

Race, riots and the press

An analysis of editorials in the British press about the 1985 disorders

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Abstract. Against the background of earlier work on the structures of news in the press and within the framework of a broader study of the reproduction racism in various types of discourse, this paper examines some properties of the British newspaper editorials about the inner city disturbances in 1985. Editorials appear to be structured by three major categories: Definition and Evaluation of the events, and Recommendations or a Moral about actions to be taken to contain or avoid future 'riots'. The disturbances are consistently defined and evaluated as criminal actions of young Afro-Caribbean males, if not blamed on the whole Black community. Socio-economic explanations are rejected in the editorials. The other major actor, viz., the police, on the other hand is represented as the victim, and as the forces of order that deserve respect and support. The results of the, mostly argumentative, analysis are further analyzed in terms of an ideological system of law and order values and a schema for the representation of all participant groups or institutions organized according to the well-known US vs. THEM pair.

Media discourse and the reproduction of racism

This paper reports results from ongoing research carried out at the University of Amsterdam into the reproduction of racism in discourse. Earlier work in this research framework focused on the structures and expression of

ethnic prejudice in everyday conversations (van Dijk, 1987a), on ethnic stereotyping in textbooks (van Dijk, 1987b) and on reporting on minorities in the press (van Dijk, 1983, 1988b). The present paper deals with one aspect of the reproduction of racism by the media, viz., the definition and evaluation of ethnically relevant events in newspaper editorials. Examples are taken from five British national newspapers, and comprise all editorials about the 'riots' that took place in the early fall of 1985 in Handsworth (Birmingham), Brixton and Tottenham (London).

On the basis of earlier work, it is assumed that the media play a fundamental role in the reproduction of racism in society, e.g., by defining minorities as problematic, if not as deviant or criminal, and thus by installing or confirming prevailing ethnic stereotypes and prejudices among the public at large (Hartman and Husband, 1974; Martindale, 1986; Smitherman-Donaldson and van Dijk, 1988; Wilson and Gutiérrez, 1985). In this way not only positions of power elites, notably of the government and its sustaining parties, in the ethnic situation are legitimated, but the media also contribute themselves to the definition of the ethnic situation through its own discursive strategies, e.g., biased topic choice, stylistic negativization of minorities and dramatization of ethnic events. Although the socio-cultural, historical and economic conditions of newsmaking play an important role in the reproduction of racism by the press, this paper focuses on the editorials themselves. This analysis takes place against the background of our earlier work on news structures in the press (van Dijk, 1985b, 1988a, 1988b).

Discourse analysis, to put it succinctly, distinguishes itself from classical content analysis by its focus on theoretically specified textual units and structures, its special interest in underlying semantic structures and subtle grammatical, stylistic or rhetorical details, and its general emphasis on a qualitative approach over a more superficial quantitative methodology, also in view of a critical interpretation of textual structures in the socio-political and ideological context (for details, see van Dijk, 1985a).

Editorials and the analysis of argumentative ideological discourse

There is at present no explicit theory of editorials (leaders, leading articles) as a media genre. Unlike news reports they do not seem to have a fixed schema or 'superstructure'. Editorials are intended and structured to express and convey the opinions of the newspaper about recent news events. Since

editorials are usually written about a single event or issue per day, they implicitly signal that the newspaper attributes particular social or political significance to such an event. Both expressed opinions as well as the assignment of relevance to events or issues exhibit underlying structures of the editorials with these underlying, dominant attitudes and ideologies.

Despite the assumed lack of a conventional schema for press editorials, statements of opinions in the editorials about the riots may be of three different kinds. That is, they may be inserted into, or subsumed under, three functional categories, viz., Definition, Explanation or Evaluation and Moral. Further empirical research on editorials will have to show whether these categories are part of a more general, formal schema of editorials. Thus, firstly, opinion statements may define the situation, that is, give a summarizing description of 'What happened'. This information focuses on the present (or very recent past). Secondly, opinion statements may explain the situation, that is, account for causes of events and reasons of action: Why did it happen? These statements are often about past events and circumstances, or about a more general current context. Thirdly, many editorials feature a category of Prediction or Recommendation, which we may subsume under the broader category of a Conclusion or Moral, and which focuses on the future: What will happen?, or What should be done?

To make main opinions, that is, 'positions', defensible and acceptable, these opinions must be supported. Like other discourse types, therefore, editorials exhibit argumentative structures and strategies. Besides well-known overall argumentative schemata, we also witness the use of many of the strategic moves that have been analyzed in 2000 years of rhetoric, such as the use of irony, metaphors, comparisons, understatements and overstatements, contrasts, etc. Also, stylistic aspects of lexical style and syntactic forms are part of such an analysis. Such a structuralist account, however, must be complemented with a more dynamic, strategic analysis, in which argumentation is studied in terms of dialogical interaction with real or constructed opponents. That is, editorializing as a form of complex verbal action, is also goal-oriented, viz., to persuade the reading public. Since this cognitive and social goal is distant and complex, subgoals are realized through several argumentative moves, such as making own positions plausible or by making other positions untenable. This allows us to study the argumentation process at least partly through an analysis of these textual moves (for details on this analysis of argumentation, see van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Kruiger, 1984).

The possible effect on the public in this case can be speculated about

only in terms of assumed shared interpretative frameworks of the reading public of the British press in the mid-1980s. That is, ultimately, a sound analysis of argumentation should also be embedded in a socio-cultural and political framework. Positions defended by the press are not personal opinions, but manifestations of more complex, socially shared and dominant ideological frameworks that embody institutional relationships and power. The argumentation of editorials is not only addressed to the reading public as a whole, but also to the social and political elites. This explains why editorials do not merely formulate opinions to be conveyed to the public, but also attack, defend or give advice to the authorities. The role of editorials in the reproduction of the ethnic consensus is inherently tied to such a broader framework, of which only fragments can be discussed here.

Within this larger socio-cultural framework, editorials and their persuasive functions also have an important cognitive dimension, both in their production, and in their reception by the public. Thus, during comprehension, they are strategically decoded, interpreted and represented in memory (see van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983; for details of this comprehension process). Besides a textual representation of the editorial, readers form a so-called 'model of the situation', in our case of the disorders and their causes and consequences. Due to shared social cognitions of the readers, e.g. about minorities, but also induced by specific textual properties, these models may well be 'biased'. These biased models may in turn confirm or create more abstract, group-based social attitudes, and hence prejudices about minorities (van Dijk, 1984, 1987a). At the same time, editorials express or indirectly signal the underlying models and attitudes of the editor(s). Hence, systematic analysis of editorials allows an indirect view of the ideological frameworks that support the definitions and explanations of the ethnic situation expressed in the editorial.

In order to avoid highly technical terminology and theoretical details, the analysis will be relatively informal. Also, space limitations do not allow detailed study of the argumentative structures and strategies of each editorial, an analysis which would fill many hundreds of pages. Therefore, this study will focus on the overall positions of the newspapers, namely as an expression of their underlying ideological framework. Despite occasional references to interpretation processes, shared meanings and ideologies, we do not discuss the detailed cognitive processes of comprehension and representation of the readers. The newspapers selected for our analysis are the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Sun* and the *Guardian*.

The 'riots' of 1985

The editorials analyzed here are about the particularly dramatic events, viz., the 'riots' in Handsworth (Birmingham), Brixton (London) and Tottenham (London) that took place in the early fall of 1985. These and other cities and areas, had been the prominent scene of earlier 'riots' in 1981, events which fundamentally influenced the ethnic situation and its public perception in Great Britain (Benyon, 1984). News reports about these earlier riots established the dominant interpretative framework for the understanding of both social disturbances and the special role of its main actors, viz., ethnic minorities, particularly young male Black West-Indians, on the one hand, and the police and other state institutions, on the other hand. In this dominant definition, Blacks were predominantly evaluated as violent and criminal, whereas the inner-cities and especially the Black communities were similarly associated with serious problems (Murdock, 1984).

This interpretation framework was solidly in place when new disturbances broke out in the poor inner city areas of Birmingham and London in September and October 1985. Hundreds of youths clashed with police, some *Times* during several nights. Fires destroyed many buildings, shops were looted, and many people, both police officers and rioters, were injured. As was the case in the 1981 Brixton disturbances, these violent clashes were typically sparked by, some *Times* insignificant, incidents in which police officers stopped, arrested or searched a black youth.

In the poor inner-city area of Handsworth in Birmingham, riots broke out on September 9, after a policing incident which is some *Times* associated with the local drugs scene. In the fires set in a shopping street, two Asian men died, an event that most of the right-wing press interpreted both as an act of murder and as an example of an alleged interracial war between Afro-Caribbeans and Asians.

In Brixton, at the end of the same month, on September 28, a police officer shot a Black woman, Mrs. Groce, a mother of 6 children, during a search in her home for her son, who was suspected of an offence. The woman was wounded in the shoulder and the spine, so that she had to be hospitalized in a serious condition. Mostly Black youths reacted furiously, initially also to the rumor that she was killed. Friends and relatives of the Black woman marched to the local police station, and later violent disturbances took place that left burnt cars, looted shops and many wounded.

Finally, on October 7, another police raid on the house of a Black family in Tottenham (London) resulted in the death of the mother of a young man

sought by the police for an alleged traffic offence. The woman, Mrs. Garrett, died of a heart attack which her family assumed to be precipitated by the tension caused by the police search. Again, relatives, friends and others marched to the police station to protest against the police raid and the death of the woman. At the same time, tension was building up in a well-known local settlement, the Broadwater Farm, in which also many Black and (other) immigrants were living. Broadwater Farm had been the scene of frequent earlier disputes and disturbances, and its Black youths were variously accused by the police and the popular press of violence or drug abuse, on the one hand, and praised for promoting experiments in community relations, on the other hand. The same evening and the next day, serious disturbances took place on the roads surrounding the Broadwater Farm, in which a large police force fought groups of youths throwing petrol bombs. During these battles, one policeman, Sergeant Blakelock, was stabbed in the stomach and died. As was the case in the other incidents, hundreds of, mostly but not only, Black youths were arrested (for details about these events, see Gifford, 1986).

We see that these incidents, like those that sparked the earlier disturbances in Brixton four years earlier, have a similar structure. They take place in poor inner city areas, where unemployment among the predominantly Caribbean and Indian communities is high and other serious social problems prevail. We shall see that these miserable social conditions are an important background in the argumentation structure of the editorials.

Policing of these poor neighborhoods, especially by white police officers some of whom are seen as racists by segments of the Black community, may often take the form of what is often interpreted as subtle or more blatant harassment, for instance in stop and search tactics or frequent false arrests. Incidents between Black youths and police officers are therefore frequent. After the serious incidents of 1981, the police tended to establish better relationships with the Black communities, and agreed to less intimidating policing tactics and more dialogues with community representatives. Lord Scarman, commissioned to make an inquiry into the 1981 riots in Brixton, had particularly pleaded for such forms of 'community policing'. His report also plays a prominent role in the present editorials (Scarman, 1981).

The editorials

Each of the events of 1985 briefly described above gave rise to one or two editorials, both in the quality press and in the tabloids, appearing one or two days after the riots. Typically and as may be expected, the editorials in the quality press are much longer and much more complex. The typical *Times* editorial has three columns of 50 lines, and may run up to approximately 750 words, whereas the *Guardian* has a similar but more variable length, distributed in one or two columns. *Mail* and *Telegraph* editorials fall in between, and are usually somewhat shorter (about 400 words on average). *Sun* editorials, headlined by the phrase "The *Sun* Says", are mostly rather brief (100-200 words). Editorials are marked as such by a fixed position in the paper, by the newspapers logo, and by relatively broad column size (about three inches, except in the *Times* which has two inch columns). None of the editorials is signed or datelined and all have a brief headline, often summarizing one main opinion.

There is an interesting regularity in the distribution of the editorials. That is, most newspapers have two editorials about the first riot, the one in Handsworth, namely on September 11 and 13 (the *Guardian* a third one on September 18), then one about Brixton on September 30, one about Tottenham on October 8, and finally one or two on the political aftermath, such as the declarations of Black leader Bernie Grant, and the Tory and Labour conferences during which the riots were discussed, on October 10 and after. In other words, there is an agreement about the importance of the events, and about the relevance of a leading comment on them in these cases. Of course, this is not surprising for social disorders of this scale, but the agreement in number, frequency and publication date of the editorials reveals something about common news values and routines in reporting social unrest.

Defining the situation

The answer to the question what happened is of course given primarily in the news reports of the respective newspapers. However, in order to evaluate and explain them, editorials often summarize or recapitulate the events, select relevant dimensions or focus on specific actions or actors. That is, they briefly define or redefine the situation. However, summarization, selection, and focusing presuppose ideologically framed opinions,

which are part of the editor's cognitive model of the situation. That is, what is summarized about the situation in an editorial reveals something about the contents and hierarchical structure of the cognitive model about the riots, for instance, what is important information in the model, and what is not. Also, more than in news reports (especially in the quality press), the description of events in editorials is not restrained by criteria of assumed 'objectivity'. That is, the facts may be described in evaluative terms, thereby allowing the editor to express an opinion about the events.

The primary definition of the disorders in all newspapers is straightforward. An "orgy" of murder, fights with the police, arson, looting, destruction, petrol bombs, bricks, and barricades are the actions and props of this well-known script of violent urban disturbances. Implicitly or explicitly, this type of disorder is qualified as "criminal" by most editorials. The right-wing press adds that there is evidence of "vicious" or "malicious" premeditation, despite the spontaneous reactions to the incidents that sparked the riots, thereby enhancing the criminal and conspirational nature of the rampage. Some newspapers go beyond such accounts of criminal fact, and see the riots as the "collapse of civil order" (*Times* about Brixton), or as a "direct challenge to the rule of law" (*Sun* about Handsworth). In other words, not only a crime has been committed, but the foundations of order are threatened. In more contemporary parlance, the *Sun* typically defines the events as a form of "terror".

The protagonists in these clashes are well-known from reports about the 1981 disturbances. Rampaging crowds are systematically described as "mobs", thereby enhancing the irrationality of the crime. Otherwise, the participants are characterized as "hooligans", "thugs", and similar evaluative descriptions of the same style register. No newspaper leaves any doubts about the identity of the main perpetrators of the crime: male, Afro-Caribbean youths. The *Guardian* adds that also whites were involved, a fact ignored by other editorials. Some editorials also introduce the well-known 'outside agitators'.

New is the death of Asian shopkeepers in Handsworth, also prominently mentioned and redefined as "murder", which transforms the disorder into a "murderous riot" for most of the right-wing press. The sympathy for the Asian victims was more pronounced than when they were the victims of racist attacks by young fascists during the same period. Rather, the clash between West and East Indians is seen, in other news reports, as evidence of a racial war, if not of Black racism. This is a well-known strategy of transfer in the general dissimulation and denial of white racism in the right-

wing press.

Besides the Black villains and the Asian victims, there is finally the police, “society’s *Guardians*, who behaved with courage and determination” (*Sun*, Sept. 11), variously described as heroes and as victims. Especially when a policeman is killed, in the Tottenham riot, the victim interpretation becomes prominent: “Police constable Keith Blakelock was deliberately and savagely hacked to death when he was trying to defend firemen from the mob” (*Mail*, Oct. 8) or “brutally stabbed to death” (*Sun*, Oct. 8).

Finally, there are the two Black women shot by the police in Brixton and Tottenham. They are only casually mentioned, namely as the objects of a tragic accident, an “error” (*Times*), which was the result of “flawed judgement” (*Mail*, or whose death was probably her own fault: “Mrs Cynthia Jarrett died of a heart attack. She was grossly overweight and had other medical problems” (*Sun*). Hence the accusation of police “killing, provocation and brutality” is resolutely rejected in the *Sun*. Only the *Guardian* gives a more personal description of the woman.

We see that the selective summary of the events is hardly ambiguous in most editorials, and leaves little room for other interpretations, for instance in terms of protests, rage, resistance, or other descriptions that would recognize more charitable motives of young Black people. Even when a Black woman dies, the reaction of the crowd as a form of “vengeance” is rejected by the *Sun*. The dominant reading of the events, thus, remains within the framework of law and order: violence, destruction, crime, lawlessness, anarchy, and terror.

Explanation

The explanations of the events fill most of the editorials. Primed by public debates about the 1981 riots, the respective positions are clear. Either the riots are primarily evaluated as crimes, or they are evaluated and partly excused as disturbances or protests that are motivated by social “deprivation”. All editorials agree that at least the Handsworth riot was probably no more than a (premeditated) crime, for some only understandable in light of the Liverpool drugs scene. For the *Telegraph*, indeed, Handsworth is the first British “drug riot”, presumably provoked to alleviate tough police actions against hard drug dealers. Brixton and Tottenham need some more explanation, since in these cases two women were shot, which would allow an explanation in terms of spontaneous anger or of

justified violence against police provocation and harassment, as was also the case in the Brixton riot of 1981, according to Lord Scarman's explanation of the situation.

Most editorials do at least briefly mention the facts of social deprivation, of the inner cities in general, and of the Black community, in particular: Bad housing, unemployment, lacking services and education, and discrimination. Since "we know that already", all newspapers, except the *Guardian*, reject a broad, Scarman style inquiry. In the right-wing press, the social situation is mentioned only in order to reject it as a necessary or sufficient cause of the riots. This central position is defended with the standard argument (and fallacy) that most other poor people don't riot to express their grievances. Similarly, the shooting incidents are rejected as an acceptable reason of protest by the routine phrase "No excuses". The law and order reading of the riots is consequent: A crime is a crime, and social explanations are either irrelevant or no valid excuses. This is important, since as we shall see below, this also means that no concerted actions need to be taken to alleviate the problems of the inner city: Not the government is at fault, or the police, but the Black community itself. While recognizing the criminal nature of the disorders, only the *Guardian*, especially after Brixton and Tottenham, emphasizes the social backgrounds of the riots.

Within this overall framework of explanation and argumentation, there are of course variations and nuances. The main position must be backed up with credible arguments, such as 'facts' and 'figures'. Handsworth is easy. The *Telegraph* summarizes the various arguments as the right-wing press has them: It can't be poverty, because most other poor people are law-abiding citizens. It can't be police harassment, because this area was well-known for its soft community policing. And it can't be the government, because they just got 20 million pounds of aid. So, it is lawlessness, greed, drugs, or other problems associated with the Black community. This is Hurd's position. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the other riots. Interestingly, the 'criminal' explanation is hardly an explanation at all. It evaluates the events, and the only explanation would be in terms of inherent criminal tendencies of the actors, *viz.*, the Black youths. Such a position is of course difficult to maintain explicitly, because of its obvious racist implications, so the editorials suggest it only indirectly, *e.g.*, when they speak of "endemic petty crime" and especially drug abuse in the Black community.

In order to further support the 'criminal' explanation of the riots, a safe and expedient strategy is to attack the other position, *viz.*, the social

explanation of the riots. The *Times* claims a moderate, and therefore wise, middle position, and rejects both explanations as the only explanation. In its later editorials, however, the law and order interpretation gradually prevails. Social deprivation may be mentioned, although never as an excuse for the riots, but is not further spelled out, and barely found important enough for further government actions beyond a “review of policies”.

The right-wing popular press is more straightforward. For the *Telegraph*, the *Sun* and the *Mail* the main opponents are the sociologists: “In no time, the sociologists will be picking among the debris of Handsworth for evidence of social protest. They will be eager to find signs of resentment over deprivation and unemployment. They will lecture about racial tension between West-Indians and Asians” (*Sun*, Sept. 11). Hence, social conditions are mentioned but rejected, both as a cause and as an excuse. Therefore the professionals who may want to analyze these events, especially from a more social and critical perspective, are also disqualified if not vilified.

Other explanations better fit the ideological framework: For instance, it is assumed that the police have become too permissive. For the *Mail*, also the “race issue must be discussed with honesty”. That is, we should not hesitate to blame the Blacks, and not fear to be called ‘racist’. Another explanation: Black kids are “stuffed with ethnic education” at school, instead of being taught “to love their country”, so that they become alienated (*Mail*). Finally, it is argued as a further explanation that the Black community condones crimes, shelters criminals, and generally does not want to integrate (as the Asians do). Its culture is defective, because “Chinese, Pakistanis and Indians live at peace because of strong family ties and codes” (*Sun*). The Black leaders, if they have control at all, are not strict enough with their young, or do not encourage them to join the police.

In other words, the blame for the criminal riots is sought in the Black community itself. The government, the police or any other institution that may be responsible for unemployment, bad housing or other conditions of the “ghetto”, are exonerated. Discrimination is mentioned only in the quality press, though briefly. Systematic patterns of racism, in employment, housing, and education are never mentioned, let alone spelled out as possible motives of urban protest by those who are most affected: Black youths. No editorial details the actual lives of Black people in the inner-cities. No editorial quotes or provides the view of the Black communities or their leaders.

Moral

Finally, the Moral category of the editorials features the advice or predictions these definitions and explanations of the riots give rise to. The recommendations are straightforward for most of the right-wing press, though again with some variation in degree and mode. All newspapers emphasize that the criminals, and especially the killers, must be “brought to justice”. They will sometimes admit that limited inquiries are necessary into the immediate causes of the riots, and into the practices and policies of policing where “errors” have been made, like shooting two innocent women. We saw that deeper probing by Scarman-style investigations is emphatically rejected (except by the *Guardian*), with the argument that we already know enough about social deprivation, and because the police already has learned its lesson from Scarman. The *Times* vaguely asks for a “review” of inner-city policies of the government.

The recommendations of the right-wing press mirror the law and order interpretation of the disturbances: The criminals (murderers, looters, agitators) must be “hunted” and brought to trial. Next, sentences for them should be stiffer (the *Sun* casually suggests life stretches). The *Mail* fears, however, that some judges may not play that game, so that finally also these “perversely lenient” judges should be disciplined, or else the law should be rewritten to allow for minimum sentences for certain crimes. We see that a radical law and order position doesn’t seem to bother with such trivial matters as the autonomy of the courts.

The major recommendation is that order and faith in the law must be restored. Obviously the instrument for this restoration are the nation’s “*Guardians*”: the police. Large part of the debate, therefore, focuses on police powers, policies, tactics, autonomy, weaponry and on the (dis-)advantages of strict or sensitive policing. At this point also the politicians are called in. They are the ones who must provide the police with extra powers. Critical opinions about this solution are attacked. The Labour party, the Black communities and all others of ‘the other side’, are vigorously reminded of their civic duty to either support (if not love) the police, or else. Thus, first the police should be allowed to act more sternly. For some less radical newspapers, such as the *Times*, a more moderate solution is recommended: “the ghetto must be policed, sensitively, but with strength and firmness, to ensure that public order is upheld without interruption (*Times* after Brixton).

One important topic in the Moral sections of the editorials are the police

technology for the operationalization of riot containment. For the tabloids this variably means CS gas, water cannons and/or plastic bullets (like in Northern Ireland), instruments that are becoming increasingly accepted as a legitimate solution to the nation's social problems. The quality press is more reticent about such devices and signals their possible dangers.

Another central issue in the Recommendations are the feared "no-go" areas, rejected by all, with a fascinating mixture of arguments. The *Telegraph* takes the most powerful move, and rejects this American invention, because it would mean an "abhorred" form of discrimination of the ethnic communities. After all, law-abiding West-Indians and Indians have the same right of protection against dealers and muggers. In other words, if the right-wing press wants to propagate rights for minority communities, it emphasizes the "right" to be firmly policed. Note that other minority rights are scarcely defended in the editorials of the right-wing press. The *Sun*, similarly, also claims "justice for all", when recommending a police crackdown on the inner city. The dramatic consequences of similar policing (Operation Swamp) in Brixton four Nears earlier are apparently forgotten.

A second major group of recommendations is addressed to the Black community. Since the riots are primarily interpreted as a crime, and the criminals are Black, the solutions are naturally sought in the Afro-Caribbean community itself. Now, some recommendations tend to take the form of threats. For the right-wing press strong leadership, if not authoritarian paternalism, is the solution for the ghetto, so that the leaders can keep a tight control over "their young". Young Black kids should be taught the love for their country and "not be stuffed with ethnic education". Or else the Black community will be further alienated from (white) British society. Secondly, the communities should cooperate with the police to bring the criminals to justice. Or else they are accessories after the fact of murder. Third, Blacks must join the police, in order to do their own 'tough' policing for the predominantly white police force. That much of the resentment in the Black communities has been based on white police behavior, despite more recent "community policing", is overlooked in this call for cooperation. These calls for Black police officers, and for "integration" generally, presuppose that Blacks are welcome in the white institutions.

Generally, the recommended solution is that Blacks should obey the rules and adapt to the mainstream of British society. Or else the fascists or racists will move in. This threat is particularly cynical. The right-wing's own (more or less) bad guys, such as Powell or the National Front, may take the

opportunity to enhance their clamor for repatriation, or worse. Sure, the tabloids formally condemn these racist ideas and actions, and emphatically claim that they have always stood up for the colored minorities of Britain (*Sun*), but with enough provocation the dark forces of the right may no longer be contained. Even though rejecting Powell, his spectre is nevertheless conjured as a reminder of what other policies should be developed when the Black community doesn't behave.

As may be expected, *The Guardian* is the only newspaper that extensively encourages more government intervention (dubbed "the socialist option" by the *Mail*, whereas the *Times* is prepared to review the current policies for their effectiveness. The other newspapers may briefly pay lip service to the need to attend to social problems, but also ignore or reject a solid and serious inner-city intervention by the authorities.

The actors

The definition, explanation and recommended consequences of the disorders also feature prominent actors, first of all the Black youngsters, pitted against the police, and then Asians, communities, politicians, government, agitators, fascists, and some others. To further understand the argumentative structures of the editorials, which after all focus on the defense of own positions and the attack of opposed positions, as well as the underlying ideology of the attitudes and opinions expressed in these arguments, we need to have a closer look at this cast. Especially in social and ethnic issues, in which opposing opinions are closely associated with attitudes about the main protagonists in the social and ethnic events, these attitudes are organized as belief schemata about social groups (see van Dijk, 1987a, for details). Therefore, we should analyze with whom the newspapers relate, positively or negatively, and why. What is the internal cognitive representation the newspapers have of Blacks, Asians, the police, the government or the other actors involved?

Since there is no space here to detail such an investigation into group representations, a simplified schema is proposed, along the usual dimension of US and THEM. This dimension is well-known from the study of both everyday and institutional expressions about race relations. The same is true for editorials. Some actors belong to US (British, whites, ordinary people, etc.), and some to THEM (aliens, criminals, Blacks, etc.).

Figure 1. Ideological group structure according to the editorials of the right-wing press

Figure 1 gives such a tentative schema for the right-wing press. Each node in the structure represents a relevant ethnic, social or political criterion of differentiation between the groups below that node. Thus at the highest level, the distinction between US and THEM is that of “belonging” or not, exemplified in the often expressed criterion of “integration” or “adaptation”. Associated with these criteria are of course evaluations. Generally, US is associated with the value GOOD or the evaluation or emotion of LIKE, and THEM with BAD and DISLIKE. In other words, in such an ideology, and rather generally in social perception, there is a binary division between ingroups and outgroups, even when such a division may be variable, flexibly adapted to new situations, or even change under social pressure. For reasons of simplicity I focus on the right-wing ideological framework, because we have four newspapers yielding data for constructing the framework. For the liberal ideology of the *Guardian* the relationships are more complex, and will not be further examined here.

The schema is an abstract reconstruction of the underlying system of group representations of the right-wing press. It has been derived from the overall evaluations of the respective groups in the argumentation and the style of the editorials. Consistent negative evaluations place a group under the THEM category. The more negative the evaluations, the larger the socio-cognitive distance from US. Therefore, each right branch of the THEM category features a group that is relatively closer to us, and hence less negatively described than those under the left branch. Whereas the tabloids position themselves at the point we have marked in the schema, the *Times* may be placed somewhat to the left, and might therefore be considered as too ‘lenient’ by the tabloids. Similarly, the *Guardian* would probably position itself under the white moderates, with the whole right branch under the header THEM. Finally, of both the moderate conservatives and liberals, the ‘radicals’ (whether left or right) may all be grouped under the same THEM category. The major nodes in that case are MODERATE and RADICAL, respectively. In other words, the social group schema may differ for each social group or institution, depending on its own position or perspective, but the basic categories used in such a schema may be the same.

For the tabloids the center for US is of course the newspaper, or rather the editors. However, as an actor the newspaper seldom intervenes in these editorials, although sometimes it is positively self-presented. The *Sun* for instance makes the well-known disclaimer (“I’m not a racist but...”): they have always stood up for the ethnic minorities (see Hollingworth, 1987, for

some evidence against the claim). The editors of the right-wing press obviously associate with the conservative power structure, that is, with Tory politics, Thatcher, state institutions (primarily the police), private enterprise, and generally the conservative power elites. This association is multiply signalled in the editorials. In the editorials, they are the ones that are never criticized, or only lightly, e.g., for regrettable “errors” or misguided policies. Secondly, given its assumed ‘intermediate’ function, the press, and especially the popular press, is presenting itself as vox populi. Hence its recurrent, positive reference to “ordinary people”, “law abiding citizens” or simply the “people of Britain”.

However, the picture is somewhat more complex. That is, even among US, there are (too) soft ones, such as the “lenient” judges who are not harsh enough against rioters, on the one hand, and the (too) hard ones on the radical right, that is, Powell and the neo-fascists. Both are condemned, but certainly not as belonging to THEM. That is, their ideas or practices may be rejected, but only because they exaggerate or, as in the case of Powell, also because his ideas aren’t practical. Those of US who are too ‘soft’ favor the case of THEM, and therefore they need correction (like firing judges). The same is true for others of US who tend to be too liberal, too understanding of THEM, such as Scarman, or some liberal-conservative Tory politicians. Interestingly, this rejection of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ associates the actual core of US (‘we, the press’), with a middle or moderate point of view, which is of course inherently good. Note that this we-core of US may move somewhat. Thus, for the *Times* it is less to the right than that of the *Sun*, or rather closer to THEM (from the point of view of the *Sun*). Indeed, the *Times* advocates some solutions that are rejected by the *Sun*.

THEM for the right-wing press, combines vastly different groups. Common to THEM-groups is that they are in essential ways ‘different’ from US. They look differently, think differently and act differently. However, again, there is variation here. Even the rather categorical and radical editorials of the *Sun* and the *Mail* make subtle differences in this “demonology” (as the *Guardian*, appropriately calls it).

Obviously, a first basic criterion is that between Colored and White, or between Aliens and Non-Aliens. Colored are immigrants, Black or Brown, usually immigrants, often commonwealth citizens, but also Chinese, or Mediterraneans. Depending on the perspective, either color (or other aspects of appearance) or origin will be most relevant. Thus, sometimes also ‘American’ or ‘Continental’ people or ideas may be rejected as ‘alien’ to the white insular British.

However, the major divide is between Colored/Immigrant and White/Original Britons. THEM-groups are further divided according to whether specific criteria are “closer” to US-group criteria. For instance, immigrants are systematically divided between Asians and Afro-Caribbeans. Asian shopkeepers were victims of Afro-Caribbeans, they are ‘haves’, they have small shops. Like US and white ordinary people they are presented as hard-working, as small entrepreneurs (and hence as good capitalists), and as victims of Blacks. Also they look more like us, and share in the Indo-European cultural tradition. For the editorials, this holds especially for these riots, however. When Asians are attacked by white fascists, because they are Asian, discriminated because they are non-white, etc., then the editorials are more confused, ignore the events, or simply deny discrimination or racism. In other words, Asians are close to (if not among) US as long as they are opposed to ‘real’ Blacks, that is, Afro-Caribbeans. Note that in the negative evaluations as well as the recommendations of the editorials, it is always the Afro-Caribbean community that is blamed or advised to better its life (and to take an example on the Asians).

But even the Afro-Caribbeans are not all the same. That is, some distinctions are some*Times* made, although also often collapsed for the sake of the argument. Thus there is on the one hand the Black Community and on the other hand the criminal Black youngsters (drug dealers, thieves, rioters, killers, etc.). Even within the Community, we may still distinguish between the good ones and the less good ones, namely between law-abiding citizens, who help the police and denounce crime, and those who are sympathetic to the youngster, who condone crime and shelter criminals.

The white section of THEM is largely there because of political criteria. For Tory newspapers, obviously, Labour is there. That is, the leftists, socialists and their ilk. Their categorization is complex and multiple. They may be seen as anti-capitalist, as anti-British, and in our case as pro-Black. Again, there are distinctions here between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’, between ‘radicals’ and ‘moderates’, between ‘violent’ and ‘non-violent’, or even between young and old. Far out are of course the young, violent, leftist youths, often associated with similar Black youths, and variously described as agitators, insurrectionists, rioters, Marxists, Trotskyists, and ultimately of course as terrorists, the biggest demons of them all. Among the non-violent radicals, we find the extreme left, but also sociologists and all those who advocate fundamental social change (prototype: Ken Livingston). Since they are often (also) intellectuals and sometimes part of a cultural elite, they are the true opponents of right-wing editors. They are attacked most often

and most viciously by the press. Occasionally in the present editorials but more often in others, also anti-racists belong to this category, especially since they dare to call the right-wing press in Britain racist, and because they associate with minority groups (see Seidel, 1988; Murray, 1986). Terrorists may be most different and most despicable, but for the editors there is not even a basis of comparison with them. They are simply criminals and belong to an other species. For them simply a police “hunt” is in order.

Among the moderate left, there are finally more subtle divisions, e.g., between right wing labor and those (like Kinnock) who are not strict enough against the radicals, or who have too much understanding for their ideas and actions. They are usually the target of good advice from the press to keep their radicals under control.

Finally, combinations are possible, such as radical left wing Blacks. The major prototype here is Ben-tie Grant. Since he also expressed himself against the police, seemed to condone the riots or even murder, he is for the popular press the devil himself: He combines all negative criteria: he is Black, Labour, leftist if not marxist, critical of the police, calls US racists, etc. The *Sun*, indeed, explicitly wishes that he “may rot in hell”. Besides in a few editorials, Ben-tie Grant is systematically vilified, as “Barmie Bernie” during this season in a large number of articles. And although Kinnock rejected Grant’s statement about the police having had “a good hiding”, the soft socialists are criticized for not removing him as a candidate for a seat in Parliament.

We see that this binary schema of US and THEM allows us to reconstruct the attitudinal ‘positions’ of the major actors as they appear in the underlying opinions of the editorials in the right-wing press. It is this schema that represents an abstraction of part of the social and political worldview of the editors. The distinctions of ‘difference’ are marked or signalled in the text by the amount, nature or distribution of evaluative statements or the style and rhetoric of actor descriptions. Note however that each ‘node’ of the schema is itself a complex ‘group schema’, featuring sometimes complex structures of beliefs about the respective groups. Some of these propositions have been discussed above in the analysis of the argumentation structures of the editorials, e.g., Young male blacks are criminal, use or push drugs, they are violent, don’t take jobs, etc. These group schemata form the underlying stereotypes or prejudices of the social cognitions of the editors.

The ideological value structure

The opinions about the events and the actors involved in the riots are not exhausted by such a complex group schema. That is, the attitudes themselves are based on more fundamental, ideological principles, that is on norms and values, on principles of importance and relevance, and ultimately on interest-bound basic goals of the editors or the group(s) they feel associated with (US). Here class, gender and race (or ethnic group), and in general social or economic position are reflected, sometimes very indirectly, in the social cognitions of the editors. Sometimes, such fundamental principles appear at the 'surface' of the text, for instance when the *Mail* urges that black kids be taught the love of their country. Such a recommendation expresses the ideological principle of patriotism, which is one of the ultimate goals of US. In other cases, these underlying ideologies are first specified in specific attitudes (e.g., about Blacks or about riots), and then made concrete for specific situations (these Blacks, these riots), and finally expressed in editorials about these situations. This complexity of the link between the text and underlying opinions sometimes makes it difficult to draw reliable inferences about ideologies from text data.

Without discussing the full details of this underlying ideological structure of the (British) right (see e.g., Gordon and Klug, 1986), we may summarize the ideological framework with a number of basic concepts. Figure 2 offers a – far from ideal – approximation of such an abstract underlying structure of a right-wing ideology. Recall though that in different situations and by different 'users' there are many variations or recombinations of the underlying notions. Also, somewhat different structurations are possible of the schema. I shall briefly comment upon the underlying logic of this schema.

Figure 2. Ideological value structure of the editorials in the right-wing British press.

Fundamental in this ideology is the notion of Order, one concept of the famous 'Law and Order' pair. It is not surprising, therefore, that Disorder is one of the most hated states of affairs for people who share this ideology, and riots are one of the most serious forms of Disorder, and hence bitterly opposed. Order, however, must be established, maintained and defended. For this, we need Authority, which is another central concept of the ideology, and literally expressed in a headline of one of the *Sun* editorials and in many other passages examined above. Authority is associated with Control and Power, that is, in order to establish or maintain Order, Authority must be powerful and control those who oppose order. Traditionally, the abstract notion of Authority was of course God, but in the non-religious press, this role may now be taken by Government or similar institutions. Note also, that sometimes such Authority has a 'natural' or metaphysical dimension: It is fundamental, eternal, part of the "natural order" of things.

However, more specifically, authority (power, control) may be either personal or social. Personal (self-)control is discipline, a value which we regularly meet in the editorials as a recommended goal of young Blacks or the Black community. Social control may be moral and political. Moral control organizes the beliefs and actions of the individual vis a vis the group or other 'natural' institutions (country, race, family). Here, members are required to be loyal, deferent, polite, and obedient to the group, or rather to the legitimate representatives of Authority, that is, the Father, the Priest, the Chief, or simply abstractions such as the Fatherland. This Representative of Authority is supposed to be severe, strict, strong, and punitive, but will also protect US. We find this ideological feature especially in the recommendations directed at the Black leaders, who are requested to discipline their young.

In modern societies part of this moral structure is transferred to a socio-political realm of complex, delegated decision making. Now, the locus for the exercise of control is the State, and its institutions, or more generally the System (Capitalist Parliamentary Democracy). Whereas in the moral realm we have Rules that regulate behavior, we here have Laws, and Leaders that initiate and enforce such laws. We see that the Law plays a fundamental role in this ideology, since it codifies the rules of socio-political obedience. Hence the importance of the pair Law and Order.

In this framework, We ("ordinary people") are required to be loyal and obedient, submissive and dutiful, and this 'good' behavior is frequently signalled in the editorials in the positively intended phrase "law-abiding

citizens". Also, leaders, are supposed to be strong, firm, and protective, as we have seen many *Times* in our analysis. This is true for the political and social leaders, but also for the institutions that symbolize their strength, and the executed power and sanctions of the State, namely the courts and the police. Hence the recurrent emphasis on the need for a strong police, on strict policing, and on not giving in to the enemy, that is, to those who threaten Order, Authority or its Representatives. The comments on the party conferences are replete with such appeals for a strong state, police, and its policies, although the less right wing press (e.g., *The Times*) may seek combinations for the exercise of Authority (Control), such as "sensitive but firm".

Obviously, the counterpart of this ideological framework is its mirror image. That is, against Order there is Disorder or Chaos, against Authority there is Anarchy, against Control there is Laxity or Indiscipline. Against the law, there is mob law or lawlessness, against Strength there is Weakness, and against Firmness there is Lenience, Toleration and Indulgence. The Lenient are those who undermine the power of Authority and open the way for the forces of Disorder and Chaos. This may lead to delinquency, insubordination, civil disobedience, sabotage, destruction, disorder, riots, revolution, and other manifestations of Disorder, Lawlessness or Chaos due to lack of Control.

Although this sketch of the dominant ideological framework of the right-wing British press, and its counterpart, that is the ideology and practices that must be resisted, attacked and destroyed, is admittedly simplistic, it is striking how much of its fundamental notions appear in the editorials. That is, it is not only an abstract construction of a right-wing ideology, but also beautifully fits the argumentative structures of the editorials. That is, each position defended is based on one or more of the ideological values mentioned in the schema, or supported by more general arguments that draw their legitimacy from the framework. Conversely, the positions attacked are precisely those that derive from the Anti-System.

Concluding remarks

This brief analysis has shown that these well-known ideological structures systematically appear in argumentation schemata, rhetorical devices, lexical style, and in the overall organization of editorials, such as the definition and explanation of the situation and the recommendation of future action.

Indeed, the editorial is THE formulation place for newspaper ideologies. We also have seen what role ethnic minorities and especially Blacks play in these ideological frameworks, and how such a position gives rise to negative beliefs and evaluations of Blacks in the power struggle between order and disorder as it is manifest in the riots as well as in their editorial consequences.

The right-wing British press reaches many millions of readers. We can only speculate about the effects of these editorials on such a large public. Ethnic prejudices and stereotypes, however, are not innate. They are acquired, largely by text and talk. The media play a vital role in this reproduction process. Confronted with fundamental changes in the social and ethnic context, many readers have sought for interpretative frameworks, for definitions and explanations of the situation and for practical guidelines for future communication and action. Editorials, even more than the news reports on which they are based, precisely offer such practical, common sense frameworks for making sense of the social situation. Obviously, readers may reject such proposals. Fortunately, many do so. Unfortunately, even more readers don't, simply because they have no information or occasion to form alternative, anti-racist attitudes and ideologies. Here lies the core of the autonomous contribution of the press in the reproduction of racism.

The consequences of such reporting are well-known and need not be detailed here. When large parts of the white public adopt these definitions, evaluations and recommendations of the ethnic situation, they are provided with a solid cognitive basis for the legitimation of prejudice and discrimination, which in turn is a major condition of the riots, which again provide the right-wing press with a welcome opportunity to criminalize the Black community. Similarly, within this same vicious circle of reproduction, the self-induced support from the readers will in turn legitimate the racism of the press when it purports to voice the attitudes of the public.

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