

Racism and Argumentation: Race Riot Rhetoric in Tabloid Editorials

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1. INTRODUCTION: AIMS AND SCOPE

This paper examines some of the argumentative structures and strategies of conservative British press editorials about ethnic affairs. My analysis is intended as a contribution to an ongoing research program, carried out at the University of Amsterdam since the early 1980s, about the role of discourse in the reproduction of racism. Besides textbooks (van Dijk, 1987b) and everyday conversation (van Dijk, 1987a), this research also focuses on media discourse (van Dijk, 1983, 1988b, 1991).

In agreement with other work on the portrayal of ethnic minorities in the media (Hartmann & Husband, 1974; Merten, et al. 1986; Martindale, 1986), my earlier studies of the press coverage of ethnic affairs have shown that ethnic minority groups tend to be represented in the media in stereotypical, and sometimes even in blatantly racist terms. Thus, minorities and the ethnic situation in general are primarily associated with problems, conflicts and threats to the autochthonous, white population. Topics tend to focus on immigration problems (e.g., the 'number game'), deviance, crime and violence (drugs, riots), ethnic relations (discrimination), and on real or alleged, but negatively interpreted, cultural differences. Topics that are relevant for minority groups themselves, e.g., racism, unemployment, social welfare, education and the arts, get less attention. Few newspapers in Europe have minority journalists, and sources and quotations are accordingly overwhelmingly white, so that minority groups have virtually no access to the public definition and discussion of their own position. Finally, local semantics, style and rhetoric show how the white press engages in an overall strategy of positive self-presentation of the white ingroup (especially of the authorities and other elite groups), and negative other-presentation of the "alien" outgroups.

Whereas news reports may thus provide a biased, white-centered, definition of the facts, it is the function of editorials to formulate the opinions of newspaper editors about prominent ethnic events. Such opinions are usually supported by a series of arguments, which overall are intended to contribute to the persuasive social function of the editorials. This paper examines such argumentative structures and strategies in order to highlight their ideological presuppositions and in view of a broader understanding of elite discourse in

the perpetuation of racist beliefs. (van Dijk, 1993).

2. EDITORIALS

As a discourse genre, press editorials have as yet hardly been analyzed in a systematic and explicit way. Their structure is different from that of the news reports to which they refer (van Dijk, 1988a). Formally, they have restricted length (between 200 and 500 words), appear at a fixed place in the paper, and often have special type or page lay-out, and a typical header, which may be different from one newspaper to another (e.g., the British *Sun*'s header is "The Sun Says:") Semantically, they obviously require definition in terms of newsworthy socio-political, economic or cultural topics. Whereas these properties of editorials are well-known, we don't know much about the details of their conventional, overall schema (superstructure), their characteristic style, or their typical argumentative and persuasive strategies.

Provisionally, we assume that their schematic structure features the following conventional categories:

- (a) Definition of the situation: What happened? This category subjectively summarizes the recent news events.
- (b) Evaluation: This category provides the evaluation of the news events.
- (c) Conclusion: This final category features expectations about future developments, or normative opinions, viz., recommendations, about what specific news actors should do, or not do.

Editorials have several interactional, cognitive, socio-cultural and political functions. Firstly, in the framework of communicative interaction, they primarily have an argumentative and persuasive function: Newspaper editors thus intend to influence the social cognitions of the readers. Secondly, by doing so, editors try to reproduce their own (group) attitudes and ideologies among the public at large. Thirdly, however, editorials are usually not only, and even not primarily, directed at the 'common reader'. On the contrary, they tend to directly or indirectly address influential news actors, viz., by evaluating the actions of such actors or by recommending alternative courses of action. Thus, the readers are rather observers than addressees of this type of discourse of one of the power elites, viz., the press, directed at other power elites, typically the politicians. This means, fourthly, that editorials are functioning politically as an implementation of power, that is, as strategic moves in the legitimation of the dominance of a specific elite formation (e.g., the government, the conservative party) or in the maintenance of power balances between different elite groups in society. Their normative and ideological nature also has an important cultural function, viz., the persuasive formulation and reproduction of acceptable norms and values by which news events may be evaluated.

Especially in editorials about ethnic affairs, social, political and cultural functions are closely related. Since virtually all editors of leading western

newspapers are white (and male, and middle class), they also tend to reproduce and legitimate the dominance of the white group as a whole. Editors feel and present themselves as “Us”, and write about minorities, immigrants and refugees as “Them” and thereby confirm ingroup cohesion both among their ‘ordinary’ white readers as well as among the (usually white) elites who are their major news actors, sources or advertisers. Depending on the political orientation of the newspaper, the gap between “Us” and “Them” may be wider or narrower, and the definition of “Them” may be more or less negative.

3. ARGUMENTATION

Although this paper is not primarily intended as a contribution to the theory of argumentation, a few general remarks are in order about the conceptual foundations of my analysis.

Some general properties of argumentation

First, a theory of argumentation is multidisciplinary: It accounts for logical, philosophical, grammatical, textual, cognitive, socio-cognitive, social and cultural properties of argumentation (see, e.g., van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Blair & Willard, 1987).

Secondly, a theory of argumentation is a sub-theory of a more embracing theory of discourse, at a level that is comparable with, e.g., a theory of narrative. This means that properties of argumentation are “inherited” from more general properties of discourse. Like discourse in general, thus, argumentation is a specific form of language use and social interaction; it may be spoken or written, monological and dialogical, planned or spontaneous, globally and locally coherent, etc. Similarly, as conversational argumentation, it will share general properties with other types of talk (Jacobs & Jackson, 1982; Schiffrin, 1985). Although discourse and argumentation studies both have their roots in classical rhetoric, argumentation theory historically also continues the classical discipline of ‘dialectica’, precursor of modern philosophical logic (van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Kruijer, 1984), whereas discourse studies, as well as its sub-discipline of narrative studies, have emerged from ethnography, poetics, semiotics, psychology and sociology (van Dijk, 1985).

Thirdly, as a sub-theory of discourse theory, a theory of argumentation must describe and explain a number of specifics, e.g., structures or strategies that discourse must have in order to be categorized as ‘argumentative’. At the level of textual analysis, thus, argumentation may be characterized in semantic and schematic (superstructural) terms. Much like narrative schemata, argumentation is formally defined in terms of a hierarchical structure of conventional categories, such as the classical categories of Premisses and

Conclusion, or in terms of contemporary proposals of further subcategories of Premises, such as Warrants, Backings, etc. (Toulmin, 1958). The ordering of these categories in the argumentation schema specifies the (theoretical) global ordering of the argumentative discourse. Also they put constraints on the global semantics of argumentation: The (macro)propositions that are part of the Conclusion category are required to “follow from” other (macro)propositions, e.g., in terms of logical (truth preserving), psychological (plausibility preserving) or social (interactionally relevant, normative) inference. Unlike in narrative, which must be about interesting past actions of people, there are no obvious overall constraints on the nature of the (macro)propositions themselves: We may argue about virtually anything, although the Conclusion or argumentative ‘point’ usually represents a relevant opinion of the speaker/writer.

Fourthly, the pragmatic constraints on argumentation are also rather loose. Often arguments have an overall assertive nature, and also their local speech acts are usually direct or indirect assertions. However, we may also argumentatively accomplish an overall threat, promise, or command (of which the local speech acts need not be threats, promises or commands), if only the propositions that are the basis of the speech act(s) accomplished in the Conclusion category are “supported” by those in the various other categories.

It needs to be emphasized that, in a strict sense of speech acts, argumentation is not itself a speech act, no more than narrative, news discourse, or instructions (for a different view, see van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1983). Kruiger, 1984). Rather it is a specific textual structure, sometimes coinciding with a whole discourse (in which case we would rather call it a discourse genre, much like a narrative that is co-extensive with a discourse is called a story). Unlike speech acts, argumentation does not have a limited and specific set of appropriateness conditions defined in terms of the knowledge and actions of the speech participants. Indeed, we have seen that we may ‘argue’ in support of many speech acts. Similarly, unlike speech acts, argumentation cannot be ‘realized’ by the expression of a single proposition: Argumentation is inherently complex, and needs at least two, and usually more, propositions. However, although argumentation is not a speech act, we may formulate some of its specifics in broader pragmatic and interactional terms (see below).

Fifthly, within an interdisciplinary perspective, argumentation has primarily cognitive foundations and functions. Intuitively, argumentation is geared towards the ‘acceptance’ by hearers or readers, of a ‘point’, viz., an evaluative or normative opinion, belief, or (speech) act of the speaker or writer. This communicative aim of argumentation is realized by the strategic expression of those propositions that are assumed to be accepted or acceptable by the reader or listener. In other words, the formal or semi-formal notion of “support”, linking different main categories in argumentative text, corresponds to cognitive relations and strategies, and hence with structures of knowledge and beliefs. Indeed, as ‘psycho-logic’ (Grize, 1982), argumentation functions,

cognitively speaking, as a discursive strategy that is geared towards specific changes of the belief system of the hearer/reader. It is this function that we know as persuasion (Petty, Ostrom & Brock, 1981).

Argumentation and cognition

These cognitive foundations of argumentation are complex. On the one hand, an argumentative structure may express an existing knowledge (belief) structure. This belief structure may be specific or general. In the first, specific, case, it pertains to a specific event or situation the speaker has personally experienced or read/heard about. Such (subjective) belief structures, are called models, which are stored in Episodic Memory (van Dijk, 1987c; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) Like narratives, argumentations may express (fragments) of such models. In the second case, argumentations may express *general, socially shared, belief structures* (scripts, attitudes, values, norms, ideologies). Often, argumentations express both models and general beliefs. In fact, much argumentation precisely focuses on the links between models and general beliefs (Sillars & Ganer, 1982). Thus, a fact represented in a model (e.g. 'Black youths have engaged in rioting') may be used as an instantiation, and hence as empirical 'support' for the general, prejudiced belief 'Blacks are violent', and vice versa, general beliefs may be used to show that specific, instantiated beliefs must be true or plausible.

On the other hand, argumentation may be the textual expression of specific, 'argumentative', cognitive strategies. In this case, there is no ready belief structure that is expressed, but a sequence of steps are made to make one target belief more plausible, e.g., by searching in memory, on line, the specific and general beliefs that are assumed to support the target belief. Natural argumentation usually expresses a mixture of such 'structural' and 'strategic' forms of thinking.

People also have models about the communicative situation itself, including models about the other speech participants (and models about the models of the other participants). These *communicative* or *context models* are crucial in argumentation because they provide the information about what beliefs the hearer/reader doesn't have or accept as yet, and what other general and specific beliefs may be presupposed so as to make such a belief acceptable to the hearer/reader.

Finally, we see that argumentation also has broader social, ideological or cultural functions and foundations. Most argumentation also features general, that is, socio-culturally shared, beliefs, represented as knowledge schemata (scripts), attitudes or ideologies, as well as their building blocks, viz., norms, values and other basic socio-cultural 'principles'. People not only argue, individually, for their personal beliefs, *but also argue as group members*, for instance when whites speak about blacks, men about women, etc. Their attitudes and hence the specific situation models construed from these

attitudes or social group representations are therefore necessarily 'biased' by their social position. This social position also affects their argumentative position, that is, the specific target belief they intend to strategically support by their argumentative discourse. Conversely, argumentation, e.g., in the mass media, may also be directed to a broad audience, a social group, and thus have the function of public, group-persuasion. It is in this way that, e.g., ethnic prejudices are persuasively reproduced in society. In other words, social argumentation is also ideological. The argumentation of press editorials is a prominent example of this function (Tirkkonen-Condit, 1987).

In sum, argumentation theory has a double core, viz., the *structural* account of informal 'text logic' and of discursive persuasion strategies, on the one hand, and a *functional* analysis of cognitive and social representations and strategies, on the other hand. To understand the discursive structures of argumentation, we need to make explicit their functional roles in the communicative manipulation of other minds in socio-cultural contexts. For the analysis of tabloid editorials, this means that their argumentative and rhetorical structures need to be studied as a function of their role in the manipulation of the ethnic beliefs attitudes of the public at large, the collusion with and the legitimation of dominance of the white group and its (conservative) elites, and the reproduction of its own symbolic media power in the definition of the ethnic situation. In this perspective, editorial argumentation about ethnic affairs also appeals to commonsense beliefs and arguments about minorities and immigration of the public at large (Windisch, 1978, 1982, 1985).

4. RACISM AND ARGUMENTATION

The events

Against this theoretical background, we may now examine in some detail the argumentation strategies of press editorials. Our examples are taken from British tabloids, viz., their reaction to the "riots" that took place in Britain in the fall of 1985 in Handsworth, Brixton and Tottenham. The deeper causes of these disturbances are to be sought in the racist inequality characterizing virtually all sectors of British society: Severe restrictions on immigration, high unemployment, neglect of the inner cities, inferior housing and education, police harassment and many (other) forms of everyday racism.

The particular events that took place in the fall of 1985, following those in Bristol, Brixton and other cities a few years earlier, were sparked by police actions. In Brixton, the police shot and crippled an innocent black woman during a raid on her home. In Tottenham, another Black woman suffered a heart attack and died when police searched her home. Large-scale fighting between the police and groups of youths, largely (but not exclusively) consisting of West-Indian young men, and other forms of violence were the result.

The reaction of the press

The British press reacted in a predictable way. Especially in the conservative press, saturation coverage focused on the violence of blacks, and sought explanations in black pathologies, lacking adaptation of the black community, and especially in crime and drugs, while largely ignoring police harassment, unemployment, discrimination and the general social, economic and cultural misery of the inner cities. Thus, instead of the Thatcherist government and the State institutions, the black community was blamed (for details, see van Dijk, 1991; Gordon & Rosenberg, 1989).

This definition and explanation of the events fits very well into the overall pattern of reporting on ethnic affairs in the conservative British press, where, as noted above, minorities in general, and black West-Indians in particular, are consistently portrayed in terms of problems, protests, conflicts, violence, crime, drugs, and other forms of unruly behavior. We may expect, therefore, that the editorials spell out the underlying ideologies that characterize their own news gathering and reporting on race, while at the same time providing the legitimation of police violence and lacking policies of the conservative administration.

My earlier research on racism and discourse has also shown, however, that present norms and laws prohibit explicit racism and that even among the radical new right public discourse of race is often (but not always) veiled (van Dijk, 1987a). Explicit racial slurs are rare, and even in the tabloids we therefore may expect euphemisms, implicit derogation, and the usual tactical disclaimers such as apparent denials (“We have nothing against the black community, BUT...”) or apparent concessions (“There are also law-abiding blacks, BUT...”). We have earlier analyzed such semantic moves as locally implementing a double global strategy of discourse and communicative interaction, viz., that of negative other-presentation (derogation) and positive self-presentation (face-keeping).

It is this broader political, social and cultural context that shapes the contents and the structures of tabloid editorials, and hence also their argumentative strategies. The main ideological point of the news coverage is the explanation of the “riots” in terms of the alleged criminal character and violence of blacks, and the exoneration of white institutions (government, police, etc.) from the blame of black revolt. This point is embedded in a broader ideological structure of nationalist racism in which minorities, immigrants, immigration, and the multi-cultural society are associated with negative qualifications, and white British people, society and culture are presented as positive and ‘under attack’ by the aliens (Gordon & Klug, 1986).

Let us now see how the editorials actually implement, formulate and defend this overall ideological framework and their position on the ‘race riots’.

For this analysis, I have selected one editorial from the *Mail*, *The choice for Britain's blacks* (October 8, 1985) and one from the *Sun*, *The blacks must act* (September 30, 1985), the first about the disturbances in Tottenham, the second about the earlier events in Brixton. We have chosen these editorials because their argumentative strategies are very similar, and offer us insight into more general properties of tabloid ideology, argumentation and rhetoric.

Part of the argumentative 'point' is expressed and summarized in the respective headlines: The blacks must choose/do something. This headlined pre-view of the normative conclusion of the editorials implies that (1) Blacks are responsible for whatever has happened, which in turn suggests that (2) others (government, the State, white people) are not responsible. This indeed has been the main political and ideological position of the conservative press after the race-related disturbances. How is this point elaborated and defended editorially?

The Mail

The editorial of the *Mail* is most detailed and features several sub-argumentation sequences. The first argumentative point (lines 3-10) is that a policeman was deliberately and savagely murdered, a point that is conceptually argued for by excluding other, non-criminal, causes of his death. The use of *deliberate* emphasizes that it was intentional and hence murder, and *hacked to death* and *savagely* stress that it was not just common murder but a brutal and bestial murder, thereby associating the perpetrators with savages, a familiar racist categorization of blacks. The point is further supported by a rhetorical contrast, viz., between savage murderers, on the one hand, and *good man who defended firemen from the mob*, on the other hand. Note that the supporting argument is purely conceptual and rhetorical: No evidence is provided that the murder was indeed deliberate.

The second point, made with much rhetorical flourish in the second paragraph, is that this murder (and implicitly the riots during which it occurred) brings Britain one step closer to the *apocalyptic vision so grimly imparted by Enoch Powell*. Informed British newspaper readers know that this "vision" of Powell was that, because of conflicts due to immigration, the Thames would be filled with blood. The *Mail* not only quotes but also seems to share this vision of the notorious racist Tory MP. This second point is more general. From the death of one policeman during a riot, the *Mail* concludes that Britain is heading for its racial apocalypse. In other words, the first point is made in order to support a more general, but as yet more or less implicit point, viz., that of the fundamental and inevitable conflict of a multi-racial society. This more general point is further emphasized by a familiar other-discrediting truth claim, namely that those who deny it are blinkered and self-deceivers.

The implications of this truth claim are literally spelled out in the next

paragraph. After another drama-enhancing image (*death-born*), the *Mail* engages in the well-known move of the right-wing press, namely, that they are (the only ones) to see and say the Truth. This is important, because many of the other editorials and news reports about ethnic affairs repeatedly claim that “the truth is taboo” or “we are no longer free to tell the truth”, thereby attacking anti-racists who are alleged to act like the inquisition when criticizing “honest” evaluations about minorities.

The core of this editorial and its argumentative structure is expressed in the next paragraph: Blacks must obey the laws, or else... A few lines later, the *Mail* correctly categorizes this utterance as a warning. In other words, the argumentative strategy of this editorial is not to defend a ‘position’ in the sense of an opinion or another belief, but to sustain a specific speech act. It would be interesting to examine whether the appropriateness conditions of this speech acts are satisfied. One might question for instance whether the ensuing threat, embodied by the content of the ‘or else...’ clause, is a negative action under control of the *Mail*. If so, the fascist street agitators may be seen as the troops that can be called on by the tabloid or the political power elites which it represents. If not, the warning would, at least under one interpretation, be void. On the other hand, if the *Mail* is warning for such forms of fascism, then it seems to attribute it not to its own incitement to racial hatred, but to the black population.

Note that the warning itself has several inbuilt forms of local argumentative moves. If blacks are warned to obey the laws of *this land where they have taken up residence and accepted both the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship*, this qualification is far from innocent. First, it expresses the well-known ideological value of adaptation, familiar from most forms of racist discourse. Secondly, it presupposes that blacks have acquired full rights in Britain, a presupposition that many blacks might well want to contest in light of the consistent and widely documented limitations of their human and civil rights (CCCS, 1982). This presupposition also implies the well-known belief that Britain itself has done everything it could for its immigrants, and that therefore the black community is itself to blame, especially when it does not take up its responsibilities. In other words, the argumentative support for the warning is in fact a legitimation. We see that this legitimation is not limited to the speech act of the warning, but also to its implied threat, viz., that of unleashing the forces of fascism and the powellite calls for forced repatriation.

The next paragraph essentially repeats the threat in a different form and with the same rhetorical formulation. Note that it is not a small group of “rioters” that is being warned, but the whole black community. Indeed, the *Mail* may seem to agitate against rioters, but it uses the events to make a much more general point about the position of blacks in the country, viz., that they should ‘know their place’. In such an ideology, the warning to adapt is in fact a warning to submit. When the police is here described as the *men and women whose task it is to uphold the laws of this land*, this is also more than

a stylistic circumlocution, but rather another local argumentative move to justify the warning: Those who attack the police are in fact attacking the laws they uphold, and hence the “land” itself. In other words, through the violent actions of its youths, the black community as a whole is represented as waging war against white Britain.

Whereas the first column of this editorial is a dramatic introduction to and the execution of a threatening warning, the rest of the editorial seems to soften the blow of these harsh words. This second part features the usual disclaimers, replete with various moves of positive self-presentation, intended to avoid the impression that the *Mail* is in fact colluding with the fascists and the powellites. The disclaimers have a classical structure: We aren’t happy with such a warning, we don’t agree with Powell, and we don’t want French style riot-squads, BUT... However, although this paragraph seems to be intended to show that the *Mail* is not defending right-wing authoritarianism, it in fact prepares the next move, viz., that the “riots” make such a position inevitable, thereby again blaming the blacks, exonerating the right for its possible racist actions, and at the same time legitimating the warning.

The following paragraphs (lines 50-57) further support the warning by commonsense normative reasoning. It describes the situation in such a way that any reasonable citizen would undoubtedly agree that such a situation can’t be tolerated: We can’t allow the police to be attacked and the inner cities to become criminal areas. Appeals to reason are a well-known move in such arguments.

Then the *Mail* proceeds to an even more seductive series of argumentative moves, also carried out to enhance its positive image: There are real problems in the inner cities and most people living there are peaceable. This familiar disclaimer (“There are also good ones among them, BUT...”), seems rather inconsistent with the previous derogation and warning to the black community as a whole, and it is therefore that we should indeed interpret it for what it is, viz., a strategic form of self-presentation using the familiar move of the Apparent Concession. The *Mail* goes even further and recommends government help and an independent investigation when a *citizen is killed or dies during a police operation*. Notice the customary syntactic device of passive voice in the mitigation of responsibility: The passage does not say: “When the police kills an innocent citizen...”.

That these are the first (positive) parts of the disclaimer is shown by the next paragraph (lines 76-79), starting with *but*: Blacks must decide their own destiny. This repeats the macro-topic of this editorial, already implied by the headline and the warning analyzed above. However, its stylistic formulation is much less aggressive in this case, and therefore an understatement of what is really meant, viz., that the blacks either adapt (obey the laws, etc.) or else our racists and fascists will get them.

The last paragraph finally spells out in somewhat more detail *what* the blacks are required to do to avoid such a bleak future: discipline their young,

find cooperative leaders and encourage blacks to police their own community. These final recommendations are in line with the conservative view of race relations in Britain, and with a conservative ideology generally, viz., the application of authority and discipline, the suppression of challenge and opposition (leaders must be “cooperative”, that is, meek) and the ghetto should solve its own problems by providing the agents for its own oppression.

Summing up, we find that this editorial has a complex argumentative and rhetorical structure, built around the main pragmatic point, viz., the warning that blacks should behave, or else. This warning is introduced by a sequence of dramatic argumentative moves that emphasizes the seriousness of the (racial) situation in Britain and hence supports the appropriateness and the harshness of the warning. The second part also legitimates the warning, but does so in the guise of quasi-liberal, positively presented “good intentions”, which however prepare the same conclusion, viz., that the blacks should obey the laws and generally behave in such a way as we want them to.

Although this argumentative structure is quite explicit, it should be stressed that at crucial points it operates by implications, presuppositions, suggestions, innuendo, mitigation, and other forms of indirectness. Whereas the first part about the police killing is cast in apocalyptic terms, and thereby legitimates the warning, the softer second part is intended to ward off the possibly negative conclusions that may be drawn from such a warning about the moral and political position of the *Mail* in the domain of ethnic affairs. To understand that this strategy of face-keeping is a front, we need to know the actual policies and news reporting practices of this tabloid, which is hardly interested in propagating socio-economic support for the inner cities or critical investigations of police actions.

It is also against this background that we should understand the *real point* of the argument of this editorial, which is not about rioters or black people breaking the law, but about power and dominance, that is, about blacks and minorities in general who are being threatened to submission. At the same time, the associated implied point is being made that the rise of racism and fascism in Britain should be blamed on the blacks themselves, thereby exonerating white society of its guilt feelings. In other words, editorial argumentation, even when seemingly explicit, is often a front for another argumentative agenda, in this case that of white dominance.

The Sun

The *Sun* also thinks that the blacks must act, and therefore also communicates a normative argumentative point, viz., an advice or recommendation. The contents and argumentative strategy are so similar to that of the *Mail* eight days later that it seems as if the *Mail* editors have had the *Sun* editorial at hand when writing theirs. Again, we first find the usual definition of the situation: Black mob terror. This definition, which is an explicit negative

evaluation of blacks, at the same time introduces the Moral category of the editorial, viz., the recommendation that ‘the black community must take control of their young’. The ‘or else’ following that piece of advice immediately shows that this is not a friendly recommendation, but also a warning. That otherwise the blacks would become the “outcasts of our land”, is premised on the presupposition that they are not outcasts already, a point that also may be contested by many blacks. So far, the normative argument supporting the warning is a summary of that spelled out in the *Mail* a week later.

The rest of the editorial is a classical piece of argumentation. The *Sun* begins with stating (and negatively evaluating: “foolish”) a point of the opponent, viz., that the events of Brixton can be seen as a revenge for the police shooting of a black woman. This argument needs to be contested, and the *Sun* does so by emphasizing (1) that the shooting was incidental (and that hence the police is innocent), and (2) that the woman’s color was immaterial (and that therefore no ‘race riot’ was needed). These defensive moves, which are not very strong, then give way to offensive moves: The riot was merely a pretext for destruction, and more general signalling the “trouble” of Brixton.

This argument could be misread as an attack on the black population, and therefore needs a disclaimer, which we indeed find in the next paragraphs, along the usual lines, as also in the *Mail*: We have championed the rights of blacks and are against Powell’s “heartless” repatriation calls. It needs little knowledge of the *Sun*’s racial attitudes to understand that the claim about the defense of black rights is no more than a disclaimer, which is indeed completed by the following “yet”, introducing the mitigated blind to *pretend that all is well in our mixed race areas*.

Later in the editorial we also find the rather incoherent statement that the West-Indians are “quick to denounce deprivation and what they see as discrimination”. This familiar denial of racism and discrimination is however needed as a rejection of the possible counter-argument that the uprising should be seen as a justifiable action, viz., of rage against racism.

Then the warning is further spelled out, also- addressing the West-Indian community and its leaders: curb the rebellion of your youngsters, or else you will be alienated. Here too, we encounter the rhetorical argumentation strategy of Apparent Praise (“You are a nice guy, BUT...”), namely when the West-Indians are addressed as “decent men and women”, and that of Apparent Concern (“I wouldn’t like that to happen to you, BUT...”), when the *Sun* seems to say that such alienation would be a tragedy for the West-Indians.

Note that the *Sun* also uses another argument, viz., that of Asian obedience. This argument, already made in earlier reporting, is based on the familiar stereotype that whereas West-Indians are rebellious, Asians are meek and well-adapted (run corner shops, and fit into the framework of the Thatcherist ideology of popular capitalism). In other words, the *Sun* suggests a division

between Asians and West-Indians, sometimes even pretending that the blacks are jealous of the Asians (as was the case in the coverage of the Handsworth “riot” a few weeks earlier), and set the Asians as the good example. Apart from dividing the ethnic communities, the tabloid thus also seems to imply that it does not have a general dislike of minorities, and therefore cannot be accused of racism.

The rather straightforward argumentation of the *Sun* is also intended to support the normative conclusion that the blacks should behave, or else. Again, this warning is premised on the interpretation of the events in terms of “mob terror” and destruction. The consequence-part of the warning (“if not...”), is formulated less threateningly than in the *Mail*. Instead of fascist retaliation, we here find self-alienation, which also blames the victim. Yet, such claims need the usual liberal disclaimer in order to be morally sound, and hence the *Sun* adds a ritual emphasis of its positive attitude towards black rights (and critical position towards Powell).

As we also concluded in our analysis of the *Mail* editorial, however, there are hidden points that are implicitly argued for. Beyond the warning that the black community should curb “the rebellion and lawlessness among their people”, there is also the message that the black community in general should behave (like the Asians), or else... That is, if they become alienated this will be their own fault. In other words, the warning is associated with a preview of future forms of blaming the victim.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis of two editorials in the British tabloid press has given us an idea about the textual strategies, as well as the underlying cognitive, social, political and cultural aspects of media argumentation. Urban disturbances, involving (mostly but not exclusively) young black people, are first of all categorized as ‘riots’, and defined in terms of black crime and violence, not as forms of resistance or expressions of rage and frustration. Thus interpreted, the evaluation of such ‘riots’ in terms of intentional criminal behavior of blacks (e.g. protection of drugs business) or lacking adaptation to British rules, laws or lifestyles, is the next step. The final Conclusion is that Blacks must either adapt and submit themselves or else they must leave or endure fascism and marginalization.

Both locally and globally these major propositions of the editorial schema are realized by argumentative and rhetorical strategies and moves. The main argumentative point is a warning: Blacks must adapt/submit or else... The argumentative moves that support this concluding warning is first of all the rhetorical emphasis (dramatic lexical items and *figurae*, hyperboles, etc.) of the negative definition of the situation, attributing the blame fully to black people (and exonerating the white institutions: police, government, etc.). The alternative for the threat is racism. Secondly, however, face-keeping

disclaimers are made that soften this harsh warning, by emphasizing the good intentions and correct ethnic position of the newspaper, and the apparent concession that there are also 'good blacks'. However, these disclaimers only introduce a repetition of the warning that the Black community must behave, adapt itself, discipline its youths, choose compliant leaders, etc.

In other words, the argumentative structure of the editorials is not only a persuasively formulated opinion about the riots and the involvement of blacks. Rather, the editorials have a broader political and socio-cultural function, viz., to argue politically for the control over black people, and for the reproduction of white dominance, that is, for white law and order, the marginalization of the black community, the legitimization of white neglect in ethnic affairs, and finding excuses for right-wing racism and reaction.

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