

# A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ANTI-RUMOUR AGENTS

How to fight rumours and  
stereotypes about cultural  
diversity in Barcelona



# **A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ANTI-RUMOUR AGENTS**

How to fight rumours and  
stereotypes about cultural  
diversity in Barcelona

## **Immigration, Interculturality and Diversity Commissioner**

Lola López Fernández

## **Director of Citizens' Rights and Immigration Services**

Aida Guillén Lanzarote

## **Technical Coordination**

Barcelona Interculturality Programme

Directorate of Citizens' Rights and Immigration Services

Area of Citizens' Rights, Participation and Transparency

Barcelona City Council

## **Editing**

D-CAS (Col·lectiu d'Analistes Socials)

## **In collaboration with**

Barcelona Anti-Rumour Network

**Translation:** Kira Bermúdez

**Design:** acast.es

**Date of publication:** October 2016

Barcelona Interculturality Programme

Directorate of Citizens' Rights and Immigration Services

Area of Citizens' Rights, Participation and Transparency

Barcelona City Council

Passeig Sant Joan, 75

08009 Barcelona


[interculturalitat@bcn.cat](mailto:interculturalitat@bcn.cat)

[barcelona.cat/bcnantirumors](http://barcelona.cat/bcnantirumors)

[barcelona.cat/interculturalitat](http://barcelona.cat/interculturalitat)



# Contents

	PRESENTATION	5
	1. Introduction	7
	2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?	11
	3. On the path together towards an intercultural attitude	41
	4. Raising awareness face-to-face	47
	5. The media as generators of prejudice	75
	6. Self-assessment	89
	7. Practical resources	95





# PRESENTATION

This is a new, revised and updated version of *A Practical Guide for Anti-Rumour Agents. How to fight rumours and stereotypes about cultural diversity in Barcelona*.

During the participatory process for drawing up the Barcelona Interculturality Plan promoted by Barcelona City Council, it was revealed that one of the key obstacles to living together in diversity is that people do not know one another. This lack of familiarity turns to fear or mistrust and is expressed through rumours and false stereotypes.

This guide is a tool for reflection and for the development of skills and attitudes that may be useful in raising awareness and fighting against discrimination by seeking to dispel rumours and stereotypes that stigmatise neighbours from other cultural contexts and discourage the creation of bonds, relations and spaces for shared action.

The first edition was published in 2012; for this first revision, new contents were included, concepts were redefined and resources were modified. The guide seeks to respond to the changing reality of the city and contribute new perspectives and reflections to the anti-rumour action being carried out by many organisations and community members in Barcelona.

This tool is one of the main support materials for the training course “Anti-rumour agents: Interculturality, a response to rumours and stereotypes” organised by the Barcelona Anti-Rumour Strategy, one of the lines of action of the Barcelona Interculturality Programme.<sup>1</sup>

However, this guide aims to be a resource in itself, beyond training. By presenting easy ways to put tools into practice, the guide will be of use to people, groups or organisations seeking to actively contribute to dispelling the rumours and prejudice we often hear at work, at home, on the metro or when meeting with friends... This is how we become active anti-rumour agents.

This tool is practical and easy to apply, and we hope it may contribute to making Barcelona a city with greater social justice, equality and cohesion regarding the diversity of all its residents.

---

<sup>1</sup> [barcelona.cat/interculturalitat](http://barcelona.cat/interculturalitat)





# 1. Introduction

The guide you have in your hands aims to be a **tool for support in training the skills and attitudes that favour awareness raising based on dialogue**. It also aims to provide a solid foundation of knowledge to people who wish to carry out awareness-raising action to stop false understandings of cultural diversity in Barcelona.

The guide is written for people who are tired of hearing rumours about ethnically diverse groups and have decided to take a stance and act to contribute their part in fostering more positive and inclusive attitudes and perceptions towards cultural diversity in their everyday life. This is how people become anti-rumour agents.

Needless to say, many of the tools, strategies and even the contents presented may also be applied to fighting against general prejudice and stereotypes towards other social groups. And we encourage you to do so, because whatever the direction they take, they all hinder relations and living together in diversity.

It is no easy task to work against what seems to be a mainstream narrative, and we should not expect immediate results. This is why we must be well prepared and **work together**. If it makes you feel any better, you are not alone: the Barcelona Anti-Rumour Network includes hundreds of organisations and individuals who are committed to the task of raising awareness and breaking the false ideas and images that abound about cultural diversity. This guide is one of many initiatives and is part of a growing web of actions and projects implemented in the city of Barcelona.

## Who took part in revising this guide?

- People who have trained as anti-rumour agents<sup>1</sup>. They contributed experiences that laid the foundation for designing the response strategies.
- Professionals who train anti-rumour agents, who contributed conceptual and theoretical documentation and contents.
- The Network organisations<sup>2</sup>, who helped in finding additional materials and resources that may be of use to people wanting to keep informed or

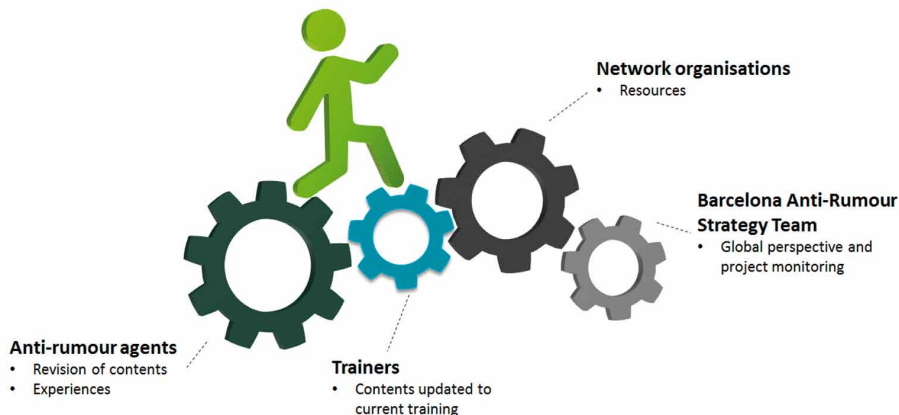
<sup>1</sup> Training organised by Barcelona Anti-Rumour Strategy, one of the lines of action of the Barcelona Interculturality Programme.

<sup>2</sup> [www.bcn.cat/antirumors](http://www.bcn.cat/antirumors)

## 1. Introduction

seeking more in-depth reflection.

- The Barcelona Anti-Rumour Strategy Team, who monitored all the content to ensure coherence.



**How are contents structured in sections? What does each section include?**

1. **Knowledge:** Includes the definition of key concepts for anti-rumour action, aiming to foster reflection and critical thinking.
2. **Self-knowledge:** Encourages self-examination regarding how to treat people with respect and empathy when raising awareness. Is our attitude truly intercultural? What changes can we make in our relations?
3. **Raising awareness face-to-face:** A collection of the main tools for communication and response strategies that can be put into practice when raising awareness face-to-face.
4. **Diversity in the media:** Encourages critical thinking about information published in the media. Prompts us to react when we think the treatment is wrong, and to act in spreading arguments against prejudice in social media.
5. **Gaining awareness of our strengths and weaknesses:** As in all strategies, assessment is a crucial aspect. Encourages us to gain awareness of the skills we have mastered and those we need to improve.

6. **Resources to keep us active and informed:** Rather than one-time resources, the guide provides links to sources that are continually updated.

### **What are the limitations of this guide? What should we bear in mind upon reading?**

The guide **contains no magic or foolproof recipes** for making rumours, prejudice and stereotypes disappear from our daily lives, as they are very much alive and change continuously. But we do believe that it provides valid techniques for raising awareness and encouraging calm and open dialogue about issues such as immigration and socio-cultural diversity which are frequently the brunt of demagoguery in its efforts to instigate stigmatisation and social discrimination.

Although we have attempted to make this guide so that anybody can read it and feel identified with some of the things that are said and use the tools provided, we should bear in mind that it was written from a **Western perspective; this conditions the result**, as will be explained in the following chapter when dealing with the concept of *culture*.

We have tried to **be respectful of gender issues** by using generic terms as much as possible, or alternating both genders at random. This is not due to a confusion nor do we mean to speak to men sometimes and to women at others; we are addressing each and every one of you, regardless of your gender.





## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

The first step in approaching the issue we are dealing with is to ask the following questions: what are we talking about when we refer to stereotypes, prejudice or rumours? What are they? Where do they come from and how do they form? How do they work? And even, what role do they play in our society? In short, we are talking about gaining full knowledge of the field before getting involved, in order to come up with the best strategy for fighting rumours and stereotypes. Several different perspectives have contributed significantly to this approach and, far from being antagonistic, they are actually complementary. We shall therefore attempt a multidisciplinary explanation that can help us in taking a closer look at the issue.

Rumours, like stereotypes and prejudice, have been around as long as humankind. And the results have always been the same: making relations more difficult between people from different social groups.

The year 2009, Barcelona City Council launched the Barcelona Interculturality Plan in an effort to face the challenges of managing how people live together in a culturally diverse city. The assessment carried out previous to drafting the Plan included a participatory process seeking answers to five questions about living together in diversity in Barcelona. The answer to the question about the factors that make living together difficult for Barcelona's ethnically diverse population was quite revealing: 48,1% of answers pointed to subjective-relational elements; that is, people not knowing one another, stereotypes and prejudice, and rumours were identified as the main obstacles for living together in diversity.

### 2.1 Culture: the prism through which we see cultural diversity

Before we get down to work and define the main concepts, we should reflect on the concept of culture, because this is the prism through which we see, and judge, the world around us<sup>1</sup>. Cultural diversity and the way people relate to each other has a lot to do with this concept. The process of reflection involves four stages, as described below:

---

<sup>1</sup> This guide, and particularly this section, analyses cultural diversity in the context of modern Western society. In focusing our analysis on this culture and through this prism, we are aware that we are neglecting other perspectives that approach cultures from a broader viewpoint.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?



- **Knowledge.** To understand how all cultures work and make sense, from a broad perspective. To understand why culture is so important for people, since it is the context where elements are taken to help us explain reality, interpret our own existence and everything around us; or to explain what we believe surrounds us, but we ignore.
- **Self-knowledge.** To explore certain key elements of modern Western culture regarding cultural diversity; that is, to know the elements through which we make representations of cultural diversity and of people belonging to other cultural contexts and, more importantly, to know how these elements determine our relationship to these people.
- **Self-examination.** To question whether our view of cultural diversity is distorted or conditioned, and hence, whether we can adopt another perspective. When we are aware of the elements in our culture that condition our perception and understanding of diversity, we are able to question this representation.
- **Empathy.** To be aware of all we share with the people we intend to sensitise, as we all have our own prejudice and stereotypes, mostly based on a shared cultural prism.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

### 2.1.1. Explaining culture from roots to branches

The six definitions of *culture* that were used in the early 20th century gave way to about 150 from 1920 to 1950, and today we can identify more than 500, a very large scope probably generated by the insufficiencies or partialities in them all. Far from attempting a thorough approach, however, we can say that generally anthropologists define *culture* by referring to values, norms and world views that are learned through social heritage and condition the behaviour of individuals and groups; these are reflected in all (cultural) manifestations of a particular community within a specific context and time. To make it simpler and linked to the issues we are dealing with here, we can see culture as the **tools generated by a human group to understand reality**.

In order to better understand what we are talking about, we will use as our leitmotif the analogy developed by Kalpana Das, the director of the Intercultural Institute of Montreal. She makes a distinction between **four different levels of culture using a tree as a parallelism** (Perez, 2006):

- **Level of beliefs and values. The roots.** Here we are dealing with the world of ideas, both conscious and unconscious, upon which different cultures are built and make it possible for us to conceive reality and be a part of it. It is a general set of values, beliefs and symbols that are invisible roots which we refer to based on other manifestations. One clear and simple example is the notion of time. In the West, we have a linear notion of time; time passes, cannot go back and always moves in the same direction. However, this notion is not universal and it is not even shared by 100% of the people within our cultural universe (Einstein and other great thinkers would not share this perception of time). Time does not pass for other cultures: we are the ones who pass through time. Ultimately, this level refers to all the things we take for granted; they are unconscious and very resistant to doubts. This makes it hard to understand that other ways of being and behaving are not wrong but simply different. Beliefs and values are transmitted from the moment we are born and develop throughout life.
- **Institutions. The trunk.** This level deals with the institutions that develop in different areas of reality; they are the materialisation of the world of ideas that are the roots. These institutions may be formal or informal, and their role is to be the framework of reference where concrete practices are inscribed and develop. Here we are referring, for example, to laws, views on education, religious practices or the understanding we have of individuals or their families and their significance within a community. In short, anything

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

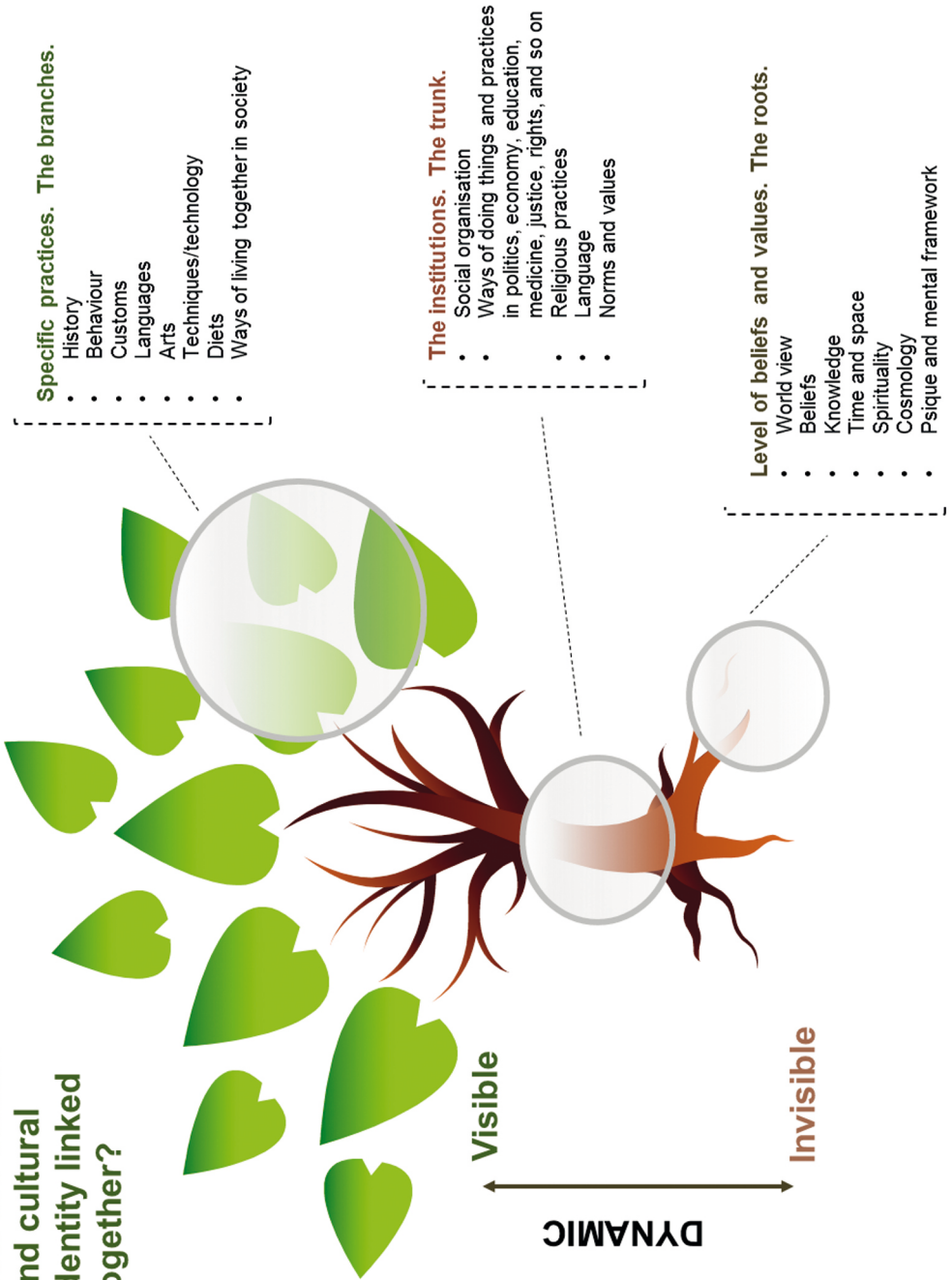
that has more or less clear norms, although these might not always be set in writing. In this dimension people are more conscious of different forms of behaviour and of the practices in place according to cultures. We might not always be that conscious, however, of the fact that the elements of the trunk are a reflection of our mythical level of beliefs and values. For instance, in Western culture laws protect private property because this is a society of prevailing individualism.

- **Specific practices. The branches.** Like branches and leaves on trees, this is the most visible part of cultures: dress, diet, languages, festivities, and so on. This is the level where the greatest and quickest changes can be made, compared to the trunk and the roots. Each practice we encounter is nurtured by the mythical level and passes through the filters of structure. **So analysing these practices based on the structures, values and beliefs of another culture can lead to misunderstandings and false impressions.** In Western culture, being first or the most advanced is considered a very positive value -we identify *the person who is ahead* with *the person who has power*-. If we see two people walking and one is always ahead, we think it means he or she is the strongest, the most powerful, the leader. So it is easy to draw false impressions in this case, because in some cultures it is common for the powerful to walk behind.

The above outline is but a simplification for easy comprehension. We should not make the mistake of thinking that the different levels can be so clearly separated, because they are also dynamic and separated by quite a diffuse and changing line. Cultures, like trees, are alive and dynamic. We cannot separate cultures from each other clearly, either. Cultures are integrated in an environment and are constantly receiving inputs and growing and developing in their relationship to their surroundings. Making a caricature out of these trees, and merely seeing the top and the branches that hide the mythical part of the roots, would be a good metaphor for prejudice.

# How are culture and cultural identity linked together?

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

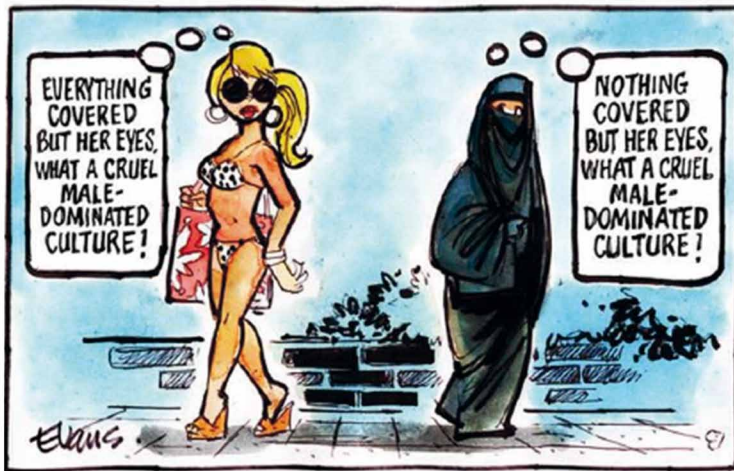


## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

### 2.1.2. Observing the woods: ethnocentrism, universalism and mission

The way Western society sees and experiences cultural diversity has more to do with its own characteristics than with those of other cultures. In the words of Anaïs Nin: «**We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are**». This might seem quite complex and hard to understand but it is linked to **three key elements that are characteristic of Western society** as an ethnocentric, universalistic and missionary society:

- **Ethnocentric.** Ethnocentrism is the tendency to apply one's own cultural values to judge the behaviour and beliefs of people from other cultural contexts. Concepts such as barbarians, savages and so on reflect the asymmetry between cultures and the tendency to assume that one's own patterns, values and ideals are universal. Needless to say, all cultures are probably ethnocentric, to a greater or lesser degree. Now, the difference about Western culture is precisely the next point, universalism.



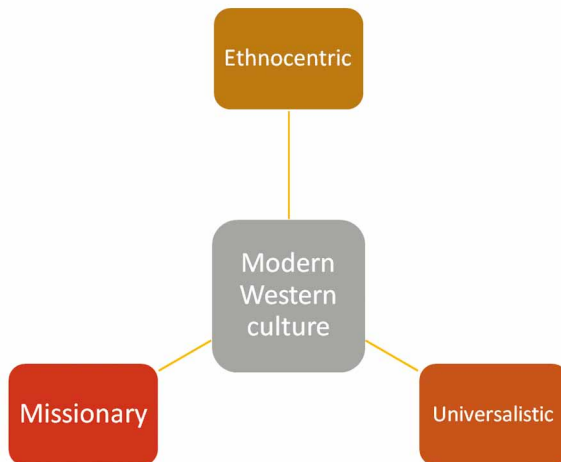
- **Universalistic.** This is the idea that our culture and its manifestations are not only the best, but also the best for all other cultures. For example, in the West we understand the notion of time as linear; time passes, does not go back and always moves in the same direction. Linked to the notion of time is the notion of progress. According to this perspective, we advance, we improve, we develop along one single possible path which is related to time. With the passage of time, we<sup>2</sup> improve and progress along a single line of

<sup>2</sup> Understood as modern Western society.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

evolution leading us to perfection. In this evolutionist line of progress linked to time, we as Westerners consider ourselves to be the most advanced; hence, the closest to this presumed perfection. This ethnocentric and universalistic perspective of cultural diversity makes us disdainful, rejecting or fearful in our attitudes to those we consider *the others*. Relationships are thus established on the premise that *the other* is wrong, which triggers rejection, avoidance or patronising without allowing for space for people to relate on equal terms.

- **Missionary.** Westerners not only feel that their culture is the best for them and for the rest; they also have the mission of helping others to follow the right path. Furthermore, in keeping with Judeo-Christian morals, sin can also be committed by omission, so *not helping* is wrong too. In this sense, and following the above comparison, backward cultures would need a little help to reach our level; underdeveloped cultures would need direct intervention, but could make it; primitive cultures we cannot help, but yes, we can protect them. However, with those who are on the wrong path, it is not so much a question of helping or not helping them to progress, but rather that they must make a complete change of course to bring them closer to our values and norms. This is a decision they can take voluntarily or not.



### 2.1.3. General principles of culture

We should start from the premise that each culture has its own singularity, and there are no two identical cultures. However, in an effort to avoid any negative or positive prejudice towards other cultures, we should bear in mind the following principles:

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

- **All cultures are limited in time and space, and are in a process of permanent transformation.** All cultures have a limit in time because they become obsolete and change permanently. Catalan culture in the 17th century is not that of the 21st century. Likewise, we say that cultures have a limit in space because they are created in different spaces and are conditioned by these spaces: a forest culture differs from a desert culture, that of a cold climate from that of a warm climate. So when a group moves to a different place, their culture experiences transformations.
- **All cultures are part of a network of exchange with people from different cultures.** This exchange is necessary for regeneration and transformation. When a culture keeps to itself, it is condemned to disappear. Catalan culture in our times is the result of the multiple transformations it has experienced in contact with other cultures: from Arab influence in medicine, architecture or language from the 10th to the 15th century, to the more recent influence of American culture through cinema or the economy.
- **All cultures are fragmented and fragmenting.** Though we may belong to the same culture, there is diversity, subcultures related to social class, gender, professional field and so on, and each one of us belongs to several of these. However, cultures are also fragmenting, in the sense that a HEALTHY culture has the ability to allow for this internal diversity and the changes that may result.
- **All cultures tend to exclusiveness, to want to keep the members of a society in their own culture.** Contact with other cultures can be experienced as a threat to losing one's own cultural identity. And the transmission of culture from one generation to the next is also considered an extraordinarily relevant fact.
- **All cultures select and favour a limited number of human qualities or values. These are organised according to a hierarchical system that is coherent and logical with regard to their own culture.** This does not mean that all the people of that culture will have the same order in the hierarchy of qualities, but they do share most of them.

One example of how values can seem universal, but are not so for all cultures, is marriage. For many cultures, the value of marriage is crucial for social cohesion and social status. An individual or the family will make the choice of a marriage partner based on these values. However, in Western societies greater weight is given to individualism and romantic love. But romantic love is not considered a value in many cultures, and people's individual decisions do not override other values such as social cohesion.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

- **No culture is able to encompass all human qualities or values and give to each the place they would merit.** Nor is there any culture that does not encompass a good number of these values. That is to say that each culture has priority values that other cultures most likely also have but consider less important than other values. This leads us to deduce that no culture deserves to be considered universal. **Each culture has its own values and is, therefore, partisan and partial.**
- **There are no superior or inferior cultures; cultures are different.** For example, regarding individualism or group cohesion as values. One is no better or worse than the other; they are different values. According to the cultural context and to the culture's system of formal logic, it may be natural and desirable for people of a particular culture to uphold the right to individual freedom, while for another culture, the community and the collective, and group cohesion is most important. Each value makes sense within a culture as a whole and cannot be understood on its own. A person who strongly adheres to the value of individualism in a society where the value of community is paramount may be considered a social misfit, problematic, maladjusted, and vice versa. This happens to many people who come here from very community-based societies, as they may feel terribly lonely upon realising the importance of the individual versus the collective in personal relations.

Intervening in a cultural practice from an ethnocentric and universalistic position can have adverse and unexpected consequences. Values develop and are linked to many other things. Attempting to change one value without bearing in mind the rest can lead to misconceptions that have consequences for people. **The capacity for intercultural relations should enable us to break the moulds upon which situations are analysed and be open to listening and understanding situations and behaviours that may be considered either positive or negative from the prism of one's own values.**

### 2.1.4. Relations between cultures

We can identify at least four ways of understanding the relations between people of diverse cultural contexts (Perez, 2006) and how these are present in policies for managing diversity. These conceptual forms have intersecting aspects mostly based on how strictly they are adopted and on the ethnocentric filter conditioning them. This is why different terms for very similar conceptualisations are sometimes used.

- **Monoculturalism:** From this perspective, relations between people of diverse cultural contexts are nonsense or are interpreted as

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

a clear threat to preserving the superiority of a particular group. Monoculturalism, in its most extreme formulation, seeks to eradicate cultural diversity with the tools of racism, discrimination and xenophobia.

This tendency towards monoculturalism leads to the political and very popular discourses of assimilationism. This position is based on the premise that immigrants must adopt the culture and national identity of the country of destination, while gradually abandoning their culture and identity of origin. Replacing one's culture and identity of origin with the culture and identity of the country of destination is considered not only a natural process but also the most ideal, because this would be the basis for guaranteeing full equal opportunities to immigrants. The determination of immigrants to preserve their culture of origin in a new context that is regulated by norms and customs resulting from a different historical evolution, can only become an obstacle to the process of inclusion. Religious or cultural particularities, in any case, are considered part of the private sphere and should not enjoy any sort of public projection (in schools, politics, public space). Needless to say, assimilationism has been discredited as a model for inclusion and has disappeared from political discourse in recent times. However, the logics of assimilation is still present in many of the inertias and socio-political dynamics of our surroundings and, to a large extent, impregnates the logics and common sense of the native population and political authorities regarding integration.

- **Multiculturalism:** From this perspective, the other's existence is tolerated and is classified according to more or less unchanging cultural attributes which are regarded from a distance, with superiority, comparing and establishing differences. Here the concept of tolerance linked to multiculturalism adopts a passive attitude towards the acceptance of difference, with no steps taken to understand the other, to reach agreements or to seek potential cultural enrichment. Cultural diversity is accepted as long as it does not question or threaten the dominant culture. The presence of other cultures is accepted as folklore, which gives an image of pluralism and diversity although only superficially.

In its political expression, and contrary to assimilationist policies, this pluralistic model acknowledges that renouncing one's culture of origin cannot be a prerequisite for participation in social life based on equal opportunities. (Torres, 2005).

Nonetheless, the transformation of social reality since the late nineties

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

requires that some premises be reconsidered. On the one hand, greater diversification of migratory flows implies increasingly high cultural diversification in Western European societies, which makes diversity management in the terms marked by these policies unfeasible. Moreover, the multicultural experience has led to a dynamics of segmentation in society, with segregated ethnic groups and prevailing inequality in relations. All these debates, among others, have encouraged new political positions and alignments as is the case of interculturality, which we shall further explain below.

- **Cultural mixing and *métissage*** (Crespo and Nicolau, 1998). Encompasses proposals that seek to build a new culture resulting from the relations and mixing of different cultures. This perspective would hence intend to eliminate the plurality of cultures through absorption into a new culture. This points to the establishment of monoculturalism although not by imposition from the dominant culture but rather as a result of relations between cultures present in the same society. *Métissage* or cultural mixing is posited as an alternative both to assimilationism and to multiculturalism, even though it is implicitly supported by modern Western monoculturalism. Those who advocate for *métissage* as an ideology are disturbed both by the dominant culture and by cultural pluralism, particularly if these question their own universal and individualistic beliefs.
- **Interculturalism.** This perspective differs from previous models as it is based on the premise that in order to achieve a balance between respect and recognition of diversity and the common and shared aspects that guarantee cohesion, special attention must be given to relations between people. This requires promoting positive interaction, contact, dialogue and getting to know one another to better deal with the complexities of diversity.

Thus interculturalism emphasises intercultural community life and promotes tolerance not in the sense of patronising attitudes towards the other, but rather in the sense of accepting and valuing difference. Likewise, intercultural relations stress the importance of aspects uniting people, aspects that are shared. We should not mistake intercultural living together with the coexistence we so often see in our cities and that might seem positive at first sight. Coexistence implies that people do not actively relate to one another and basically ignore each other in daily life. People are respectful towards others but this respect is passive whereby people live and let live with little or no interest in the other. When speaking of the other there is no manifest aggressiveness and hostility,

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

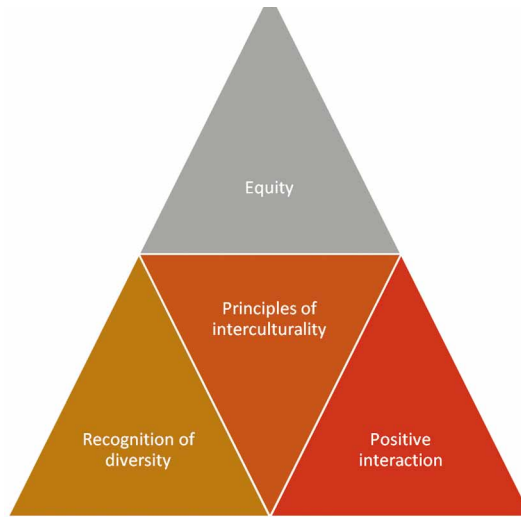
but people do not speak to each other. Nobody wants to break existing ties, but people are unwilling to engage in more solid bonds like friendship. Regarding multiculturalism, interculturality shares its concern for difference but diverges in valuing individuality, and not just the community or cultural group of origin, as a basis for the expression of difference. This approach pursues not so much the interaction between different ethnic identities as the recognition of the multiplicity of identifications that make up individual identities. Aside from ethnicity, people may identify on the basis of many other criteria of social differentiation, like gender, profession, preferences, ideology, lifestyle, family roles, and so on. It is precisely multiple identifications that make dialogue possible between different social groups, and interculturality as a source of enrichment. Likewise, we should bear in mind that the intercultural perspective fosters building together. Cities and neighbourhoods change and we should be able to recognise the contributions that all cultures and individuals can make to future society. This involves relinquishing things, but this too should be shared.

Three principles sustaining the interculturalist approach have been identified:

1. **Principle of equity.** The premise of this principle is that interculturality can only advance in a context of respect for fundamental and democratic values while promoting true equal rights and duties and social opportunities for all people. So for us to advance towards true interculturalism, ambitious policies must be in place in favour of equity and against any situation of exclusion and discrimination, particularly those related to citizens' ethnicity and cultural differences.
2. **Principle of recognition of diversity.** This principle is linked to the need to recognise, value and respect diversity in a broad sense. This principle goes beyond simple contemplation or passive tolerance, and emphasises the need to make efforts towards benefiting from opportunities derived from socio-cultural diversity. These opportunities are linked to cultural enrichment and to economic and social life as well.
3. **Principle of positive interaction.** This principle clearly defines the interculturalist approach and is the main difference with other models such as the multiculturalist perspective. This principle focuses on positive interaction, or unity in diversity. Recognition of differences is a step towards emphasising aspects that are common and shared, aspects that unite all people. Improving intercultural community life requires work on day-to-day relationships and this is a reciprocal, two-

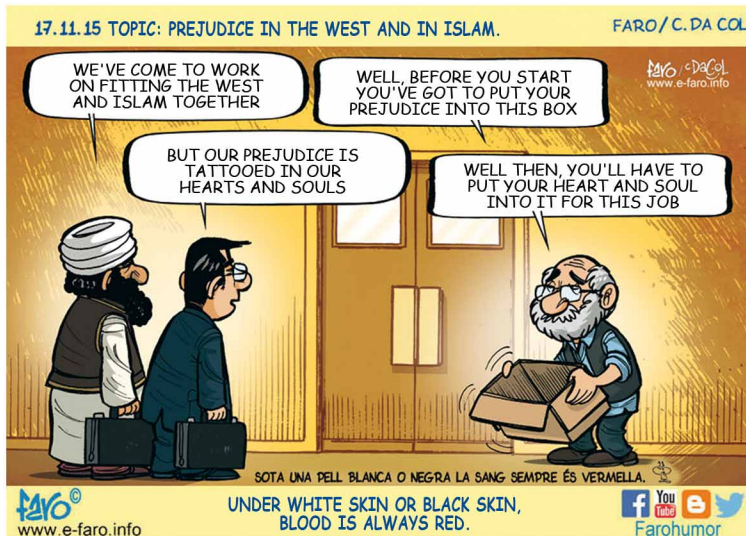
## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

way, dynamic process; and this is why, parallel to social policies and policies promoting equal rights and duties, we must stimulate contact, getting to know each other, spaces of shared action and dialogue as a way to reinforce this common sphere and a sense of belonging, the basis for cohesion. Living together in intercultural diversity should be natural for everybody and in all domains of social and city life.



It is important to underscore that the interculturalist approach does not avoid conflict. When fostering contact and spaces for interaction, the emergence of conflicts in everyday life is inevitable. But conflicts must be accepted, and appropriate and innovative ways of dealing with them should be found: through respect, dialogue, mutual help, equal access to information and so on. On the other hand, we should bear in mind that the interculturalist approach seeks opportunities for shared action and community-building to prevent other more negative risks for cohesion, such as social fragmentation and segregation, and the prevalence of prejudice and stereotypes. These can lead to discriminatory practices or populist discourses that foster fear and mistrust by identifying foreigners and immigrants as the culprits of social problems and are clearly an obstacle to a shared sense of belonging. In emphasising the need for respect to fundamental and democratic values shared by all, we can avoid the dangers of cultural relativism, which may justify certain practices or attitudes that might be clearly opposed to these values.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?



### 2.2. Prejudice, stereotype and discrimination

Prejudice, stereotype and discrimination are all terms that are difficult to understand on their own because they are very strongly interdependent. Treating the matter as if it were a ball of yarn, we shall start by pulling on a thread to then unravel each of its interconnections and meanings. Prejudice is the first concept we will tackle, the first thread in our discussion.

One of the most widely accepted definitions of this concept was provided over 50 years ago by Allport (1954). According to this author, **prejudice is a hostile and mistrusting attitude towards a person who belongs to a group, simply because they belong to that group.**

Prejudice is an attitude and, as such, appears as a combination of beliefs, feelings or emotions, and predispositions to action. The beliefs that prejudice is based on are known as stereotypes. These are beliefs that, as we cautioned in earlier chapters, are not always conscious. Quite the contrary, they are automatic associations that are mostly drawn from our cultural roots. Stereotypes exist among all social groups and are neither negative nor positive, as such. **They are generalisations made about a whole group of people based on certain characteristics of some of the members of that group. Qualities are attributed to a person as a member of a group; people are not judged on their individual qualities (Myers, 1995).**

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

Negative images held about a group of people lead to negative judgements regarding those people which are not first verified and are not based on a direct or real experience. Furthermore, negative attitudes towards a particular group are extended to each of its members.

Stereotypes tend to have an empirical basis, but it is the exaggeration and indiscriminate generalisation extended to all members of a particular community that turn them into prejudice. The mistake lies in its extrapolation and also its persistence over time, ignoring the particular characteristics and changes that occur among the subjects of any group.

Simply accepting the clichés popularly associated with immigrants (poor, uneducated, no training, anti-social attitudes, with beliefs and customs that may seem absurd) is to ignore the enormous heterogeneity of migratory routes, origins, family circumstances, education, background (rural or urban), social class and even the individual interests and motivations of those who have immigrated.

However, we should not make the mistake of thinking that prejudice is one-directional. Quite the contrary: **prejudice exists among all social groups and in all directions**. There are clichés too between communities, for instance, of Moroccans about Latin Americans, of Catalans about those who emigrated from the south of Spain, and so on and so forth.

As we have mentioned, learned stereotyped prejudice is transmitted without any contact (or regardless of contact) with the members of the group against which the prejudice is directed.

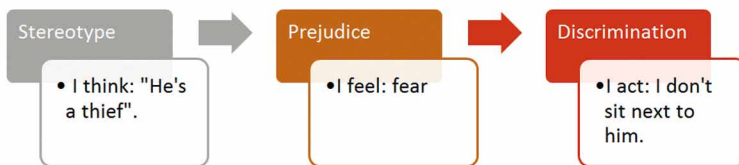
Family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues and the media are all transmitters of perceptions that go unquestioned and which we adopt as our own, so that we eventually end up spreading stereotypes and their associated prejudice.

However, **prejudice based on stereotypes is very difficult to undo, because it carries extremely simplified messages and is therefore very easy to transmit**. Having adopted these as truths and, when faced with personal experiences that contradict our preconceived ideas, it is often easier to consider experience as an exception to the norm than it is to question our own apprehensions. For example, if among our work colleagues, we meet a Muslim man with a degree in education who supports the feminist cause, we would consider him to be an exceptional case or, ironically, an “advanced” member of his group, but not as reliable proof of the true heterogeneity of individuals that belong to the group as we interpret it.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

Our aim here is not to overlook the usefulness of stereotypes. Quite the contrary: stereotypes help us to simplify reality and enable us to quickly decide what to think or how to behave in situations we have never come across before. **Stereotypes enable us to effectively economise the effort it takes to constantly interpret the social reality that surrounds us.** However, this does not mean that we should not also be open-minded and sensitive enough to question or even change our clichés when reality presents us with situations that contradict our preconceived ideas.

Another key aspect to take into account are the direct consequences that stereotypes and prejudice can have. In fact, stereotype, as a belief, can lead to prejudice as an attitude and this in turn can lead to discriminatory behaviour:



Cultural discrimination results in intolerant attitudes and actions and the rejection of whole population groups, who are perceived homogeneously, and this then leads to processes of marginalisation and social exclusion. Discriminatory treatment might limit employment opportunities and leave unqualified jobs to discriminated people, even when they have the training and professional experience to do other jobs. If we take a closer look around us, we might be surprised at the number of university graduates we find serving us coffee each morning, cleaning our offices or looking after the old lady in the flat upstairs.

There are different forms of discrimination depending on the particular group being targeted. Homophobia occurs when stereotypes, prejudice and discriminatory treatment is directed against homosexual men and women; misogyny occurs in discrimination against women; ageism occurs when discrimination is targeted against people of other ages; or aporophobia is a strong aversion to poverty or poor people. So just as anybody can be part of a stereotyped group, anybody can also be subject to discrimination and exert it in turn against others. This underscores the fact that our identity is complex and that we may have greater or lesser power over others depending on the context we are in.

Now we will talk about how we understand **racism and xenophobia**, as

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

these concepts refer to a phenomenon of discrimination *against the other, the stranger*, those who do not belong to *one's own group*. However, each of these concepts has a different social target for discrimination: in racism, it is ethnicity that stands out as the main characteristic of a minority, while xenophobia emphasises the place of origin.

Furthermore, **cultural discrimination limits and determines the social interactions between groups, and this perpetuates segregation and social marginalisation for long periods of time, even for generations**. It not only has negative effects on the person being discriminated against, it also affects the people who discriminate. For example, a company might disregard a candidate because he or she is foreign, assuming that the quality of their education or the experience they have acquired in their country of origin is of little value, or that their work standards will not be good enough. In this case, not only do they limit the employment opportunities of the person seeking work, they might also be passing up the opportunity to hire the most suitable candidate<sup>3</sup>.

Two forms of racism or xenophobia are currently in place: **manifest forms and subtle forms**. On the one hand, racism in its manifest dimension generates discriminatory behaviour which is clearly recognisable as racist: the individual is fully conscious of this because the prejudice it is rooted in is also conscious (racists perceive themselves as racists, as this gives them a positive self-image within their group). On the other hand, the latent or subtle dimension of racism generates behaviour that is hard to label as racist. The discriminating individual is not conscious of it because his or her social image is that of an anti-racist. People who express themselves in this way suppress their prejudicial thoughts and feelings, as though they consciously wished to break a bad habit (Devine, 1989, 1991). Despite this, negative attitudes often persist even when they are expressed more vaguely. The latent dimension of racism is activated *regardless of the individual*, on the basis of the latent content of prejudice, **that generates feelings of discomfort and insecurity that lead people to avoid contact or to unconscious discrimination** (Alonso, 2006).

Our present context leads us to another concept, **Islamophobia**<sup>4</sup>, both in its manifest and latent dimensions. According to the Council of Europe and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, Islamophobia is a form of racism and xenophobia made manifest through hostility, exclusion, rejection and hatred against Muslims, especially when they are part of a minority as in Western countries. People who might not perceive themselves as racists, openly express their hostility

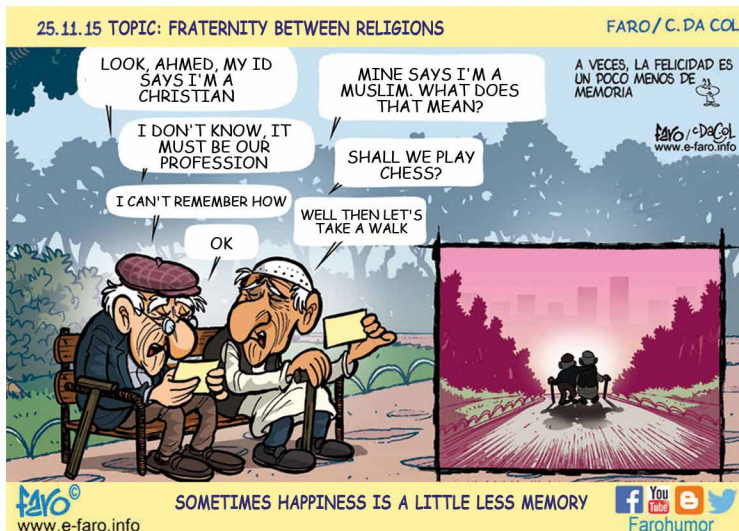
<sup>3</sup> Cartoons included in this chapter are taken from [www.e-faro.info](http://www.e-faro.info).

<sup>4</sup> For more in-depth knowledge, see David Karvala (ed.) (2016): *Combatir la islamofobia*. Barcelona: Icaria.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

towards the Muslim religion in general without making a difference between its various forms of expression and seeing it as a threat to Western values.

Lots of awareness-raising strategies are aimed at promoting mutual knowledge between people that are part of the groups where prejudice is present. The idea behind these awareness-raising actions is that, if we get to know other people, we can begin to question existing false beliefs and clichés. Despite this, research conducted by people such as Muzafer Sherif (1967) question this affirmation. According to this author, **simply knowing the other is not enough to undo these beliefs. Common objectives need to be created, and these milestones are hard to reach unless people from both groups collaborate and work together.** The existence of a common challenge can help to create a new group and, above all, a new sense of belonging. Here we should mention the potential that sport has to bring together people from very different backgrounds, precisely because it has the capacity to “create objectives and a team identity” shared by all members, which transcends prejudice and stereotypes. Likewise, many projects, aware of this potential, create groups of people who are bound by a common goal in order to promote a shared identity that transcends place of origin (women, young people, artists, etc.).



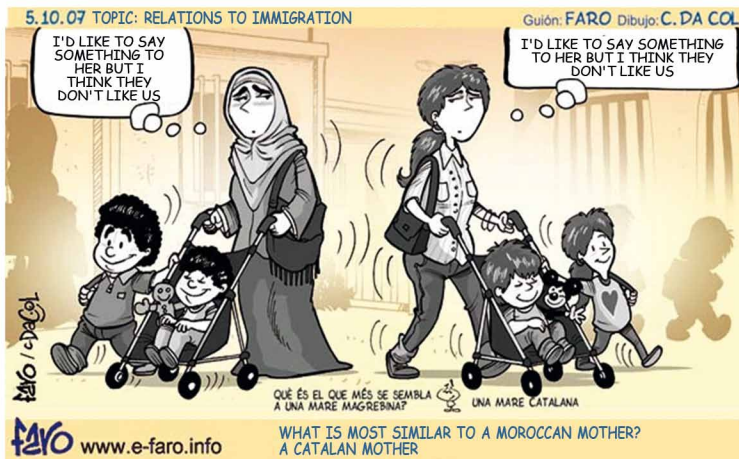
### 2.2.1. How are stereotypes and prejudice formed? Why do they exist in our society? What role do they play?

Prejudice comes from various sources: social, psychological and emotional.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

The first of these, **social**, shows that social inequalities foster prejudice. But also the other way round, prejudice is used to justify the economic and social superiority of those that have the most power. Therefore, prejudice and discrimination support each other: prejudice justifies discrimination and discrimination fosters prejudice (Pettigrew, 1980): the native population may see the foreign population as having few qualifications and an undesirable attitude towards work (lazy, demanding, irresponsible. and so on), in other words, as a group with traits that justify their relegation to subordinate jobs.

One of the effects of this is what is known as the Pygmalion effect according to which our negative behaviour towards someone - on the basis of specific characteristics we attribute to them without actually knowing whether they possess them - can elicit behaviour that sustains our discrimination. For example, if we believe people who have migrated have no wish to integrate, we don't interact with them and that effectively contributes to their non-integration. Consequently, **regardless of any real or empirical basis the prejudice might have, the irony is that it is our own prejudice that acts as a powerful social mechanism to reinforce this real basis.**



There are other theoretical elements that are useful in understanding the social factors that lead to prejudice. One of these factors emerges when two groups are competing for scarce resources. This means that apprehensions and fears regarding people from ethnic minorities are more present among those competing for the same resources (jobs, welfare, public spaces, etc.), so that these fears become a means of channelling and expressing frustration and hostility (Pettigrew and Meertens, 1991). Another factor is the need for

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

status. To put it another way, to perceive that we have a particular social status, we need to feel that we are superior to other groups of people (Myers, 1995). This explanation helps us to understand the differentiation strategies and reticence towards the newly arrived immigrant population among people who have migrated earlier and settled in a particular country for a long period of time.

The second aspect of prejudice is the one offered by **social psychology** which is closely linked with the way we construct our identity. When asked the question “who are we?” we might answer by referring to the groups we feel we belong to and not to our own individual attributes. For example, we might say that we are a middle-class Senegalese immigrant woman and a nurse. It is also a reflection of how we see ourselves and feel about ourselves. Another person in the same objective circumstances might have used other social categories to define herself: I am a mother, divorced, left-wing and an atheist.

However, what is it that makes us identify with one group and not another? And why is it that others sometimes categorise us in a certain way that does not correspond to the categories we ourselves truly identify with? A woman might identify as Catalan and behave as such, while her neighbours continue to treat her as Senegalese even though she was born in Catalonia, just because her parents are of Senegalese origin (Pujal and Lombart, 2006).



Tajfel's theory of social identity enables us to understand a large part of this process of identification and de-identification. This theory encompasses three psychosocial processes: comparison, social categorisation and identification. All three processes refer to the way we perceive other people and ourselves, taking as a basis for this perception people's sense of belonging to certain groups. For example, we might see a man wearing a tie and carrying a briefcase. We might automatically think he belongs to the executive

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

category or group and, based on this assumption, label him with a whole set of characteristics. For example, that he has got good manners, that he is intelligent, well educated, qualified, serious, and so on. This is how we put people into categories and assign them characteristics we believe are inherent to those categories. One of the effects of this categorisation is a stereotyped view of others. So we act and interact with others not so much based on who they are but rather the group they belong to, which we attach certain characteristics to. The group category therefore provides an identity and social position and, simultaneously, serves as a prism of the structure and perception of the social reality that surrounds us.

One of the consequences of categorisation is that we falsely accentuate the similarities between people belonging to the same category or group and exaggerate the differences between people from different groups. This perception is both a cause and a consequence of the scarce interaction between groups with different cultural origins: we perceive them as being very different and consequently we don't interact with them; and because we don't interact with them, we continue to see them as very different. In fact, the more familiar we are with the group in question, the more we perceive their diversity, and the less familiar we are, the more we see the stereotype (Myers, 1995).

It could be said that social categorisation has an instrumental value in the sense that it organises, structures and simplifies the information we have about our environment. It helps us to know how we have to behave in certain situations, even if we have never been in those situations before. But it also has an ideological value, of social control, in the sense that it structures society into groups based on the interests and values of the dominant groups. Through this process we establish differentiations of the "us" versus "them" kind, differentiations that are often based on competition or conflicts of interest rather than any real difference. In this regard, the native category only makes sense when the aim is to differentiate this group from the immigrant population, by creating differences between them (place of birth) that are quite feeble, rather than talking about other more reasonable similarities (fathers and mothers, profession, political ideology and so on).

Needless to say, the categories we are talking about are on no account matter-of-fact. Quite the contrary, they are charged with value and privilege. Hence, some put us in a more central and privileged situation within society than others. For instance, in the city of Barcelona, being a white, native male with a university degree puts me in a more privileged position than being an unschooled immigrant woman. My opportunities in life will no doubt be conditioned by the categories I occupy for others. This is why even this more psychological concept of categorising everything and all the people around us, has direct repercussions in terms of social structure and inequality.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

**Our perception of reality is always more receptive to information that reinforces our assumed beliefs:** we see what we want to see or what we have learned to see, while the situations that do not fit with this view are very easily overlooked. If, for example, we believe that immigrants tend to be criminals, we will pay more attention to news about criminal acts perpetrated by foreigners. In contrast, we will pay less attention to information that contradicts this idea. The media are well aware of the highly selective nature of perception and take this into account when it comes to capturing their audience. With this process of selective analysis, stereotypes are constantly being self-confirmed. They are persistent and therefore difficult to change, even if we are presented with objective and contradictory information that could bring them into question.

The third aspect of prejudice is the **emotional** aspect. This aspect is what makes it particularly difficult to weaken people's prejudice by using logical arguments. Prejudice is not cold beliefs about other groups; it is beliefs charged with emotion and feeling, passed on to a large extent by family, friends or loved ones, and which generally contain the implicit message that others (the group against which the prejudice is directed or the *out-group*) pose a threat to our values and ethics and even to our possessions. Therefore, the task of trying to alter or question social prejudice is as difficult as trying to change a feeling or emotion, which in the case of prejudice is highly critical. This is why **actions to raise awareness of prejudice that are based solely on rational argumentation have a limited impact, to the extent that they question the empirical basis of the prejudice but do not touch on the emotional elements of identification, understanding or assessment of the groups that are the target of prejudice.** We should also mention that this emotional basis for prejudice (feelings of fear, mistrust, foreignness...) is one of the most significant obstacles to establishing inter-ethnic interpersonal relations. Even when there is no personal feeling of rejection, the establishment of inter-ethnic relations can be hindered by the condemnation these relationships receive from members of the same group (*in-group*). For example, the company that decides not to hire a Muslim person as a sales assistant because this may lead to rejection among their customers; or the person who decides not to date someone who follows a different religion, because they are afraid of how their family will react.

Finally, prejudice is also the cause of counterprejudice. Perceiving rejection and being exposed to discriminatory situations can lead to mistrust among minority communities and defensive attitudes towards the rest of the population, and can make people show more suspicion, sensitivity and unconditional pride towards their own community. Sometimes these situations of discrimination are not real or have not been experienced first-hand, but among the group there is so much insistence on their existence that there is a tendency to perceive them. We are talking, for example, about discourses that constantly

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

victimise the foreign population and hold the native population responsible for all their ills. Counterprejudice is, in some way, the closure of a vicious cycle of prejudice that feeds situations of discrimination and social segregation.

### 2.3. Rumours

We have all probably heard a rumour at some time or another: an information that we don't know where it comes from nor who started it nor whether it's true or false. Rumours are part of everyday life, that's true; they spread wherever there are people living together, no differences made. We hear them in the neighbourhood, at schools, at work and at bars. They take on different forms and very often we don't even realise we're spreading them.

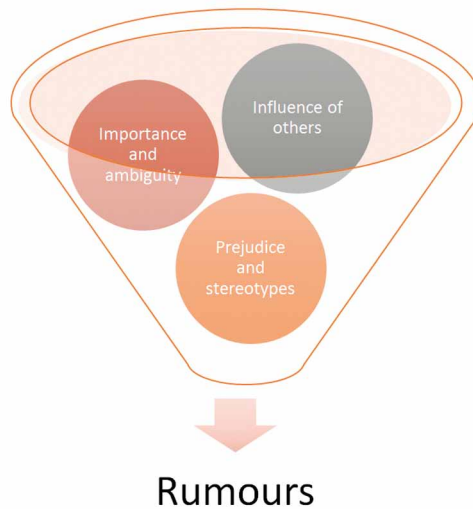


Concerned about their importance and the impact that rumours can have in times of war, on the running of organisations or even on public health, a number of authors from the field of social sciences have addressed this problem<sup>5</sup>. Sunstein (2010) offers us one of the most accurate definitions that could help us to understand the issue we are addressing here, rumours relating to the foreign population. According to this author, rumours are statements about people, groups or events that are passed from one person to another without being proven to be true, and which are credible, not because there is any direct evidence to back them up but because lots of people believe them. So, rumours often emerge and circulate successfully because they fit with the previously held beliefs of the people who accept them (listen, believe and spread), and also back up and reinforce these beliefs. This definition links rumours directly to stereotypes and prejudice as the main reason why some

<sup>5</sup> Allport and Lepkin (1945); Allport and Postman (1967); Epstein (1969); Rosnow (1991); Knapp (1994); Neubauer (1999), among others.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

rumours and not others are accepted by people. However, we won't be offering any explanations here and we shall move on as this is not the only issue we will be dealing with in this section, where we are going to try and answer the following questions: why do we accept rumours, even the ones that are implausible and destructive? Why do some people believe the rumours while others find them absurd?



### 2.3.1. Importance and ambiguity

Allport and Postman (1947) were the first authors to highlight importance and ambiguity as the main factors that determine the predisposition to believe a certain rumour or not. They even came up with what is probably the most widely known formula to explain how rumours spread. According to these authors, the quantity of the rumour is the result of multiplying its importance by its ambiguity.

Importance has to do with the fact that the content of the rumour refers to some aspect, event or fact that directly affects the listener:

*«For example, you wouldn't expect a citizen of the United States to spread rumours about the price of camels in Afghanistan, as this issue is of no importance to him. He won't be spreading gossip about what goes on in an Albanian village, because he doesn't really care what they do there.» (Allport and Postman, 1967. p. 16).*

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

On the other hand, if a rumour is specific - with names of specific people, dates, places, etc. - it is more likely to be questioned by the listener. In contrast, if it is ambiguous it will be more difficult to dispel. For example, the rumour about Chinese restaurants serving dog meat is close enough to home and relevant enough, given that it refers to restaurants that everyone has been to at one time or another, and ambiguous enough, because it is not about a specific restaurant but rather about a type of restaurant.

Years later, Rosnow (1991) added two very important factors to this equation which refer to the context and whether or not it makes it easier to spread rumours. We are referring to the possibility that such rumours arise from **situations of widespread uncertainty and to the anxiety that such uncertainty can generate among the population**. So if a group is facing difficult circumstances or danger, many of its members will be angry and want someone to blame. The worst situations can lead to feelings of being wronged by others, and when someone feels wronged they are more likely to accept rumours that justify their state of mind and point to someone to blame. This is one of the factors that can help us to understand why we are now hearing more rumours than ever which make ethnic minorities the “scapegoats” for the Welfare State deficits. The arrival of foreign-born populations makes competition in the distribution of social benefits more evident. It should be pointed out that the allocation of welfare benefits has always generated unease, but in the current economic crisis, with the rise in the number of people experiencing economic instability, this is a particularly controversial issue. However, it overlooks the essential contribution that the foreign, mainly working, population, have made to the labour market and economic growth in Europe in previous years, which is what fuels the Welfare State and any public service.

### 2.3.2. The influence of others

Sunstein (2010) offers us a broader perspective which takes into account the influence of others and the group we belong to (who spread the rumour) on our readiness to believe the rumour. The author makes specific reference to three different phenomena:

- **Information cascades:** Rumours are often spread through cascades of information. The basic dynamic behind these cascades is simple: at the point where a certain number of people seem to believe a rumour, others will also believe it, unless they have good reason to believe that the rumour is false. Since most rumours relate to subjects about which people have no

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

direct or personal knowledge, they are often left in the hands of the crowd. So, if most people we know believe a rumour, we will also be inclined to believe it. When we do not have our own information, we accept the opinions of others.

- Of course, people might have different levels of information when they come into contact with a rumour. Many might have absolutely no knowledge of the subject matter. So once they hear something plausible but worrying, those without any other information to go on may believe what they hear if they have no other knowledge or information that contradicts it. Some may have a certain amount of information, but not enough to contradict the opinions of others they trust. Lastly, there are the people who do have relevant and plausible information but who might have reasons, despite all that, for accepting the false rumour. According to the author, very often the rumour is initially spread by people who have little or no information about the subject and, as the number of “believers” increases, it makes its way to other people who do have more information but who end up accepting the rumour because “so many people can’t be wrong”. The result is that vast swathes of the population end up believing a rumour even when it is unfounded.
- **Conformity cascades:** Sometimes people believe a rumour because others also believe it. But on other occasions, they simply act as though they believe it. They censor themselves and so go along with the majority. Conformity cascades then offer another explanation as to how rumours are spread. According to this theory, people sometimes falsify their own opinion or knowledge, or at least overlook their doubts, when faced with opinions expressed by the crowd. Therefore, in a conformity cascade, people align with the group to avoid having to face hostility from others and to keep the good opinion others might have of them, and therefore go without expressing their own opinions or doubts.
- **Group polarisation:** In the field of social psychology, it is believed that when people with similar ideas discuss their ideas, they normally end up adopting a more extreme position than the one they held before the discussion (Brown, 1986). In the context of rumour-mongering, the implications are simple: when the members of a group have a previously-held assumption and they hear a rumour that supports that belief, their internal dialogue reinforces the idea that what they believe is true. The exchange of information intensifies existing beliefs. According to this theory, people’s opinions become more extreme when there are rumours to back them up, and because

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

they gain confidence knowing that other people share their opinions.

This phenomenon plays an important role when it comes to accepting and spreading rumours. When someone hears that foreigners are treated favourably by the public administration, they might get angry, not necessarily because they genuinely feel angry, but because they want to show they share the same beliefs as the other members of the group they belong to. The members of this group might even seem to be strongly convinced of this fact, while in private they might question or doubt the reasons why the administration would favour some people over others.

### 2.3.3. Prejudice and stereotypes underlie rumours

According to our previous discussion, a good way to fight rumours would be to offer people objective information to replace falsehoods with the truth. However, experience has taught us that this is not so straight-forward. The main reason for this is the existence of previously held prejudice and stereotypes that make us more resistant to this information. As we have seen in previous sections, we do not process information in a neutral manner. **Our perception is biased and selective and this makes us accept information that supports our previously held beliefs, and disregard or ignore any facts and information that call them into question.**

So, if we try to refute a rumour we have heard based on information such as statistics, facts or theories, we have to be aware that we might eventually achieve the opposite effect: first, the other person might be annoyed by the correction and become defensive and this might further reinforce what they already thought or even radicalise their discourse. Second, even though it is unreasonable, the very existence of a correction might help to confirm that the previously held belief was true. «Why would you go to such lengths to refute an argument when there is no truth to it?» Third, the correction will focus people's attention on the issue in hand, and by focusing their attention on it, it might reinforce their need to have an opinion on the matter.

Lastly, reference must be made to the legitimacy of the source. It is difficult for people to be convinced by those who are involved in the rumour itself simply by offering them information, however objective and reliable it might seem. Going back to the example of the Chinese restaurants, it would be difficult to get people to believe the arguments of a Chinese restaurant owner trying to dispel the rumour («Of course, what else are you going to say?»). And it is precisely the owner's involvement in the issue that would make people

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?

think that some personal interest is behind the information. In contrast, if the opinion comes from someone who might be considered “one of theirs”, that is, someone who they see as closer and a more legitimate source of information, they might be more predisposed to accept the information. An example is when City Council in the town of Reus had to confront the rumour about Social Services extending gift vouchers to immigrants so they could exchange them at baby-care stores in the city. The strategy they followed to dispel the rumour was to seek allies. The owner of one of those shops spoke out publically, beside town councillors, against the false information.

## 2. Knowing the field. What are we talking about?





### 3. On the path together towards an intercultural attitude

Our starting premise, right or wrong, is that the people who are reading this guide have a culturally sensitive attitude, that is, you do not express rejection to cultural diversity. Moreover, you are concerned that others do. But that does not mean that you are free from all prejudice, for instance, in your relations to many other social groups that you might be apprehensive about or mistrust,<sup>1</sup> but also in your relations to people from other cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds. Being aware of this is the first step towards establishing a different kind of bond with people or, better said, for **learning to relate to people as equals, in the understanding that we are all a source of knowledge, values or ways of behaving that can enrich us in the diverse society that we share**. And it is important to stress that we are not only referring to the more folkloric aspects of diversity, like dress, music or food, but rather to other deeper elements, those that belong to the trunk of cultures or to their roots (see Chapter 2).

For example, we can recognise that in other parts of the world massages as part of childcare give babies greater elasticity. This does not mean that modern Western society, in general terms, does not have adequate ways of caring for babies. It means that, if we are open to other ways of doing things, we might want to include their beneficial elements in our own ways. Another example is the borrowing systems in some African communities called tontines<sup>2</sup>, which might be a very interesting form of saving and lending without the intervention of banks. These practices could enrich modern Western society and would not need to be applied from A to Z; they could be adapted to context. But in order for this to happen, we must stop thinking in terms of positive or negative, good or bad, and start seeing diversity as a multitude of ways of being, doing, feeling. Open to understanding.

1 To each their own self-examination; think of situations in which, without knowing a person and just because they belong to a particular social group, you have expressed a hostile and wary attitude towards them (police, politicians, public servants, and so on).

2 On African tontines, see the article published by the organisation Ambit Maria Corral in their website: <http://www.ambitmariacorral.org/es/2013/08/les-tontines-africanes-un-nou-repte-per-a-la-banca/>

### 3. On the path together towards an intercultural attitude

Being open to interculturality also means leaving space to build together, to being receptive to including other forms of relating, other traditions or family structures; it means being open to dialogue in search of common ground, and yielding too, no doubt, at times in some aspects, and recognising the values and priorities of all. One example is that of Sikh youngsters and the tradition of wearing a dagger or *kirpan* that symbolise the commitment to a set of duties and obligations upon joining the *Khalsa*, the community of fully-initiated Sikhs. Some schools have solved the potential conflict of carrying weapons<sup>3</sup> on the premises by being receptive and understanding the importance of this object for the person carrying it. Rather than prohibition, solutions have been found through negotiation and leniency to carrying the *kirpan* when made of wood, for instance.

**But where do we meet along this path? The path that abandons the ethnocentric perspective and is open to listening and understanding other ways of doing things in search of shared solutions.** There is no single answer; it depends on each person and how they relate to diversity. To do this exercise in self-examination and self-knowledge, we will present a simple example with 4 levels so that anyone can see for themselves where they stand on the path to an intercultural attitude:

This is the situation: a new fruit shop has opened in the neighbourhood; it is run by Bushra and Abdel, a family of Moroccan origin.

Different attitudes or ways of acting in this situation:

- Level 1: I tolerate that there is a fruit shop in my neighbourhood that is owned by a family of Moroccan origin. I am aware that the relationship between them and the way they manage the business is different from the way things are traditionally done here; but I don't mind, I don't change shops for that reason. I go twice a week, as usual; I buy my fruit and I leave with a smile.
- Level 2: I'm curious about this family. Actually, Bushra made a welcoming gesture to me and that has stirred my interest in getting to know her. I decide to invite her home for lunch. Since I know they open every day, I invite her for Sunday, it's the only day she closes at 3 pm. I've already planned the meal: I'll cook typical Catalan dishes so she can get to know our culture.

---

<sup>3</sup> The kirpan has been a fundamental part of the Sikh religion since its beginning and is a very sacred symbol for Sikhs. To suggest that it is a "dagger", "weapon" or a mere cultural symbol is an unfortunate and offensive observation for Sikhs.

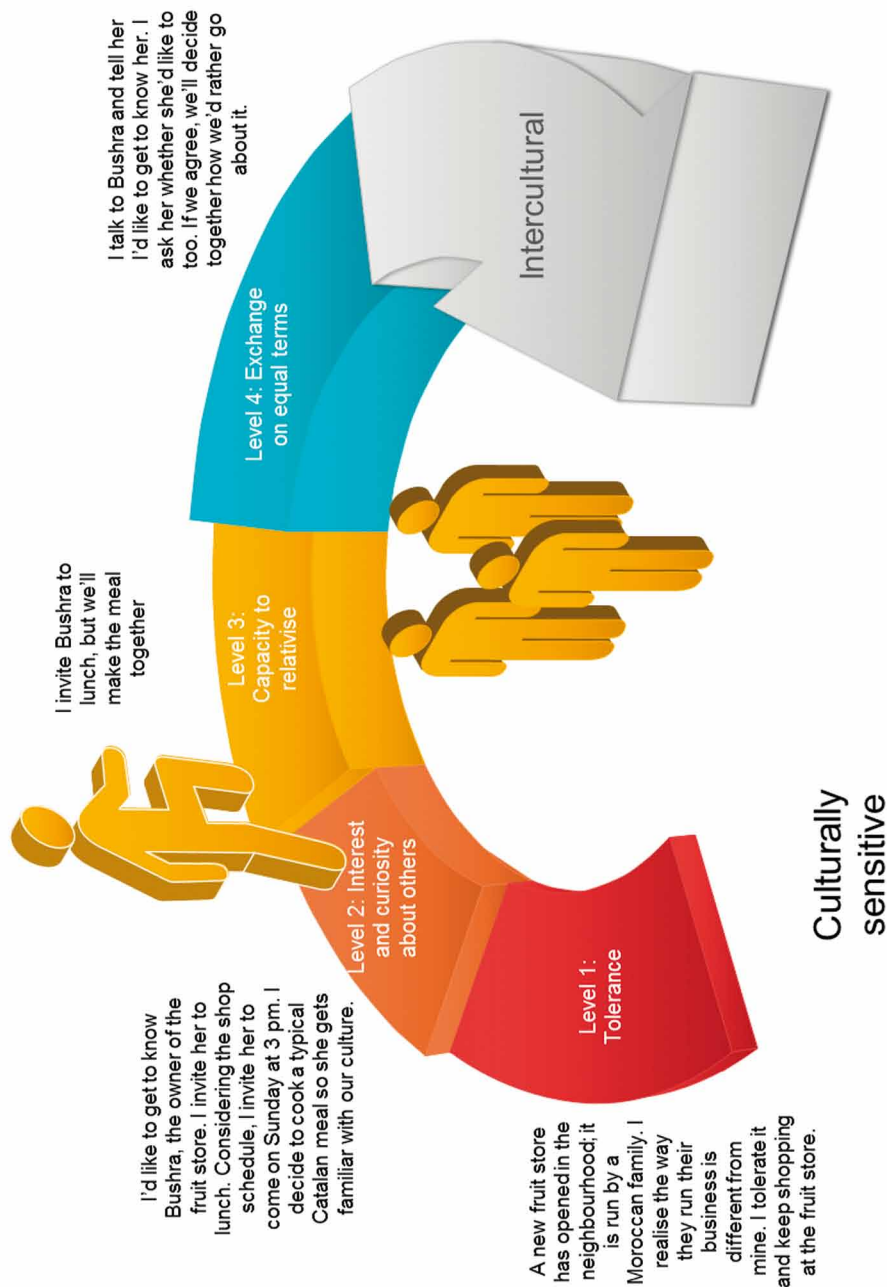
### 3. On the path together towards an intercultural attitude

- Level 3: I want to invite Bushra to lunch and I do so, but since I realise that we might not have the same idea of how to plan the meal, I suggest that we organise it together. Perhaps Bushra will propose that we not eat at home and would prefer a park, or she might suggest eating on cushions or maybe we'll think up the menu together.
- Level 4: I don't set rules; we'll think them up together on equal terms. So I don't invite Bushra to lunch at home because I don't know whether she wants to get to know me in the first place, and I don't even know whether she'll want to come for lunch. First I mention that I'd like to get to know her and ask whether she too would like that. How will we go about it? At lunch or any other way. We'll decide that together as we go along.

Naturally, this is only an example, but it may illustrate how close or how far we are from acting with an intercultural perspective. Of course the intention here is not to make value judgements, but rather to be rigorous in our reflections and keep going.

### 3. On the path together towards an intercultural attitude

## And you, where do you stand?









## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

In previous chapters we have shown that there are lots of rumours, stereotypes and prejudice about cultural diversity in our city. People who come from other countries and even their children who, despite having been born here, are still labelled as foreigners or immigrants, are often accused of being responsible for antisocial behaviour in the city or for the saturation of public services such as health, education and social services, among other things. We have all heard these kinds of rumours at work, at our children's schools, at the market and even at family gatherings.

What attitude should we take when faced with these kinds of comments? Unfortunately, in most cases, many of us simply listen, or hear, and rarely do we challenge such comments and rumours. We might remain passive because of bad experiences or even fear of confrontation. However, professionals and organisations engaged in this work say it is important to break the spiral of silence in order to voice our disagreement openly and try to get people to reflect upon the comments they make. In this section, we will try to develop a strategy for action that not only aims to provide **response arguments** to the rumours we hear, but also tools for more effective communication and **more productive and positive dialogue** with people whom we are trying to sensitise.

We are aware that **these should not be the only possible strategies and that they do not necessarily have to work with everybody**; but from our point of view, these are useful tools for awareness raising on this issue in everyday life. Now, before we get started and display our bag of resources, we should be aware of a set of **premises** that are as important as the strategies themselves:

*Before you start...*



- ⊘ Lower your expectations
- ⊘ Treat people as equals
- ⊘ Keep a positive attitude
- ⊘ Adopt a professional stance
- ⊘ Practice

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

- **Lower your expectations:** There is no special magic to the process of communication, there are no secret sentences or words and no powerful recipe or mysterious system that enables us to persuade others. Changing people's stereotypes and prejudice is a long journey that does not depend only on what we say to someone at any given moment. Of course, we must not allow this difficulty to open up feelings of defeat by believing our actions will have no influence on how other people think. Quite the contrary, we want to encourage you to try. The great value of our role as anti-rumour agents is making small changes that will certainly make a big difference. **Leaving our partner in conversation with certain doubts or even with a small bit of our narrative as now part of their way of thinking, should be seen as a huge success.**

If we are clear on this point, we will feel more relaxed, we won't draw conversations out unnecessarily nor will we attempt to get our partner in conversation to agree with everything we say. Because who are we fooling? Chances are that is not going to happen. Prejudice has a very strong emotional component. It has been part of our lives for a long time and will not disappear with a brief conversation. So bear in mind that it is much more effective for people to come to thoughts and conclusions on their own, without feeling pressured: **let people do their own process.**

- **Treat people as equals.** Everybody has their own prejudice and a stereotyped view of the world. We all develop a biased perception that helps us to see in our surroundings that which we want to believe and which confirms the thoughts we already had. We can all act grudgingly when someone tries to question our deepest convictions.

Culturally diverse people are not the only ones about whom clichés and false conceptions abound. Negative ideas prevail about many other social groups. Disabled people as defenceless and weak, politicians as schemers and corrupt, public employees as lazy and sulky, gays as campy, limp-wristed queens, Germans as square and rigid, and so on. Indeed, we could all make a never-ending list with a bit of self-examination.

We are no better, certainly not even different from the people we want to sensitise. Empathy must start by acknowledging our own stereotypes or prejudice. Constructive dialogue, which we engage in for raising awareness, is only possible when we acknowledge the other as a valid partner in conversation with whom we can exchange knowledge and experiences.

#### 4. Raising awareness face-to-face



- **Keeping a positive attitude.** Although this might sound straight out of a self-help handbook, our attitude when faced with situations of this kind is crucial to displaying the skills we shall be dealing with in this section.

If your starting thoughts are that a conversation is going to be unbearable, it most likely will be since your attitude will sway you in that direction. However, if you believe quite the opposite, that regardless of the result you will surely manage to get something positive from it, you will probably succeed in moving one step forward in the direction of intercultural relations that are free of rumours, prejudice and stereotypes.



- **Adopt a professional stance.** These issues stir up lots of feelings in people, feelings that often take hold of us and do not let us concentrate. Contrary to what occurs on other occasions, family and everyday surroundings are

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

the hardest to manage; this does not happen in more professional settings where it is easier to keep a distance. Wherever we are, we must be aware that some of the comments we will hear can be offensive to our deepest values. It is important to acknowledge these feelings and empathise with the person we are talking to even if we disagree with what they say. Try to remember how confused you have felt when faced with situations you did not understand and how you interpreted them based on your cultural perspective. Be aware that changes sometimes come with fears, or simply acknowledge how comforting it feels to find someone to blame when we feel wronged.

Our advice is: control your feelings when they surface in situations like this, do not feel disappointed or judge the person in front of you; take on a more professional distance. Even when you are in more informal contexts, with people who are close to you personally, try to think as if you were working and take distance in order to keep your feelings from overwhelming you and causing you to lose control. The tools we will be looking at now will help you to go through these situations with less stress and greater control over your emotional responses by listening to the person you are talking to and feeling empathic towards them.

- **Practice.** Knowing about the tools we are about to present is no guarantee of success in your intervention. Before we begin, it will depend on the attitude and predisposition of the person we aim to sensitise, but the mastery we display also counts, and that can only be achieved through practice. This does not mean we will not face complicated situations with poor results while we are in the process of building our capacity and improving. But practice and perseverance will help us to refine our technique and skill.

This guide aims to provide you with the knowledge, the attitude and the tools to have a greater impact when raising awareness about these issues. But allow mistakes, do not be overwhelmed by all the information you receive from the outset. We are trying to give you a few strategies that you will have to master for yourself and adapt to each new situation; keeping quiet will not do the job. What's more, practice will help you get to know yourself better and be aware of your strong and weak points.

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

### 4.1. How can we improve our dialogue when raising awareness face-to-face. Key elements in communication

#### Be aware of time, place and company

Haste is the worst enemy of effective communication. Choosing a good time, place and company is important if we want our message to have any kind of impact. If we simply approach anyone at any time and place, most likely we will not be very welcome. **Have you ever felt that people avoid you because “you’re always harping on the same subject”? Your words are likely to have a greater effect if you say them at the right time and place.**

Although we might never find the perfect time, it is true that having time to start a calm conversation with enough leeway to listen to the other person’s arguments can help us to come up with convincing arguments and the best response strategies. This is not to say that hours are required, but more than 30 seconds are certainly needed.

When we hear arbitrary comments or rumours nearby, our gut reaction may be to make some sort of sarcastic comment that makes our point of view very clear, to counteract what we have just heard. For example, «Yes, of course, they give them all the benefits, they buy them Mercedes cars and they pay for their holidays in Honolulu». But we need to bear in mind what the real impact of our comment could be. It might leave us with a clear conscience: «I’ve said what I think». But are we really making that person reflect? Or are they more likely to feel offended and to respond by radicalising their discourse even further? Actually, depending on how they take our comment, we will get a second chance or not. Sometimes the best strategy would be to withdraw and resume the conversation more easily at another time: «I was thinking about what you said the other day and...».

Sometimes the people around us will ruin any attempts to hold a relaxed conversation. Perhaps they constantly interrupt our partner, with accusatory arguments about the prejudice they might be expressing or using arguments that might even be counterproductive. The outcome of this conversation is most likely going to be a defensive attitude that could lead to the person taking an even more extreme and unchanging position. So a better strategy might be to find a moment when you and your partner in conversation are alone, and **a space where you can avoid the feeling of confrontation, of “us against them”.**

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

### Show respect

Routine communication is based to a large extent on imitation (for example, I raise my voice and the other person raises their voice, I smile and so does the other person). When we show an attitude of respect towards our partner in conversation, we can influence that person by encouraging them to employ the same attitude towards us (Borg, 2007).

The key to respect is not to see your partner in conversation as “the enemy to be defeated”, as an opponent we have to square up to. As mentioned above, we all have prejudice or stereotypes, either about people from different cultures or backgrounds, or about many other groups that tend to be strongly stigmatised. Likewise, all of us, at some time or another, have believed certain statements without having any information to corroborate what we hear, simply because these statements reaffirm beliefs we already hold.

Precisely, what we are trying to do is to **stir up people’s critical awareness, blurring the boundaries between the categories of “us” and “the others” and coming closer to the people who we want to sensitise**, who are probably much more like us than we might think at first glance. Understanding why people think the way they think and say what they say is the first step to empathising with them, even if we do not agree with the arguments they put forward. Ultimately, if we want people to set their prejudice aside and reflect on the rumours they express, we need to be open to changing our own and, more importantly, to acknowledging them openly.

Upon finishing the conversation, we should ask ourselves the following questions: do I feel like talking to this person again? And, more importantly, does he or she also want to talk about these issues again? Regardless of the apparent outcome, if the conversation has been relaxed enough, interesting and respectful, we can be sure that some impact has taken place.

### Value the other person

In previous chapters we saw that rumours that are most frequently spread are those that we experience close to home, that relate to issues that concern us and that respond to our fears and worries. This is precisely the part we have to value the most. Under no circumstances should we dismiss a family’s concerns about their child’s education, about the financial situation of a friend or relative, or their own financial worries. Also, the person might have had an unpleasant personal experience that reinforced their viewpoint. **Acknowledging and valuing their concern can help to ensure they listen more openly to our reasoning, even if it contradicts their own.**

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

### Example:

**Neighbour:** With tourism on the rise, things aren't like they used to be in the neighbourhood. Everything's gotten terribly expensive and people who've been living here for ages have had to leave. My parents had to close down their paper store and now, to top it off, someone's set up a halal butcher shop. I still flare up just to think of it!

**Anti-rumour agent:** Wow, I didn't know that, I'm so sorry.

**Neighbour:** I can still remember when we used to play out front with my brothers and sisters. My whole life.

**Anti-rumour agent:** And why did you say they had to close the shop?

**Neighbour:** Because the rent got too expensive.

**Anti-rumour agent:** Oh, but that wouldn't be the butcher's fault, would it? He probably has his share of trouble keeping the business open. I don't think they charge him any less.

Attaching value to the experience of your partner in conversation and highlighting your points in common can help you in gaining greater acceptance for your arguments, even if you both disagree.

**When you value your partner in conversation, this helps people to feel understood, appreciated and accepted.** Focus attention on the problem that needs to be resolved, which in this case is to dispel a rumour, and not so much on the person responsible for spreading that rumour. Person-centred communication can make your partner in conversation defensive and might create a situation where we end up blaming the person rather than offering solutions and counterarguments. Nobody likes to be called a racist or an ignorant.

For example, you could say to your partner in conversation: «You always believe everything you're told. You're not in the least bit critical of anything», or instead you could say: «We're hammered with these kinds of rumours all the time, so much that we end up believing them, eh?»

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

### Listen closely and understand their reasoning

The act of communicating begins with the ability to listen to what the other person has to say. But listening is more than just keeping quiet while the other person speaks. Active listening should help us to understand the thoughts, feelings and actions of our partner in conversation, while analysing what is happening in our own minds.

When the subject of the conversation is a rumour we want to dispel, the problem is that while the other person is talking to us, we are thinking about what we can say as a counterargument. But remember, there is no perfect argument. **What we have to find is the best argument for the person we are talking to. If we don't listen to them first, it will be hard for us to find a suitable response.** It might seem as though you are listening, but actually you are simply waiting for your turn to speak.

The way you listen and respond to other people is very important for improving the act of communication and the interaction itself. If you listen emphatically, you are conveying the message that you are interested in everything the other person is saying and you are making an effort to understand their point of view. If you do the opposite, the other person will think otherwise and lose interest in continuing the discussion: «What's the point if they're not listening to me?» So we are not only talking about listening, but also about showing that we are listening. This way, the person we talk to will feel more comfortable, they will express their point of view more openly and this will enable us to understand them better. What's more, we need to be aware that the more interest we show in what others are saying, the more likely they are to listen to what we have to say.

But how can we show that we are actively listening? A bit of practical advice is do not interrupt, do not finish the other's sentences and do not talk over someone when they are speaking (Borg, 2007). On the other hand, we should not be afraid to ask questions; the better we understand someone's reasoning, feelings or underlying concerns, the better we will be able to adjust our answer.

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

### Example:

**Neighbour:** You can only go to Social Services for benefits with a heard-scarf on nowadays. If you're a local, there's no way they'll give you anything!

**Anti-rumour agent:** How do you know? Do you need help or support of some kind? (With interest, not sarcastically).

**Neighbour:** I don't, but my sister does. They'll be kicking her out of her flat in no time. Poor girl, can't pay the mortgage.

**Anti-rumour agent:** Has she been to Social Services?

**Neighbour:** But didn't I say they give it all away to those ragheads?

**Anti-rumour agent:** Tell her to go ask. We sometimes believe whatever people say and don't check for ourselves. As far as I know, a social worker assesses cases based on things like income or how big a family is. Tell her not to pay attention to rumours and go directly so she can check for herself.

### Catch their attention

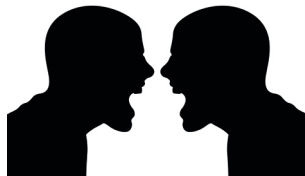
Most of us have a pretty short attention span. It is very difficult to maintain a constant level of interest. What can we do to get people to listen to us with interest and hold their attention? First of all, we need to avoid long-winded arguments in which we refer to abstract concepts such as globalisation or interculturality. It is much more effective to offer **brief and clear arguments that get straight to the point of the conversation**. It is much more effective to use examples and arguments that the person has already given, but reducing them to shared points, common ground.

On the other hand, we have already talked about how powerful questions can be when it comes to getting someone to reflect and also to hold the person's attention and interest. Try to establish dialogues in which both parties listen and contribute, and avoid long monologues in which all you do is demonstrate everything you know about cultural diversity.

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

### Stay calm

One of the main reasons why we often prefer to keep quiet rather than challenge rumours and stereotypes is fear of confrontation. Because these issues are ideologically and emotionally loaded, dialogue can end up turning into a direct confrontation, an argument, and we often do not know how to control it. What's more, the effect of these situations is not to raise awareness, but quite the opposite. Normally, partners in conversation end up radicalising their initial discourse, reaffirming what they thought at the start.



In dealing with such a complex situation, breathe and keep calm. **Do not make accusations, remember that you are not confronting an enemy; you are talking to a friend, colleague or service user.** Communicate your differences but also highlight the points you agree on. If you remove affirmations that are emotionally loaded and work on the basis of mutual agreement, you will find it easier to talk to that person. What happens in these kinds of situations, when we try to dispel a rumour, is that the issue often triggers strong emotions in us, either because we feel a sense of injustice, or because we identify with the people the rumour is about or because we feel it is our responsibility to change the opinion of the other person.

When you are dealing with an aggressive person who uses hostile communication techniques, perhaps because the issue touches a nerve and they have let their emotions run free, try as hard as you can to remain calm. If you match this type of energy, all you will do is raise the level of anger which makes listening to one another very unlikely. You need a lot of self-control to ensure this type of attitude does not affect you. Most of us would react by responding in the same way, as a defence. Take a deep breath and remember that you will be better protected if you keep calm. Now, more than ever, try to listen to the other person, empathise with them. Try to see what is happening as objectively as possible and not in an emotional way. It is really easy to spoil a personal or professional relationship when feelings get the better of you.

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

### **Body language and tone of voice should reflect what you are trying to convey in conversation**

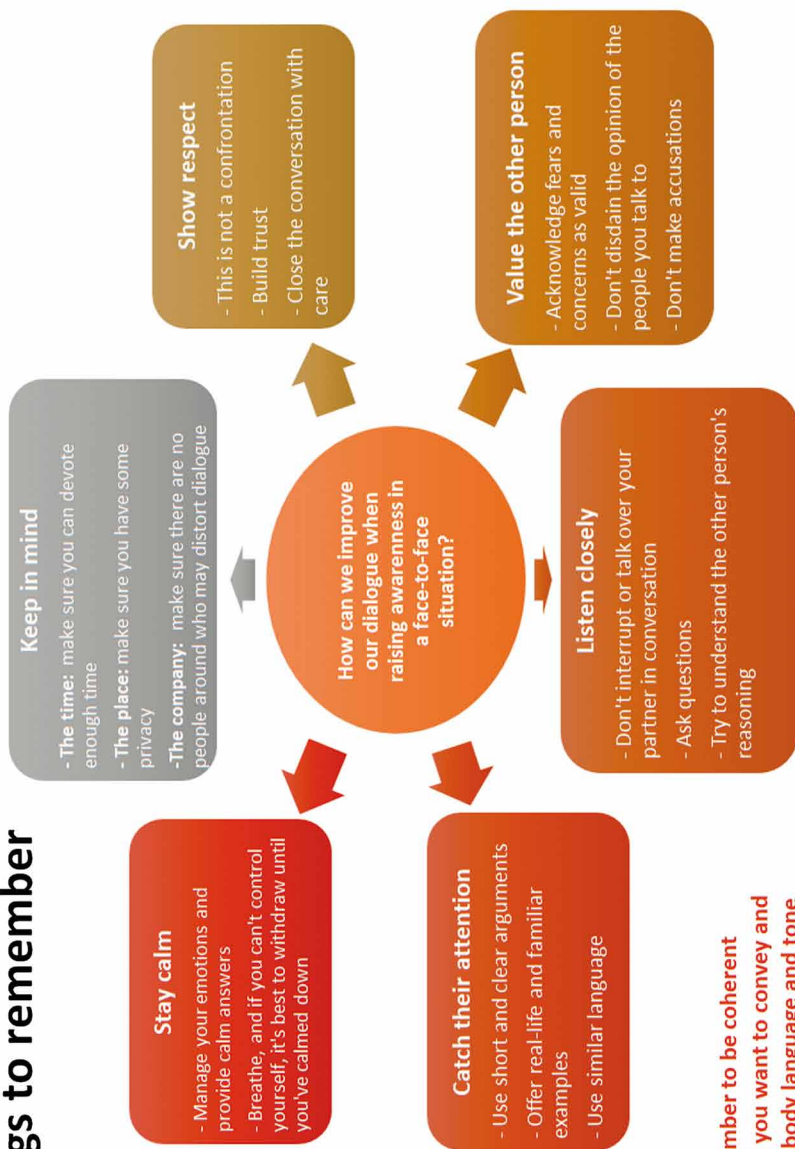
We know that not all cultures share the same codes when it comes to body language or tone of voice. For some cultures, not looking straight at one's eyes is a show of respect; nodding is a way of showing you are listening, although it does not mean you understand or agree; or a loud tone of voice does not necessarily mean you are angry.

So this is why the only thing we can say on this topic that might be of use for the majority is to try to show coherence between what we are trying to express with our words and what our body or voice is corroborating. Often what happens is that although we might be trying to value our partner in conversation, show respect, listen closely and so on, our face betrays a clear disagreement and strong disapproval. Taking a few seconds during our conversation to be mindful of the face expressions we adopt will help us to reinforce our intentions.

Aside from showing coherence between the attitude we want to express and what our body is really saying, we should be aware of how our partner in conversation is reacting. Instead of interpreting their answers according to our own cultural codes, it is best to ask questions about how we can make one another feel more comfortable together while gradually deciphering our different cultural codes.

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

### Things to remember



Also remember to be coherent with what you want to convey and with your body language and tone of voice.

### 4.2. Response strategies

Up to now we have been talking about listening to our partner in conversation and then responding in a respectful, suitable way that invites dialogue. In this section we will be looking at some of the **response strategies we can use and will give some examples of possible arguments.**



Needless to say, as mentioned above, there is no perfect argument. In all cases, we must try to find the best argument for reaching that person and that makes us feel the best.

We also need to stress that there are no **magic recipes**. Changing such deeply rooted ways of thinking and feeling, as prejudice tends to be, cannot be achieved in a single conversation. We need to set a more attainable and realistic goal: to stir up people's critical awareness somewhat when it comes to rumours and stereotypes, sowing the seeds of doubt, creating space for reflection.

We should also point out that the strategies we put forward here **are not exclusive**. When we establish a conversation with another person we need to bear in mind that we will not simply be challenging a rumour and then leaving the conversation there. It is highly likely that the other person will put forward counterarguments that make the conversation go on for longer and which will probably be reasoned and even convincing. This is why we need to make use of a range of responses, resorting to different arguments over the course of the conversation.

Finally, we should mention that the strategies we will be presenting **are not unique or sometimes the most effective**. By taking them on, each of us can develop strategies of our own that fit our thoughts and forms of expression and make us feel more comfortable. So we encourage you to **adapt them, enrich them or reject them straight out, whatever seems right to you**<sup>1</sup>.

#### 4.2.1. Ask questions

Questions are a means of **showing interest** in what our partner in conversation is saying and they **help us to understand** their argument or problem more clearly. They also help us to hold their interest because they must pay attention to the conversation and analyze and reason what they are saying.

<sup>1</sup> These strategies were discussed with a group of trained anti-rumour agents. Based on an initial proposal and a presentation of real cases and true experiences, workshop participants contributed their ideas.

#### 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

Moreover, since we are aiming to sow seeds of doubt, it might be much more effective for our partner in conversation to come to the conclusion we are seeking for himself, instead of directly giving the answer ourselves. **Now, as a tool for reflection**, we need to take care to ensure our intonation is correct. It is very easy to sound sarcastic when we ask questions that we think we know the answers to. If we ask the question sarcastically, the person might feel offended and radicalise their discourse or become defensive. So we could ask the person if they are sure of what they are telling us and how they know that, **without sounding like we are accusing or discriminating them.**

On the other hand, very often we tell our interpretation of what we have seen without really describing the situation as it is. Interpretation may be influenced by our prejudice or by our cultural perspective. In cases like these, it might be interesting to ask the person to make a more precise description of what he or she saw, and then wonder out loud if **there could be other possible interpretations.**

- And what was it that you saw, exactly? And are you sure that... (trying to clearly discern between description and interpretation)
- This happened to me once when I saw... and I got this big idea of what had happened but I was wrong, it was my interpretation.

In cases where our partner in conversation reproduces someone else's discourse or experience, it might be interesting to call their attention to the fact that we very often **reproduce comments we have heard from others without really questioning whether these are true.** When expressing these thoughts, it's best to include ourselves in this thoughtless practice or habit.

- And how do you know? Who told you about it? And what did they say, exactly? And how do they know? You see sometimes we hear something said so often that we end up believing it. Not because we have any proof that it's true, just because everyone says so. It's okay to acknowledge it, we're all human and can make mistakes.
- This happened to me once... (if we can come up with a real-life example of a time when we believed a rumour because everyone else did and then discovered it wasn't true). We fall for the strangest things sometimes, really...

We should also mention that people might end up lying about what they have seen when it actually did not happen. When this occurs it is not a good strategy

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

to accuse them of being liars, lest their efforts to avoid being labelled as liars lead them to insist on what they are saying to the extent that they end up believing it. One final point could be to add that the information seems odd to us, that we see inconsistencies or that we have opposing views on the issue. This might be a way to end the conversation on more friendly terms.

Finally, keep in mind that **the question may be a strategy in itself or may be a way of generating others**. If our aim is for the person to reach their own conclusions, we can ask questions, reflect on the real causes of the situation or simply apply common sense.

### 4.2.2. Encourage curiosity

When people express their doubts, it is important to encourage them to try to find out the real situation first-hand, emphasise the possibility of **getting direct information through official sources or from other reliable sources and not to let themselves be taken in by everything they hear**. It would be more effective than for us to tell them outright the way things are, wouldn't it? Why should they believe us any more than the person who shared the rumour with them?

- The truth is I don't know the schedules shops have to follow. There must be some specific regulation. Do you know of any? It might be best to look into it before we go any further, don't you think? I mean, maybe they're not doing anything wrong and here we are, chewing them out.
- I hear that all the time, but the truth is I've never seen the prerequisites for granting free school lunches. Have you? Let's check and see, shall we?

Needless to say, in our day and age many people check information quickly on the Internet, with their mobile phones. We should be wary though of the sources we use. Whenever possible, it is advisable to resort to official or serious websites and avoid those that only reproduce rumours and even support them with arguments.

### 4.2.3. Approach reality directly

Just as we encourage people to check official and public sources, we can also encourage them to try and experiment before making certain statements. Particularly with regard to issues like living together in diversity, people who are victims of rumours are often accused of not making the effort to talk or dialogue without remembering that this effort has to go both ways.

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

Furthermore, the people we are talking about might also have a stereotyped viewpoint and, therefore, it would be interesting to **take the first step and break this two-way prejudice**.

Along the same lines, a source for checking information could be the people themselves whom the rumours are about. Taking the step to ask whether what we have heard is accurate or not is a way of giving voice to those who have been wronged and give them the chance to express their own points of view.

- We always say they don't want to relate to us, but the truth is I don't make the least effort either to talk to them. They might feel the same about us, don't you think?
- And have you ever asked them why they dress that way? What it represents? If you do so politely, surely they'll explain. Aren't you curious? You might be surprised.
- It's natural that we're a bit fearful about all the changes taking place in the neighbourhood, but we can't expect things to stay the same forever, can we? That they look different to us is not necessarily negative. We should try to get along as neighbours and we won't be able to unless we all make an effort. We could try to do something together.

### 4.2.4. Apply common sense

As we said earlier, some of the arguments people use to justify rumours or prejudice are **full of inconsistencies and inaccuracies**. Revealing these inconsistencies by asking questions might be a way of **making them reflect on how we repeat this sort of argument without being critical**.

- And why would public services want to benefit these people over the rest of the neighbours? And why would the revenue authority let these shopkeepers get away with not paying taxes? Most of them aren't even able to vote...
- But did anything specific happen to you? Did something go wrong with someone? Because misunderstandings between neighbours are so common, wherever you are (we might want to add an example of a conflict with someone of the same origin as our partner in conversation).
- Why do we talk about ghettos only when we talk about people who are culturally different? Isn't it natural for people to relate more to those they've got a greater affinity with? Are all the elderly people in the park also a ghetto? What are you afraid of exactly?

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

Likewise, it might be interesting to highlight the **contradictions or impositions that exist in all societies** and are not considered as such.

In a conversation about the headscarf some Muslim women wear, and after questions about whether they have ever talked directly to a woman wearing one to ask her whether she feels forced to do so, we could add the following thought: Westerners aren't as free to dress as they wish:

- What would happen if a sixty-year old woman goes out in a mini skirt and a halter top?
- I don't think women wear high heels because they're comfortable.
- How do people react when they see a man wearing a skirt in the street?
- Why would a person decide to have surgery to look younger or thinner?

### 4.2.5. Find common ground

We need to reinforce the arguments that emphasise aspects that all people share. **We do not have to deny differences but we do need to acknowledge they are not just down to cultural factors. We are all different and yet very similar.** The concerns, expectations, worries and dreams of human beings are usually very similar, even though we speak different languages or practise different religions. Our arguments could help us to find common ground and overcome socio-cultural differences, that is, find a common identity as parents, workers or business people.

- That shopkeeper, whatever his culture, religion or origin, surely experiences the same hardships as you do in keeping his business afloat: rents are on the rise, people buy more often at the big shopping centres they've put up in the neighbourhood, you need special discounts to attract customers, fear of theft...
- If we went to a parents' meeting at school and they were asked what they'd like their kids to be when they grow up, surely they'd all say things like doctors, engineers, teachers. Everybody wants the best for their children, you and I do too. I don't think anyone would neglect the issue or act indifferent.

We need to bear in mind that **many of the people we want to talk to will have had their own migratory experiences** or might be migrants in the

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

future. A good way to **find empathy and highlight common ground** is to remind them of their own experience, make parallels with the way they did things and, above all, with common feelings.

- Here in the neighbourhood there are lots of people from Andalusia/Extremadura/Murcia, etc. In their day many people must've complained about so many immigrants in town. It's terrible to be rejected, isn't it?
- Morocco, Ecuador, China or Pakistan, it doesn't matter, we all have to go through the same troubles to get our papers, to work and make friends. The same gossip spreads about people from our country and we don't like it, do we? So let's not do the same.
- You came from your town/country years ago, would it be easy for you to go back and leave behind the life you've made for yourself here?

This kind of reasoning gives people the chance to feel somewhat closer to those they talk about, while encouraging them to do things together or find new alliances to face challenges we might have in common.

The end goal is to **break with these 'us and them' categories that often group people together according to dissimilar traits** (age, origin, expectations, experiences and so on). At first sight they might seem to be a very homogeneous group though very far from 'us'. We must break these images to bring people closer physically and symbolically.

- But you, who is more like you? The guy who goes to school or to work with you every day and you do the same things, or me? I'm twenty years older than you, I live in another town and lead an entirely different life from yours. Surely you've got much more in common with him than with me.

### 4.2.6. Positive messages

Debating that immigration is not synonymous with delinquency is a must, but we should also **highlight the social and economic benefits that cultural diversity brings to our society**. This is important because, generally speaking, there are few visible examples of this. Finding things that have benefitted life around us thanks to the contributions of diversity is an interesting strategy.

- We're actually lucky these shops are here now or we wouldn't have anywhere to go for things we need, aside from the big shopping centre that's quite a walk from here...

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

- Well I think it's really interesting we have kids from different cultures and origins at school. Not the same to have to learn all that from a map instead of experiencing it first-hand. I'm sure they'll be better prepared for the future. Actually, the classroom is no more than a reflection of the world they'll be living and working in.
- But having kids of different levels in the classroom is a good thing. You know, school isn't only for teaching math or language; kids are taught to be understanding and to cooperate with their classmates. Helping each other out is a good thing, isn't it? Don't you try to get your kids at home to be like that too?

Mostly, when we talk about immigration, we do so thinking about the people with the greatest difficulties or in cases of conflict that might have occurred. However, our city's cultural diversity is natural now and so familiar. The trouble is we rarely talk about this and only stress the conflicts that emerge.

Conflict in itself does not necessarily have to be negative. Quite the contrary, much can be learned through conflict. When people live together in diversity, adjustments and some difficulty might take place, but **the crux of the matter lies not so much in the existence or not of conflict, but rather in how we solve it or in how we do something constructive together.** So in case of conflict, instead of denying it, we should explore the ways we have of solving it and the lessons we can draw from it.

### 4.2.7. Questioning generalisations

We need to convey the message that **we all have personal characteristics or circumstances that make us unique.** We cannot presume that someone will behave in a particular way just because they come from a particular background. So we can highlight **just how ridiculous some exaggerations are.**

- Man or woman, all of them, every single one of them... you think they're all... well I guess there's a bit of everything, like everywhere, right?
- Not all of them, but the majority...the majority? What is the majority? 60%? 75%? 90%? How do you know?

When we are told a story that has to do with a negative experience, we should point to the fact that this is a personal incident, both in terms of the experience and the person. We can also stress the availability of channels for filing

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

complaints and take action instead of blaming an entire community for acts committed by just a few.

- But they're not all thieves. If a Catalan had robbed you, you wouldn't be thinking they're all thieves, would you? Did you report it? And what did they say? It can be really unpleasant and frustrating, but that doesn't mean we should be chewing out people who haven't got the blame.

We can also look for close examples of people who don't fit the stereotype that was just mentioned, while preventing that they be labelled as an exception. The internal diversity of all social groups must be reflected in our conversation. To this end, we might share that perception is very subjective and that our previous views on matters may condition the way we see a part of reality, that which corroborates the ideas we already had. We must be open to seeing the diversity in our environment in all groups and situations. Otherwise, regardless of how visible the diversity might be, we shall continue to see others in two colours: us and them.

- You think they're all racists? And what about all the people in the neighbourhood you get along with? They're racists too?
- But how many people do you know (of that origin, culture or religion)? They're all like that? (Try to give an example of someone you both know) ...is not an exception. There are all sorts of people everywhere you go. The problem is we use generalisations too often and lots of people end up bearing the brunt.

### 4.2.8. We can all be victims

Everyone can be labelled with a stereotype and stir prejudice in others. We could **foster empathy by using examples of other generalisations or prejudice that are expressed about a group our partner in conversation identifies with.**

- Look what people say about those who live in such and such a borough or town... we're not all like that, are we?
- Look what people say about those who have certain professions... ridiculous, isn't it?
- Look what people say about women or about men when they lump them all together... what a way to generalise, splitting the world in two! Couldn't be

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

more absurd!

- Just think what people say about those who are originally from a certain place or follow a certain religion... it's so unfair to lump them all together! Don't you agree?

We all have the same rights and we must guarantee these rights for all. Stereotypes and prejudice do not contribute to their protection and they are sometimes used to justify their violation.

So we must stress the **harmful consequences of prejudice related to the violation of rights, the lack of opportunities and obstacles to relations between people, and how everyone may suffer these consequences at one point or other in their lives.**

- And how about all the youngsters who have had to leave the country in recent years? Many of them are having a hard time because people in the countries they've moved to accuse them of all the same things you're saying. They're going through the same problems!
- When we moved into the neighbourhood, we also came across people who gave us dirty looks. Didn't you think it was unfair? They didn't know you.
- Just think that in another context you might be the one who's different or strange. You wouldn't like people to make assumptions about you without knowing you, would you?
- What if it were your son or daughter who was having trouble with math, for instance? You wouldn't like other parents saying that your kids are to blame for bringing down everyone else's level, would you? Anyone can have their own troubles but that doesn't mean they're guilty of anything.
- What if war broke out in your country? Wouldn't you flee? Imagine people said you were a "freeloader" or a "terrorist".

### 4.2.9. Show that people are being used as scapegoats and that other factors are involved

Recent changes in the job market, in families, in the economy, in technology or in the natural environment are occurring so quickly and so radically that we feel the effects and are really concerned. Responsibility for this situation is unclear, little known and, in any case, out of reach. However, the main

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

characters in the intercultural process are quite visible. We find them on the streets, they are our neighbours and we identify them by their appearance or by their accents. And we can easily, out of habit or ignorance, fall into the temptation of **pointing them out as those responsible for all the changes upsetting us**. They thus become scapegoats of the difficulties and problems people are facing when overwhelmed by complex phenomena occurring without tangible culprits. So **we must resort to arguments that can help to easily identify other possible explanations**.

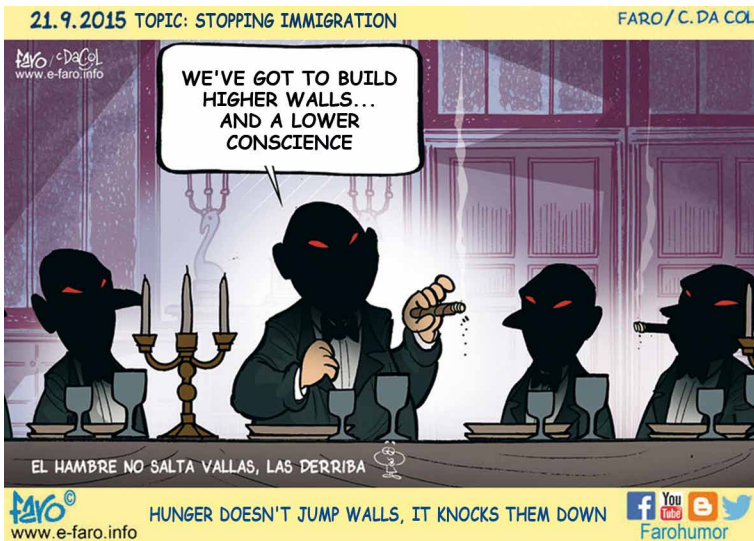
- Large shopping centres as a cause for the disappearance of buyers and closing down of small shops.
- Budget cuts in public health services as a cause for the increase in waiting lists.
- Rise in ratios and lack of resources at schools as a factor that lowers the academic level.
- Economic crisis and labour regulations as causes for worsening job conditions.
- Do you know of anyone who has never worked or done business illegally or paid under the table? The greatest thieves in this country aren't your next-door neighbours.

### 4.2.10. Show who is to lose in all this and who is to gain

Sometimes **malicious and hate discourses are used to justify discriminatory political decisions or directly advocate for the supremacy or pre-eminence of part of the people living in Catalonia over others as a way to gain more followers**. So our arguments can be useful in uncovering political positions, public statements, campaigns and acts of discrimination, xenophobia or racism on the part of representatives of political parties who defend ideas like these or act upon them. When their discourses based on public service management actually hide their true intentions, we must prevent them from going unnoticed. Likewise, we should also call attention to the fact that **everyone has the right to live together in harmony and with equal opportunities**.

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

- All they want with this kind of message is to frighten us so they can take decisions we would actually reject straight off. They're manipulating us!
- That sort of comment just makes for bad feelings in the neighbourhood. Isn't it better if we get along with each other?
- "You reap what you sow". Can't be good to feed all this hate between us; in the end it'll be us, the neighbours, who'll pay the consequences.



### 4.2.11. Acknowledge that you feel upset

If there is enough familiarity with the person we are talking to, we might want to express how upset we feel about certain remarks or expressions: jokes that are offensive, discriminatory or scornful language, or direct accusations can stir intense feelings of rejection in us that are hard to control.

Indeed, we might choose to ignore such remarks or answer aggressively or accuse the person who says them, but remember that if we want to have some sort of impact on the way they think, we will have to look for a more reflexive and friendly way to respond. This is why most of the recommendations in this guide are meant to prevent direct conflict and entreat you to be cautious, respectful and value your partner in conversation first and foremost. However,

## 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

we can certainly **acknowledge openly, without engaging in a confrontation, that we feel upset about their remarks or expressions:**

- This sort of joke bothers me. Can we change the subject, please?
- Oh, I don't like you to use those words (wogs, white trash, spic, frog, nigger, wetback). To me, they're insults.

In this last example, people might not be aware of how derogatory their language is. **We could also reply by using other less offensive words that may provide a new framework for communication:** migrant people, Moroccans, Argentines, Latin Americans, Catalonians, and so on. The difference in language, when clearly used, might make them understand that you don't agree with the words they use.

### 4.2.12. Recognising their rights openly<sup>2</sup>

To conclude, or rather to close this section on strategies, we should not be afraid of **openly recognising the rights and liberties that we believe all people should enjoy.** Along these lines we could emphasise that we all agree on fundamental rights on an abstract level: education, health, asylum when life or integrity is in danger, and so on. So we should be coherent and recognise these rights in everyday life and for all our neighbours living with us in our towns and cities.

- Well, what's the problem with them using the health services? Didn't we fight years ago so everyone could have access? This is what public health is.
- Social benefits are for whomever needs them most. What difference does it make where they or their parents were born?
- We carry on about children's rights in the world to a good education, but not when they share a desk at school with our kids?
- But what are parks for if people can't enjoy them? Makes no sense to have places like these if we can't use them, right?

<sup>2</sup> European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City. Barcelona City Council recognises a set of rights to be guaranteed for the entire population: <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/sites/default/files/arxiu-documents/%5BPDF%5D%20Carta%20Europea%20de%20Salvaguarda%20dels%20Drets%20Humans%20a%20la%20Ciutat.pdf>

#### 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

- And what if you or your family were in danger? Wouldn't you flee? Don't you think these people also have the right to escape?
- Doesn't everyone pay the same price for bread, water or the bus? We're all taxpayers, so we've all got the same rights!

This kind of argument can be easily dismissed with some conclusive remark like “locals first and then foreigners”, thus identifying first and second-class citizens. Truth be told, this kind of argument often **hides not so much a difference in origin but of social class.**

- And what if we were talking about people who shop at jewelleries or at expensive clothing stores instead of people who are in need? I'm under the impression that we wouldn't be carrying on like this about them. If they bring money along, it's fine, but when they come to earn an honest living, it's not okay. Well, I think those who are leaving the country or who've already left are more like the ones who just want to earn a living.
- When they came over to cover jobs the locals didn't want to take, or when they helped to pay retirement pensions, they weren't a problem, and now that things are getting rough, they should go home. The problem is the job market needed workers, but families and people came with their lives. They are not some kind of merchandise you can just send back when you're no longer interested.

Finally, we might be facing remarks or conversations that justify acts of discrimination. **It might even occur that someone isn't expressing a feeling of personal rejection but tries to justify their or someone else's actions because of potential disapproval from members of the same group.** For instance, those responsible for a centre who allow service users to reject part of their employees for belonging to a different culture or religion; or someone who decides not to date someone for religious or ethnic reasons and because they fear their family's reaction.

- This person is being discriminated against for their religion/culture/nationality, or for the colour of their skin. If you think it isn't right, why do you let others force you to do it? We shouldn't be accomplices.
- Do you really think that hiring someone from another cultural origin will have such an impact? So you might lose some customers, but you'll certainly gain others.

#### 4. Raising awareness face-to-face

- To what extent do you think their culture/religion/skin colour will prevent them from doing a good job? What qualities are you seeking in the person for the job? Have you checked to see whether this person has these qualities?

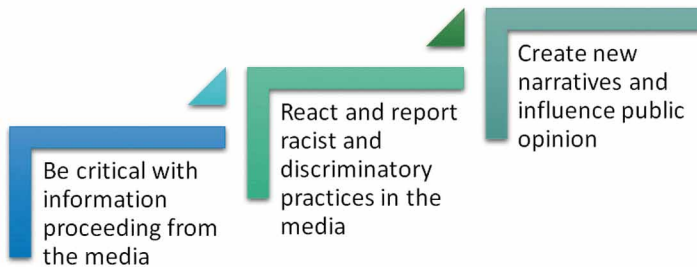
#### 4. Raising awareness face-to-face







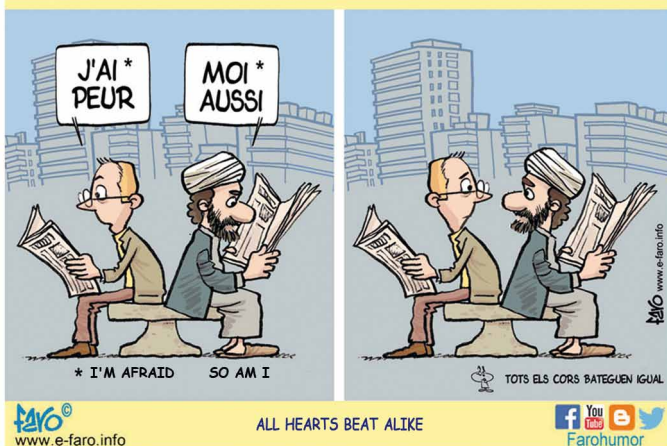
## 5. The media as generators of prejudice



### 5.1. The importance of fostering a critical perspective of information in the media

Migration is not a new phenomenon nor is it circumstantial; it is a consolidated reality that has changed society as it was previously understood. Society has progressively undergone transformation and adaptation processes as cultural, religious and ethnic diversity increases. Accurate and appropriate treatment in the media regarding the migration phenomenon and its effects on society is of the utmost importance to prevent fear of change and misinformation from creating or maintaining extremely harmful stereotypes or prejudice for society as a whole, and for respect for diversity, integration and social cohesion.

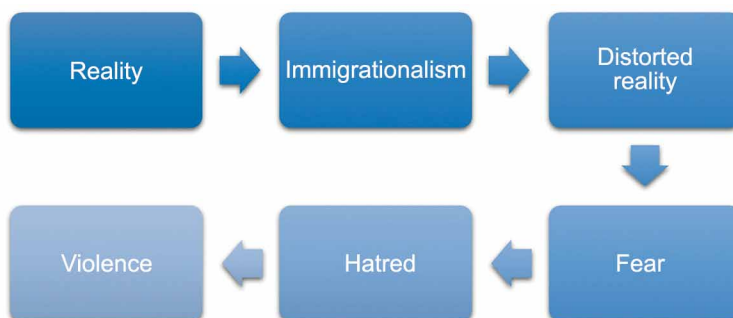
10.1.2015 TOPIC: WESTERN AND MUSLIM COMMUNITY FACING THE OUTBREAK IN TERROR FARO/C. DA COL



## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

Thus far the media has engaged in narrating this transformation and portraying in its productions this richness in society. However, its narrative is still inadequate. On the one hand, we see that a dangerous association is made between particular groups (Roma community, certain nationalities, Muslims, and so on) and criminal acts, while other realities that are common in a diverse society are neglected or underrepresented<sup>1</sup>.

Based on proof of this practice, a new concept has recently appeared to explain this phenomenon: immigrationism, that is, the sensationalist treatment of immigration in the news. A more accurate definition of the term refers to manipulation of information in the news that tends to produce fear, hatred or confusion and can even cause violence<sup>2</sup>.



Which elements explain, though never justify, some of the media's treatment of cultural diversity?

- **Lack of pluralism in sources.** The media, most likely as a reflection of the society they belong to, seek immediacy in information and therefore prioritise the most common sources of information, which are usually news agencies and public or private institutions. However, they very rarely consult the main people involved in the situations they cover. Routines in the production of information and the lack of stable reporters do not justify this practice<sup>3</sup>. Journalists must get used to resorting to a broad range of sources and talking to potential informants, experts and specialists who may provide more in-depth or alternative points of view<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Red Acoge: Estudio sobre periodismo e inmigración. Inmigracionalismo 3. Medios de comunicación: agentes de integración y cohesión social. Madrid, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.inmigracionalismo.org/es/>

<sup>3</sup> Initiatives like that of Diverscat are an attempt to provide communicators and the media with a tool that may enrich their sources and foster higher standards in the treatment of information regarding diversity.

<sup>4</sup> Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya: Guia sobre el tractament de la diversitat cultural en els mitjans de comunicació. Resource available online: [www.interculturalitat.bcn.cat](http://www.interculturalitat.bcn.cat)

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

- **Lack of diversity in newsrooms.** The presence of ethnically diverse professionals in the media is not only a matter of social justice. It is also necessary for journalism in order to ensure quality of information and the contribution of new perspectives on reality. Hopefully, the lack of diversity in newsrooms is only circumstantial and in future years these will be a fair reflection of the student body in journalism and communication universities today.
- **Lack of connection with the streets and with readers and viewers.** The fast pace of journalistic production causes professionals in charge of providing readers and viewers with information to resort to the facts through news agencies with no time for going out onto the streets and searching for the information first-hand. This lack of connection with reality gives media professionals a very uniform perspective of diversity and prevents them from seeing that it is present in any and all spheres of everyday life. By connecting with life on the streets, they would realise that, for instance, there are gay and lesbian people in the Muslim community, people who are more orthodox and others whose view of religion is more secular; that there are people of all ages and social classes and there are people who are unschooled while others are highly qualified and work in multiple professions.

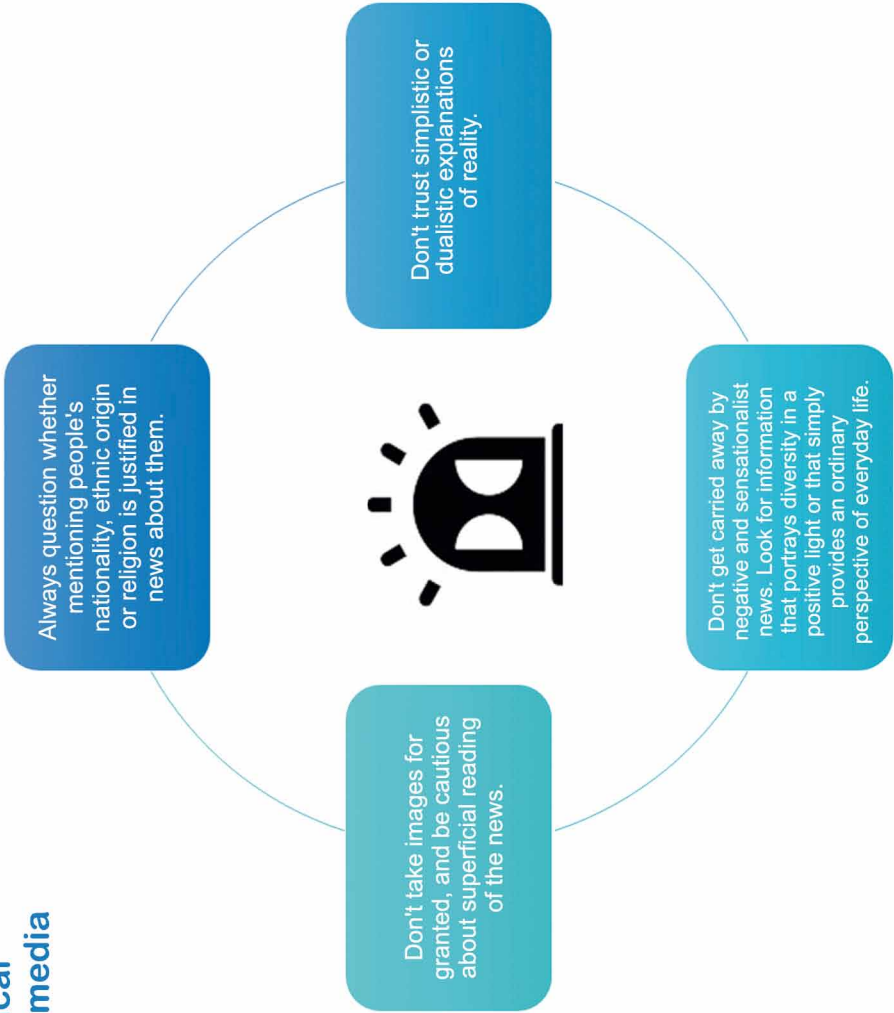
Moreover, it is also true that more caution is taken with organised groups with a greater capacity for filing complaints. The empowerment of ethnically diverse people to exercise their right to holding the media accountable for their news might ensure that more care is taken when furnishing information that may be damaging to their public image.

- **Editorial line in the media.** In the end, the decision to publish certain information and not another, to use stigmatising and discriminating language or to furnish information with a sensationalist and alarmist skew might simply be a conscious decision based on particular ideas or political interests.

In this situation, it is important to **foster a critical perspective** in readers or viewers, and the following recommendations are meant to be useful in this task:

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

### Recommendations for fostering a critical perspective of media information



### **Always question whether mentioning people's nationality, ethnicity or religion is justified in news about them**

In routine professional practice, driven by a keen interest in the basic principles of journalistic information, details are often introduced, like people's nationality, ethnicity or religion, that might seem to complement the news, although they are not news as such. But does this information really help us to understand the news or does it condition us to make unjustified associations?<sup>5</sup>

This kind of practice encourages the identification of people of a specific ethnic background with a particular illegal or criminal activity, since it may be considered an attribute or characteristic linked to the group mentioned. Latin gangs, Romanian mafias, gypsy neighbourhood and other clichés may stigmatise the people in the news. These expressions are not an accurate representation of reality and reinforce prejudice. Not all youngsters who engage in a fight are members of a gang nor do they share the same ethnic background, just as not all pickpockets have a particular nationality nor do they belong to a mafia.

Regarding the use of the term immigrant as a category identifying a person regardless of how long they have been residing in the country, we should also bear in mind that being an immigrant is, by definition, a transitory circumstance which is generally prolonged due to precarious political, social and cultural mechanisms of inclusion<sup>6</sup>.

### **Do not trust simplistic or dualistic explanations of reality**

Good intentions on the part of some media aiming to make news reports easily understood for readers or viewers may involve a dualistic view of reality. This perspective seriously distorts and simplifies reality by supplying a good and evil image without explaining the complexity of the phenomenon or event that is being reported.

Using terms like Arabs, Asians, Sub Saharans or South Americans conveys stereotyped views because macro ethnic categories are produced which posit uniformity among very diverse groups. Moreover, when an action or conduct based on one sole case is extrapolated to the entire population of a country, ethnic group or culture, a generalisation is established. We must regard this

<sup>5</sup> According to Red Acoge's report *Inmigracionalisme 3*, 70% of the news items analysed made unjustified use of immigrant people's nationality, ethnic background, religion or condition.

<sup>6</sup> Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya: *Guia sobre el tractament de la diversitat cultural en els mitjans de comunicació*. Resource available online: [www.interculturalitat.bcn.cat](http://www.interculturalitat.bcn.cat)

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

sort of generalisation with a suspicious and critical eye because they can create natural categories in society. These also reinforce discriminatory thoughts and attitudes towards the group or individuals mentioned and makes intercultural relations more difficult<sup>7</sup>.

**Do not get carried away by negative and sensationalist news. Look for information that portrays diversity in a positive light as well, or that simply provides an ordinary perspective of everyday life where diversity is not presented as exceptional but rather as one more trait of our societies.**

Analyses of media contents show that people who are considered *different* are almost always presented as a problem, a threat or as people who undergo the worst of misfortunes<sup>8</sup>.

If the media only talks about diversity when the news is negative, the perception of lay people, of people in society, cannot be positive. This does not mean that we should not pay attention to negative information, rather that it is best to be informed of positive events as a way to relativise and not raise alarm or spread fear.

Likewise, we should be very critical of words like *illegal*, *invasion*, *outbreak*, *avalanche* or *great waves*, that reinforce the idea of invasion, catastrophe and turmoil.

**Do not take images for granted, and be cautious about superficial reading of the news**

We should be aware of the importance of the physical space where information is presented. A negative news item affects other adjoining items with a link in common, just like when a domino tile knocks others down. Unfortunately not all news reports are well set in context, so their proximity to more catastrophic news can create nonexistent connections.

On the other hand, items such as images (photographs, video clips, infographics and so on) are potentially the easiest to manipulate. The power they have in generating conclusions requires that special precaution be taken when selecting them, because they can give information an entirely different

7 Mesa per a la Diversitat en l'Audiovisual: El discurs mediàtic sobre la immigració a Catalunya. July 2013. Available online: [www.mesadiversitat.cat](http://www.mesadiversitat.cat)

8 Red Acoge: Estudio sobre periodismo e inmigración. Inmigracionalismo 3. Medios de comunicación: agentes de integración y cohesión social. Madrid, 2015.

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

meaning. Likewise, we must be cautious about headlines and news briefs that are meant to engage readers, since often brevity can entail lack of precision or fostering stereotypes<sup>9</sup>.

For all these reasons, we recommend that you read the news more closely and avoid drawing conclusions based solely on headlines and images.

*An example of how an image can lead to unjustified prejudice.*

This news item was published on March 20, 2015, two months after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. The photograph and the headline of the news piece would lead us to believe that the increase in security at the Montjuïc mountain was motivated by a terrorist threat. However, the text of the news is actually about pickpockets in the area.

### MORE SECURITY ON MONTJUIC MOUNTAIN

City Council will apply urgent security measures in the surroundings of the museums and fountains of Montjuïc, as was approved yesterday to fight against pickpockets, on proposal by UxB. In the picture, Arab tourists on the terrace at the MNAC, yesterday.

FOTO: MARTA PÉREZ / EFE

Las mejores imágenes del día, y más fotogalerías, en...  
**20minutos.es**



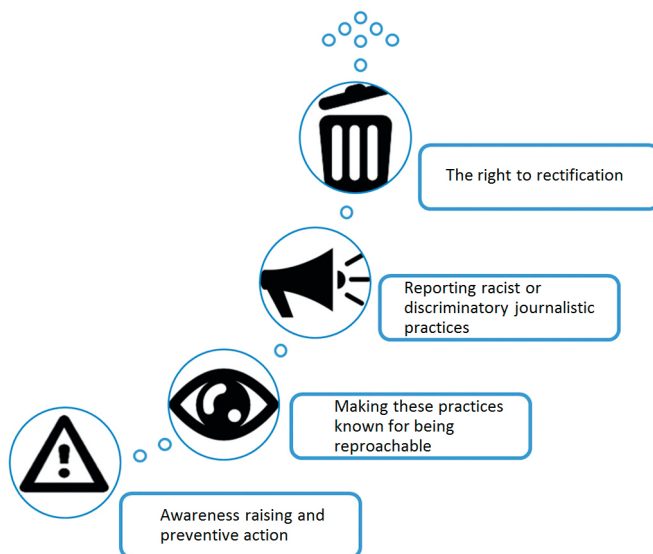
<sup>9</sup> Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya: Guia sobre el tractament de la diversitat cultural en els mitjans de comunicació. Resource available online: [www.interculturalitat.bcn.cat](http://www.interculturalitat.bcn.cat)

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

### 5.2 Our capacity for reaction

**What tools have we got for reporting this kind of practice and having an influence on the way the media reflect diversity in the information they publish?**

Here we will be providing a few resources and tools that can be used to change this state of affairs and have an impact on journalistic practices regarding how they deal with cultural diversity. This kind of advocacy may be carried out through practices ranging from direct actions aimed at getting the media organisation to publically rectify the news that was published, to more preventive actions seeking a change in perspective and in professional practice in general. All of these are possible and have repercussions, although they also have limitations.



**The right to rectification** of inaccurate and erroneous information. According to Fundamental Law 2/1984 in Spain, any legal entity or natural person has the right to have a media organisation rectify published information that may be considered inaccurate or harmful to them. Anyone can exert their right with a written text to the news organisation that published the information, within 7 days of its publication. The news organisation is required to rectify within the three days following receipt of the letter. Should they neglect to do so, a complaint may be filed at court with no need for a lawyer.

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

We should clarify that this regulation can only be applied to information and not to opinions, value judgements or subjective expression as these are protected by freedom of expression.

**Reporting racist or discriminatory journalistic -or generally communication- practices.** There are several institutions in place for reporting discriminatory news or treatment of information:

- The Audiovisual Council of Catalonia/Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya ([www.cac.cat](http://www.cac.cat)), has the authority to sanction Catalan public news organisations.
- Public provincial prosecutors for hate and discrimination crimes: this is the legal body with authority for safeguarding social harmony and plurality in society by investigating and prosecuting hate crimes and those related to the discrimination of individuals or groups.

<http://www.mjusticia.gob.es/cs/Satellite/Portal/es/direcciones-telefonos/administracion-justicia/fiscalias>

- Information Council of Catalonia/Consell de la Informació de Catalunya: [www.fcic.periodistes.org](http://www.fcic.periodistes.org): is a non-profit organisation created in 1997 by the Professional Association of Journalists of Catalonia (Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya-CPC). Its main aim is to safeguard the enforcement of the principles of professional ethics for journalists contained in the Code of Ethics.

**Critical analysis of information and making news the focus of heightened scrutiny.** If we are not inclined to formally file a complaint but would rather make these practices visible for being reproachable, here are a few other resources available in the Spanish context:

- Professional Association of Journalists of Catalonia/Committee for Solidary Journalism.  
Col·legi de Periodistes/Comissió de periodisme solidari/Diverscat:  
[www.periodistes.org](http://www.periodistes.org) / [www.diverscat.net](http://www.diverscat.net)
- Committee for Diversity in Audiovisuals / Mesa per a la Diversitat en l'Audiovisual: [www.mesadiversitat.cat](http://www.mesadiversitat.cat)
- Immigrationism: [www.inmigracionalismo.org](http://www.inmigracionalismo.org)

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

- Observatory of Racist and Xenophobic Policies / Observatori de Polítiques Racistes i Xenòfobes: [www.oprax.org](http://www.oprax.org)
- Proxi Observatory / Observatorio Proxi: [www.observatorioproxi.org](http://www.observatorioproxi.org)

**Awareness raising and preventive action.** From within the profession, there are journalists and communication specialists who are sensitive to these issues and have drawn up awareness-raising materials aimed at offering recommendations to journalists for establishing a benchmark of quality in the media and for understanding and presenting cultural diversity as rich and beneficial for society. Here are a few in the context of Catalonia:

- Professional Association of Journalists of Catalonia / Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya: Guia sobre el tractament de la diversitat
- Committee for Diversity in Audiovisuals / Mesa per a la Diversitat en l'Audiovisual: El discurs mediàtic sobre la immigració a Catalunya. Juliol 2013. Available online: [www.mesadiversitat.cat](http://www.mesadiversitat.cat)

### 5.3. Our creative capacity:

**How can we have an impact on people's opinions? How can we generate a current of narratives that questions generalisations, prejudice and rumours?**

With the emergence of social media and new mechanisms of virtual communication, we have gone from a scenario where only the larger media organisations controlled the generation of information to a new one where individuals relate to one another in a fluid and non-linear manner and are not only recipients of information but also creators of new information, opinions, alternative narratives, and hence, have a greater capacity for influence. Phenomena like the 15M movement in Barcelona or the Arab Spring movement are evidence of the power of social media to generate a critical mass rallying against the predominance of hegemonic opinions.

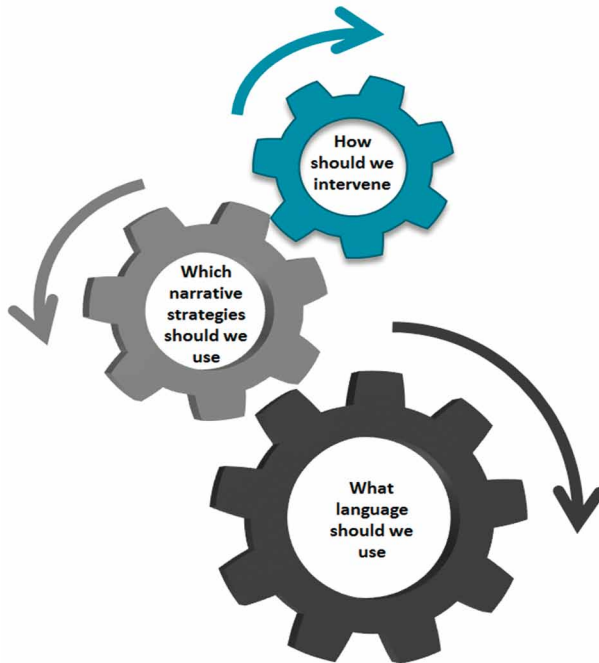
Although we do not intend to make comparisons with these phenomena, we would like to encourage anybody who feels outraged about racist and xenophobic remarks in social media to not keep silent, and take assertive action.

A recent study presented by the PROXI Observatory has highlighted the fact that social media opinion forums are full of hate and intolerance. Silence when

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

reading this sort of remarks may give the impression that people radically opposing immigration in forums represent the majority opinion. One recent study published in *Human Communication Research* by a group of researchers from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand confirms our concern when concluding that exposure to online prejudice increases readers' own prejudice who are then more likely to also contribute remarks of the sort<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, action can offer an alternative narrative that may influence the opinion of others with a more ambivalent attitude or with fears or concerns regarding cultural diversity.

With a view to exerting greater influence in these sites, whether forums or social media, we would like to propose a few recommendations under the following classification:



How should we intervene. In tune with what we have said in previous chapters, it is more effective to let the person who is reading reach their own conclusions rather than exerting extensive pressure or control. This is why it is best for interventions to be subtle, allowing for space for participants to

<sup>10</sup> [www.proxi.cat](http://www.proxi.cat)

## 5. The media as generators of prejudice

reflect on what we have said instead of accusing them of racism or making explicit remarks about presumed norms of social behaviour that might have the opposite effect.<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, when dealing with cases of hate crimes, the reaction should not really be dialogue but rather reporting with the tools provided above.

**Which narrative strategies should we use.** As in face-to-face dialogue, we can use a whole range of narrative strategies that may help us to develop our arguments (see the section on Response strategies).

On the other hand, and as a complement, written social media allows us to make reference to research studies and articles supporting our arguments. The Barcelona Anti-Rumour Strategy has published a whole set of informative materials with data, arguments and explanations of reference frameworks that can help us in this task: [www.antirumors.cat](http://www.antirumors.cat)

**What language should we use.** The way in which we express ourselves should allow for an alternative and more inclusive narrative regarding diversity. This is why we propose to avoid certain words and expressions, such as: *immigrant, foreigner, race, illegal, wog, wetback or Islamic terrorism*, and start talking about *migrant people of diverse ethnic backgrounds; people in an irregular situation; Moroccan, Ecuadorian, Argentine or Colombian people; and fundamentalist or Al Qaeda terrorism or terrorism by other related groups*.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, whenever possible, we should speak of people by using their names and surnames, with common and shared interests and expectations, and avoid expressions or categories that remit to images of a society that is fragmented between “us and them”.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This has been the line of intervention followed by the PROXI Observatory and it has given satisfactory results.

<sup>12</sup> In the material published by the Mesa per a la diversitat en l'Audiovisual, “El discurs mediàtic sobre la immigració a Catalunya” (Committee for Diversity in Audiovisuals: “Media narratives on immigration in Catalonia”), there is a list of terms for engaging in responsible and accurate intercultural communication. Available online: [www.mesadiversitat.cat](http://www.mesadiversitat.cat)

<sup>13</sup> For more extensive and detailed information on inclusive language, see Mesa per a la Diversitat en l'Audiovisual: El discurs mediàtic sobre la immigració a Catalunya. Reflexions per a la consecució d'un llenguatge inclusiu. July 2013. Available online: [www.mesadiversitat.cat](http://www.mesadiversitat.cat)









## 6. Self-assessment

Practice and experience will help us to fine tune our technique and arguments, and to **develop our own personal style, the one that works best and is most in keeping with the way we are and our usual surroundings**. We should not lose heart if our first self-assessment is negative. We should use this as a chance to improve, to highlight and work on our weaknesses, and to value and reinforce our strengths.



Some interactions will be successful, others will not work out as we expected and we will have to try new tools and review what we can do better next time; others will go badly because we have come across a person who is particularly stubborn when it comes to changing the way they think and reflect. Do not lose heart and remember that there are initiatives like the Barcelona Anti-Rumour Network where you can share experiences and join in action together to dispel these rumours.

We now propose that you answer a few questions that might be useful when ending a face-to-face conversation in which you have attempted to get someone to reflect on their own prejudice or to question certain rumours. At the end you will find an exercise for self-examination where you can take note of the communication skills that are your strengths and those you should improve. You can also collect the response strategies that have worked best for you, as well as new ones you might have discovered in practice.



Choosing the time and the company		
Do you think you approached the subject with the person in a timely manner?		
Did you have enough time to listen to one another?		
Were other people present? Did they benefit the dialogue?		

## 6. Self-assessment



### Showing respect

		
Did the dialogue make you reflect on your own beliefs? Did you let the other person know?		
Would you like to talk to this person again?		
Do you think the feeling is mutual?		



### Valuing your partner in conversation

		
Did you judge or blame the other person?		
Were you disdainful about any of his or her arguments?		
Did you find points in common?		



### Listening closely

		
Were you listening to what your partner in conversation had to say, or were you simply waiting for your turn to speak?		
Did you interrupt him or her, or did you talk over them?		
Did you understand his or her reasoning?		
Did you ask questions?		

Catching their attention



		
Did you use brief and clear arguments?		
Did you offer examples that are relevant and close to the other person?		
Did you use language that the other person was comfortable with?		

Staying calm

		
Did the conversation turn into a discussion?		
Did you manage to control your emotions and give calm answers?		

LET'S  
RECAPITULATE!

Which skills are your strengths?



## 6. Self-assessment

Which response strategies worked best for you?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Did you discover any different response strategies?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_







## 7. Practical resources

Since we are aware that any kind of resource will soon be outdated due to the enormous productivity of organisations, professionals and programmes engaged in these issues, this version of the guide will include web platforms where updated and comprehensive information can be found<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, we have tried to broaden our perspective and recommend not only resources and educational materials or bibliography. We have also included sources for filing complaints and for communicating actual experiences. We hope this will help in answering your questions in advance:



How can I take action in diversity issues?



What can I do if I see or experience a racist or discriminatory situation?



What can I do today?



Where can I read further on these issues?

<sup>1</sup> This section is not meant to be a comprehensive collection of all there is on diversity issues, but rather a set of recommendations for further exploration on these issues.

## 7. Practical resources

### 7.1. How can I take action in diversity issues?



#### **The Barcelona Anti-Rumour**

**Strategy** is a line of action of the Barcelona Interculturality Programme at Barcelona City Council. Its website offers information and resources on the following:

[www.bcnantirumors.cat](http://www.bcnantirumors.cat)

- Anti-rumour training
- Catalogue of anti-rumour activities
- Anti-rumour tools (comics, anti-rumour handbook, gossip protocols for responding to viral rumours, and so on)
- Talks
- Video clips
- Work plans and research studies



#### **Edualter. Network of resources on education for peace, development and interculturality**

<http://www.edualter.org/index.htm>

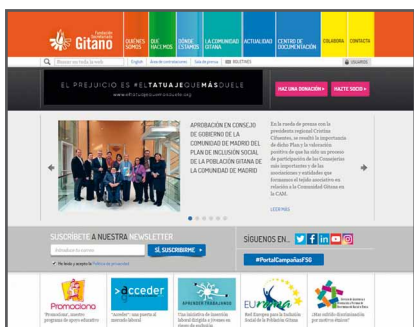
This is a website providing access to bibliography related to Education for Development, Intercultural Education, Values Education, and Education for Peace. It includes a database on educational materials and provides access to links of people and groups working in this field. Other sections of interest are the Activities Agenda and Current News, where campaigns and educational suggestions are posted.



### PROXI - Online Project against Xenophobia and Intolerance in Digital Media

<http://www.observatorioproxi.org/>

This is an initiative of several human rights organisations to fight against hate discourses on the Internet. Their website includes articles, news reports, infographics, a glossary of concepts, video clips, information about other awareness-raising campaigns and links to external resources. Also interesting are the tools provided for collecting comments and filing complaints.



### Foundation Secretariado Gitano

<https://www.gitanos.org/>

This foundation has a history of over 45 years of dedication to the promotion of the Roma community from an intercultural perspective. Its broad experience in action against prejudice against the Roma community has been widely recognised. Their website includes extensive information on publications, audiovisual materials, links, articles and documents. This collection of materials is related to the Roma community and to cultural diversity in general.

## 7. Practical resources



### Lafede. Organisation for global justice

<http://www.lafede.cat>

This is a network of 116 organisations that promote collective action for social justice and the elimination of inequalities everywhere, in other parts of the world and here at home, through development cooperation, human rights advocacy and promotion, and fostering peace.

Their website includes information about news, an activities agenda, documents, publications and audiovisual materials.

### 7.2. What can I do if I see or experience a racist or discriminatory situation?

A selection of resources is provided below for people wanting to file complaints or seeking advice in cases of cultural or religious racism and discrimination:

- Catalan Ombudsman/Síndic de Greuges ([www.sindic.cat](http://www.sindic.cat)): Its role is to attend the **complaints** of all people who feel unprotected by action or lack of action on the part of public administration. It oversees proper action by the Generalitat (regional administration) and by local administrations in Catalonia, such as city councils and provincial or county public authorities. It therefore acts as supervisor and collaborator of the Catalan administration, with an aim to improving standards of operation.
- Barcelona Office for Non-Discrimination/Oficina per la No Discriminació de Barcelona ([ond@bcn.cat](mailto:ond@bcn.cat)): advice, training and information service for the protection of citizens' rights, with special attention to groups affected by discrimination because of sex, sexual orientation, health, ethnicity, age,

economic or social condition, and others.

- Assistance and Reporting Service for Victims of Racism and Xenophobia/ Servei d'Atenció i Denúncia per a les Víctimes de Racisme i Xenofòbia (SAiD): This cost-free service is provided by SOS Racisme to attend individuals, groups and communities who have been victimised or witnesses of racist or xenophobic acts or behaviour, as well as to report against unfair application of their rights. This service provides comprehensive assistance that includes conflict management and resolution, as well as social and personal support in case of need.
- Audiovisual Council of Catalonia/Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya ([www.cac.cat](http://www.cac.cat)): it has the authority to sanction Catalan public news organisations.
- Public provincial prosecutors for hate and discrimination crimes: this is the legal body with authority for safeguarding social harmony and plurality by investigating and prosecuting hate crimes and those related to the discrimination of individuals or groups. <http://www.mjusticia.gob.es/cs/Satellite/Portal/es/direcciones-telefonos/administracion-justicia/fiscalias>
- Information Council of Catalonia/Consell de la Informació de Catalunya: [www.fcic.periodistes.org](http://www.fcic.periodistes.org): is a non-profit organisation created in 1997 by the Professional Association of Journalists of Catalonia (Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya-CPC). Its main aim is to safeguard the enforcement of the principles of professional ethics for journalists contained in the Code of Ethics.

### 7.3. What can I do today?

Finally, here are some resources where you will find information about events, activities and spaces for sharing in Barcelona related to cultural diversity.

- BCN Acció intercultural has a diverse agenda of activities organised throughout the city that have to do with cultural diversity. <http://interculturalitat.bcn.cat/bcnacciointercultural/ca/inici>
- Espai Avinyó is a meeting space in Barcelona for the dissemination of cultural contributions to the city by all citizens, regardless of their origin. Activities to get to know Barcelona better in its cultural

## 7. Practical resources

diversity are also provided for people learning the Catalan language.  
<http://interculturalitat.bcn.cat/bcnacciointercultural/ca/espai-avinyo-que-fem>

- Raval cultural. Agenda, news and cultural spaces in the neighbourhood of El Raval. <http://ravalcultural.bcn.cat/ca>

### 7.4. Where can I read further on these issues?

Allport, G. and Postman, L. (1947). *The Psychology of Rumor*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Allport, G. (1954): *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Federación Autonómica de Asociaciones Gitanas de la Comunidad Valenciana (FAGA) (2015): *Guía de recursos contra el antigitanismo*. This publication is part of the project “Gitanízate y participa”.

Banton, M (1967): *Race Relations*. London: Tavistock, p. 8.

Borg, J. (2009): *La persuasión. El arte de influir en los demás*. Madrid: Piramide.

Brown, R (1986): *Social Psychology*, 2ª. Ed., Nueva York: Free Press.

Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya: *Guia sobre el tractament de la diversitat cultural en els mitjans de comunicació*. Resource available online: [www.interculturalitat.bcn.cat](http://www.interculturalitat.bcn.cat)

Delgado, M (1998): *Diversitat i integració*. Barcelona: Empúries.

Devine, P.G. (1989): “Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, pp. 5-18.

Devine, P.G.; Hirt, E.R. and Gehrke, E.M. (1991): “Diagnostic and Confirmation Strategies in Trait Hypothesis Testing”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, pp. 952-963.

Fine, D. (2008): *Saber conversar. Cómo mejorar tus habilidades para comunicarte con los demás*. Madrid: Temas de hoy.

Giménez, C. and Malgesini, G. (2000): *Guía de conceptos sobre migraciones, racismo e interculturalidad*. Madrid: Los libros de la Catarata.

Giménez, C. (ed.) (2014): *Convivencia social e intercultural en territorios de alta diversidad. Encuesta 2012 sobre convivencia intercultural en el ámbito local*. Obra Social la Caixa. Barcelona.

Meertens, R.W. and Pettigrew, T.F. (1992): "Le racisme violé: dimensions et mesure", in M. Wieviorka (Dir), *Racisme et modernité*. Paris: La Découverte. pp. 109-126.

Mesa per a la Diversitat en l'Audiovisual: *El discurs mediàtic sobre la immigració a Catalunya. Juliol 2013*. Available online: [www.mesadiversitat.cat](http://www.mesadiversitat.cat)

Moreno, F.J. and Bruquetas, M. (2011): *Immigració i Estat del benestar a Espanya*. Col·lecció Estudis Socials, nº31. Obra Social La Caixa. Barcelona.

Muñoz, J. and Vázquez, F. 2004: *Procesos colectivos y acción social*. Barcelona:UOC.

Myers, D. (1995): *Psicología Social*. Mexico: McGraw-Hill.

Pease, A. (2004): *El arte de negociar y persuadir*. Madrid: Amat Editorial.

Pease, A. and Pease, B. (2009): *El lenguaje del cuerpo. Cómo interpretar a los demás a través de sus gestos*. Madrid: Amat Editorial.

Pettigrew, T. F. (1980): "Prejudice". Thernstrom and Cols. (eds.), *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Pettigrew, T. F. and Meertens, R.W. (1991): "Subtle Racism: Its Components and Measurement", presentation at Threedays on Racism Conference, Paris, France.

Red Acoge (2015): Estudio sobre periodismo e inmigración. Inmigracionalismo 3. Medios de comunicación: agentes de integración y cohesión social. Madrid, 2015.

Rosnow, R.L. (1976). *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay*. New York: Elsevier.

Sherif, M. (1974) : 'Conflicto y cooperación'. Torragrosa, J. (Comp): *Teoría e investigación en la psicología social actual*. Madrid : JOP.

Sunstein, C.R. (2010). *Rumorología*. Barcelona: Debate.

Stolcke, V. (1994): *"Europa: nuevas fronteras, nuevas retóricas de exclusión"*. AA.VV. Extranjeros en el paraíso. Barcelona: Virus, pp. 235 – 266.

Sutton, M.; Perry, B.; Parke J.; and John-Baptiste, C. (2007): *Getting the Message Across: Using Media to Reduce Racial Prejudice and Discrimination*. Department for Communities and Local Government.