associations noires* (CRAN - Representative Council of Black Associations) in 2006 indicates a deleterious situation for minorities. CRAN's mission is to fight discrimination against blacks. Notwithstanding its critics, it remains an effective social framework and helps mobilize persons who are not black, but wish to join in the struggle against racism. One of CRAN's projects involves devising a 'barometer' of diversity. This is to display the level of integration of blacks into French society with reference to employment. In 2006, CRAN undertook a study on the status of blacks in France. This study shows that they represent 3.2% of the population and recognize themselves as a visible minority. Fifty-six percent report having experienced discrimination principally at work or in a public place. Those questioned recalled "disdainful, disrespectful, or demeaning attitudes", "verbal assaults", "insults", "difficulty in the purchase or leasing of housing", "police identity controls", "difficulties in relations with public services" and "the refusal of employment" (CRAN 2007, p. 16). "Sixty-one percent of 'blacks' report having experienced at least one situation of discrimination in the last 12 months" (ibid. p. 17) In their struggles against discrimination, the persons questioned appealed to the following for help:

4 The owner of TF1 Channel.

associative groups (81%), schools (72%), the HALDE⁵ (68%), the law (59%), religious leaders (57%), the media (48%), the state (46%), the police (37%), businesses (35%), and politicians (29%) (op.cit., p. 21). These percentages reflect the way in which blacks are covered in the media and the derisive statements produced in the media and by politicians. For some time now, mainstream media have been staging xenophobic acts in order to enhance their own profits. The most marked acts of discrimination as revealed by the survey were insults and acts expressing disdain and hatred. Statements made by Pascal Sevran, Alain Finkelkraut, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, Claude Imbert, Michel Houlebecq, Maurice Dantec, Marc-Olivier Fogiel, Georges Frêche, and Nicolas Sarkozy will not easily be forgotten. Civil rights groups and schools are seen in a more positive light than such celebrities and seem to function as forces promoting social integration in France.

4. Conclusion

The question of integration is recurrent in French political debate and has repeatedly appeared in political and media campaigns over the last 30 years. For certain parties of the right and the extreme right, the issue of integration guarantees their influence with their proposals against laws regarding discrimination, racism, and social cohesion and with their stance against the thousands of organizations that fight xenophobia. The last elections brought immigration to light once again through debates on a concept of 'national identity'. As a result, politicians were perceived as the sole generators of public discourse on integration and immigration. In fact, the major media participate in propagandizing and amplifying the issue, presenting the immigrant as more of a problem than as part of a solution. Since the very first contemporary immigrations, language expressing fear and suspicion has abounded in media reports (Hubsher 2005, p. 478). The French suburbs, residence of economically underprivileged groups, are described as lawless and violent, and as "the abandoned territories of the Republic". Those subjected to this media reporting are allocated no right to response. Until the dawning of the Internet, French people of foreign origin were without any substantial source of information. But the creation of Internet sites, of informative, feminist and general magazines, and of radio stations has transformed the relationship between society and the media.

5 Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations (HALDE – High Authority in the Fight Against Discrimination).

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