

# The Black gangster and the Latino cleaning lady

## DISCRIMINATION AND PREJUDICES ON TELEVISION

Ana Eckhardt Rodriguez

**The article summarises the stereotypical roles assigned to members of minorities in TV and points out recognisable changes.**

In 2017, the global average TV viewing time stood at 2 hours and 56 minutes. However, this figure varies a lot around the regions of the world (Asia: 2 hours and 25 minutes, Europe: 3 hours and 49 minutes, North America: 4 hours and 3 minutes; Eurodata, 2018). During this time, people are often confronted with stereotypical portrayals of minorities, discriminating actions and out-dated perspectives that are reproduced without reflection. Most of the time, this is not purposely intended by producers but rather happens subconsciously (e. g., Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2010). As one of the leading media channels that shapes the daily lives of many people, it is important to understand and critically assess these stereotypes, especially to prevent a systemic reproduction of prejudices. While there are some television programmes that provide a balanced and realistic representation of minorities, the presence of stereotypical roles prevails (e.g., Browne Graves, 1999; Harwood & Anderson, 2002). This includes the limited types of roles that minorities are offered, as well as the overall under-representation in television. Diversity and realistic representations on television not only increase inclusivity but bring many other benefits. While improvements have been recorded, much work remains to be done. This article provides a short overview over re-current prejudices

of minority groups and the roles that are offered to them on television. Positive feedback and examples are then presented.

*Eurodata (2018). One Television Year in the World. Available at: <https://www.eurodatatv.com/en/one-television-year-world> [4.3.18]*

*Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (2010). Rassismus & Diskriminierung in Deutschland. Available at: [https://heimatkunde.boell.de/sites/default/files/dossier\\_rassismus\\_und\\_diskriminierung.pdf](https://heimatkunde.boell.de/sites/default/files/dossier_rassismus_und_diskriminierung.pdf) [8.10.18]*

*Browne Graves, Sherryl (1999). Television and prejudice reduction: When does television as a vicarious experience make a difference? Journal of Social Issues, 55(4), 707-727.*

*Harwood, Jake & Anderson, Karen (2002). The presence and portrayal of social groups on prime-time television. Communication Reports, 15(2), 81-97.*

### PREJUDICES AND DISCRIMINATION OF MINORITY GROUPS

Prejudices nowadays are no longer blatant but have rather developed to a subtle and indirect form, the so-called "latent prejudice" or "everyday racism" (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Bergmann & Erb, 1986; Essed, 1990). This new type of prejudice, according to van Dijk (2012), is a system of ethnic dominance along 2 dimensions: 1) the social dimension; and 2) the cognitive dimension. The former includes everyday social practices of discrimination against minorities and ethnically different groups, including discourse. The latter refers to stereotypes, prejudices, and ideologies of minorities and ethnic groups. Both lead to discriminatory practices against those groups. Many studies focus on prejudices, "specific traits" that people associate with eth-

nic minorities and religion (see, e.g., Katz & Braly, 1993, 1935; Karlins et al., 1969). In earlier studies, results showed that black people and African Americans were characterised, for example, as "athletic", "rhythmic" (both positive stereotypes), but also as "low in intelligence". Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) analysed both blatant and subtle racism in Western European countries. Amongst others they found that the French study participants voiced more prejudice against North Africans than Asians, while Dutch participants showed more prejudice against Turks than Surinamers (see also Hagedoorn & Hraba, 1987). Additionally, they found that negative stereotypes do re-appear again, in particular the perception of "lazy" Blacks in Britain and the Netherlands, and "dishonest" North Africans in France. This is in line with the results of an earlier study, which found that the general stereotypes are not changing but rather personal beliefs are undergoing a shift (Karlins et al., 1969).

The way these stigmatisms and stereotypes are voiced and reproduced in discourse is particularly important for the media and television, as they reproduce our ideas about these minority groups. Mass media has the ability to shape the prejudices of people who have little direct contact to and with minority groups and communities (IFJ, 1997). For instance, studies have found that people watching shows depicting African Americans or people with darker skin as suspects of law suits rather found them to be

guilty than white suspects (see, e.g., Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997; Oliver et al., 2004). Therefore, it is problematic that the majority of programmes are to date not representative of the reality and often based on those (latent) prejudices.

Pettigrew, Thomas & Meertens, Roel (1995). *Subtle and blatant prejudice in Western Europe*. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 25(1), 57-75.

Bergmann, Werner & Erb, Rainer (1986). *Kommunikationslatenz, Moral und öffentliche Meinung. Theoretische Überlegungen zum Antisemitismus in der BR Deutschland*. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 38(2), 223-246.

Essed, Philomena (1990). *Everyday racism: Reports from women of two cultures*. *Alameda: Hunter House*.

van Dijk, Teun (2012). *The role of the press in the reproduction of racism*. In Michi Messer, Renee Schroeder & Ruth Wodak (Eds.), *Migrations: interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 15-29). *Wien: Springer*.

Katz, Daniel & Braly, Kenneth (1933). *Racial stereotypes of one hundred college students*. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 28(3), 280-290.

Katz, Daniel & Braly, Kenneth (1935). *Racial prejudice and racial stereotypes*. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 30(2), 175-193.

Karlins, Marvin, Coffman, Thomas & Walters, Gary (1969). *On the fading of social stereotypes: Studies in three generations of college students*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 13(1), 1-16.

Hagendoorn, Louk & Hraba, Joseph (1987). *Social distance toward Holland's minorities: Discrimination against and among ethnic outgroups 1*. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 10(3), 317-333.

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (1997). *Media and tolerance. UN/UNESCO Seminar on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media (10-13 September)*. *Sofia*. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001117/111758Eo.pdf> [8.10.18]

Hurwitz, Jon & Peffley, Mark (1997). *Public perceptions of race and crime: the role of racial stereotypes*. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(2), 375-401.

Oliver, Mary Beth, Jackson, Ronald, Moses, Ndidi & Dangerfield, Celnisha (2004). *The face of crime: Viewers' memory of race-related facial features of individuals pictured in the news*. *Journal of Communication*, 54(1), 88-104.

groups are thus under-represented on TV, to such an extent that it does not match the real and diverse world.

In Germany, for example, one study found that the TV show *Gute Zeiten Schlechte Zeiten* (*Good Times, Bad Times*), one of the longest running shows in the country and first screened in 1992, only started having a character with a Turkish background in 2008. It has up to date very few characters with Turkish background, even though it is the largest minority group in Germany (Phul, 2011).

## Binary representation

Another common way to define and show minorities is from a binary perspective. This binary representation includes the characteristics of good vs. bad, civilised vs. primitive, ugly vs. excessively attractive, repelling-because-different vs. compelling-because-strange-and-exotic (Morris, 2000, p. 215). It also includes the dualism of the "good" and the "bad" minority group. The "good" group usually being characterised by hard work, while the "bad" group by stealing and criminality, and with being "too-different-to-share-the-Western-values" (Goethe Institut, 2014). One example of this binary representation is the characterisation of Sinti and Roma. Here, the dichotomy includes "the good gypsy", the "mysterious", "carefree" persona versus "the bad gypsy", the "dirty thieves" and "criminals" (Morris, 2000, p. 215). This is similar to the stereotype of black people, who are often shown along two themes: 1) as a "problem", or 2) as a "victim" (IFJ, 1997). Another type of dichotomy is found in the portrayal of many women of minority groups. Arab women, for instance, are either shown as the "sexy belly dancer" or fully veiled, submissive, and oppressed. This is again observable in the portrayal of Asian and Latin American women, who are either "excessively-attractive-because-exotic" or shy, naïve and prude. For example, negative responses were voiced against the character Ling Woo in the drama se-

ries *Ally McBeal*. In the show, "while she is different from the typical submissive Asian female stereotype, her sexuality is used to define her as a person. Her background is not completely explored, adding to her mysteriousness as a character on the show. At the same time, she is devoid of emotion – another Asian stereotype." (Sreedhar, 2013)

Dyer, Richard (1997). *White*. *London/New York: Routledge*.

Phul, Patrick (2011). *Migranten in der Medienwirklichkeit*. *Bachelor's thesis*. *Cologne*.

Morris, Rachel (2000). *Gypsies, travellers and the media: Press regulation and racism in the UK*. *Tolleys Communications Law*, 5(6), 213-219.

Goethe Institut (2014). *Medien und Minderheiten – Fragen der Repräsentation im internationalen Vergleich*. Available at: <http://www.goethe.de/lhr/prj/d30/ver/dok/de13758463.htm> [20.9.18]

Sreedhar, Anjana. (2013). *5 most offensive Asian characters in TV history*. *Article in Salon*. Available at: [https://www.salon.com/2013/09/22/tvs\\_5\\_most\\_offensive\\_asian\\_characters\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2013/09/22/tvs_5_most_offensive_asian_characters_partner/) [20.9.18]

## STEREOTYPICAL PORTRAYALS AND ROLES PLAYED BY MEMBERS OF MINORITIES

In the media and television, one main stereotype prevails: that of the criminal foreigner, the "bad" minority group. In Germany, for example, one study found that Turkish men are often represented as "machos", wearing trendy clothes, a lot of jewellery, and gel in the hair, as well as in connection to crime and violence (Schorb et al., 2003). Therefore, most Turkish men in Germany are shown as the "criminal foreigner" on television.

The connection of minorities to violence is also very predominant regarding other men from ethnic minority groups, including black men, Arab men and Muslims. Black men, for example, are often portrayed as being violent, particularly in relation to sexual violence (Hall, 1992). This prejudice is often represented in TV, where they tend to be offered the roles of the criminal, the gang member, the drug dealer or human trafficker, to name a few. Latin American men are commonly stereotyped to be less educated and

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### Underrepresentation

The tendency in Western media and television is the representation of white people in central, leading and elaborated roles; they are depicted as the standard (Dyer, 1997). In comparison, non-whites and members of minority groups are shown, if represented at all, as supporting characters. Minority

more prone to criminal activities (Latino Voices, 2014). They rarely play major roles in television, such as in the TV show *CSI Miami*, and if they do it is usually the role of the criminal instead of being a member of the police or the forensic team (Lozovina, 2016). Arab and Muslim men are mostly portrayed as the “threat of a State of Islam in the West” (Said, 1997) through roles as the fundamentalist Muslim and terrorist (Halse, 2015).

Next to crime and violence as returning prejudices against ethnic minorities, another big issue is the limited types of roles minorities are offered in television. Stereotypical roles of minority women include: 1) prostitutes (e.g., Eide & Nikunen, 2011); 2) cleaning staff (Ill. 1; e.g., Rivadeneyra, 2006); and 3) immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers (e.g., Mastro & Greenberg, 2000).

Black women, for example, are screened as loud, angry and controlling; their natural hair is considered unprofessional and rarely shown (see, e.g., Walley-Jean, 2009; Thompson, 2009).

Besides crime and violence related roles, men from minority groups are often offered the role of low-skilled workers or labourers (Punyanunt-

Carter, 2008); other stereotypical roles are: 1) the wise/mystical advisor or Kung Fu master (Park, Gabbadon & Chernin, 2006); and 2) the shop, kiosk or restaurant owner and vegetable merchant (e.g., Treviño, 1985). Asian men, in addition, often play the nerd or geek, which tends to come together with being socially awkward and insecure (Mok, 1998; Zhang, 2010).

The list of cliché roles is large and these roles above are only some examples. What tends to bind all the characters is the continuous portrayal of all these characters having a thick accent and struggling with the local language.

Schorb, Bernd, Echtermeyer, Karin, Lauber, Achim & Eggert, Susanne (2003). Was guckst du, was denkst du?: Der Einfluss des Fernsehens auf das Ausländerbild von Kindern im Alter von 9 bis 14 Jahren. *Schriftenreihe der ULR*, 22. Kiel: Schmidt & Klaunig, ULR.

Hall, Ronald (1992). African-American male stereotypes: Obstacles to social work in a multicultural society. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 1(4), 77-90.

Latino Voices (2014). The impacts of crime and criminal justice policies on Latinos. Available at: [http://www.lchc.org/wp-content/uploads/LatinoReport\\_low-res\\_06.23.14v2.pdf](http://www.lchc.org/wp-content/uploads/LatinoReport_low-res_06.23.14v2.pdf) [20.9.18]

Lozovina, Dario (2016). Racial profiling in *CSI Miami*. Available at: <https://repositorij.unizd.hr/islandora/object/unizd:1122/preview> [20.9.18]

Said, Edward (1997). *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*. New York: Random House.

Halse, Rolf (2015). Counter-stereotypical images of Muslim characters in the television serial 24: A difference that makes no difference. *Critical Studies in Television*, 10(1), 54-72.

Eide, Elisabeth & Nikunen, Kaarina (2011). *Media in motion: Cultural complexity and migration in the Nordic region*. New York: Routledge.

Rivadeneyra, Rocío (2006). Do you see what I see? *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 21(4), 393-414.

Mastro, Dana & Greenberg, Bradley (2000). The portrayal of racial minorities on prime time television. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44(4), 690-703.

Walley-Jean, Celeste (2009). Debunking the myth of the “Angry Black Woman”. *Black Women, Gender + Family*, 3(2), 68-86.

Thompson, Cheryl (2009). *Black women, beauty, and hair as matter of being*. *Women’s Studies*, 38, 831-856.

Punyanunt-Carter, Narissa (2008). The perceived realism of African American portrayals on television. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 19, 241-257.

Park, Ji Hoon, Gabbadon, Nadine & Chernin, Ariel (2006). Naturalizing racial differences through comedy: Asian, Black, and White views on racial stereotypes in *Rush Hour 2*. *Journal of Communication*, 56(1), 157-177.

Treviño, Jesús Salvador (1985). Jump Cut: A review of *Contemporary Media* (No. 30, March 1985), 14-16. Available at: [https://blogs.uprm.edu/film/files/2012/12/Latino-portrayals-in-film-and-television\\_Trevino.pdf](https://blogs.uprm.edu/film/files/2012/12/Latino-portrayals-in-film-and-television_Trevino.pdf) [8.10.18]

Mok, Teresa (1998). *Getting the message: Media images and stereotypes and their effect on Asian Americans*. *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*, 4(3), 185-202.

Zhang, Qin (2010). *Asian Americans beyond the model minority stereotype: The nerdy and the left out*. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 3(1), 20-37.

## POSITIVE FEEDBACK AND EXAMPLES

Many improvements have been recorded in the representation of minorities in the media and television, as well as the roles that are offered to members of minority groups. In Europe, the UK, the Netherlands and by now also Germany, media producers are increasingly participating in multicultural programme development. This encompasses the inclusion of minorities in the mainstream shows, the supporting of minorities in media companies, and providing specific programmes for minorities in the information- and entertainment areas (Volf, 2003). Some examples of television programmes that have received positive feedback regarding their representation of minorities, are presented below.

Positive feedback was found, for example, regarding the TV show *Insecure*. A review states: “I saw not just my life, but the lives of my friends — both men and women — projected on the small screen in a way that didn’t involve fist fights or screaming matches over a man. (...) The second element many of us viewers were grateful for was the (friendship) relationship between Molly and Issa. (...) Third, I was grateful in this season to see the microaggressions brown folks often encounter at work depicted with both seriousness and levity.” (Davis, 2016)

Positive reactions were also found regarding the representation of economic classes in the TV series *Jane the Virgin*. Here, the writer of a review states: “Many non-Hispanic Americans mistakenly believe that Latinos are largely confined to lower-level jobs like as maids or gardeners (...). *Jane*



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Ill. 1: Stereotypical roles in Hollywood movies: the Latino room maid in *Maid in Manhattan*

Game of Thrones is currently broadcast on Sky (Germany). © (2019) Home-Box Office, Inc. All rights reserved. HBO® and all related programs are the property of Home-Box Office, Inc.



Ill. 2: German actress Sibel Kekilli as Shae in the fantasy series *Game of Thrones*

*the Virgin* dispels this myth by depicting Latino characters of all economic classes — from the incredibly wealthy family of Jane’s father and her child’s father, to Jane’s own working-class family. The characters pursue a variety of careers (...).” (Zeilinger, 2015)

The TV shows *Fresh off the boat*, *Master of None*, and *The Edge of Seventeen* also got positive responses, in these cases regarding the representation of Asian people on television. It is stated that “the quest for increased Asian representation is, at its simplest, a desire to be portrayed as Dev in *Master of None* or as Erwin Kim in *The Edge of Seventeen*: just a normal person, with normal anxieties about dating, eating, career paths and all the other foibles of navigating modern life.” (Seto, 2017) Regarding the portrayal of Muslims, the Canadian TV show *Little Mosque on the Prairie* was found to be “a comic relief to succour anti-Muslim fears and hostility, as the show directly opposes

stereotypes and hostile perceptions toward Muslims by exaggerating these attitudes or exposing their instrumentalisation by Western media. (...) The characters in *Little Mosque* reflect the diversity among the followers of Islam and its varying ideologies in opposition to the perception that the religion is homogenous and monolithic; their designations include reformist, moderate/feminist, conservative, and also nominal.” (Chao, 2015) In Germany, one example of an actress that has escaped stereotypical roles is Sibel Kekilli, a German actress from a family with Turkish origin. She has played in the film *Gegen die Wand* in 2004 and more recently

in the US TV series *Game of Thrones* (Ill. 2). Sibel Kekilli had also become the inspector Sarah Brandt in the German TV crime series *Tatort* (Made for minds, 2016).

Volf, Patrick (2003). Medien – Minderheiten zwischen Klischee und Mainstream. *Demokratiezentrum Wien*. Available at: [http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/file-admin/media/pdf/volf\\_medien2.pdf](http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/file-admin/media/pdf/volf_medien2.pdf) [20.9.18]

Davis, Arianna (2016). Dear Issa Rae: Thank you for season 1 of *Insecure*. *Refinery*, 29. Available at: <https://www.refinery29.com/2016/11/131136/insecureseason-1-review-issa-rae-black-women-stereotypes> [20.9.18]

Zeilinger, Julie (2015). 6 ways “Jane the Virgin” is destroying Latino stereotypes. Available at: <https://mic.com/articles/110768/6-ways-jane-the-virgin-is-destroying-latino-stereotypes#.F1quD4LKX> [20.9.18]

Seto, Fern (2017). How Aziz Ansari & ‘*Master of None*’ improves Asian representation on screen. *Article in Highsnobiety*. Available at: <https://www.highsnobiety.com/2017/05/18/aziz-ansari-master-of-none/> [20.9.18]

Chao, Jenifer (2015). *Oppositional banality: Watching ordinary Muslims in “Little Mosque on the Prairie”*. Available at: <https://necus-ejms.org/oppositional-banality-watching-ordinary-muslims-in-littlemosque-on-the-prairie/> [20.9.18]

Made for minds/Deutsche Welle (2016). *Diskriminierung im deutschen Film?* Available at: <https://www.dw.com/de/diskriminierung-im-deutschenfilm/a-19007719> [20.9.18]

## CONCLUSION

The representation of prejudices and discriminatory practices in television likely shapes the view of people to the negative (e.g., Fujioka, 1999). At the same time, diversity in the media and television not only is inclusive by enabling a larger number of people to identify with the characters, but also brings other benefits, such as: 1) attracting a broader range of readers and viewers; 2) providing access to diverse sources of information leading to an increase of standards; and 3) attracting consumers from different backgrounds leading to an increase of economic benefits (IFJ, 1997). While some actors and actresses have succeeded in escaping stereotypical roles in Western media and the representation of minority groups has improved, a lot of changes are left to be done. One way to increase the number of success stories by eliminating stereotypes and providing a realistic representation of minority groups is to support positive coverage. This can be done, amongst others, by generating incentives and offering further education and training, or promoting the access of ethnic minorities into the media production (Bonfadelli, 2007). ■

Fujioka, Yuki (1999). *Television portrayals and African American stereotypes: Examination of television effects when direct contact is lacking*. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 76(1), 52-75.

Bonfadelli, Heinz (2007). *Die Darstellung ethnischer Minderheiten in deutschen Massenmedien*. In Heinz Bonfadelli & Heinz Moser (Eds.), *Medien und Migration: Europa als multikultureller Raum?* (pp. 95-116). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

## THE AUTHOR

Ana Eckhardt Rodriguez, BA in Political Science, Msc Economics and Business Administration, is a Research Manager at VVA Economics & Policy, Brussels, Belgium.

