

Cultural diversity and inclusion in Italian media: Between (in) visibility and self-representation

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Abstract

Over the past 30 years, several European institutions have called for ethnic and cultural diversity to be reflected in the work of news media, either in the content they produce or in the composition of newsrooms. Italy as a country and as a media system has so far shown limited interest in the issue. However, the children of the protagonists of the major waves of immigration of the late 1980s and early 1990s are claiming a public voice. Over the past decade, a new generation of journalists and media professionals with an immigrant background has come to the fore. This paper presents the findings of an exploratory study of legacy media and digital native media in Italy. Through interviews with editors and senior journalists and young racialised journalists, the paper reflects on the perceptions of diversity within the industry. It shows how traditional media struggle to intercept and connect with this new generation of journalists. At the same time, digital media and social media provide fragmented spaces for their voices to be heard.

Keywords

Cultural diversity, inclusion, Italy, immigration, representation, racialisation

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, the demographic and social landscape of Italy has undergone a remarkable transformation. According to the Italian Office of National Statistics, in 1995 children born in Italy to foreign nationals accounted for 1.7% of total births; in 2015 this figure was 14.9% (ISTAT, 2020). As of today, there are about 2,6 million

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children of immigrants, either born in Italy or taken to Italy as children and raised in the country. Due to a restrictive citizenship law informed by the *jus sanguinis* (right of blood), almost a million of them (936,000), do not have Italian citizenship (IRES-Emilia-Romagna, 2024: 12; see also Tintori, 2018).

These numbers, while emphasising the level of cultural diversity of Italian society, point to some important questions about the way such diversity is reflected in and represented by the media. Over the years, the issue of “immigration” has never ceased to occupy a central position in political debate and media discourse (Maneri, 2016). However, the attention to immigration as a permanent “emergency” (Bruno and Peruzzi, 2020: 35) has obfuscated the fact that the first children of the major flows of immigration of the late 1980s and early 1990s are today in their thirties and that Italian society is factually a multicultural (Gilroy, 2005). In 2005, with the constitution of Rete 2G (Network Second Generations) children of immigrants claimed a public voice to push for a new citizenship law. They started blogs, websites and news portals (Morani, 2022). This process has intensified in recent years and particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests, between 2020 and 2021. From these experiences, some have moved into journalism, others have embraced podcasting and social media (Finozzi, 2023). There is a terminological challenge in defining the young participants of this study. The term “second generations” has been critiqued for its analytical limitations (see for example, Thomassen, 2010; Frisina and Kyeremeh, 2021), while “new citizens” and “new Italians” have become more visible in literature over the years (Bachis, 2025). However, Hawthorne (2021, 39) emphasises that the use of “second generations” by Rete G2 activists differs from scholarly debates as it tends to include people who arrived in Italy as young children, as well as adoptees and children of mixed backgrounds. The participants in this study reflect the complexity of these experiences. The issue of racialisation emerges as central in most cases and “race” as an active signifier (Hall, 1997), a discourse that defines who belongs and who does not belong (Colombo, 2013).

This paper presents the findings of the first study on the issue of cultural and ethnic diversity in news media in Italy that includes the perspectives of editors and senior journalists alongside those of young journalists and media professionals with an immigrant and/or racialised background. While providing an insight into the level of cultural and ethnic diversity of the media industry, this study offers a necessary reflection on how journalists perceive “diversity”. The study addresses two research questions (RQ): RQ1 What are the perceptions of journalists about cultural and ethnic diversity in the media? RQ2 What opportunities are available in the Italian news media industry to journalists of immigrant and/or racialised background? Amid an ongoing crisis of legacy media, news media outlets appear by and large to pay limited attention to the issue of cultural and ethnic diversity. On the other hand, journalists and media professionals of immigrant and/or racialised background navigate through the blurring boundaries of contemporary journalism seeking for opportunities and creating spaces for themselves when those opportunities do not materialize in established media outlets.

Articulations of diversity in media and journalism

The debate about media and diversity has been particularly lively in the first decade of the 21st century. During that time, several initiatives either supported or initiated by European institutions were undertaken with the aim of “strengthening the capacity of the media to reflect diversity” (Triandafyllidou and Ulasiuk, 2011: 3; see also FRA, 2008; EC, 2009). These initiatives were generally informed by European policies that addressed issues of inclusion and integration of immigrants and promoted strategies to achieve “social cohesion” (Council of Europe, 2004). Understandably, diversity in the media has broader significations than just the issue of “immigration”; it can refer to the representation of gender, age, disability, race, social class, and more. Nonetheless, much of the research conducted in the European context over the past two decades appears to have the issue of ethnic and cultural diversity as its main concern.

This interest reflects the fluctuating debates about multiculturalism and its declinations in different countries. A number of studies have investigated how “multicultural societies” are represented in national media, paying particular attention to public broadcasters (Horsti et al., 2014; Horsti and Hultén, 2011; Rogers et al., 2014), to diversity in the newsrooms (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2021; Lück et al., 2022; McGuinness et al., 2023), and to the role of migrants, including “second generations”, in the media industry (Leurdijk, 2006; Markova and McKay, 2013; Triandafyllidou, 2013). Northern European countries are at the forefront of research and policy in this area. Within Europe, the United Kingdom have historically been an early reference point in academic and policy debates around the politics of representation and diversity (Cottle, 2000). Responding to the Equality Act 2003, public and private media outlets such as the *BBC*, *Channel 4*, *The Guardian*, and *The Financial Times*, have developed internal diversity strategies that stand as models for organisations in other countries, although issues of exclusion along racial and social lines persist (Douglas, 2021). In comparison to these cases, very limited scholarly and policy attention has been paid to Southern European countries.

The case of Italy is exemplary of this trend. Meli (2015) conducted a qualitative comparative study on diversity in the media in six European countries with the aim of providing suggestions for the Italian context. She highlighted that Italy was the only country where she had to explain the meaning of diversity in the media (2015: 4). Her findings resonate with those of the questionnaire-based study *Media for Diversity and Migrant Integration* (Triandafyllidou and Ulasiuk, 2011). Respondents from Italian media were not aware of equality policies and diversity monitoring practices. In one of the few specific contributions on this subject, Bruno and Peruzzi (2021) stress that the application of policies and practices of diversity and inclusion in the journalistic profession is virtually unexplored in Italy. In the first decade of the 2000s several national newspapers run “multicultural” sections, but by the mid 2010s they were all closed. Up to this time, there were also about 150 “multicultural media” serving specific immigrant communities or immigrants more broadly (Maneri and Meli, 2007). Some journalists from these outlets have tried to enter mainstream media, with limited success (Facchini, 2017). To this day, journalists of immigrant and/or racialised background are almost absent in national news broadcasts and have a very limited presence across all legacy media (Boccatto and

Guidotti, 2023). These contributions highlight a gap in the knowledge of the issue of diversity in Italian media and especially in relation to the role of journalists of immigrant and/or racialised background.

Metykova (2016: 3-4) provides a useful framework for the representation of diversity in the media pointing to the representation of various voices in society, the access of communication channels, and to a wide range of choices. Webster (2017) defines “diversity of exposure” the possibility for TV audiences to access a wide variety of channels. In a similar vein, various authors have conflated diversity with “pluralism” (see for example Napoli, 2007). For McGuinness et al. (2023), diversity in the news industry has essentially two interrelated dimensions: representation and content. Representational diversity relates to the dimension of production (diversity within the newsroom), while content is what is being produced and disseminated (how diverse is the content). Awad Cherit (2008: 56) asks if cultural diversity in the news media should be “a democratic or commercial need”. She distinguishes between a “laissez-faire” model and an “interventionist” model. The first one is exemplified by the USA, where “diversity is promoted as a source of journalistic excellence and as a source of economic profit”. The interventionist model, in contrast, “underlies governmental efforts to distribute economic resources, ensure legal regulations, and engage openly in public discourse to promote certain multicultural goals”.

The authors of the Kerner Report (NACCD, 1967), who investigated the way media had reported on human rights protests across the USA of the 1960s, believed that having different (black) faces on television and in the newsrooms would make a change to the way society sees itself (see also Byerly and Wilson, 2009). Mislán (2018: 514), however, argues that “evidence that would suggest diverse newsrooms function differently is scarce”, and Nishikawa et al. (2009: 255) contend that minority journalists working in mainstream media may internalize the journalistic norms of their profession. Deuze (2005) argues that journalists these days need to develop an active awareness of the needs of culturally diverse publics. This point is supported by Triandafyllidou and Ulasiuk (2011), who suggest that more diversity in the production chain improves the media product and appeals wider audiences, while leading to greater social cohesion. The findings of the present study provide support for the idea that ethnic and cultural diversity in the media production chain enriches society at large. At the same time, they invite to pay closer attention to the complexity of contemporary media systems.

Echoing Silverstone (2007), Siapera (2010) stresses that, in our contemporary hypermediated societies, diversity is not something that media can reflect or represent, but something that is already operating also in the media. Her argument resonates with the concept of complexity developed by Jesús Martín-Barbero (1988). Drawing on a post-colonial perspective, Martín-Barbero emphasises how mediation is a non-linear process; hegemonic forces penetrate rather than dominate social actors. Coudry (2024) believes that the theoretical work of Martín-Barbero remains relevant despite a deeply transformed scenario. For example, his attention to inequality was not limited to economic inequality, but also to symbolic inequality, that is “inequality in the distribution of voice and the opportunity to speak and be heard” (Coudry, 2024: 662). In more participatory media systems, such as those brought about by the digital revolution, minorities can let more

easily their voice be heard, although arguably to smaller, segmented, audiences (Deuze and Prenger, 2019). Siapera (2010: 77) takes this further, stressing that, depending on contextual factors, diversity can either be encouraged or ignored, but it may also “fight back, respond, resist, represent itself and/or all at the same time”. This last point is particularly relevant to the present study.

Media and Italian society

Italy has been defined as an example of “television-centred” country (Shehata and Strömbäck, 2011) in which television occupies a dominant role compared to other media. Newspapers never developed mass circulation, but, reflecting a high “political parallelism” (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 102), they have “often taken an activist role, mobilizing their readers to support political causes and participate in political events”. To this day, they are influential in political discourse, contributing to set the agenda of public debate (Padovani et al., 2021). Similarly to other countries, over the last few decades newspapers have lost readership, while newsrooms have continued to shrink. Between 2019 and 2023, the daily circulation of print copies of newspapers has almost halved, while digital copies of newspapers have only increased by 13,3% (AGCOM, 2024). However, the changes in the way audiences consume media have not left broadcasters unscathed. Between 2019 and 2023, national television broadcasters have lost almost three million viewers. Over the past decade, a few digital native news outlets (Salaverría, 2020) such as *Il Post* and *Fanpage* have established a visible profile, growing in credibility and popularity (Cornia, 2024).

Between 2010 and 2018, the number of “active journalists” registered with the Order of Journalists declined by 10,7%, reaching the figure of 35,706 (AGCOM, 2020). About 45% of active journalists are freelance, a percentage which reaches 75% in digital newsrooms. The trend toward atypical and insecure employment is well established, and precarization is acknowledged as one of the main challenges for journalists (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2019: 11). These days, as noted by Deuze and Witschge (2020), journalists very often work across communication fields; their professional identity has changed to include different types of communication work.

Italy is one the European countries with the highest level of state subsidies to the press (EC, 2024). This is historically done to guarantee a stable pluralism of voices. Subsidies are directed primarily to outlets run by cooperatives, not-for-profit organisations and linguistic minorities. The fact that media from linguistic minorities receive institutional support may point to an interest of policymakers to cultivate “diversity” of voices across Italian society. However, these are specific exceptions designed for historical communities, whose recognition is the outcome of post-WWII international treaties (Sierp, 2008).

The journalistic profession is regulated by a public body, the Order of Journalists (ODG), which was created in 1963 to give journalists a legal status like that of doctors, lawyers and other professionals. Membership to the ODG is, in principle, a requirement to practice the profession. However, in a rapidly changing media landscape, many young people do not feel the need to join the Order to do media work. Only two of the “second

generations” participants in this study are members of the Order. It is worth paying attention to the procedures of access to the Order, as they have some implications for the issue of diversity.

There are two main categories of journalist recognised by the ODG: the publicist and the professional. To become a publicist, one must demonstrate a paid collaboration with a registered media outlet lasting at least 2 years. At the end of this period, they will apply to the Order to obtain the publicist card. To become a professional, the traditional route is an 18-month paid internship, at the end of which one must sustain two in-person exams (written and oral). Opportunities for paid internships are increasingly limited these days, so part of the internship can be completed through one of the master’s programmes recognised by the Order.¹ Most of the participants in this study argued that it is difficult for them to join the Order; some may not yet have Italian citizenship but the most common reason is the cost of the master’s degrees. Furthermore, even completing one of these degrees cannot guarantee access to an established media without the “right” connections. Many interviews highlight how issues of racialisation intersect with social class inequality, similarly to what happens in other European countries (Markova and McKay, 2013; Lück et al., 2022).

Methodological considerations

This paper is based on an exploratory study undertaken between December 2023 and May 2024. Given the limited literature on the issue of cultural diversity in Italian media, an exploratory approach has been deemed appropriate for this study (Stebbins, 2011). Drawing on interpretative theoretical frameworks influenced by Cultural Studies and post-colonial theory (Allan, 2010; Gilroy, 2005; Hall, 2006), journalists are conceptualised as cultural producers who can shape public discourse, social narratives and collective identities – including racialised ones – and news as a form of “social knowledge” that provides “an ideological construction of contending truth-claims about reality” (Allan, 2010: 5). The study has comprised of twenty semi-structured interviews. Ten interviews were conducted with editors-in-chief and senior journalists from newspapers, magazines, broadcasters and digital native media whose careers span between 20 and 40 years. Ten interviews were conducted with journalists, video-makers, podcasters and graphic journalists aged between 26 and 42, whose family roots are in eight different countries.² Both cohorts of participants were selected through non-probability purposive sampling, as this approach best reflects the exploratory purpose of the study. The decision not to focus on one specific type of media was made to gather a broader understanding of the relevance of the issue of diversity in the journalistic profession. On the other hand, most of the younger journalists tend to operate *across* media, which is a pattern worth of consideration.

The younger participants were selected because they were either born or raised in Italy to immigrant parents and they do journalistic work for a living. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the sample is not an accurate representation of the demographic profile of immigration in Italy; the aim is to learn about those who work as journalists. The first selection criterion was extended to include those who, although born to Italian parents,

may be racialised because of the colour of their skin or their somatic characteristics. The conflation of immigration and race in debates about citizenship and nationhood is a key trait of contemporary Italy (Pesarini and Tintori, 2020). According to Hawthorne (2021: 9), in Italy “racism continues to reproduce and renew the category of race through new essentialisms that do not necessarily invoke blood or skin, but gain their meaning through other signifiers – including citizenship”.

The interviews lasted on average 45 minutes and followed a biographical approach (Back, 2007: 23). The interviews were conducted in Italian and were transcribed and translated by the researcher. The data was analysed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This approach invites the researcher to acknowledge the position they occupy in relation to the topic and the participants (see also Finlay, 2002; Mauro, 2019). The issue of positionality (Goundar, 2025) influenced the research design. As a former journalist and reporter who worked for more than a decade on migration issues in Italy, I was quite familiar with the issues discussed in the interviews. However, more importantly, as a white, middle-aged man, my role as a researcher might be perceived differently by senior journalists compared to young racialised ones. At the same time, the fact that I was born in Switzerland to working-class parents, and raised in Italy, gave to my experience some reference points closer to those of the younger participants. In the following sections, I will discuss two themes emerging from the analysis: perceptions of diversity in the workforce and content and diversity. Some participants consented to waive anonymity and will be quoted with their name.

“We are not in the UK or the USA” – diversity in the workforce

In the interviews, senior journalist mentioned diversity in the workplace mainly in relation to the gender gap, which is notable in leadership positions.³ Their responses articulate an emerging discourse that, while acknowledging social changes, foregrounds the limits of traditional media to intercept and reflect them (Siapera, 2010). In 2023, the daily *La Stampa*, appointed the first “diversity editor” of an Italian news media outlet, Pasquale Quaranta, who today covers the same role also for *La Repubblica*.

Diversity is the big elephant in the room in our newsrooms. At some point I looked at my newsroom. I saw all white faces, 50-year-old and over on average, mainly man in leading positions. Two or three openly gay. This is not just our newspaper, it’s the same everywhere; there are cultural, social, historical reasons for this.

The role of “diversity editor” has limited scope, as the organisation does not yet have a diversity strategy. Its main duties are about finding the right language when talking about marginalised communities and the organisation of training activities in collaboration with the Order of Journalists.

Compared to previous studies (Meli, 2015; Triandafyllidou, 2013), my research shows more awareness of the issue, but there is also a sense of distance from it, as if cultural diversity is not truly an issue in Italy yet. *Il Post* is a digital media founded in 2010. It is one of the few established news media born and operating online. On their website, they

publish the staff members' list. Among 70 people, about 20 are non-journalists.⁴ The editor and founder, Luca Sofri, confirms that the only person with an immigrant background is an audio technician.

I think it's a bit early for our news media; we are not in the UK or the USA, our history of immigration is younger. Maybe it's my age, I am 60, but I don't see a big cultural diversity in the media business yet. If I look at the job proposals that I receive, maybe just one in fifty could be from someone with an immigrant background. This will change.

Internazionale is a weekly magazine specialised in international news that has built a reputation for high quality commentary and reporting. They recently appointed as columnist Nadeesha Uyangoda, a young writer of Sri Lanka origin, but raised in Italy. Out of 30 people working in its newsroom, two have family roots in France and Japan, none are from the Global South. The editor and founder Giovanni De Mauro stresses the role of his outlet in Italy's media landscape:

We were the first to give a space to the second generations, already years ago. It was a way to let new voices be heard. But let's be honest, the attention to diversity in our industry is very limited and we live in a society where racism is still widespread. I don't think newspapers are the exception in the way they represent diversity.

Most of the senior journalists argue that there are less opportunities for paid work with news media, and they believe this is the main problem they face, not the lack of diversity. At the same time, according to Anna Meli, researcher and former director of the Association Carta di Roma⁵, "diversity is perceived by many as a fringe issue, as the sector is struggling and the crisis is palpable". A senior female producer with the national broadcaster RAI believes that it is particularly difficult for young journalists with an immigrant background to be hired.

Journalism is a very closed profession, and this is particularly true at RAI. It is a matter of class mainly, but also of gender. If you are from an immigrant background, and not from affluent families, it is a big hurdle to overcome.

Today, the public broadcaster employs about 2000 journalists, but there are no official data on their ethnic and national backgrounds.⁶ According to a senior female executive, only a handful have an immigrant or mixed national background. They were mostly hired abroad by RAI Med., a channel operating between 2001 and 2014 devoted to North-Africa. So far, no black or ethnic minority journalist has presented a prime-time national news bulletin in any of the three channels of RAI.

All the senior journalists interviewed acknowledge Italy as a multicultural (Gilroy, 2005) but struggle to see "minorities" as either a source of journalistic excellence or as a source of economic profit, as they could help to reach new audiences (Awad Cherit, 2008; Lück et al., 2022). On the other hand, the lack of attention of policymakers and the industry to diversity policies reduces the opportunities for the "second generations" and

racialised minorities, who must overcome multiple hurdles to enter the industry (Markova and McKay, 2013). This trend might have been exacerbated by the ongoing crisis of legacy media, but it remains a trait that distinguishes the Italian case from other European countries (Meli, 2015; Triandafyllidou and Ulasiuk, 2011). At the same time, there are signs of change. The evolution of the media landscape leads to a more visible participation of ethnic minorities in the media, but mainly outside traditional media, which resonates with the theoretical point raised by Siapera (2010: 77) where she argues that if diversity is ignored or marginalised, “it may fight back” and “represent itself”.

Life at the margins?

All but one of the young participants in this study are freelance; this is in line with national statistics as almost eight out of 10 journalists in Italy are freelance (AGCOM, 2020). They contribute to magazines and newspapers while producing podcasts, they do PR work, social media management for NGOs and even copy for advertising. And they sometimes do this across countries and languages, for international media or diasporic media. The fluidity of their professional identity (Deuze and Prenger, 2019: 16) arguably intersects with the issue of access to established media organisations. As noted by one participant, “To even think of doing freelance work for a national newspaper you need contacts. There is no simple, linear route to follow, particularly if you are from a racialised minority” (female, 31).

To some extent, Black Lives Matter represented a moment of change for Italian media. Publishers, magazines and newspapers, but also the national broadcaster, approached young racialised Italians, particularly women, and gave them “space” (Medugno, 2023). However, in most cases their interest revealed to be temporary and conditional. An exemplary case is that of Danielle Madam. Born in Cameroon in 1997 and raised in Italy since the age of 7, she was hired by RAI to co-present *Euro Nights*, the main show about the 2020 Men’s Euro Championship.

I was given a great opportunity, never before a black woman had presented a programme like this on Italian TV. I understand it happened because of everything that was generated by Black Lives Matter. The feedback was positive, but there was no follow up. Since then, I have received many invitations to take part in talk shows, but essentially to talk about racism. I decline. It’s not my job to be black.

The idea that black and racialised people can only access the media to talk about racism or issues related to their personal experience of “immigrants” emerged in many interviews. Declining the invitations may mean missing a job opportunity but working your way out of this is not easy. For most of the interviewees it means using other spaces, outside traditional media, or creating their own (Ardizzoni, 2025). In 2022, a group of self-defined “racialised female journalists” based in Milan set up a news media company, Dotz, with funding from the European Cultural Fund. On their website, they claim: “The lack of diversity in the newsrooms and the persistent inappropriate and biased language in describing the ‘other’ is still a big issue in Italian and European journalism and DOTZ

wants to be an alternative to that”.⁷ One of the founders stresses that the main problem for independent media is sustainability. “It is very difficult to do this job if you are not from an affluent family. So, to pay the rent I do also other media work for organisations and institutions” (female, 34).

Colory, based in Rome, started as a website telling stories about the second generations. They have developed into a media company of four which seeks stories not covered by other media. They also organise public events to connect with their emerging audience, their community, and work with companies that are interested in communicating “diversity”. The motto published on the website states: “ITALY HAS CHANGED. It’s time to write about it”.⁸

We are from many different origins, but we came together as racialised persons. All of us have been victims of micro-aggressions in everyday life. We felt that the media did not cover these themes, and if they covered them, they were not accurate as they would be by someone who does not share this life experience. (male, 30).

As a theoretical standpoint, I understand race and racialisation being essential reference points in my analysis of Italian media and society (Delgado et al., 2017). An interviewee of Albanian background, who works in the newsroom of a national newspaper, admitted that, for most her life, she “passed” as Italian. The colour of her skin and her somatic traits allowed her to hide her background, a well-known pattern among youth of immigrant background in Italy (Colombo, 2013).

Until quite recently, I made my best to hide my origin. I never mentioned that I was born in Albania, although I am often asked the origin of my name. Some thought it was an exotic name chosen by hippy parents. Even in the newsroom some people don’t know about my background. (female, 39).

The young participants in this study often lament of not being heard or seen by mainstream media, or of being misrepresented. However, in the face of “symbolic inequality” – that is, in the words of Couldry (2024: 662), “inequality in the distribution of voice and the opportunity to speak and be heard” – they have created websites and news portals, started podcasts, and arguably pushed established media to include different angles in their stories (Morani, 2022). This development is enabled by the availability of spaces in the digital environment, and by the emergence of new media, which provide unmapped possibilities (Siapera, 2018). If the channels of access to established media are closed or hard to come by, with some exceptions, they can explore new opportunities, as many media entrepreneurs are doing across the world (Deuze and Witschge, 2020). The fact that this type of work is predominantly done by racialised people, those who are more likely to be stigmatised or marginalised in public and media discourse, shows how change can originate from the “margins”, inviting us to pay attention to the extending boundaries of what Martin-Barbero defines as the complexity of “new territory of mediations” (1993, cited in Couldry, 2024: 662).

Content and diversity

McGuinness et al. (2023) argue that diversity in the news industry has essentially two interrelated dimensions: representation (diversity within the newsroom and among content producers) and content (how diverse and pluralistic is what is being produced). The present study confirms how these two dimensions are closely connected. A recurring point raised by the senior journalists interviewed is that, while newsrooms might not be ethnically and culturally diverse, the way immigration and cultural diversity are reported has improved. This might have been helped by the introduction, in 2008, of the Journalist's Code of Conduct on immigration, the so-called "Carta di Roma" (ODG, 2021). "20 years ago, disparaging words such as 'vu cumprà' were widely used in the media, that is not the case anymore. But there is still a lot to do, even in newspapers like ours that have historically focused on inequality and the rights of minorities", says Marco Boccitto, deputy editor of the daily *Il Manifesto*. This feeling is shared by Valerio Piccioni, who has worked for more than 40 years as a sport journalist, mostly for the daily *La Gazzetta dello Sport*. "I think that, over the last few decades, *La Gazzetta* has been at the forefront in fighting racism and showing the beauty of a new Italian identity, which we see a lot across national sports".

The lack of diversity among content producers reflects a discourse about immigration which has characterised public perceptions on "Italiannes", about who belongs to the national community, over the last 30 years (Dal Lago, 2009). A senior female producer with the public broadcaster RAI explains:

If I am doing a report on immigration, I must be careful how I start it; I noticed that having a black face, even if it may be a doctor or a professional, would drive viewers away. I put something else at the start and then bring in the protagonist of the story.

A female journalist with 30 years career at RAI offers a more nuanced picture. "We would need more diversity on screen, more people of colour. The familiarity with different faces on video has an impact on social level. But this depends also on the political conditions we operate in". She stresses that progress has been made in certain areas, such as fiction and digital content, more appealing to younger audiences, but not yet in news.

In 1988, RAI pioneered "multicultural" programming in Italy with the production of *Nonsoloneiro* (Notonlyblack), a news programme about immigration aimed at a general audience. Maria De Lourdes Jesus was the first black presenter on national TV. The trajectory of this programme reveals how public broadcasting tends to operate under the influence of politics. "We were on air after the midday news bulletin on the second channel. At some point we had 35% share. We stayed on air until 1994; the programme was closed when Berlusconi came to power". In her view, social media provide valuable opportunities to immigrant communities to connect and to present different representations of themselves, but they cannot compare to traditional media, and particularly television, in the way they reach large national audiences.

Her view contrasts with that of younger media makers, who rely essentially on digital spaces to put out their stories; their idea of the audience is different (Siapera, 2018: 153).

“While producing a podcast you are also part of a certain community, there is a more democratic approach to communication” (female, 32). This generational tension highlights a well-known pattern that sees traditional media struggling to engage with young audiences (Newman et al., 2024), and young media makers focusing more on “new media”. The young participants in this study share similar experiences: their focus is more on creating connections with communities of interest, rather than reaching large national audiences. For examples, Dotz Media focuses on stories “largely ignored by mainstream media, such as marginalised spaces, people of foreign background, gender identities, disability, the prison system, Roma camps, everything that is marginal” (female, 34).

The interviews highlight that the “boundary work” (Silverstone, 2007) historically made by public broadcasters and national media continues to erode. The function of marking the cultural boundaries of the “imagined communities” interpreted as nations (Anderson, 2016) is challenged by well-known trends such as digitalisation, audience fragmentation, and changing funding models for public service media (Horsti et al., 2014). A further trend is significantly important for the representation of diversity. Traditional media, and especially public broadcasters, struggle to connect with the younger generations, where ethnic and cultural diversity is more prevalent. By and large, the content mainstream media produce is tailored to older audiences, something that is not surprising in a country such as Italy where one in four is over 65. This arguably contrasts with the idea, articulated by Deuze (2005), that journalists who operate in culturally diverse societies should develop an active awareness of the needs of culturally diverse publics. As it stands, the gap in the representation of diversity can only be filled *outside* mainstream media, among fragmented platforms and by more precarious organisations. Drawing on Silverstone (2007: 19), this could be seen as “micro-boundary work”, but in the *mediapolis* it is not less significant than the “macro”. They are part of a single media environment, which reflects ideas of diversity emerging from society while, at the same time, constructing them.

Conclusion

The Italian case provides an original insight into the way journalists perceive ethnic and cultural diversity in a European country which is central to debates on immigration. The limited literature available highlighted how, outside the issue of gender, diversity was largely ignored among media professionals, the industry and lawmakers in Italy. While there have not been changes at the level of policy, interviews with editors and senior journalist and young journalists with an immigrant and/or racialised background show that new patterns are emerging. On the one hand, established media have started to acknowledge the issue of diversity within the industry, but struggle to address it, both in the composition of their workforce and in the content they produce. On the other hand, over the past decade, the so called “second generations” have been increasingly active as media makers, setting up websites, magazines, podcasts, and YouTube channels. Paying close attention to this phenomenon, the present study makes a significant integration to the literature on diversity in media and journalism (see for example Lück et al., 2022; Metykova, 2016).

Amid a palpable crisis of legacy media, access to the journalistic profession proves harder for young people of immigrant background and racialised minorities. The interviewees emphasise how access to the profession is predominantly dependent on social and economic capital, and that having an immigrant background, and being racialised as “the other”, represent further obstacles to gain access to established media. These factors, combined with the opportunities provided by the digital environment, have propelled the creation of small media companies run by “second generations”. Such initiatives represent an asset of the media landscape; their lively dynamism benefits Italian society, beyond its effective impact on public discourse.

Silverstone (2007, 95) concept of “contrapuntal” is helpful to make sense of this, as it stresses how “minority media” may be relatively invisible within a national media culture dominated by mainstream media, but “that invisibility does not erode, and cannot deny their presence”. The work of one cannot be comprehended without the work of the other. They both exist in a society in which the definition of belonging and the articulation of “difference” are socially constructed and depend largely on media.

Some questions raised by this study could be explored in future research, such as the profile of the “audiences”, or emerging communities, served by media run by young journalists of immigrant and/or racialised background.

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Ethical consideration

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Consent to participate

The individual participants cited with their name have given written informed consent to be quoted.

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Notes

1. As of 2025, there are 11 such programmes. <https://www.odg.it/scuole-di-giornalismo> (accessed 30 June 2025).
2. Their family backgrounds include the following countries: Albania, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Palestine, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia.
3. According to the Authority for Communications, women represent 42% of active journalists, a figure which aligns with the employment rates of the Italian population (AGCOM 2020).
4. <https://www.ilpost.it/chi-siamo/> accessed 2 July 2025.
5. Carta di Roma was founded in 2011 with the goal of implementing the Journalist's Code of Conduct on immigration, signed by the National Council of Journalists (CNOG) and the National Federation of the Italian Press (FNSI).
6. Contratto di servizio 2023-2028 <https://www.rai.it/trasparenza/Contratto-di-servizio-e6731507-23ae-41bf-83dd-bf99b44b66ec.html> (accessed 25 January 2025).
7. <https://www.dotzmedia.com/what-is-dotz/> (accessed 15 April 2025).
8. <https://colorcommunity.it/> (accessed 10 March 2025).

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