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# Mediating racism

## The role of the media in the reproduction of racism

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### 1. Introduction

One of the most serious social problems in Western Europe is the growing racism or ethnicism against immigrants from Mediterranean countries and former colonies. Despite local differences in the targets or types of racism, similar prejudices and discrimination by (White) autochthonous groups and institutions are directed against Turkish or North-African 'guest workers', or against Black immigrants from African, Asian or Caribbean countries (Castles 1984; European Parliament 1986). Although there are historical roots for this development, culminating most notably in the Nazi holocaust of the Jews, racism has become more widespread since World War II, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s.

The context of this problem is well-known: Labor shortages in the postwar economic development of most countries in Western Europe led at first to the employment of workers from Spain, Portugal and Italy, and later from Turkey, Morocco, and other Mediterranean countries. At the same time, the independence of the former colonies of England, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, spawned widespread emigration to the metropolitan centers. As long as there was enough work, the immigration of foreign workers from Southern Europe received relatively little attention. The 'guest workers' were often simply ignored, housed in shabby pensions and, above all, they were expected to eventually return to their own countries (Hammar 1985). Whereas this was indeed the case for large groups of Italian and Spanish workers, those groups who took their place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, such as the Turkish workers, turned out to be willing

to stay, despite growing unemployment. For the citizens of former colonies, immigration had a more permanent character from the outset. It was initially facilitated by the fact that most of them carried metropolitan passports, although several countries, especially Britain, soon passed laws that barred unlimited immigration of their overseas, that is Black, citizens.

The socio-economic situation of the new citizens has been extensively documented in research: They are predominantly employed (if they find work) in menial and dirty jobs; they occupy the worst housing in the inner cities, and they generally suffer from minority status in all social contexts (see e.g. Castles 1984; Hammar 1985, for references). For most Western Europeans, this immigration brought about first and sometimes close encounters with members of substantial groups of different racial or ethnic backgrounds. By large segments of the autochthonous population this presence of so many 'aliens' was met by increasing feelings of uneasiness, growing ethnic prejudices and widespread discrimination in many contexts: in the neighborhood, on the street, in shops, on busses, at work, in the welfare agency or in the media (Essed 1984)

These negative attitudes, however, were not simply spontaneous reactions of the White population at large, nor merely caused by the economic recession of the 1970s. After all, most people never had any direct contacts with minority group members, nor were they threatened by them in employment, housing, or other social domains. In many respects, the (bad) example was given by the ruling elite groups, especially by the respective governments. We mentioned that in the 1960s the British governments (both Tory and Labour), took measures to stop the 'flow' of immigrants from the now independent countries of its former empire (Barker 1981; Husband 1982; Miles and Phizacklea 1979; Mullard 1985; Sivanandan 1982). Similar actions followed and became even stricter in the next two decades, also in other European countries (Hammar 1985). The implicit message to the autochthonous population was clear: These people do not belong here, and their presence may cause problems.

In this context racist parties were allowed to be founded that gave even more explicit expression to these opinions: Foreigners should return to where they came from because colors or cultures should not be mixed (Billig 1978; Hoffmann and Even 1984). Again, these are not merely popular movements: They were sustained by elite or intellectual pre-formulation (Barker 1981; Seidel 1985). In more moderate tercos, such attitudes were shared by the more respectable parties (Reeves 1983), and by the public at

large. This is one of the reasons why these racist parties were never forbidden. The overt political rhetoric against such parties was an ideal strategy of positive, liberal self-presentation. Thus racist groups played the role of scapegoats for more widespread and structural racism, and as useful idiots of the more respectable parties. Despite these professed differences, however, a widespread consensus was being established: Further immigration should be barred, present minorities should adapt themselves as quickly as possible, cause no problems, and be content with their actual situation and with what the authorities would do for them.

The question this chapter would like to address is how the hostile cognitions and actions that structurally define the racism of the White dominant ingroup could become shared so widely and effectively in the first place. Apart from occasional personal observations and experiences in public places, especially in the cities, most White people do not have daily dealings with minority group members. Therefore, we must assume that racism is being expressed and persuasively communicated throughout the ingroup in a multitude of social contexts. Majority group members speak or write about minorities in everyday conversations, in the news media, in textbooks, lessons, comics, TV-programs, films, parliamentary debates, institutional decision making, reports, scholarly discourse, or courtroom dialogues (Smitherman-Donaldson and van Dijk 1987).

In our research of the last eight years about this type of discursive reproduction of racism in society, we have focused primarily on everyday talk (van Dijk 1984; 1987a). From the analysis of more than 170 interviews, conducted both in Amsterdam and in San Diego, it appeared however that people often refer to the media when expressing or defending ethnic opinions (see also Hartmann and Husband 1974). Specific topics of discussion seem to originate in the media, rather than in everyday talk. On the basis of our analysis of the Dutch media carried out in 1980 (van Dijk 1983), and reporting the first results of a replication and extension of this earlier work carried out in 1985 and 1986, this paper discusses in more general terms the role of the media in this complex process of the reproduction of racism (see also UNESCO 1974; 1977).

Much of what we have described above not only holds true for Western Europe, but also applies to the situation in Australia and Northern America, and especially in the U.S.A., where racism is rooted in centuries of the enslavement of Blacks, the elimination of American Indians, and the exploitation of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans or other Latinos (see, e.g., Bowser

and Hunt 1983; Katz 1976; Wellman 1977, for racism in general; and Wilson and Gutiérrez 1985, for racism and the media).

## **2. Discourse and the reproduction of racism**

Before we discuss the role of the media in more detail, a few more general observations are in order about the role of language, discourse and communication in the (re-)production of ethnicism and racism. In order to understand these processes of reproduction, we should first realize that racism in general is to be analyzed primarily within the structural framework of historical, political, socio-economic and cultural power relations in society (Mullard 1985). White groups dominate ethnically or racially different groups by the exercise of various types of physical, social or symbolic control. In the present European context, this means that minority groups are systematically, although often indirectly and subtly, denied equal rights, that is, equal access to material or cultural resources, and equal opportunities in housing, work, health care or education. The practices that realize these forms of discrimination are not incidental or individualistic. They are systematic, group-based, institutionalized and show a surprising degree of similarity across national boundaries.

There exists a body of generally shared beliefs on which such discriminatory actions are based, and which provides the tacit legitimation of the power exercised by the dominant ingroup. However, this ideologically framed system of ethnic prejudices and its societal functions must be acquired. Part of this social learning is based on observation, imitation, participation in social interaction, and on an inferential framework that features rationalizations such as 'Everybody does it'. Especially for racist practices against ethnic minority groups, such experiential learning is not enough. In the context of complex industrial societies, and when other information is lacking, social information processing is largely based on discourse and communication (Mueller 1973; van Dijk 1987a).

People make strategic inferences from these kinds of discourse, build mental models of ethnic situations and generalize these to general negative attitude schemata or prejudices that embody the basic opinions about relevant minority groups (van Dijk 1984; 1985b; 1987a).

However, the various types of discourse and communication are not equally involved in this type of social information processing. Everyday storytelling requires personal experiences, or stories heard from others, and

many White citizens do not have such experiences, let alone negative ones. And when no ethnic minority groups were salient during our childhood, as is the case for most adults in Western Europe, socialization discourse is only minimal about ethnic minorities (although it may be about other outgroups, defined in terms of gender, class, religion or occupation). Children did and do acquire ethnic or racial proto-schemata based on such discourse and on the basis of children's stories and movies (Klein 1986; Milner 1983). When they grow up, however, they *need* further information in order to interpret the present ethnic situation.

Most elite types of discourse, such as political and legal discourse or scholarly reports, are directly accessible only to a small segment of the ingroup. Mass circulation and sharing among the ingroup of ethnic prejudices and ideologies presuppose mass communication, that is, expression or (re-)production in the mass media. Therefore, we assume that the (news) media play a very specific role in the distribution and acceptance of ethnic ideologies.

To understand this role of the news media, we should summarize a few of its general properties as they have been made explicit in recent research (Bagdikian 1983; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978; van Dijk 1987b). The news media do not passively describe or record news events in the world, but actively (re-)construct them, mostly on the basis of many types of source discourses. Corporate interests, news values, institutional routines, professional ideologies and news schema formats play an important role in this transformation. These factors favor preferential access of powerful persons, institutions and nations to the media, more stories about these power elites, special focus on negative, conflictual or dramatic events, and generally a White, Western, male, and middle class perspective on news events. Most readers tend to adopt this definition of news events and news discourse (Graber 1984; Robinson and Levy 1986).

These properties of news processing tend to lead to a reproduction and legitimation of the ideology of the political, socio-economic and cultural elites (Hall *et al.* 1980; Mueller 1973). On the other hand, the specific institutional and professional functions and goals of the media and the journalists also allow and require a semi-autonomous role in the (re-)production of news events and the manufacture of a social consensus. It is also this 'symbolic power' of the media that helps explain its role in the reproduction of racism.

### 3. Ethnic minorities and the news media

Against the background of this structural framework of class position and professional routines, goals and values, we also understand the specific orientation of journalists upon the definition of ethnic reality as provided by the elite (van Dijk 1987d). This is why in news about ethnic minorities it is usually the White institution, such as the government, the city council or the police, that is accounted for and quoted, and much less the representatives of the minority groups themselves (Downing 1980; Fowler 1987; Wilson and Gutiérrez 1985).

To this general ideological orientation towards the power elites ethnic group membership also adds an ethnic or racial dimension: White journalists primarily write as White ingroup members, and hence represent ethnic minority groups in terms of 'them' and not as part of **Since** ethnic minorities are also predominantly working class, are less organized in powerful institutions, and have little political influence, the two dimensions of race and class combined produce social cognitions and therefore social practices among journalists that tend to ignore these outgroups or to represent them in a consistently negative framework.

Generally, controlled ignorance about outgroups, combined with group self-interest, favors the development of stereotypes and prejudices (Hamilton 1981b; Tajfel 1981). The same is true for the media. This tendency is further reinforced by two other factors: According to dominant (Western) news values (Galtung and Ruge 1965), the media favor stories about negative events, and such stories are generally recalled better, especially in the case of outgroup members (Rothbart, Evans and Fulero 1978; Rothbart 1981). This means that there is a complex ideological framework in which intergroup perception, prejudices, White group dominance, cognitive strategies as well as journalistic news values all contribute to the negative representation of ethnic minorities in the press.

The same structural framework defines the tendency of the reading or viewing public to accept this kind of negative representation, so that critical feedback or resistance does not prevent the successfulness of the communication and reproduction processes. That is, in Western Europe there are as yet no dominant counter-ideologies or anti-racist forces that are strong enough to have regular access to the media in order to counterbalance the prevailing definitions of the ethnic situation. Anti-racist positions are often ignored or censored, or their coverage by the media is limited to preferably

violent demonstration and action (Murray 1986; Seidel 1987a; 1987b). This has been a general tendency in the account of counter-ideologies and action in the media (see, e.g., Halloran, Elliott and Murdock 1970).

Barred from public communication, and hence from persuasive, counter-prevailing power, minority groups are forced into forms of resistance that may attract public attention through media accounts, e.g., disobedience, disruption, or destruction. These will capture the attention of journalists precisely because they are consistent with both news values (negativity, violence, deviance) and with ethnic prejudices (minorities are deviant, violent). Hence the widespread media attention to what they define as violence, riots and crimes and which they specifically associate with ethnic or other minorities, e.g. drugs or mugging (see Cohen 1980; Cohen and Young 1981; Hall, *et al.* 1978; 1980, for details of such media portrayals relating 'deviance' and minorities).

This picture of the production conditions and the contents of the media representation of the ethnic situation is even more complex, however. In the present social situation in Western Europe and the U.S.A., the negative representation of minorities is not without constraints. As a result of the Civil Rights movement, there are norms and laws that officially prohibit overt discrimination, also in the realm of public discourse. These may more specifically be formulated in the statutes of media organizations. In addition, journalistic ideology features opinions that hold that news should be true, fair, balanced and non-partisan, focusing on facts instead of opinions. This also holds true for many journalists in their accounts of ethnic events, even when in practice more fundamental ethnic stereotypes and prejudices will unwittingly 'bias' their account of such events. Finally, when minorities, or White anti-racists, have become substantial in number and have found access to more powerful positions, their counter-action (if only by cancelling subscriptions or by writing letters to the editor) may hurt the media organization. In other words, there are contradictions within the media organizations as well as resistance from minority groups that may condition mitigation or change.

Hence, discursive discrimination, at least in the more respected media, has shown a tendency of becoming more subtle and indirect, displaying coherence with the more general liberal ideologies of the cultural elite in society (see e.g. Barker 1981, and McConohay 1983, for these forms of 'new', 'symbolic' or otherwise more subtle and indirect racism; and van Dijk 1987d for a discussion of the relation between elite racism and the

media). Note, however, that there are only gradual differences between the more liberal ethnic attitudes, and those of the cultural elite of the conservative and more overtly racist New Right (Seidel 1987a; 1987b).

#### 4. Properties of news about ethnic minority groups

Against the background of the theoretical framework sketched above, the rest of this chapter gives a brief characterization of the representation of 'ethnic events' in news reports in some Western countries, such as the UK, the USA, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands. On the basis of a review of some relevant research, we have organized this description in terms of a systematic but informal discourse analysis of news reports (see van Dijk 1986; 1987b, and Hartley 1982, for details on news structures). In turn, we will respectively pay attention to presentation in Section 4.1; thematic structure in Section 4.2; local meanings in Section 4.3; and style and rhetoric in Section 4.4 (for details about methods, see also the contributions to van Dijk, 1985a). Because of a lack of relevant data, other structures of news discourse, such as the role of news schemata, will not be considered here. We will focus mainly on news in the press.

##### 4.1 *Presentation*

By the 'presentation' of news, we mean the structure of occurrence and visual properties that influence its chances of perception and attention, such as frequency, location in the paper or program, location on the page, size, (size of) headlines, the use of photos, pictures, drawings or cartoons, and the type of media text (news, background article, editorial, opinion article, column, etc.).

##### *Frequency and size*

From his study of actors in U.S. television networks and magazines, Gans (1978) concludes that whereas nearly 70% of news space or time is dedicated to the elites or to "violators of laws and mores", only some 7% is dedicated to Civil Rights leaders at the end of the 1960s. A decade later even this low percentage dwindled to practically zero. On the other hand, when Blacks — among other 'unknowns' — are assumed to be associated with crime, violence, or riots, they get much more attention (see also

Schary 1969; Knopf 1975). In the 1960s nearly a quarter of all stories about Blacks are about racial disturbances. When, a decade later, no riots occur, Blacks virtually disappear from magazine and TV news (see also Graber 1984).

In a study of crime news (Graber 1980) found that crime and justice account for about 20% to 30% of all topics mentioned in the press, and for a steady 12% on the national networks. However, half of this crime news is about 'street crime', and this is the type of crime media users tend to remember best. For our discussion it is interesting to find that whereas in 70% of the crime stories (and in agreement with FBI statistics) suspects are Whites (of all ages), and about 20% Black, media users reverse these figures and "recall" that more than 60% of the crimes are committed by Blacks and 7% by Whites. This shows that specific attention to crime, together with the ethnic identification of suspects and prevailing ethnic prejudices, produces a clear attribution effect among the readers: they identify young male Blacks as the major criminals and ghettos as its main location (see also Duncan 1976).

In Great Britain, much of the early work on race, racism and the media was conducted and inspired by Hartmann and Husband and associates (see e.g. Hartmann and Husband 1974). In their content analysis of the British national press in the 1960s, Hartmann, Husband and Clark (1974) found that the amount of (British) race related material fluctuated between 0.55% and 0.78 % of the editorial space, that is, between a mean of 0.8 and 1.3 news items per day. Critcher, Parker and Sondhi (1977) replicated this study for the provincial press, and found somewhat higher figures (up to 4%) for the Midland press. Troyna (1981) found for the 1976-1978 period that the British local and national press published about 1.3 items per copy on race. Also the TV news studies of the Glasgow University Media Group (1976, 1980) report frequency percentages for crime, disaster and human interest that are ten times higher than stories on

In their study of "foreigners" in the German press of the city of Bielefeld, Ruhrmann and Kollmer (1984) found between 1000 and 1500 articles on this topic in two and a half years, that is, between 1.3 and 2.0 items per day in two local newspapers. From a broader study of the German press (Merten, *et al.* 1986), we may calculate an average of about two stories per newspaper or magazine issue about foreign workers and refugees.

In our first (1981) study of one month of coverage of minorities in the

Dutch press (van Dijk 1983), we found an average of 1.8 article per day, but if we only count articles in which minorities are thematic actors (and not just briefly mentioned), this average drops to below one article daily. In our replication of 1985-1986, which studied some 1700 articles of seven national dailies during six months, we found an average of 1.3 story per day. As is true for the U.S., English and German press, quality (and national) newspapers usually publish more about minorities.

From these various studies we may conclude that the frequency or amount of reporting about ethnic minority groups in the Western media is regular but not impressive. The (quality) press mostly publishes more than the magazines and television. The average frequencies vacillate around one percent or about one story per day. Although some studies suggest that this figure may depend on the numbers of minorities in the country or city, we must conclude that on the whole, the percentage of minorities in the country does not lead to a proportionate increase in stories about them. In the U.S.A., where minorities total five times as high as in Western European countries, the average frequencies and space of media stories are more or less the same.

Similar remarks hold true for the size and the location of media stories about minorities. The various studies discussed above suggest averages in the range of 125 cm<sup>2</sup> and 200 cm<sup>2</sup>. Merten *et al.* (1986) report an average of about 150 cm<sup>2</sup>, which according to earlier data is about twice as large as an average news report. Also, their headlines are usually larger than for other news reports. Although as to their size stories about minorities may be more prominent than the average newspaper report, most of them appear on the inside pages, unless they are about crime, violence and especially

Despite these conclusions, it should be added that for media users the impression of the amount of ethnic news need not reflect these figures. We have also suggested that selective attention and memorization, especially for negative (crime, or problem) stories, is such that autochthonous people may think that they read or hear about 'them' all the time. This means that frequency and size of minority coverage only tell part of the story. Much more important is the question *what* is written about ethnic groups.

#### 4.2 *Topics and thematic structure*

The study of discourse meaning or content may take place at the local level of words and sentences, and on the global level of topics or themes, which we define in terms of semantic macrostructures (van Dijk 1980). Topics express the most important information in the text, and form a hierarchical thematic structure, which also underlies the summary of a text. In news reports, such a summary is expressed in the lead, whereas (in principle) the highest proposition of the thematic structure is expressed in the headline. Transformations, however, are quite normal: Headlines may be 'biased' by expressing lower level topics. This may signal the personal or institutional relevance assignment of the journalist (for details, see van Dijk 1987b). Psychological research has shown that macrostructures like topics and titles are important in the effective interpretation, storage and recall of information (van Dijk and Kintsch 1983). People usually recall topical information best.

Unfortunately, most studies of news about minorities do not exactly define the notion of topic. Mostly, what are called 'topics', 'themes', or 'subjects' are labels of topic classes, e.g. immigration, education or discrimination. In each of these classes, we may find text topics of a propositional format as we define them, e.g. 'Many Tamil refugees enter the country', or 'Employment office discriminates against foreign women'. To facilitate our review of the literature we use the same notions as the authors, however; from the examples it may be clear whether propositional topics or one-concept subjects are meant.

Hartmann, Husband and Clark (1974) provide an extensive analysis of what they call 'topics', e.g. immigration, race relations, housing, education, employment, and crime. They found that most articles (18.8%) were about immigration, followed immediately by the general topic of race relations (18.6%), and a long way behind, the subject of crime (9.0%) (percentages calculated by us on the basis of their absolute numbers). Topics such as housing, education, health, or racial harmony score much lower (below 3.4%), whereas discrimination scores come in between (6.7%). The immigration topic was further differentiated in sub-topics such as control, refused entry and illegal entry. This suggests that the major news topics were of the following schematic type: 'Government (political party, border police) acts to stop (should stop) (illegal) entry'. That is, the news reports probably did not deal with the rights of British Commonwealth citizens to enter Great

Britain, but rather with their 'wrongs'.

For the British regional press, the figures are somewhat different. Here crime and human interest precede race relations and immigration, with about a third of all minority stories (Cricher, Parler and Sondhi 1977). All other topics score only a few percent. Most crime stories are about violent crime, as is also the case in the U.S. (Graber 1980). The other topics are also related to negative concepts, such as overcrowding in housing or education, or to notions that may spawn resentment, such as special provisions for minorities.

Ten years later (1976-1978), immigration, crime, human interest and race relations are still prominently on the list of major subjects (Troyna 1981), accounting for nearly 40% of all items in the local and national press. However, a new issue now heads the list, viz. the National Front. Note, however, that it is not so much the racist policies of the National Front which are being discussed, but rather its role as a political force which maybe elected into office and the reactions of the other parties to the NF. Similar reporting takes place in regard to the major racist party (Centrum-partij) in the Netherlands. Just as in the 1960s, immigration is discussed as a problem of control, as an election issue, or consists of reports about illegal entry and the numbers of immigrants involved.

Minority news in the Netherlands in the early 1980s shows a slightly different thematic picture, although here crime and drugs also heads the list, with more than a quarter of all reports. Housing and social affairs together reach the same proportion. Discrimination and immigration are also high on the list, and even appear to be the main issues in the 1985 data (when many Third World refugees came to Western Europe). In these latter data, crime has dropped to third position.

Also in the Netherlands, most of these topics are dealt with in terms of 'problems', and from the point of view of the authorities. Thus, housing is not a topic that deals with the problems minorities have in getting decent housing, or with discrimination of landlords, but features reports about squatting, police action, and difficulties created for the authorities. The same is true for topics such as immigration, education, employment or cultural differences. Crime is often associated with drug dealing or use by male Black Surinamese, in the same way as mugging in the U.K. was associated with young Blacks (Hall, *et al.* 1978). Social affairs are mostly dealt with in terms of special programs or subsidies 'given' by the authorities. Discrimination is a frequent topic in the Dutch press, but this is predominantly the

case in individualistic terms (typically: a bouncer of a disco not allowing Blacks), not in the structural terms of a racist society. The concept of 'racism' is generally avoided in such cases, or preferably mentioned between quotes when used by minority groups or anti-racists in 'accusation' contexts. Subjects that are interesting for minority group members, such as (good) education, health care, and political organization, occurred much less in the press of the 1980s.

The German regional press also had crime at the top of the subject list, closely followed by subjects like residence status, politics, identity and integration (Ruhmann and Kollmer 1984). Many articles deal with the immigrant status of Turkish workers. The authors also found, however, that more than half of all items mention problems experienced by immigrants, primarily and work permits, education and communication problems, but much less employment and housing problems. Generally, the attribution of blame for the various immigration problems is distributed evenly between articles that are positive and those that are negative about foreigners. Merten, *et al.* (1986) report similar topics for the German press as a whole, with human interest accounting for nearly half of all articles on foreign workers, followed a long way behind by social issues, culture and politics. The latter topic, however, is most prominent when people seeking asylum are discussed.

#### *Thematic structures*

After the more quantitative account of topics, a more qualitative analysis is necessary. We have seen that the same topic class, e.g. immigration, may include topics of very different kinds, according to the predicates, actors and actor roles involved.

Our data from the 1981 study (van Dijk 1983), show that such (propositional) topics, which theoretically are unique for each report, also allow further abstraction and generalization. Thus, we find topics such as: minorities are criminal; minorities use drugs; minorities need help; minorities protest against government policies, on the one hand, and Dutch authorities help minorities; Dutch government restricts immigration, and a Dutch person or institution discriminates against minorities, on the other hand. On a higher level of abstraction, such topics may further be generalized, for example as follows: Minorities cause problems; minorities are not (never) satisfied; Dutch authorities help minorities; and some

Dutch people discriminate against minorities. In 1985 and 1986 we essentially find the same topics. However, there is also a development: The topic of (legal) resistance of minorities becomes more important, whereas the authorities are more often portrayed as wanting to improve race relations. With the increasing immigration of refugees, the topic of a government that restricts entry of more foreigners remains one of the most prominent, however.

This thematic analysis is consistent with the general conclusions of the British studies reviewed above. Thus, under the main topics we have mentioned they find subtopics such as the following:

- a. *Immigration*
  - i. Numbers entering/leaving Britain
  - ii. Government controls (should control) entry
  - iii. British passport holders (do not) have right of entry
  - iv. Coloreds are refused entry to Britain
  - v. Immigrants enter Britain illegally
  - vi. Immigration is an election issue.
- b. *Race Relations*
  - i. General comments on race relations
    - Positive steps to improve race relations
  - iii. Anti-colored speeches or statements on race relations.
- c. *Crime*
  - i. Coloreds involved in crime (general)
    - Coloreds involved in drugs scene
  - iii. Coloreds involved in illegal immigration.

From these and other reconstructed themes that dominate the portrayal of race in the British press, we may derive the following more general themes: (i) There are (too) many (colored) minorities coming to Britain; (ii) The government must control entry of (colored) immigrants; (iii) Race relations are bad in Britain; (iv) Minorities are involved in crime; (v) Minorities are discriminated against and abused.

From these general topics found in the respective studies in Western Europe, the most general topic that emerges is that minorities have or create problems. Whether in immigration, employment, housing or education, or even in discrimination, minorities are generally represented as creating difficulties for 'us', if not in terms of deviance or illegality.

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rights (e.g. of entry, housing or education) are seldom discussed. And if racist parties are topic, they rather are portrayed as creating difficulties for mainstream politics than in terms of an expression of racism in society. It is not surprising, therefore, that topics such as 'white hostility' are rare. For

British media coverage of the 1980s, for which we lack systematic data, we may add the dominant topic of the 'nace which are covered in terms of violence, rather than as forms of protest and resistance.

Similarly, anti-racism of both Black and White groups is also portrayed in negative terms, viz. as the 'enemy within', especially in the conservative press (Murray 1986; see also Tumber 1982; CARF Media Project 1985). The same may be observed in the Dutch press, as well as in the French right wing media (Bonnafous and Fiala 1984). This `reversal tactics of the elite are especially noteworthy for the media, as we have found ourselves for the press reactions against our first study of racism in the press (van Dijk 1983). Hollingworth (1986) found that the racism of the conservative media elite in Britain is not limited to press reports, but also shows in remarks made in the editorial office.

The topics in the German press are similar to those in the Netherlands and Britain (Ruhrmann and Kollmer 1984; Merten, *et al.* 1984). Here the emphasis is on the use or abuse by foreigners (mostly Turkish) of German resources (welfare, employment, housing, education). Another thematic dimension of all these topics is that which is called `Überfremdung' in German (literally: over-alienation), which has also dominated the political and media discussion in France (Mots 1984), Switzerland (Ebel and Fiala 1983), Sweden (Hedman 1985), and other Western European countries.

#### 4.3 Actor roles

What role do minorities play in news reports and their topics? For the dominant negative topics, such as illegal entry, protests or crime, this role is clear: they are active, responsible agents, and not victims (e.g., of White aggression) (Graber 1980). The same is true for the other topics, such as employment, housing or education, where minorities are perceived as causing problems, if only by their presence. Ruhrmann and Kollmer (1984) found that in more than 50% of the cases, these roles of foreigners are valued negatively by the press itself, by public opinion or by the government.

The role of the autochthonous actors is ambiguous. Our Dutch data first suggest that the authorities especially are always prominent and frequent actors, also in news about minorities. Their role is usually active: they control immigration, prevent and prosecute crime, and provide assistance in employment, housing or education. They are expected to analyze and solee problems and to develop the best policies to 'contra the `minor-

ity problem'. This role is portrayed mostly in neutral or positive terms, although some newspapers may be critical of incidental government decisions to expel individual foreigners, typically mothers and their children. General immigration and ethnic relation policies are seldom criticized in fundamental terms. Ruhrmann and Kollmer (1984) showed for Germany that the government and public opinion are most often (about 80%) mentioned as the actors from which action is expected or demanded, or to which recommendations are addressed.

Other autochthonous groups are represented in a variety of roles. When supportive of immigration and immigrants, or when acting as anti-racists, they are portrayed as active but negative agents (Murray 1986; Seidel 1987a; 1987b). But since they are ingroup members, their actions of protest, dissent and demonstration are implicitly viewed as racial treason, and dealt with in even more negative terms than those of the outgroup members. On the other hand, we have seen that racist parties or discriminating individuals are also portrayed as negative active agents, but again this coverage is incidental, and does not take place in an anti-racist framework. Rather, such extremists may be seen as — sometimes understandably — reacting against the presence of immigrants. Racist parties are illegitimate, while at the same time embarrassing competitors in the political arena.

At the local level of syntactic organization, this role distribution has been systematically investigated by Fowler and his associates (Fowler, *et al.* 1979; Fowler 1987). They show that the action structure of sentences, as expressed by word order, grammatical relations (subject, object, etc.), actives and passives, in news about disturbances, also signals that minority groups play the role of prominent (first, subject position) agents especially in negative contexts. The police in that case will be put in a less direct passive phrase or remain implicit altogether.

#### *Who is speaking?*

One important clue about the perspective taken on the ethnic affairs by the media comes from an analysis of speaker roles. When and how often are minorities quoted or referred to as speakers, as people who voice facts and opinions? Downing (1980) found that minority group members, just like Black African leaders, are less quoted than White spokespersons, also in accounts of events that directly concern them. Similarly, in our 1981 and

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1985 Dutch data, although minorities may be more frequent actors, they are speaking much less than Dutch (elite, institutional) actors.

This bias in the distribution of speaking roles has several structural and cognitive causes. First, as dominated groups, minorities in Western Europe are less organized, and therefore have less organized access to the media, e.g. by press conferences, press releases, or designated spokespersons. Secondly, journalists are at the same time less inclined to actively search for or listen to minority sources, for the same organizational reasons. Thirdly, such sources are considered to be less 'objective' and hence less credible, which also shows in the predominant use of doubt and distance particles, and the more explicit use of quotation marks when they are allowed to speak. As 'interested party' they are seldom or cautiously quoted when they accuse Dutch people or organizations (e.g. the police) of discrimination or racism. This is much less the case when the opinions of the authorities are mentioned, for instance when these deny discriminatory acts. Fourthly, practically all journalists in Western Europe are white, and have no personal nor professional relationships with minority groups. Due to their subtle or more open prejudices, or to the usual problems of intercultural communication, white journalists will feel much less comfortable when talking to (interviewing) Black spokespersons, and will therefore also tend to avoid them as sources. Fifthly, the converse reinforces this tendency: since most credible sources, that is, the authorities, politicians, educators, professionals or scholars, are white, and since most institutions are white, their chance of being used as sources is higher for the opposite reasons as those mentioned above for the lack of minority speakers and opinions.

U.S. research shows the same tendency. In general, but especially when ethnic or racial conflicts arise, the version of events provided by the authorities, most notably the police, prevails. Gutiérrez (1978) showed that not only do Chicanos tend to be represented stereotypically by the Californian press, but also that their point of view of the conflicts in which immigrant workers are involved is subordinated to that of the Anglo officials. This has also been a permanent observation about the press accounts of Black 'riots' in the 1960s and before (Fisher and Lowenstein 1967; Knopf 1975). And the same holds until today for the coverage of the 'riots' in the British cities during the 1980s (Downing 1985; Murray 1986; Sivanandan 1986; Tumber 1982).

#### 4.4 *Local meaning, style and perspective*

The informal thematic and role analysis given above already suggests a number of implications for the study of style and perspective, although few studies pay attention to such qualitative dimensions of news discourse. How do the prominently negative topics appear at the local level of word meaning or style? Lack of specific data (and lack of space) force us to make only a few observations about this aspect of news discourse.

News about minorities is often rather evaluative (Ruhrmann and Kollmer 1984). Although the (Dutch) press very seldom uses racial slurs, frequent use of the style register connected with the concept of 'problem' may also convey negative representations of minorities. This is particularly true for the more aggressive and deviant dimension of this register, such as the frequent use of words such as 'threat' or 'violence'.

Identifying descriptions in the Dutch press vacillate between popular usage ("foreigners") and more academic and political terminology ("ethnic minorities"), in addition to reference to groups in terms of their origin. A similar ambiguity may be found in the usage of terms such as "guest workers" ("Gastarbeiter", in German), and "foreign workers", respectively. The term "Blacks" is more often used to denote Afro-Americans or Blacks in Africa than for Black minority groups in the Netherlands, where even the elites still occasionally use the term "negro". As a political term for all people "of color" it is only used by minority groups and White anti-racists.

Unlike in Britain and the U.S.A., and maybe as a consequence of Nazi abuses of the term, the word 'luce' is seldom used in the Dutch and German press, although "racial discrimination" is not uncommon in the Dutch press. "Racism" is often used only in quotes, which indicates the distance of the press from anti-racist opinions or a denial of racism in the country. In German, the standard term has become "Ausländerfeindlichkeit" (hostility against foreigners).

The British media still use the term "race" very prominently in their coverage. Hartmann, Husband and Clark (1974) found in their analysis of headlines that for the representation of minorities in Britain, the concepts of "race", "immigrant" or "color", as well as descriptions of origin, were used in nearly 50% of the headings. In other words, the ethnic groups were generally defined and identified, already in the (situation defining and topical) headlines, as belonging to another radical, ethnic, or national group. From the start their special status as immigrants of color is underlined,

despite their British citizenship or despite the fact that many of them have lived in Britain for many years or all their lives. References to "White" groups are rare, even when the news reports are about White hostility and discrimination.

The same authors also found that nearly a third of all headlines feature negative words of different classes: first, words that denote conflict or disagreement (*hate, row, fight, crisis, etc.*), followed by words that denote control (*stop, cut, curb, ban, censor, etc.*), words that denote violence (*murder, kill, riot, shoot, burn, massacre, used especially for events overseas*), and those that are associated with legal process, crime or illegal acts (*prison, jail, police, arrest, illegal entry, theft, etc.*). Again, most of these concepts and words are used in association with ethnic groups, and much less in relation to White hostility or racism, unless occurring in the U.S. For the British media the preferred words in the headlines come from the lexical classes of restriction and conflict, in combination with race, color or immigrant, whereas the use of ethnic names is more frequent for the description of groups in foreign news.

In other words, despite the vast variety in origins, immigrants or minorities are treated as one undifferentiated group. This tendency has been shown to be related to ethnic prejudice and intergroup perception, generally (see, e.g. Tajfel 1981). Overall, the notion of "race" is used in 30% of the headlines in combination with conflict or violence words. This is of course particularly (though not exclusively) true for the tabloids, which usually score twice as high as the liberal or conservative quality press. Although these analyses and figures are based on media content in the 1960s, there is little reason to assume that the situation in the British press in the 1980s is significantly different.

Our analysis of some 1700 headlines, published between August 1985 and February 1986 in the Dutch press (for details, see van Dijk 1987e), first shows that the major topics of the news also appear in the headlines: immigration, discrimination and crime account for 40% of all headlines. Half of the headlines identify ethnic authors, especially various refugee groups (Tamils, Iranians), as well as Turks, Moroccans and Surinamese. Syntactic analysis shows that although minorities occupy 25% of the first, subject positions, they only are agents in 7% of the headlines. And if they are agents, then they are mostly found in negative roles. Therefore, minorities are mainly headlined as experiencers or patients of actions of others, usually the Dutch authorities. Just as in the British press, we find

notions such as 'restrict', 'expel', 'curb', 'refuse', or 'arrest', as well as notions from the 'protest', 'problems' and 'illegality' registers.

Also from these observations at the local semantic and stylistic levels we may conclude that ethnic or racial groups, or race relations in a multi-ethnic society, are consistently associated with problems, conflict, difficulties, if not with violence and illegality. It does not greatly matter in such cases whether the authorities or the police are portrayed as performing an action that might, as such, be evaluated negatively, such as 'curb', 'expel' or 'arrest'. Rather, as soon as such words are associated with a context of ethnic or racial affairs, they tend to attach rather to the minority group than to the autochthonous organization. It is less the precise context than the vague association that is relevant for the cognitive consequences of interpretation in this case. Extant prejudices will make readers tend to attribute negative properties or acts of the whole situation to one focused actor: the (Black) immigrant or minority group member (see, e.g., Duncan 1976; Hewstone and Jaspars 1981; Hamilton 1981a and the other contributions in Hamilton 1981a).

## 5. Contexts and conclusions

The properties of news reports about minority issues are systematically related to various characteristics of the social and cognitive contexts of news, that is, with production by journalists and uses by readers and viewers. Data from content analyses in different countries show, first, that the attention paid to ethnic groups in the media is very limited, unless minority groups are associated with violence, illegality, crime, or 'strange' cultural behavior, that is, with deviance of many kinds. News reports tend to be about topics that are often instances of prevailing ethnic stereotypes or prejudices. If not as a threat to our culture, society or personal safety, minorities are stereotypically portrayed as 'problem people', as causing trouble (riots, demonstrations, protests) or as having problems (work, housing, language or education). The causes or the context of such problems are seldom analyzed in the press, and hardly ever explained in terms of White racism.

Secondly, minorities appear less often as major agents, unless again they are suspected or accused of such negative acts. The production conditions that determine this type of coverage have briefly been mentioned: there are (very) few minority journalists; minorities are less organized, and

therefore have less chances to provide the necessary framework for routine news gathering; the news values of journalists tend to exclude socio-cultural outgroups both as topics and as reliable sources; and finally, ethnic prejudices cause journalists to consider minority groups as less credible. These various conditions provide a context in which minority news events and their actors generally have less and less prominent coverage in the media.

Thirdly, the overall negative thematic content and biased stylistic associations result in part from the same conditions. News values (e.g., negativity), and ethnic prejudices of editors and reporters, both provide a framework in which ethnic groups and the whole ethnic situation are perceived and represented in a biased way. Immigration is not seen as a normal or natural phenomenon, or as a right of passport holders or dependants to enter the country. Rather, it is construed as a permanent threat, as a conflict between us and them, between those who want to get in and do not belong here, and those of 'us' who belong here. The same holds true for race relations in general, and for the respective social domains in which minorities are perceived to cause problems, difficulties and conflict: housing, work, social services, education and culture in general. The problems minorities are thought to cause may be represented 'mildly' as those created by their very presence and numbers: They are a burden on the socio-economic framework, and there are simply too many who want decent work, housing or education.

Yet, for at least some of the media, these problems are represented more negatively: Minorities play a deviant role, they are disruptive, they (actively) take our houses and jobs, they cheat on welfare, they violate the norms and the rules, they do not (want to) adapt, they protest and demonstrate, and most importantly, especially in the conservative popular press, they are a threat to our personal safety, because many of them are assumed to be criminals. Often such media messages remain implicit and indirect. Most newspapers, especially in the Netherlands, will not blatantly state that minorities are criminal, but special attention, focus and selection of crime stories establish such associations in a more subtle way.

Such prejudices, which are also shared by large segments of the media public, favor attention to, and memory and selection of those stories that are consistent with such opinions (Howard and Rothbart 1980; Rothbart 1981). At the same time, deviance and disruption are consistent with prevalent news values. That is, *if* minorities are portrayed in the press at all, stories that feature such opinions, even implicitly, tend to be published

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more often than normal, neutral and of course positive news stories about our fellow citizens. Finally, the typical sources for this kind of news, viz. the authorities, and especially the national or local government, the police, the courts or state agencies such as employment or welfare offices, have preferential access to the media, because of their elite status, power, high credibility and because of systematic links with newsbeat routines. That is, their versions of the 'facts' will get routine attention, and they are represented as neutral or positive actors, so that, by contrast, more negative images about minorities will result.

Even more revealing are the kind of topics the press does *not* focus on. Problems *experienced* by ethnic groups tend to be neglected: Racism, prejudice and discrimination, immigrant status, employment and work conditions, education, health, culture and politics of minorities are virtually absent in the majority media. This is not surprising when we observe that minorities are seldom used as credible sources, and that very few journalists come from minority groups (Greenberg and Mazingo 1976; Husband 1975).

Fourthly, journalists are like other middle class, dominant group members, and express, enact, legitimize and hence reproduce the dominant and consensual ideological framework of their class and ethnic group. Yet, on the other hand the media in general and news production in particular play a central role in the very production mechanisms of ethnic attitudes and racism. They may not always explicitly tell the public exactly what to think, nor do all media users always agree with explicit or implicit ethnic opinions expressed in the media. Yet, variety of opinion among the public, and even the occasional dissent of a relatively small group, are not necessarily incoherent with the general ethnic framework as it is expressed and conveyed by the media. A large part of the public consensus can *only* have come about through mass mediated communication and information. Only a relatively small part of the public is in fact or potentially victim of criminal acts by minority group members. Yet, our analysis of much everyday talk shows that many people are not only increasingly afraid of crime and violence, but explicitly associate this with minority group members, and refer to the media to substantiate their prejudices (van Dijk 1987a). It is especially the (conservative, popular) press that pays such prominent attention to minority crime, and to crime in general.

We have begun this inquiry by identifying racism as the structural societal framework that enables and reproduces dominant group power. Ultimately, all white people profit from this kind of power appropriated by

their group as a whole. However, the leading power elite is particularly interested in remaining in control of the power structure, both within their own group, and with respect to the immigrant or ethnic outgroups. We have argued elsewhere that it is plausible that the elite, through the media, in fact provides the pre-formulations of many prejudices in society (van Dijk 1987d). For power to be exercised, legitimized and reproduced, it must also be expressed and persuasively conveyed in discourse and communication (Mueller 1973). In modern industrial societies, this communication is no longer only local and interpersonal, but mass mediated. Therefore, besides everyday discourse in socialization and conversation, and with educational discourse, the mass media play a crucial role in the persuasive reproduction of dominant ideologies in general, and of ethnic ideologies in particular. We have seen that this role is not passive, but active. The media not only express, reflect or disseminate ethnic opinions, but actively mediate them, both among the various power elites themselves, as well as between the elites and the public. They autonomously (re-)interpret, (re-)construct and (re-)present them, and therefore contribute themselves to their production, and hence to the construction of the ethnic consensus that underlies the racist ideologies and practices of our society.

#### NOTE

A more detailed version of this paper has appeared in van Dijk (1987c). This book also features a chapter with an illustrative analysis of the press coverage of the immigration of Tamil refugees to the Netherlands. A more extensive study, provisionally entitled, *Racism and the Press*, is in preparation.

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