

Political Discourse and Racism: Describing Others in Western Parliaments

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Discourse plays an important role in the production and reproduction of prejudice and racism. From the socialization talk of parents, children's books, and television programs to textbooks, news reports in the press, and other forms of public discourse, white people are engaged daily in communication about ethnic minorities and race relations. In this way, they acquire the mental models, the social knowledge, the attitudes, and the ideologies that control their action, interaction, and dialogues with—or about—minorities.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which politicians speak about race and ethnic relations, immigrants, refugees, and other minorities as well as how they contribute—through media coverage of their discourse—to the ethnic consensus in white-dominated societies. Analysis of fragments of parliamentary debates about ethnic affairs in Europe and North America shows that such talk often is premised on humanitarian values of tolerance, equality, and hospitality. At the same time, however, politicians participate in more subtle forms of elite racism when they present immigration and minority relations as essentially problematic, if not threatening, while defining refugees, immigrants, or minorities as a main cause of many societal problems.

Our analysis of political discourse is part of a larger project on discourse and racism in which earlier research was done on everyday conversations, textbooks, news reports in the press, and academic and corporate discourse. The goals of this project were to examine (a) the ways in which white people write and talk about minorities and ethnic/racial affairs, (b) the social cognition that is the base of such discourse, and (c) the social, cultural, and political functions of such

discourse and cognition in the reproduction of ethnic inequality (van Dijk, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1993).

One result of these earlier projects was to discover that the various elites play a major role in these discursive reproduction processes of the system of racism (van Dijk, 1993). Popular racism exists; sometimes it may be more overt and blatant than elite racism. But many of the beliefs, prejudiced attitudes, and ideologies of popular racism are derived from interpretations of elite discourse such as media messages, textbooks, corporate discourse, and, especially, political discourse.

Against this background, I studied some parliamentary debates of the 1980s and early 1990s in the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Great Britain as well as in the U.S. House of Representatives (van Dijk, 1993; see also Reeves, 1983). In Europe, these debates often dealt with the increasing pressures of the East-West and especially South-North migration of refugees and others seeking asylum and work in the rich but increasingly barricaded fortress of the European Community. In the United States, congressional debate focused on civil rights, for instance, during the debate on the Civil Rights Bill of 1990, which would have provided minorities with more solid legal means to fight discrimination in the labor market. After being adopted by the Democratic majority in the House, this bill initially was vetoed by President Bush, who claimed that the bill favored quotas. A year later, a modified bill (also focusing on the rights of women) finally was adopted and signed into law.

Theoretical Framework

White European racism is understood in our work as a complex societal system of inequality in which immigrants and other ethnic-racial minorities (mostly from the South) systematically have less access to, or control over, society's power resources such as adequate conditions of residence, housing, employment, welfare, education, safety, knowledge, and status (Barker, 1981 ; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Essed, 1991; Kalpaka & Rätzzel, 1992; Katz & Taylor, 1988; Miles, 1989; Omi & Winant, 1986; Wieviorka, 1992; Wodak et al., 1990).

This system of inequality is reproduced in many ways. Dominant white group members may engage in everyday discrimination against dominated groups and their members while at the same time acquiring and using the beliefs that form the mental basis of such discrimination. This double system of everyday action (discrimination) and cognition

(prejudices, racist ideologies) at the micro level implements and sustains the macro-level system of group inequality and the role of organizations and institutions in the reproduction of racism. Given the increasing role of culture as a substitute for race in many forms of “modern” racism, racism is understood here as also encompassing certain forms of ethnicism, Eurocentrism, and anti-Semitism, especially when criteria of origin and appearance are combined with those of culture (such as religion, language, customs, norms, and values).

Discourse plays a role at both the micro and macro levels as well as in both interaction and cognition. At the micro level, discourse as a form of interaction may be directly discriminatory, for example, when white speakers or writers derogate minorities. At the same time, discourse expresses and influences social cognitions such as ethnic prejudices, and this contributes to their acquisition, use, and reproduction in everyday life. At the macro level, genres or orders of discourse, such as those of the media and politics, may be seen as the overall manifestations of organizations or institutions in the system of ethnic-racial relations and as expressing the shared ideologies of the white dominant group.

It already was suggested that elite groups within the white dominant group play a prominent role in these processes of reproduction. Their power is defined not only by their preferential access to material social resources but also by their preferential access to, and control over, various forms of public discourse. This also is the major means in the production of public opinion and the dominant consensus on ethnic affairs. Thus politicians, journalists, columnists, professors, corporate managers, church or union officials, and many other leading elites in society play a role in a complex process in the definition of the ethnic situation. This role may effectively contribute not only to the reproduction of racism but also to the (often marginal) forces that combat racism.

Political Elites

In this complex system of double dominance by the elites, namely of class and position within the dominant white group itself and of ethnicity and race with respect to minority groups, the politicians and their sustaining bureaucracies play a central role. They are the ones who ultimately make the decisions on immigration and immigration restrictions, on discrimination and measures against it, on affirmative action policies, and on general resources for housing, welfare, and education

for immigrants and minorities (Layton-Henry, 1984; Layton-Henry & Rich, 1986). When new immigrants appear at the borders, or when ethnic conflicts take place, politicians are the ones who are supposed to provide the first “official” definition of the situation. Such definitions, as well as the discourses that enact them, also have a long tradition. The same is true for the tradition of political racism (Lauren, 1988).

Obviously, politicians do not provide such definitions from scratch. For most ethnic events, they derive their information and beliefs partly from the mass media, bureaucratic reports (e.g., those produced by the ministries), reports of scholars or other experts, and talk with other elites such as party officials, corporate managers, and professionals (Lau & Sears, 1986; Reeves, 1983; Swanson & Nimmo, 1990).

Officially (i.e., according to democratic theory and norms), politicians are supposed to base their opinions on popular reactions to immigration and ethnic affairs, for instance, during election campaigns, hearings, or speeches they give for party members and others. However, their access to truly popular opinion is marginal or at best indirect; politicians talk mostly to other elites, and what they read is written by elites, even when such discourses claim to express the concerns of the population at large. Popular resentment against immigration, such as that in Western (Europe, is filtered through the constructions or interpretations of popular reactions by journalists or other professionals. This means that both the media and the politicians are able to construct popular resentment as meaning what they please, for instance, as a “democratic” majority legitimation for the restriction of immigration or civil rights.

Conversely, the media and other elite institutions may in turn be influenced by political discourse and decision making (Gormley, 1975; van Dijk, 1991). In sum, political cognition and discourse essentially are a product of complex interelite influences, that is, of other elite discourses, namely those of the mass media, ministries, state agencies, scholars, and other experts. A full-fledged analysis of the political discourse on race should exhibit such multiple influences and dependencies.

Finally, these assumptions about the role of politicians and political discourse in the reproduction of racism should be examined not only in the context of a theory of racism or a theory of discourse but also within the framework of political theory. The role and influence of elites in general, and that of political elites in particular, is one element in such a theory (Domhoff, 1978; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Mills, 1956). Analysis of parliamentary debates, however, presupposes assumptions

about the role of democratic institutions; about the functions, tasks, and conceptions of parliamentary representatives; about the relations among the legislature, government, and agencies of the state; about the relations between parliament and other political and social institutions; and about the relations among parliamentarians, their constituencies, and the population at large. Obviously, these and many other structures that are among the objects of political theory cannot all be examined in this chapter, although several of these relations are mentioned briefly.

Within our discourse analytical perspective, I prefer to focus on the structures and functions of political discourse. Against this background, it is not only the power of legislation and policymaking in ethnic affairs that is a crucial element in the reproduction of systems of inequality such as racism, but also the influence of politicians on public discourse (through the media) and hence on public opinion. Along this political power dimension, we discover the double dimension of discrimination and prejudice that defines the system of racism. As a group, white politicians sustain and legitimate the dominance of the white group with which they identify, and their extraordinary legislative powers allow them to play a primary role in the reproduction of this system of dominance. They have the prerogative to legislate in matters of racism, discrimination, affirmative action, and other aspects of ethnic relations that are of crucial importance for the position of minorities. In sum, their role in ethnic affairs is not marginal, and this also is how we should understand their discourses and the functions of such text and talk in the reproduction of ethnic relations in general and in the reproduction of racism in particular.

Parliamentary Debates: General Strategies

Before I proceed to a more detailed analysis of fragments of parliamentary discourse about Others, I should summarize some general strategic properties of such institutional talk about ethnic affairs. It should first be recalled that most contributions to parliamentary debate are “for the record” and usually are read and prepared in advance. They are spontaneous only in moments of direct interaction such as interruptions, catcalls, or other reactions from their colleagues in the House or in Parliament. Especially on the topic of ethnic-racial affairs, such monitoring by prepared statements is essential, given the controversial nature and the moral and political implications of the issue; white

politicians know that the choice of even one “wrong” word may lead to angry reactions from minority groups as well as from white antiracists or other liberals. Indeed, they know they may be accused of bias, xenophobia, or even racism as soon as they derogate immigrants or minorities. As elsewhere, but especially in this official role and for the record, talk of ethnic affairs is highly self-controlled.

Therefore, given the dominant norms (and laws) that prohibit discrimination and expressions of racial hatred, most parliamentary delegates will refrain from overt, blatant expressions of prejudice. This means that if they play a role in the reproduction of the negative social cognitions that underlie the dominant system of ethnic inequality, then they need to do so in the rather subtle and indirect ways that characterize what is variously referred to as “symbolic,” “subtle,” or “modern” racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). Systematic and explicit discourse analyses are among the more successful means of assessing this “delicate” political talk on race.

Our earlier analyses of these parliamentary debates resulted in the detection of a number of rather characteristic overall strategies, which may be summarized as follows (for details, see van Dijk, 1993).

1. *Positive self-presentation.* Parliaments are the typical sites of national rhetoric. Self-glorification, in comparison to other nations, is routine, especially in large countries such as the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and France. With respect to immigration and ethnic-racial relations, we encounter many references to “long traditions” of hospitality, tolerance, equality, democracy, and other values. These are, so to speak, the “national” correlates of what are known as face-keeping or impression management strategies in everyday interaction and dialogue.

2. *Negative Other-presentation.* Especially among conservative parties or in general when restrictions on immigration or civil rights are being defended, positive self-presentation often functions as a strategic disclaimer that introduces sequences of negative Other-presentation. Immigration, the multicultural society, or equal rights may be presented in a negative light; immigration is defined as “illegal” (if not “threatening”), refugees are defined as “economic” (and hence fake), race relations and the situation in the inner cities are seen as marred by popular white resentment (often justified by the inability of immigrants to adapt), and social resources are seen as under severe pressure because of the influx of “foreigners.” The well-known numbers game is only one

of many moves that may be used in this strategy of negative Other-presentation. There is no balance between the positive and negative sides of immigration; political talk seldom focuses on the economic, social, or cultural contributions of new immigrants or resident minorities. The political definition of the ethnic situation, especially in Europe, is predominantly negative. At the extreme right, delegates may even engage in overtly racist talk about minorities.

3. *Denial of racism.* At the same time, it is necessary to make sure that such negative talk and cognitions are not perceived as biased or prejudiced, let alone racist. Closely related to the moves of positive 'I'll presentation are the usual disclaimers in which speakers deny that they are racist or otherwise biased: "We have nothing against immigrants [or minorities], but . . ." Another move in such strategies of denial is the mitigation of racism in the country or the transfer of racism as "popular resentment" to the white lower class. Denial, mitigation, and transfer also are typical moves of elite racism used by politicians.

4. *Apparent sympathy.* Similarly, decisions that have negative consequences for immigrants or resident minorities often are defended by constructing them as being "for their own good." Potential immigrants are encouraged to stay where they are, for example, with the argument of helping to "build up" their own countries or to avoid coming to "our" country because they may be confronted by (popular) resentment, if not by the cold or other unpleasant surprises in the North. It is only in such strategic arguments that "our" country is presented as a disagreeable place to be-for immigrants, that is. At the same time, immigration restrictions may be supported by arguing that they are necessary for "harmony" in society. That is, it is in our common interest for "them" to stay away.

5. *Fairness.* Within the framework of positive self-presentation, discourse and decisions on ethnic affairs are premised on principles of humanism, tolerance, and equality. However, political "reality" is seen as "forcing" politicians to sometimes make "unpleasant" decisions. This dualism is routinely expressed by the well-known "firm but fair" move: Pragmatic decision making requires that we are "firm" but at the same time remain "fair." Of course, politicians will claim that such firmness has nothing to do with prejudice or racism, even when people with

another color or culture (and generally immigrants from the South) are the victims of such “fair” policies.

6. *Top-down transfer.* I already have argued that the denial of one’s own racism may be accompanied by various forms of transfer. These also are characteristic of other types of elite discourse, for instance, when corporate managers blame their subordinates for prejudice or discrimination against minorities in the company, when newspaper editors blame their readers for “abusing the truth” about the minority issues on which they report, or when shop or cafe owners blame their white clients for “forcing” them to discriminate against minorities. Politicians, if admitting at all the incidents of resentment, intolerance, xenophobia, and/or racism in the country, will tend to blame the extreme right or, more often than not, “ordinary” white people. Frequently, such blame may be mitigated or distributed, justifying resentment by assigning part of the blame to minorities whose behaviors or cultures are said to irritate or harass the native population. For the political elites, racism always is *elsewhere*—if not abroad, then at least at the extreme right or among the lower class.

7. *Justification: The force of facts.* Negative decisions, or even derogation of Others, routinely are justified by referring to the “force of facts”; the international situation, agreements, financial difficulties, number of refugees, and so on are among the many “good reasons” being used in justification tactics for negative decisions. Again, the argument of popular resentment may be one of these “facts,” even when it is largely constructed or exacerbated by politicians in the first place. This argument also may be used as one of the steps in the “fair but firm” argument.

These are among the major strategies of cognition and talk on ethnic affairs in parliamentary debates in Western Europe and North America. It is striking to find that, despite local differences of style and rhetoric, the overall strategic arguments and other moves are so much alike in different countries. It is as if the very topic of ethnic affairs or the sociopolitical situation of immigration or race relations invites a typical mode of perception and argumentation across national boundaries. This is not surprising when we realize that the overall goals and functions of such talk are to maintain and legitimate white group dominance. This means that immigration and residence of “different” people generally

will be seen and characterized as at least problematic, if not threatening, and that the concrete implementation of equal rights implies loss of power for the dominant group, as is obvious in the continuing debates on affirmative action, multicultural education, measures against discrimination and related issues.

Parliamentary Debates: Further Analysis

Against this background of elite racism in general, and the role of parliamentary politics in particular, we need to probe somewhat deeper into some of the mechanisms, moves, and strategies employed by parliamentarians in defining the ethnic situation. Therefore, in the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the detailed ways in which politicians speak about Others and on how such discourse may contribute to the reproduction of ethnic prejudice and hence to the system of racism.

Our examples are taken from debates in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, and the Netherlands that were held between the early 1980s and 1990s. To understand the many details of these debates, one would have to explain in detail the social and political situation in each of the respective countries. Space limitations, however, I do not allow such a lengthy explanation of background. I provide it, ad hoc where it is directly relevant for understanding our interpretations.

For most European debates, the most prominent background was the continued immigration of family members of resident minorities, primarily from the Mediterranean (in the case of “guest workers” from Turkey, Morocco, and other countries in North Africa), as well as of citizens from former colonies in the Caribbean (in the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands), from Africa (in the United Kingdom and France), and from Asia (in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands). More prominent toward the end of the 1980s was the increasing arrival of refugees in Western Europe (mostly from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia) and in the United States (mostly from the Caribbean [Haiti] and central America).

The American debate I analyzed focused on job discrimination. The civil Rights Bill of 1990 tried to guarantee that minorities (and later also women) would be in a position to oppose such discrimination legally and effectively. More concretely, this bill essentially was aimed at repairing the “holes” in the law that were due to controversial

decisions by the Supreme Court that generally were seen as inconsistent with earlier civil rights legislation and practices.

Describing Others

There is an abundant literature in anthropology, sociology, and social psychology about the ways in which “we” see and describe “them.” Group perception, biases in intercultural observation, and stereotyping are well-known topics in such scholarly discourse. However, much of this work focuses on psychological or cultural perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies; on the mental strategies of categorization, differentiation, and polarization; or on the social strategies of exclusion, inferiorization, and marginalization, among others (Asad, 1973; Fabian, 1983; Hamilton, 1981; Miller, 1981; Zebrowitz, 1990).

In the scholarly approaches to the perception and treatment of Self and Others, the fundamental social practice of *discourse* generally has been ignored. “We” write and talk about “them,” especially when “their” presence has become socially salient or otherwise “interesting.” Theoretically, this discourse reflects underlying cognitive structures and strategies, for example, mental models, attitudes, and processes (such as categorization and polarization) and their societal functions (such as persuasion and legitimation for discrimination).

In other words, analyzing parliamentary discourse on Others contributes to our insight into the broad ideological and sociocultural system of group relations, power, and dominance. In that respect, discourse analysis may be seen as a method of social analysis. At the same time, such discourse, as part of the system of political decision making and legislation, is itself a form of action and interaction. This means that analyzing political discourse directly contributes to political theory itself, while highlighting the structures and practices of the body politic, as well as to a theory of racism, while studying the role of politicians and their discourses in the complex process of the reproduction of discourse.

In this complex framework of the study of discourse about Others, explicit and systematic analyses of text and talk may proceed in many ways. After all, discourse about Others is first of all discourse. That is, all dimensions and levels of such discourse should be characterized systematically, from graphic, phonetic, phonological, morphological, and syntactic “surface” structures and their context-dependent stylistic

variations or rhetorical manipulations to the “underlying” structures of local and global meaning and speech acts and the interactional functions of dialogue and conversation, among other structures and dimensions of systematic description (van Dijk, 1985).

However, such full-scale analysis is more like a fishing expedition than a theoretically guided investigation of those discourse structures that are particularly relevant for the expression of social representations of other groups and the societal and cultural functions of this expression and representation within the system of racism. Even intuitively, we may surmise that the stylistic choice of words used to denote other groups will be more directly revealing about “underlying” attitudes and discriminatory and exclusionary functions than, for instance, phonetic articulation (pronunciation) or the degree or complexity of syntactic clause embedding. The same is true for the analysis of storytelling and argumentation about “foreigners,” which also tells us how in-group members see and find ethnic events as well as which personal and socially shared opinions and attitudes are involved in the construction of mental models of “ethnic reality” or in strategies of interpretation, planning, or decision making in ethnically relevant action and interaction.

Theoretically and methodologically, we need to focus on those structures that (a) are the preferred sites of expression or articulation of crucial underlying social cognitions (e.g., models of ethnic events or attitudes about other groups) and that (b) play a primary role in communicating, in influencing other group members, and hence in reproducing such social cognitions. The latter point is as obvious as it is tricky. Overt uses of blatantly derogatory remarks are rather reliable signals of underlying prejudices while also having a clear function of persuasive reproduction of racist beliefs. However, because they are so overt and blatant, interlocutors may be less easily influenced by them, precisely because of extant norms against racism and the usual strategies of resisting persuasive messages.

Thus it may well be that more subtle and indirect expression of seemingly reasonable, humane, or tolerant beliefs or arguments are much more insidious and influential in persuasion (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). Obviously, this is particularly relevant in public parliamentary discourse. The same is true for structures of discourse that usually are processed more or less automatically, such as the schema of a story or that of a news report; what is mentioned or ignored in a headline or lead paragraph may easily be noticed, but the structural functions of such

prominent placement in the text rarely are noticed. This is even more characteristic for sentence structures, rhetorical figures, and other local properties of text and talk.

In other words, in the analysis of the description of Others, we must focus on several discourse dimensions that either overtly or more subtly play a prominent role in the expression and communication of the social representations of Others as well as their social and especially their political conditions and functions. Once we have this theoretically guided analytical schema, we will know what to look for when analyzing parliamentary debates.

To cut short a long theoretical analysis of relevant discourse structures and strategies, we may summarize the major elements of such a schema as follows.

1. *Meaning*. generalized references to inherent “traits” or “typical” actions of minorities. These may reflect social attitudes and ideologies (stereotypes, prototypes, etc.).
2. *Meaning*. references to relevant (in-group or “Universal”) norms and Values, for example, in argumentation. These may express the building blocks of ideological structures that organize attitudes about Others.
3. *Meaning*: references to in-group goals. These may dominate group interests and the overall orientation of ethnic ideologies.
4. *Semantic moves such as disclaimers*: These play a role in impression management and persuasion while exhibiting the underlying structures of ethnic attitudes.
5. *Storytelling about ethnic events including personal experiences with Others*: These express mental models of such events and the opinions storytellers have about them.
6. *Argumentation structures*: Arguments and the various strategies of supporting them presuppose shared sociocultural knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about Others while expressing the model-based interpretation of the ethnic situation. Also, arguments play a functional role in the genre and context of parliamentary debates as conducted between government parties and the opposition.
7. *Lexical style of the descriptions of the properties and actions of Others*: The choice of specific words signals not only contextual functions or genres (e.g., a parliamentary debate) but also model-based opinions about Others.
8. *Rhetorical figures*: These usually function as special strategies in processes of attention manipulation, credibility enhancement, impression management, and other modes of persuasion.

Of course, this is not a complete list but merely a limited number of practical suggestions for the analysis of political text and talk. In principle, virtually any type of discourse structure may be relevant, depending on one's research questions. It is crucial to establish how underlying attitudes about minorities tend to be strategically expressed (or indeed concealed) in discourse structures or, conversely, which discourse structures typically are used to influence the mental models and the social cognitions of the audience. More specifically, we need to know which discourse structures characterize political (parliamentary) text and talk about ethnic affairs.

Talk About Others in the British House of Commons

Debates on ethnic affairs in the British parliament, like those in most other Western European parliaments, tend to focus on immigration. From the 1980s to the mid-1990s, this meant that proposals to restrict or otherwise regulate immigration were made by the Thatcher and Major administrations and routinely attacked by Labour representatives. The latter then usually took a more humanitarian point of view in which immigrants and minorities were presented in a more positive light than they were in Conservative rhetoric. Generally, however, in Conservative contributions to these debates, blatant derogation of immigrants and minorities was rare, except among some right-wing Tories. As elsewhere in Europe, substantial portions of the debate were about the many technicalities of special immigration measures and regulations. Only occasionally did these debates feature general statements about race relations in the United Kingdom or about the properties of refugees, immigrants and minorities. Let us consider some examples of this kind of talk. Quotations are taken from the weekly *Hansard*, which records the parliamentary debates in the British House of Commons.

In a debate about Kurdish refugees, the minister of state of the Home Office, Tim Renton, first reacts as follows to a moving statement by Jeremy Corbyn on the predicaments of the Kurds in Turkey:

I want to consider the serious subject of this adjournment debate, and I will begin by explaining the general context of the government's policy towards people who claim asylum. As the [honorable] member for Islington North reminds us, the United Kingdom was one of the earliest signatories to the

1951 United Nations convention on refugees. We take our responsibilities very seriously, despite what is sometimes said by organizations like Amnesty International. No one who does my job can fail to be affected daily by the plight of people who are fleeing from persecution in their own country....

If the interests of the people genuinely fleeing from persecution are to be safeguarded, it is vital that the system designed to protect them should not be exploited by people whose main motivation is economic migration. (May 26, 1989, column 1267)

The structures and strategies of this fragment are as stereotypical as its contents. Virtually all talk on immigrants, minorities, and especially refugees opens with national rhetoric replete with various forms of positive self-presentation; policies and principles are humanitarian and “our” country has a “long tradition” of hospitality, or, as Minister of State David Waddington said in 1985, when the first Tamils came to the United Kingdom, “Our tradition of giving sanctuary to those fleeing from persecution goes back many years” (July 23, 1985, column 971). Such moves in the strategy of impression management are crucial to avoid tacit or explicit accusations of xenophobia or racism by the opposition, by relevant organizations, or by more liberal segments of the public at large. If such accusations are actually made, then they are strongly denied or attacked, as is the case here in rejecting the accusations by Amnesty International. Typically, the same rhetoric of positive self-presentation also features emotional references to the “plight” of refugees.

Whatever the sincerity or truth value of these claims may be, they are virtually always the introduction to a real or mental *but*: We should remain “realistic,” we need to be “fair but firm,” we need to stop illegal immigration, and we need to stop “economic” refugees. The concept of “economic refugees” was coined around 1985 when large numbers of Tamils fled from civil war in Sri Lanka and came to various European countries. It was at that time that a new conceptual and discursive categorization of refugees became imperative, not so much because most refugees suddenly began coming to Europe only to find jobs or to flee from poverty but because there simply were “too many” of them. The pitiful image of the traditional political refugees, and especially those fleeing from communism (like the Vietnamese boat people), needed to be strategically changed so that severe immigration restrictions could be enacted and legitimated among the public at large. The

notion of “economic refugees” thus became the new political buzzword to denote “fake” refugees, if not simply all those profiteers who were seen as “coming here only to live from our pocket.”

The press reacted accordingly. The conservative newspapers and tabloids especially further exacerbated this negative image projected by leading politicians. Fast-growing resentment among the European population at large against such “scroungers” showed that these strategies were very successful. Indeed, this manipulated voice of the people was in turn used as a “democratic” legitimation to clamp down on the “massive” immigration of refugees everywhere in Europe. The latter part of this passage from the speech of Renton should be understood in that broader framework.

Note also the more detailed structure of this fragment. Even the negative references to “exploitation” and to “people whose main motivation is economic migration” are introduced by a positive characterization of “people genuinely fleeing from persecution.” The rhetorical contrast established here between “real” and “fake” refugees expresses underlying social representations in which refugees are categorized as positive and negative groups. The first category, and its concomitant attitudes, is now reserved for the traditional, pitiful political refugee who has been persecuted, whereas all others are henceforth categorized as criminals: exploiters, scroungers, liars, and so on. This rhetorical and cognitive contrast is further enhanced by an argumentative move, namely that economic immigration is not restricted so much because it hurts “our” interests; on the contrary, it is more persuasive to construct their immigration as a threat to the interests of “genuine” refugees. In sum, Renton’s fragment should be heard as a defense of the interests of true refugees. Moreover, not only are true refugees welcome, but the government even purports to have a “system designed to protect them.” In a passage that categorizes large segments of the refugee population as fakes, the speaker emphasizes the positive policies and points of view of his government.

To evaluate such claims, and hence to interpret their discursive implementation, we need to know that the number of “real” refugees being recognized by Western European countries is very low. According to the Foreign Office, the United Kingdom in 1991 granted asylum to only 420 refugees (whereas 1,860 received exceptional leave to stay and 2,410 were refused), much less than the number granted by most other European countries. Also, it should be emphasized that the distinction between “political” and “economic” refugees not only is vague and in

many circumstances irrelevant but also is liable to the vicissitudes of a political economy of immigration. When there are many applications, the number of economic refugees increases more than proportionally. The concept is used not to make an honest separation between real and fake refugees but rather as a political and rhetorical means to restrict *all* forms of immigration of refugees.

The claim that many refugees come here for economic reasons must, of course, be supported argumentatively by “facts” that show unambiguously that the speaker is credible. There are many strategic ways in which to do this. First, there is the *numbers game*, the rhetorical manipulation of numbers of arrivals, as Renton also does in the passage that follows the one I have quoted (“In one instance they almost filled an entire charter flight of over 100 passengers”; “We are now looking at more than 1,000 Turkish cases who have arrived in the past four weeks”). The numbers of cases (not people) are persuasive by themselves while suggesting objective facts. (How many people *leave* each (lay, or how many are *sent back*, is not as prominently displayed in the political and media rhetoric of the numbers game.) The second strategy is to accuse criminal “middlemen” who exploit the poor refugees (“There is evidence that middlemen selling air tickets have been exploiting the economic situation in Turkey”). The proof, for Renton, that most came simply to get jobs is that 80% already went back on their “own accord” (which is not so obvious because they were refused or harassed by the British authorities):

Many of them were, quite simply, led up the garden path, in their own towns and villages. That is not the action of people who fear imminent persecution. We are seeing a gross and transparent abuse of the asylum procedures as a means of obtaining jobs, housing and perhaps social security benefits in the United Kingdom. (May 26. 1989, Renton, column 1268)

This passage, as well as similar ones, suggests that there is only one way in which to support the point of view that refugees are economic and hence fake: their association with crime, fraud, or other violations of rules, norms, and values. At least, as this passage suggests, they were deceived. At the same time, however, it is not the alleged crimes of the middlemen (for whose existence evidence is said to exist but is not provided) that is focused on (after all, they are not immigrants); rather, it is the behavior of the refugees themselves (“not the action of people who fear . . . persecution . . . [and] gross and transparent abuse”). The

natural wish to get a job and housing when one takes refuge in another country is taken here as proof of fraudulent intentions. Closely mimicking and reformulating popular racism, refugees are thus blamed for whatever they do. If they try to get work, then they will be accused of taking away jobs; if not, then they may be accused of coming only for social security benefits, which is the real proof of their being fraudulent and scroungers.

Of course, such rhetoric is hardly new. It has become prominent especially since the arrival of Tamils in 1985, which was recalled in a debate on asylum seekers in 1987. One Conservative member of Parliament (MP) rhetorically addresses his “right honorable friend,” Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, as follows:

Is he not Further aware that all Western democracies are having to find other ways to contain the flow of people from Third World countries who arrive for bogus reasons’! Is he not also aware that there is a Substantial increase in the forgery, alteration, and counterfeiting of passports and other travel documents’? (March 3, 1987, John Wheeler, column 735)

The rhetorical questions suggest that Wheeler holds his presuppositions about fraud to be true, if not commonsense knowledge to be acted on in due course and with appropriate policies. At the same time, refugees who have to be kept out are clearly identified here as coming from the Third World. Especially people of other cultures and colors are associated with bogus applications, forgery, and crimes. In news headlines, stereotypical metaphors of “flow” (words such as *waves*, *floods*, *streams*, and *tides*) are routinely applied to asylum seekers. They are perfidiously appropriate metaphors for persuading public opinion in the British Isles. Explicitly using this populist appeal, his colleague Terry Dicks will later in the same debate qualify Tamil refugees as “liars, cheats, and queue jumpers” who will “anger thousands of people in this country” (March 3, 1987, column 737). This, then, is the dominant elite voice of the conservative mind and the reliable expression of the underlying social representations of Others as refugees in the rich Northwest of Europe. Instead of the buzzword “economic refugees,” we find here what is really meant: They are frauds and liars. Hence we need not let them in. The logic of the ensuing policy is as clear as the rhetoric of its persuasive parliamentary recommendation by Tory members of Parliament (or, more than a decade earlier, by Labour members of

Parliament when they were in power and enacted immigration restriction bills).

By describing Western countries as “democracies,” it is suggested that such tidal waves from the South are a threat to our democracies that have to find ways in which to stem the tide. In other words, immigration restriction is not a policy decision but a “natural” necessity to protect white Britons from the hordes from the South. In summary, there are many stylistic and rhetorical ways in which to describe the situation so that the preferred policy answer from the government is predictable: Restrict the immigration of refugees. This has indeed happened since 1985, both in the United Kingdom and in all other Western European “democracies.”

Yet, there also may be evidence of political oppression in other countries. After all, everybody knows about the treatment of Kurds in Turkey. The accusation of being an economic refugee, and the concomitant denial of political persecution, obviously is weak against the background of such facts (as supplied by Amnesty International, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and other international organizations). So, the next move in the argumentative strategy must be to deny or mitigate such facts, as Renton indeed does when he speaks about Turkey: “We are well aware that the human rights standards in Turkey still fall somewhat short of which we consider acceptable” (May 26, 1989, column 1268).

Massive arrests, torture, execution, and all-out war against Kurds thus euphemistically come to “fall somewhat short of human rights standards.” We see that the categorization into political and economic refugees has little to do with the facts. Refugees are classified as a result of financial, political, and other opportunistic criteria, not on the basis of the human rights situations in their own countries. And if, under international pressure (e.g., from the UN High Commission for Refugees), countries are officially declared to be seriously infringing on human rights, then other strategies, except flat denials or mitigations, may be applied. These include requiring proof of individual persecution or even proof of torture. The main political strategy, however, is to examine whether refugees could not stay “in the regions” of their own countries where they would be close to peoples of their own “kinds” or “cultures.” This suggests that ethnic-racial criteria also play a role in the classification and treatment of refugees. Otherwise, as is now European policy, refugees are relegated to the first “safe” country through which they pass, even if they are on their way to the United Kingdom because they

may have relatives there or because they already may speak English and consequently can get work more easily.

Overall impression management strategies, rhetoric (such as contrast and hyperbole), lexical style, and the local semantic moves that function as disclaimers reveal not only the underlying social cognitions of the British Conservatives regarding immigrants but also how such social cognitions and their discursive formulations are used persuasively in a political and public relations strategy to garner media and popular support and legitimation for a restrictive immigration policy. Indeed, as Renton's arch-conservative colleague, Sir John Stokes, said a year later in a debate on immigration rules, "British citizenship should be a most valuable prize for anyone, and it should not be granted to all and sundry" (May 15, 1990, column 844).

It is not surprising that such rhetoric claims to be supported by the "vox populi" of a white group that is the secondary (if not the primary) target of such talk; immigration restrictions, said Stokes, "will be welcomed wholeheartedly by the British public" (May 15, 1990, column 844). Thus the elite preformulation of prejudice and the strategies of political legitimation come full circle if "the public" can be persuaded to think and speak like the elite.

Just in case one might conclude that such discourse is applied to all immigrants and that the question of ethnic, racial, or regional difference is therefore irrelevant, we may refer to the remark of Stokes's comrade on the Right, Tim Janman, made a year earlier during a debate on new immigration rules:

We do not have vast numbers of Americans entering this country on a false basis to secure permanent residency. The whole point of this legislative change is to direct it at where the problem lies—people from west Africa, not from America.... We are talking about country of origin, culture, and religion. Those factors are important, and they cause great anxiety to our constituents. (June 20, 1989, columns 292, 294)

In other words, it is "black" immigration that must be stopped. It is this kind of differentiation that is at the heart of British immigration policies and of the populist rhetoric with which political elites sell themselves to the white public at large. Everyone knows it, but only arch-conservatives like Janman say so explicitly, although he is somewhat frowned on by his more moderate colleagues. (The opposition speaks of a "vicious streak of racism.") Americans do not *need* to enter

the country “on a false basis.” That they will not have much difficulty in being accepted as immigrants in the first place is a presupposition of this statement that is wisely not made explicit by the speaker. The same is true not only for immigrants but also for minorities more generally. That “one in three children born in London today [is] of ethnic origin” is, for Janman, a “frightening concept to come to terms with” (June 20, 1989, columns 293-294). Immigration restrictions thus legitimated are tantamount to a policy of keeping Britain as white as possible.

When challenged, however, Tories will, of course, never admit such an implication but have ways to redefine the categories of people involved. This was the case during another debate (on DNA testing of immigrants) during the same year. Besides the usual prepared statements of representatives, here is a piece of genuine dialogue between a Labour and a Conservative MP:

Mr. Hattersley: Does the home secretary believe that the rule [declaring oneself a “real” student from the outsell should he applied to all Students or that it should apply just to students of a particular ethnic origin?

Mr. Hurd: I regard it as reasonable where the mischief has arisen. [Interruption.] If the right [honorable] member for Sparkbrook wishes to remain blind to the facts, he can do so, but if he wishes to study the evidence of the abuse, where it exists, and the proportion of it to be found in those countries where visas are required for entry to this country, we can provide him with it.... Large parts of the Third World are in ferment of one kind or another, and many people are suffering as a result of disorder or poverty. (July 5, 1989, column 383)

Hattersley’s seemingly factual question obviously presupposes his belief that for the Conservative administration, represented here by Home Secretary Hurd, “bogus” students should primarily be sought among non-Europeans. Hurd does not immediately deny the implicit allegation of racism but cautiously moves around ethnicity and race by referring in abstract terms to the domain of application of the rule “where mischief has arisen” and, more specifically although still very generally, to the countries whose citizens need visas to enter the United Kingdom. Hurd’s reaction is circular, if not begging the question, by referring to current visa policies that are themselves premised on concepts about the likelihood of immigration abuse from specific countries:

those in the Third World. Only a paragraph later does he actually mention “large parts of the Third World and Pastern Europe” as the geographical area of application for the policies, but he does so with the expected positive style of humanitarian concern (“People are suffering as a result of disorder and poverty”). Again, people from the South (and the East) are literally associated with fraud (“bogus students”), mischief and abuse, an accusation that is made credible by offering for examination “the evidence” or “the facts,” which the opposition refuses to see. These remarks are followed by the well-known story of the middlemen we have encountered earlier.

Even in the style of the more moderate Conservatives such as Hurd, there is ample evidence of a consistently negative portrayal of immigrants, refugees, and Others, especially those from the South. Other Conservative speakers in the same debate thus speak of “illegal immigration,” “bogus marriages,” and the “birth rate [that] exceeds that of the original population” (Stokes, column 390). Indeed, in such a plainly racist framework, white elite speakers like the right-wing Stokes may even wonder what will happen to “our beloved England” and what will be the effect of immigration on “our religion, morals, customs, habits and so on? Already there have been some dangerous eruptions from parts of the Moslem community” (columns 390-391). The differences are merely of degree. Right-wing Tories explicitly formulate what is presupposed or otherwise implied by more moderate speakers.

Although several of the more blatant expressions of political racism analyzed in the preceding are easy to spot and therefore easy to analyze and challenge, additional characterizations of Others are much more insidious. The moderate MP Andrew Rowe, who “distances” himself from the remarks of his Conservative colleague Stokes, recalls that there still is too much “prejudice” in Britain. Those who know British race relations could not agree more, although some of them would prefer to speak of racism rather than use the more innocent sounding term prejudice. However, Rowe qualifies the experiences of minorities confronted with racism as follows:

One must, of course, always be extremely careful about the natural tendency of those who belong to a minority, whatever it may be, that when they do not get what they want, they assume that their failure to do so is directly attributed to their membership of that minority, when that is frequently not the case. (July 5, 1989, column 393)

The “natural” tendency of minorities, about which Rowe wants us to be “extremely careful” and which thus seems to constitute a fundamental problem, is, however, a widespread myth, especially under the more moderate white elites. Minorities, and particularly blacks, often are characterized as having a chip on their shoulder, as being overly sensitive, and as seeing “racism where there is none.” This myth is at the heart of what has been called modern (or symbolic) racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). According to this view, not only do minorities (and especially blacks) make unreasonable demands, they commit the unforgivable sin of accusing “us” of prejudice and racism. This is also the dominant discourse among white elites in the Netherlands in their attacks against those who combat racism in general and against minority researchers and leaders in particular.

That this accusation is based on a self-serving myth is shown by repeated research results that have found that, on the contrary, minorities do not have a natural tendency to blame their own failures on the majority by accusing majority members of racism. They generally are reluctant to make such accusations, even when justified, precisely to avoid white charges of oversensitiveness (Essed, 1991). Underreporting of experiences with racism is the tendency, not overreporting, let alone groundless accusations of majority group members. Blaming minorities for imagining or exaggerating racist events is part of a well-known strategy of marginalizing dissidence and problematizing minorities. No wonder Rowe’s colleague, Robert G. Hughes, finds that “we need a drive against discrimination, but not a rerun of discredited, so-called ‘antiracist’ strategies” (July 5, 1989, column 398). That is, some opposition against discrimination is allowed as long as it does not go all the way and assumes a truly antiracist stance. Obviously, the use of the adjectivized verb *discredited* conceals *who* did the discrediting, namely the white elites who feel uncomfortable with antiracism and whose strategy of reaction is to marginalize antiracist critique.

British Education Secretary Sir Keith Joseph typically rejects well-documented accusations of prejudice and racism among teachers during a discussion of the well-known Swann report on multicultural education:

The [honorable] gentleman has allowed himself to speak in far too absolute a fashion about what he calls “racism.” He does an injustice to the teaching force, whose members are dedicated to the service of individual children and in whom I have seen precious little evidence of any racist prejudice. (March 14, 1985, column 453)

The classic example of racism denial operates through several con- current moves. First, the very notion of racism is rejected as an accept- able description of the facts, namely as a purely subjective qualification. Second, the use of the expression “far too absolute” suggests the usual counteraccusation of exaggeration. Third, Joseph positively calls to mind the “dedicated service” of teachers, thereby suggesting that if one uses the term *racism*, then one would falsely accuse all such dedicated teachers. And, finally, he provides “personal evidence”—there is no racism because he has not seen it himself—as if he were daily present in the classroom and his observations and experience were on a par with those of a minority child. In summary, the defense against the observa- tion that in education we find racism is simple: It is not true, and those who say it is do not know what racism is and/or exaggerate (see also Mullard, 1984; Troyna & Williams, 1986).

It is crucial to emphasize again that the denial of racism not only is a form of self-serving impression management but also is an attack on Others whose insight, knowledge, and experience are marginalized, not taken seriously, or even qualified as a threat. In the same way as refugees were seen by Tories as making “spurious” applications for asylum, we now find that minorities and white antiracists make “spurious” accusa- tions of racism. That is, they are liars, cannot be trusted, and are a threat to “our system.”

Thus those who combat racism may effectively be silenced; racism is not on the public agenda, and those who use the very term will have no access to public debate. This may be less true for extremist, overt racism of the far Right, which is strategically recognized and (weakly) com- bated by moderate politicians because it deflects attention from their own role in race relations. It is, however, typical for all reactions against analyses of elite racism and of the seemingly “innocent” forms of everyday racism that characterize virtually all situations, organizations, and institutions of white society.

Describing Others in the U.S. House of Representatives

Style, rhetoric, and topics in the U.S. House of Representatives when debating the Civil Rights Bill of 1990 (H.R. 4000 or the Kennedy- Hawkins Bill) are quite different from those in the British House of Commons. Yet there also are interesting commonalities. To attack the

bill proposed by the Democrats, which was supposed to make it easier for minorities to fight discrimination in employment, the Republicans also occasionally felt the need to resort to (usually subtle) forms of derogation. The easiest form of attack, not subject to the same norm that prohibits explicit racism, was the attack against those who are seen to profit most from antidiscrimination litigation: the lawyers. Hence the frequent reference to a “lawyers’ bonanza” bill. It is even more persuasive to address an alleged breach of U.S. equality norms: This bill is a “quota” bill that will hire minorities “by the numbers” instead of by their qualifications. It is the bill’s alleged “quota” property that was used by President Bush as a reason for vetoing the version of the bill adopted by the House later that year (a veto that subsequently could not be overturned by a two-thirds majority in the House). Third, the beneficiaries of the bill, namely minorities, had to be addressed. This meant that they, and especially their role in accusations of discrimination, needed to be characterized in some way.

Contrary to much political and media debate in Europe, U.S. representatives do not generally deny the existence of racism and discrimination. On the contrary, most Democrats and Republicans will first of all emphasize the need for civil rights and continued struggle against racism, citing the background of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the legislation that has resulted from it. Hence this bill, which was intended to counter some Supreme Court decisions that generally were seen as incompatible with the spirit of earlier legislation. Many interventions in this debate began with the following humanitarian rhetoric. (Quotations are taken from the *Congressional Record*.)

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of this rule. Discrimination in America today is unthinkable. It is offensive. It should be a relic of history. This hill should pass this House unanimously. (House, James Scheuer, August 2, 1990, H6326)

It is within this complex political framework that we should understand the conservative attacks against this bill, which was seen to grant excessive rights to minorities when suing discriminating employers. Indeed, Republicans primarily saw this bill as an unwarranted attack against the business community and as an indirect way to push for “quotas” because, as they emphasized repeatedly during the debate, employers would rather hire by the numbers to comply with such a law

than pay huge litigation costs. Some conservative representatives even saw the consequences of this bill as a national catastrophe:

This nonsense about quotas has to stop because when we begin to hire and promote people on the basis of their race, we are going to bring to our society feelings of distress, feelings of unhappiness, and these emotions will accumulate and ultimately destroy us. (House, August 2, 1990. William Dannemeyer, H6332)

That the bill was supposed to combat the fact that (white) people in the United States have been, and still are, often hired on the basis of their race is a point ignored in this well-known move of reversal: We are not discriminating, they are. Thus quotas are seen as reverse discrimination, which, according to Dannemeyer's populist appeal, is opposed by "most Americans . . . who overwhelmingly support even-handed policies that treat all individuals equally" (House, August 2, 1990, H6333). More importantly, such "even-handed" policies have the "support of the business community," as Dannemeyer concedes a few minutes later. We see that one of the argumentative moves of the Republicans was to assert the myth of a "color-blind" society, which obviously favors those who already are in power.

Among the many arguments leveled against this bill, we may also expect negative descriptions of those who will benefit from it: ethnic minorities, and especially African Americans. Let us examine how this is done in the U.S. Congress to get insight into the more subtle means used by elites in the United States to convey persuasively negative social representations of such minorities and of those who are firmly with them.

One first move in this strategy of negative Other-presentation is to refer negatively to everybody who would support this bill: "Now a 'no' vote on the bill is bound to be politically unpopular because the civil rights industry—it is no longer a movement but an industry—will demagogue the issue" (House, August 2, 1990, Robert Dornan, H6335). Thus discrediting the civil rights movement as an "industry" (as British Conservatives also do routinely) and as "demagogues" who will force such a bill on us is one of the moves in the conservative strategy of attack against this bill. The choice of the word *demagogue* is, of course, not innocent and suggests that the civil rights movement

is incompatible with American values of democracy and political decision making.

Another important move in attacking this law is to suggest subtly that unqualified minorities will be hired under the threat of litigation, as is the case in the following fragment about an imaginary plumbing firm named ABC:

Along comes Joe Johnson, a black applicant who has not graduated from a trade school and has only six months of experience. He applies to ABC and is turned down. He sues, charging that ABC's hiring practices have a "disparate impact" upon the black community. Instead of having 20 minority plumbers, the company has only 10. (House, August 2, 1990, Bill McCollum, H6781)

Two presuppositions are casually introduced into the debate, namely that minorities tend to be less qualified than other applicants and that minorities are likely to sue falsely employers for discrimination. Both presuppositions are the stock in trade of modern racism; no proponents of this antidiscrimination bill suggested that unqualified people must be hired "by the numbers," nor is there any evidence that blacks tend to make unwarranted accusations of discrimination. It is especially the presupposed lack of qualifications that is a powerful argumentative move because it plays such an important role in white resentment against blacks, commonly formulated in terms of favoritism. Following is what Senator Orrin Hatch said that same autumn during the Senate debate, after President Bush had vetoed H.R. 4000:

With respect to successful performance on the job, that language means only minimal standards are acceptable. What that means is that employers, if this bill passes, will have to hire on the basis of the lowest common denominator. They will no longer have to hire the most qualified employee for the job. (Senate, October 24, 1990, S 16566)

France: The *Assemblée Nationale*

Debates on immigration in the *Assemblée Nationale* in France sometimes are more heated than those in the United States. Especially the far Right, represented by Le Pen's *Front National*, may in that case focus on the alleged negative properties of immigrants (usually North Afri

cans). Most debates during the 1990s, as elsewhere in Europe, were about details of immigration and residence regulations and conditions. Let us just give a few examples to provide the flavor of conservative and right-wing discourse on minorities in France.

Our examples are taken from a debate about a new bill (*Conditions d'entrée et de séjour des étrangers en France*) proposed in July 1986 by the lie conservative government (a coalition of two parties, the *Rassemblement Pour la République* [RPR] and the *Union pour la Démocratie Française* [UDF]). The bill was strongly attacked by the Socialist opposition Here, also, the debate begins with the usual rhetoric of positive self-presentation, but soon a more "realistic" approach to those who "refuse to integrate" is proposed (Pierre Mazeaud, July 9, 1986, pp. 3049-3050).

To make sure that negative Other-presentation is not misunderstood as racism, the well-known "rotten apple" argument, which says that the good will suffer from the bad, is used. Examples are taken from the *Journal officiel* and are translated more or less literally to keep the original stylistic flavor of the speeches.

Indeed, illegal foreigners and those who do not respect our public order cause great damage to those foreigners who wish to integrate themselves into the national community. . . . [Some people come here without any money.] Such a pecuniary situation often leads them to clandestine work or, much more seriously, to acts of delinquency. (Pierre Mazeaud, July 9, 1986,p.3050)

The restrictions on residence and immigration proposed in this bill are legitimated by criminalizing sections of minority and immigrant populations Obviously, Mazeaud does not accuse all immigrants of crime but makes sure to distinguish carefully between the immigrant communities as a whole and those illegal and criminal immigrants who spoil the situation for the rest.

Whereas this discourse is still rather moderate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the racist *Front National*, is more explicit in his derogation of c Others. Following are a few fragments of one of his speeches in this debate:

The increasing number of foreigners implies serious dangers for the security of our country and its economic and social equilibrium. . . .

[France and the French are under] serious and lethal menace by the continuous development of foreign immigration. . . . [France people from other countries only have to come here and,] without working, they make ten to 100 times more than for work in their own country. . . . They only have to write “Mohammed, come quickly! Allah’s paradise is not at the other side of death of the glorious soldier, but at the other side of the Mediterranean! Quickly take an Air France flight!” (July 9, 1986, pp. 3061-3063)

It is not surprising that after his last remarks about the fictitious Mohammed luring his Muslim compatriots to France, the Socialist opposition protested forcefully. In these few fragments, one sees the standard racist prejudices against immigrants in Europe: They only come here to take advantage of our social security, they do not want to work, they are a threat to “our” country and “our” people, and so on. The racist prejudices and attacks against Muslims and Islam are classic right-wing rhetoric (see Said, 1979).

Today, the French people, realist and solidary as it is, knows that it cannot welcome particular foreign communities. Thus, we now observe, on our national soil, a clash between two fundamentally different cultures. Islam, which already represents the second religion in France, is opposed to any assimilation and threatens our own identity, our Western Christian civilization. (July 9, 1986, Jean-Pierre Stirbois, p. 3092)

In line with many other forms of “modern” racism, such right-wing speakers carefully focus on culture instead of on race and articulate the difference, if not the threat posed by Others in terms of religion and other practices that are found incompatible with “our culture.” Note also the use of such typically nationalist terms as *soil* (French: *sol*) and the use of “identity” and “Western civilization.” Although Islam is presented as the second religion in France and therefore as a threat to Christianity for the speaker, only about 5% of the population is Muslim, and this makes the “threat to our identity” a hyperbole rather than a realistic assessment of the situation. Also, the presupposed condition that *if* immigrants would assimilate, then they would be seen in a more positive light is spurious because even members of minority groups who are French by birth, speak French fluently, and are not Muslims are treated as aliens by the representatives of the *Front National*.

Speakers of the right routinely enumerate cultural differences that allegedly do not allow integration and hence are defined as barriers to immigration:

The Maghrebian [North African] community remains largely attached to a civilization which is not our own and which even totally distances itself from it on numerous points that we consider to be essential, such as the equality of the sexes or the conception of the family. Hence, the uncontrolled increase of that population in certain sectors will always, beyond certain thresholds, pose unsolvable problems.... Finally, the increase of violence with which neighborhoods like mine are confronted, and the important role that certain immigrants play in this delinquency, contribute to maintaining a dangerous combination of immigration and insecurity. (July 9, 1986, Serge Charles, p. 3096)

This routine list of racist prejudices is persuasive because it makes an appeal to generally accepted norms and values in “Western civilization” such as gender equality, birth control, family values, and security. One of the many problems of such passages is the facts themselves, not the values that are at stake, even when these may vary considerably within Muslim, North African, and European cultures. Thus, in the reference to gender equality, which is routine in school textbooks and the media, the presupposition is that gender equality already has been achieved in Europe; this, of course, is hardly true and certainly not in the ranks of the *Front National* or the Right in general. Indeed, the “family values” of the right favor a rather traditional role for women.

Similarly, the familiar racist suggestion about “uncontrolled” reproduction among foreign communities ignores the well-known fact that in a very short time their birthrates become similar to those of the rest of the population (Bisseret-Moreau, 1988). Finally, the familiar association of immigrants with crimes has nothing to do with culture, and this, after all, is the crucial criterion of difference for the extreme Right. Nor does the presence of foreigners, as such, have any relation to crime, although the social circumstances of poor and marginalized people, including poor whites, may be related to criminality.

Racist rhetoric like this is a mixture of assuming general values of “our” civilization that are not general, presenting biased or wrong information, selecting specific forms of deviance that may be associated with immigrants, and so on. As is also the case for everyday “antiracist”

practices, there is little point in simply rejecting, let alone counterarguing, such racist argumentation; rather, it should be critically analyzed, and its mechanisms should be exposed. In this case, it is the sequence of faulty argumentative steps, and especially the manipulation of presuppositions as “facts,” that is involved and that needs critical analysis. Despite the many blatantly racist remarks by himself and the other members of the *Front National*, Le Pen repeatedly denounces those who accuse him of racism. He claims only to defend the interest of France and the French: “We are neither racist nor xenophobic. We only wish that, quite naturally, there be a hierarchy in this country, because it concerns France, and France is the country of the French” (July 9, 1986, p. 3064).

In overtly racist discourse such as this, equality is replaced by a “natural” hierarchy between the French and Others, as is also the case in traditional supremacist thinking. At the same time, this claim is prefaced by the familiar disclaimer of the denial of racism. Le Pen’s hierarchy is not simply one of nationality or citizenship but essentially one of race and culture. He never opposes immigration from other European countries or from North America but focuses on immigration from the South and especially by Muslims and (other) Africans, that is, those for whom he “spontaneously” sees “differences of behavior and culture” (July 9, 1986, p. 3065). His colleague, Jean-François Jalkh, even rhetorically demands to know why it is so reprehensible that people who naturally are attached to their children rather than to those of their neighbors should not also “prefer French people to others” (July 9, 1986, p. 3070). Discrimination, for the Right, is a “natural” tendency of people: a familiar argument of racist ideologies.

One valid objection against my analysis of these examples of the *Front National* would be that the racist rhetoric of the Right is marginal and thus does not allow us to generalize to political discourse in general. True, I have argued that usually in Western parliaments such overt and blatant forms of racism as practiced by the *Front national* are (still) rare. However, as we have seen in other parliaments, and as we know from less formalized settings of political talk, other politicians may routinely engage in sometimes indirect or subtle forms of derogation. That African Americans are seen as being favored in affirmative action programs and as having a chip on their shoulder when falsely accusing employers of discrimination is also quite a “respectable” racist belief, even in the U.S. Congress.

More generally, other cultures tend to be presented in a negative and threatening perspective by many politicians. Especially arguments derived from the belief that immigrants engage in unfair competition are routine in populist rhetoric that attempts to limit the rights of minorities, refugees and immigrants, as we also have seen in the consistently negative definition of “economic” refugees in Europe. In less self-controlled communicative events, many European politicians often made derogatory comments on immigrants or minorities. In other words the members of the Front national and similar racist parties may not be he totally wrong when they openly say what many others think and what many politicians only dare to say in brief moments of enthusiastic populism.

At the present, political discourse on ethnic affairs is becoming increasingly blatant. The social backlash of Reaganomics in the United States and Thatcherism in the United Kingdom has influenced various policies of “no-nonsense” social measures that affect minorities and race relations. An increasing number of racist arguments of the Right have become “respectable,” at least among conservatives. In the Netherlands in 1991, Frits Bolkestein, the leader of the conservative party *Volkspartij voor vrijheid en democratie*, started a “national debate” about Islam and Muslims in which arguments were used that were similar to those proffered by representatives of the Front National in France. The liberal press in the Netherlands occasionally features articles that claim to break the “taboos” about “foreigners” and that plead for an “honest” discussion of minority “problems” such as alleged lack of integration or adaptation, minority crime, and Islam.

Concluding Remarks

Common to all these discussions, whether on the far Right or among conservatives in general, is not only disrespect and populist violation of the social facts but also a presentation of “our own” culture and values that has little to do with the vast variety of cultural lifestyles and convictions in “Western” culture or in “alien” cultures, for that matter. I lie rhetorically populist point in all these discourses always is the persuasive construction of a *threat*—that is, a threat to our norms, values, principles, or religion; a threat to the economy and social structure; and, of course, a threat to our standard of living and our

wallets. Cultural differences between “us” and “them” are thus exaggerated, and differences within our group and their group are ignored, as we know from the standard social psychology of (unequal) intergroup relations (Hamilton, 1981; Turner & Giles, 1981). Our own group, culture, and civilization are idealized and uncritically presented as the great example. Even among those liberals who publicly refrain from uttering blatantly racist remarks, we may notice the foundations of this system of intergroup inequality in their occasionally strong nationalist feelings and rhetoric as soon as other ethnic groups, immigrants, or refugees are relevant in observation or discourse. Denying racism, mitigating discrimination, and ignoring Others’ perspectives and evaluations of us are common elements in this overall strategy of positive self-presentation, even among the political elites who routinely speak of the “long tradition” of tolerance in their own countries.

Not only do we need to focus on the blatant, and especially the subtle, discursive means of representing and derogating Others when studying elite racism, but perhaps we need to concentrate even more on what Others say about themselves and about our sort of people, our country, our company, our intellectuals, our journalists, and our scholars. In the face of mounting racism, xenophobia, and resentment against minorities and other immigrants, it is this ego defense against explicit or implicit accusations of discrimination and racism that functions as one of the sure signs of group inequality. This is one of the most effective and insidious ways in which to marginalize and problematize Others. Due to such elite denials and mitigations of racism, combating racism becomes very difficult because it presupposes that a problem within white society is first recognized.

True, in most parliamentary speeches, strategies of derogation may be very subtle and indirect, especially among the more moderate MPs. Yet, when we make explicit the presuppositions and implications of such talk, we often discover the beliefs that make up the cognitive representations that are the basis of modern elite racism. Moreover, such talk is not merely talk or merely the expression of underlying social cognitions. It has direct persuasive and thus social functions when targeting other MPs and, more importantly, public opinion. The media and the public at large will make such preformulations of racism more explicit in familiar and less subtle forms of derogation against minorities. Such talk is social and institutional action as constitutive of decision making on immigration, civil rights, and ethnic affairs in general. Its presuppositions, meanings, structures, and strategies thus signal the

real social and political functions and consequences of such discourse for ethnic minorities in “our” Western “democracies.”

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