
The Role of the Press in the Reproduction of Racism

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Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a theoretical analysis of the role of the press in the reproduction of racism. Many empirical studies in many countries have shown that the media play an important role in expressing and spreading ethnic prejudice. And it is generally assumed that prejudice is one of the conditions of racist practices that define racism as the social system of ethnic power abuse. However, the relationships between media discourse and racism are generally assumed to exist, based on correlational evidence, without much detailed theoretical analysis of the precise linguistic, cognitive, and social nature of these relationships. A multidisciplinary approach to the study of the press as well as of racism is able to elucidate some of these relationships in a more explicit way.

Racism

Racism is here defined as a system of ethnic or “racial” dominance, that is, of systematic power abuse of a dominant (European, “white”) group against various kinds of non-European groups – such as ethnic minorities, immigrants, and refugees – in Europe, the Americas, and other European-dominated countries. Social power abuse is the illegitimate exercise of power resulting in social inequality (Van Dijk 2008b) and involves the exclusive or preferential access to, or control over scarce social resources, such as residence, housing, employment, health care, income, status, knowledge, and respect (among many other general studies of racism, see, e.g., Back and Solomos 2000; Boxill 2001; Bulmer and Solomos 1999, 2004; Cashmore 2003;

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Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Essed 1991; Essed and Goldberg 2002; Feagin 2000; Feagin et al. 2001; Goldberg 1997, 2002; Goldberg and Solomos 2002; Lauren 1988; Marable 2002; Sears et al. 2000; Solomos and Back 1996; Wiewiorka 1994, 1998; Wrench and Solomos 1993; for reports and studies on racism in Spain and Latin America, see, e.g., Van Dijk 2005, 2009b).

The system of ethnic domination has two major dimensions, namely, social and cognitive dimensions. The first, *social* dimension consists of the everyday social practices of discrimination against ethnically different groups, for example, through the exclusion from, or unequal distribution of social resources or human rights. The second, *cognitive* dimension consists of the ethnic beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices, and ideologies that function as the motivation and legitimation of such discriminatory practices. In very general terms, this means that out-groups are represented negatively (as different, deviant, or a threat) compared to the European in-group, which represents itself as superior in all relevant attributes.

It should be emphasized from the start that the concept of “racism” is not understood here to apply only to radical, extreme, violent, or blatant forms of racism. On the contrary, most forms of racism today – and those that interests me – are the kind of indirect, subtle, or “modern” racisms in everyday life characterizing the many daily encounters by members of majority and minority groups.

Discourse

One of the most crucial social practices is discourse, that is, socially situated text and talk. Within the system of racism, this means that just like other discriminatory practices, discourse may be used to problematize, marginalize, exclude, or otherwise limit the human rights of ethnic out-groups. Such may be the case either by direct discriminatory discourse in interaction with ethnic Others, or indirectly by writing or speaking negatively *about* the Others (for detail, see Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Jäger 1992, 1998; Reisigl and Wodak 2000, 2001; Van Dijk 1984, 1987a, b, 1991, 1993; Wetherell and Potter 1992; Wodak and Van Dijk 2000).

One of the main roles of discourse is the reproduction of social representations, such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms, and values. *This means that discourse is the main interface between the social and cognitive dimensions of racism.* On the one hand, it may itself be a discriminatory social practice, and on the other hand, it expresses and helps reproduce the negative social representations (prejudices, etc.) that are the socially shared mental basis of such social practices.

Elite Discourse and Racism

Not all types of discourse are equally influential in the reproduction of society and of systems of domination such as racism. Obviously, public discourses are more influential throughout society than private discourses such as everyday

conversations in the family, among neighbors or friends. Those groups who are in control of most influential public discourses, that is, *symbolic elites* such as politicians, journalists, scholars, teachers, and writers, thus play a special role in the reproduction of dominant knowledge and ideologies in society. Since prejudices are not innate, but socially acquired, and since such acquisition is predominantly discursive, the public discourses of the symbolic elites are the primary source of shared ethnic prejudices and ideologies (Van Dijk 1993).

Popular racism and its practices and discourse are often based on, exacerbated, or legitimated by such elite discourse and racism. Although popular racism in principle may be reproduced by shared personal experiences with ethnic Others as well as by interpersonal conversations, it is unlikely that it may have fast and widespread influence of public discourses such as parliamentary debates, news, TV programs, novels, movies, or textbooks. Even when the media may “give voice” to popular racism, it is still the media elites who are responsible for this publication and reproduction in the public sphere. That is, the elites at least preformulate, legitimate, or condone popular racism.

Obviously, the same arguments hold for the reproduction of antiracist practices and ideologies in society. However, the antiracist elites in all domains of society – politics, media, education, research, etc. – have much less influence and are themselves often problematized and marginalized.

The Media

We see that by this logic of the role of the symbolic elites and of public discourse in the reproduction of racist social representations, the mass media play a prominent role. Even if politicians sometimes have the first word on ethnic issues, for instance in parliamentary debates, their discourses and opinions become influential only through media accounts. Scholars and writers may publish books and articles, but the main results of these studies become part of the public domain only when reported and popularized in the news media. Textbooks are – obligatorily – used by and influence millions of children worldwide, but these kids hardly have much influence on the general racist attitudes and ideologies in society. In sum, the mass media are currently the most influential source of racist bias, prejudice, and racism. We therefore need to examine this role in much more detail (see also Campbell 1995; Chávez 2001; Cottle 2000; Entman and Rojecki 2000; Gandy 1998; Hartmann and Husband 1974; Jacobs 2000; Jäger and Link 1993; Kellstedt 2003; Martin Rojo et al. 1994; Prieto Ramos 2004; Rome 2004; Ruhrmann 1995; Smitherman-Donaldson and Van Dijk 1987; Ter Wal 2002; Van Dijk 1991, 1997; Wilson 2005; Wilson and Gutiérrez 1985).

I shall do so primarily for the written press, even when in many ways television has more influence because of the role of the press in the formation of elite opinion. More detailed news, editorials, and opinion articles in the press are crucially involved in the formation of ethnic attitudes and ideologies.

The Press

A detailed study of the role of the press in the reproduction of racism in society presupposes the general assumptions and findings summarized above, for example, about the role of public discourse in the reproduction of beliefs, the elite control over public discourses, the primary role of the media among elite discourses, and the role of racist discourse in the reproduction of racism.

A study of the role of the press in the reproduction of racism requires a multidisciplinary framework that systematically accounts for the contexts, the production, the structures, and the effects of newspaper discourses such as news reports, editorials, and opinion articles. That is, the often observed biases of press accounts of ethnic events may be largely due to biased sources that are uncritically reproduced, due to opinion leaders freely admitted to write in the newspaper, or due to the biased attitudes of reporters or editors themselves – or a combination of these factors. Let us examine these different stages or dimensions of press discourse production, discourse, and discourse effects in some more detail.

Contextual Variation

So far, I have used the general label “the press” to refer to newspapers. Obviously, however, the press in different countries and of different types (popular or elite) and different sociopolitical orientation and ideologies is rather varied. As to their role in the reproduction of racism, for instance, the *Guardian* and *The Sun* in the UK are hardly comparable, not only as to their different political position or their style, but also because of the differences when writing about ethnic affairs. On the other hand, especially when we limit our attention to the elites, for the reasons given above, and hence focus on the role of the elite press, the similarities between newspapers, also among different countries, are bigger than the differences, also when it comes to reporting about ethnic affairs.

Ideally, however, we would need to provide detailed context analysis for each newspaper in terms of the education, social position, status, and ethnic beliefs of owners, editors, and reporters, as well as their readers on the one hand and the specific production processes on the other hand. If I generalize below, this means that such generalizations hold for the (vast) majority of the press. If not, I shall indicate contextually based variation (for a new theoretical account of contexts as subjective mental models of participants, see Van Dijk 2008a, 2009a).

News Production

News and opinion articles in the press largely depend on outside sources, and in this sense, press discourse is intimately linked to the public discourses of the other elites, mostly politicians, scholars, lawyers, writers, etc. Whereas opinion articles and columns are written by writers who may be more or less closely related to the

newspaper as well as by independent outside writers, news discourse is organized, produced, and written by journalists, even when they use various sources. However, in all cases, except when owners control editors, journalists decide and are responsible for what is published in the newspaper (Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978).

News production in the written media is a very complex set of social and discursive interactions, controlled by editors, involving editorial meetings and negotiations, story assignments, reporters' beats with a limited number of institutions and organizations, such as parliament, the police, the courts, the universities, and (big) businesses; extensive interaction with necessary or probable sources of "information" and "opinion"; writing up of news stories by reporters; and final editing by editors. The microsociology, social psychology, and discourse analysis of all these processes and strategies of newsmaking is much more detailed and, at present, not yet fully explored; indeed, editorial meetings, like many other elite encounters, are seldom accessible to scholars – and even less to critical scholars and totally without access for critical scholars writing about racism and the press.

Selection of Sources and Source Texts

Yet we know that much of this process consists of various forms of "text processing," in the sense that different kinds of "source texts" are sought for and acquired by reporters, for instance, through document research, consulting other media, interviews, press conferences, telephone conversations, and so on (Van Dijk 1988). Many such source texts reach the newspaper on the initiative of institutions, organizations, and individual citizens, for example, in the form of agency messages, press releases, phone calls, e-mails, faxes, letters, and so on.

Since the vast majority of all these source texts cannot possibly be published in the newspaper, reporters and editors apply a rigorous system of selection and information reduction, for example, in the form of summarizing. That is, source texts may have influence on the knowledge and opinions of journalists, but need not as such appear in the newspaper. Also, if they appear in the newspaper, they generally tend to be modified in so many ways that the resulting news report should be seen as the collective textual product of the newspaper and its journalists.

It is important to insist on this point when we examine the causes and responsibilities of the role of the press in the reproduction of racism. Journalists, who are hardly used to published criticism (indeed, which newspaper publishes critical reports about the press, let alone about racism in the press?), tend to defend themselves against critique also by relaying the blame to their sources, a well-known strategy of denying racism. True, journalists are not responsible for the (racist) talk of politicians or other elites they write about. Publishing about such talk may even have a critical function if properly formulated, for instance, as a form of accusation. This is, however, generally the case only for the (critical) reporting about the extreme right, for example, about the Front National in France. Less virulent, everyday, and "commonsense" racism of the elites is hardly ever reported

critically, especially when the journalists see themselves as belonging to the same or similar social groups.

In sum, on any account journalists are ultimately responsible, either for uncritically publishing racist talk of other elites or for writing their own biased discourses.

As suggested, we as yet barely have insight into the details of these news production processes. From participant observation and ethnographic reports, we know some about editorial meetings and about the everyday routines of news gathering with several organizations and institutions (Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978). We have some insight into the kind of source texts produced by these processes and how these are selected or discarded, and used to write news reports. We have no idea, however, how all these discourse types, also the discarded ones, manage the minds of the journalists: what knowledge and opinions result from reading or skimming (parts of) these source texts? How exactly are they read, understood, and stored in memory as mental models of ethnic events, which in later news report writing may again be used.

What we do know from some empirical research, however, is that source texts of all groups who are considered to be less important, less powerful, or less interesting tend to be ignored, overlooked, or discarded (Van Dijk 1988, 1991). This is specifically also true for those of ethnic minority groups, organizations, or persons. Their press releases tend to wind up in the wastepaper basket, and only the largest organizations in special circumstances may be explicitly sought after or their press releases used in news production. Ethnic minorities, their leaders, or spokespersons are not usually considered experts about ethnic events, even about those events that involve themselves. Rather, they are typically considered biased sources, whereas (white) politicians, police officers, lawyers, scholars, or organizations tend to be seen as “independent” or “expert” and hence as reliable sources, also on ethnic events. “Our” white group and its members are never seen as being “ethnic” in the first place.

Discrimination of Minority Journalists

The social and cognitive processes involved in the production of news, such as gathering, selection, discarding, and summarization of source texts and their resulting mental models (subjective interpretations) in the minds of journalists, show how news and bias are produced. Journalists prefer white sources and their texts and judge these to be more reliable and objective.

This is also because most journalists of most newspapers in Europe and the Americas are white themselves. In Europe, there are hardly any editors that are non-white. Thus, European news production is generally a form of in-group production, even in increasingly multicultural societies: Minority journalists tend to be discriminated against; they seldom enter the newspaper as reporters in the first place, and those few who are able to enter invariably will touch the racist glass ceiling of higher editorial positions (Ainley 1998; Dawkins 1997). Moreover, those few minority journalists who do manage to get employed by newspapers are hardly

chosen because of their critical antiracist position and writings. On the contrary, those whose ideas on ethnic relations are not fundamentally different from those of the editors will be selected.

Since minority journalists are virtually absent from most newsrooms, especially in Europe, this not only means that news production in general will be biased by a white perspective, but also that fundamental knowledge and expertise on ethnic communities and experiences are usually lacking in reporting. It has often been observed that most white journalists have few daily contacts with ethnic communities, and reporting ethnic events is thus not only biased but often also ignorant. Few journalism schools in Europe provide special training or specialization in ethnic or multicultural reporting, and white journalists who have specialized in ethnic reporting and who are knowledgeable and unbiased are rare.

The conclusion is that not only the news production process but also the very social structure of hiring and the composition of the newsroom do not favor another perspective on news gathering and news production. Critical, antiracist sources and their texts and opinions are not routinely sought for, nor will these be easily admitted, and the same is true for antiracist journalists.

News production is thus generally “white news” production, even when the news is about ethnic affairs, such as immigration. Part of this bias can be explained in general terms – also women and many other socially dominated groups or minorities are thus discriminated in news production, and news and news sources generally are those of the powerful elites in society, and these happen to be largely white males in European societies.

But another part of this bias is the result of racist prejudices, for example, when white sources are by definition found to be better and more reliable, when ethnic groups and organizations are found less important or newsworthy, or when problems and issues, for example, racism itself, of minority groups are not found to be very relevant. And conversely, that disproportionate attention is paid to the differences, deviance, or alleged threats of ethnic minority groups and their members also shows that the very expectations and criteria of journalists are ethnically biased by negative social representations about the Others.

In sum, news production is racist because of all these factors of routine news gathering, selection, preference for white sources and their texts, discrimination of minority journalists, as well as the biased interest in specific negative topics associated with minorities.

All this holds for the press generally. More liberal newspapers do not have more minority journalists and a different news gathering system from conservative newspapers, and the same is true for elite and popular newspapers. In the Americas, some more minority journalists may be employed – variable in different countries – but both in North America and in most countries of Central and South America, newspaper owners, chief editors, editors, and most reporters are predominantly white(r). As far as I know, no newspaper has an explicit code of non-racist news gathering and news production – and only some have guidelines for non-biased news writing.

News Structures

It is not surprising that given this social context of news production, news reports on ethnic events tend to be biased in many ways. Since these are the discourses that reach millions of readers every day, their systematic and critical analysis is crucial. Probably no other public discourse influences the formation of ethnic prejudice and stereotypes as much as news, also because most white people do not have daily experiences with members of ethnic minority groups or with recent immigrants. This is true for news in the press as well as for news and other programs on television, but the elites are more generally influenced by news in the press, and the same is true for those elites who produce television programs. Moreover, television news is only a fragment of the news in the newspaper.

So let us summarize some of the findings of the many studies on racism in the news. Since news reports, like all discourse, have hundreds of relevant structural categories, we obviously can only focus on a few typical ones.

Topics

One of the first questions one may ask in a critical analysis of discourse in general, and of news about ethnic affairs in particular, is about the *topics* of text and talk: *What* do people write or speak about when they refer to ethnic minorities, immigrants, refugees, or in general ethnic Others? Theoretically, this means that we ask about what have been called the “semantic macrostructures” of discourse, that is, global meanings that organize the local meaning of words and sentences at higher levels of paragraphs and whole discourses (Van Dijk 1980). Such topics are important not only because they provide global coherence to discourse but also because they are the information that is best remembered and that in turn organizes how we represent ethnic events in our personal episodic memories of everyday experiences.

In news reports, such topics are typically expressed in headlines and, in somewhat more detail, in the lead, which also form the first, most prominent part of news reports, and the part that is mostly read, sometimes exclusively (Van Dijk 1988). The formulation of headlines and leads reflects the way the newspaper (reporter, editor, etc.) frames the topics and how these organize the meaning of the whole text.

Topics in the news may be about virtually any subject that is of public concern, especially of the elites. Topics in news on ethnic minorities, however, do not have such a broad variation. On the contrary, much research has shown that “ethnic” news focuses on only a few main topics, which on the whole may be summarized as *problem news*.

Initially, when non-European groups are immigrating, such immigration tends to be represented as a major problem, if not as an invasion and hence as a threat, for instance, of our welfare, job market, or culture. Stories abound, as is currently still the case in Spain, about illegal entry, smuggling, false papers, mafias, and so on. The difference between the newspapers in this case is not so much whether or not

they focus on this topic – all newspapers do – but whether or not such stories are written with more or less empathy with the problems of the newcomers and with more or less critique of the police, border patrols, or the authorities. Despite such differences, however, the main message in this case is that the country is invaded by masses of illegal aliens.

Once the newcomers are settled in the country, the next major class of topics focuses again on problems, namely on problems of reception, housing, employment, and integration. This may be an opportunity to tell many stories about the major problems immigrants have to build up their lives in the new country. Some newspapers sometimes tell such (background) stories, typically in special supplements, but on the whole, and especially in conservative tabloid newspapers, such stories focus on the problem *they* mean for *us*: They take away our jobs and create unemployment, they take away our houses, and they do not want to adapt; they have strange habits, do not want to learn our language, and so on. Most virulent in this case, for instance, in the British tabloid press, are constant accusations of abuse of welfare and benefits, temporary housing in expensive hotels, and other subtopics that may arouse indignation of the “taxpayers.” Whereas dealing with cultural differences may originally still have an exotic flavor, these soon are topicalized as *unacceptable* differences, that is, as deviance, and finally as a threat to our welfare state and culture.

Thirdly, one of the most frequent topics associated with minorities and immigrants is crime and violence. This may begin with the emphasis on “illegal” immigration and residence and the activities of mafias (even if immigrants are victims of such mafias!), but soon is a major topic describing their activities in the country. Crime reporting more generally thus becomes “ethnicized,” and specific forms of delinquency typically and selectively attributed to “foreigners,” even when the majority of such crimes are committed by nationals: drugs and holdups.

These are the three main topic classes that characterize most news on minorities and immigrants in most countries most of the time. The overall message is that the newcomers or minorities are at least a problem if not a threat for us, and the general perspective of such stories is white – not the problems *they* have with us.

Depending on the country and the current state of immigration and settlement, further topics may be the political debate on immigration, for example, on new immigration laws, legalization, and in general the reactions of politicians and the authorities to recent immigration or minority groups. Again, also under pressure of racist parties, such debate tends to focus on the problems allegedly created by immigration, residence, and integration (Wodak and Van Dijk 2000). The negative definition of the situation by the politicians thus becomes a prominent topic by itself – and a powerful legitimization of popular racism.

It is not surprising that immigration restrictions have been the dominant answer to increased immigration anywhere in Europe, independently of the political ideology of the government. The pressure of right-wing and racist parties and the competition for the popular vote make pro-immigration policies in a racist society an impossible plank to win elections.

The general interest of newspapers in the political elites not only promotes interest in immigration policies and debates but also promotes the interest in racist parties and leaders, as was and is the case for such figures as Le Pen in France, Haider in Austria, and to a lesser extent Fini in Italy, Dewinter in Belgium, and Fortuyn and Wilders in Holland. As leaders of the racist right, or as vociferous opponents of immigration, they represent the “official” racism in some of these countries and hence may be portrayed negatively. This implies that similar anti-immigration ideas and policies of the mainstream parties are not represented as racist, as is the case for recent immigration restrictions by Tony Blair’s New Labour government today.

Such special interest in the racist right may spawn more critical stories, but as suggested, this does not mean a general antiracist stand of newspapers. No leading newspaper in Europe is explicitly antiracist both in its official guidelines and in its reporting practice. Thus, we do find, as a next topic set, regular stories on discrimination and racism, but such stories will focus on right-wing, extremist racism, such as the activities of skinheads, racist attacks, or exceptional cases of labor or housing discrimination.

Stories on elite racism are rare. Stories on racism in the press are simply nonexistent neither in the popular tabloids nor in left-wing quality newspapers. Racism as an everyday problem for immigrants and minorities seldom gets topicalized, even when *they* define racism as the major problem of living in their new home country, besides getting decent housing and a job.

This also suggests that the global meanings of news – and the same is true for editorials and opinion articles – are also characterized by the topics that are *absent*: The problem the Others have entering the country, finding housing and work, integration in a new social and cultural environment, or everyday experiences with more or less blatant racism, such as exclusion, marginalization, and problematization. On the contrary, the everyday lives of the Others are seldom portrayed in the press, even on topics that would be covered for European people. The same is true for the topics that negatively reflect back on *us*, such as racism, prejudice, discrimination, intolerance, lacking hospitality, nationalism, and so on. If treated at all, these are portrayed as exceptional, of people of the extreme right, of a few “racist” individuals, and never of the elites, never as part of the system, and never as the general rule.

The same logic of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation explains why positive stories about *them* are similarly rare. Although immigrants in all European countries have significantly contributed to the economic welfare of these countries, such contributions seldom make headlines in the press. Not to speak of their contributions to culture and the arts, social diversity, multiculturalism, multilingualism, international relations, cuisine, fashion, and not to forget sports – although the latter topics may occasionally enter the marginal human interest and sports pages. The famous black footballer, however, will in that case typically be defined as English, Dutch, or French, and not as Caribbean or African.

Since topics are normatively expressed in headlines, the predominance of negative topics in the news also shows in the headlines, as the dominant and defining structural category of news reports. Similarly, the more negative a story about *them*, the more it will appear prominently and at length in the paper, that is, on the front page, on top, across several columns, and with big letter types. The opposite will be the case for stories, if any, on *our* racism.

We see that the general ideological position of “ethnic” reporting not only influence topic selection and construction but also influence prominence, size, layout, placement, and typography – all geared toward emphasizing *their* bad things and de-emphasizing *our* bad things.

Local Meanings

If topics as semantic macrostructures control local meanings, negative topics organize negative local meanings, from words to complex descriptions of situations, events, actions, and people. There are many ways such local semantics may be biased, and I shall summarize only a few, according to the general, macrostrategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation dictated by the well-known ideological polarization between in-group and out-group representation in racist discourse.

Implicit vs. Explicit Meanings. Most meanings of discourse are implicit because discourse presupposes that readers have vast amounts of world knowledge that allows them to fill in or derive the information that is implicit in text and talk. This is also true for news reports and for discourse on ethnic affairs. This means that many of the negative meanings that are controlled by negative overall topics (e.g., illegal immigration, violence, drugs, cultural deviance, etc.) will typically be expressed explicitly and thus emphasized, whereas “our” prejudices and racism will remain implicit.

Presupposition. More specifically, information may be presupposed in news that is not at all a shared “fact.” Thus, negative attributes of minorities may simply be indirectly stated through presupposition, for example, by such expressions as “delinquency among immigrants,” which presupposes that immigrants are delinquents.

Detailed vs. General Descriptions. One of the ways to emphasize the negative acts of the Others is to provide very detailed descriptions, for example, of their alleged cultural deviance, violence, or crimes. No such detailed, but at most very general, descriptions are given about the bad situation in which many immigrants live or the ways *we* treat them in everyday life. The same is true for more or less *precise vs. vague* descriptions.

Disclaimers. Well known are the local semantic moves that combine positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in one formula: “I have nothing against blacks (Arabs, etc.), but. . .” This apparent denial, meant to avoid negative impression formation by the recipients, tends to be followed by a largely negative

characterization of the Others. Disclaimers come in many formats, such as transfers (“I have no problem with them, but my clients. . .”), apparent concession (“Some of them are smart, but in general. . .”), apparent empathy (“Yes, they have problems in their country, but. . .”), and so on. These disclaimers typically appear in argumentative discourse in the newspaper, such as in letters to the editor, editorials, and opinion articles.

Rhetorical Figures

Prevalent especially in argumentative opinion discourse in the press is the ample use of rhetorical figures, which have the well-known persuasive function of emphasizing and de-emphasizing meanings, most typically represented by *hyperboles* and *euphemisms*. Thus, our racism will typically be described, if at all, in many euphemistic ways, for example, as discrimination, bias, or even as “popular discontent” – a phrase that even suggests democratic values. On the other hand, *their* negative actions or attributes will tend to be described with hyperboles.

Metaphors are the best known semantic and rhetorical means to make complex or abstract meanings more concrete and understandable. This is also characteristically the case in the rhetoric of ethnic event reporting, starting with the now standard description of immigration as an “invasion” by “waves” of immigrants or refugees. In many languages and countries, immigrants thus typically are represented as a threat, especially in terms of threatening masses of water – in which “we” may drown. The description of a threat to our life can hardly get more concrete. Immigration restriction thus becomes a matter of life and death.

Quotation

Given the contextual properties of news production described above, in which white sources and source texts are preferred and found more reliable or interesting, we may expect that quotation patterns reflect such biases in news gathering. This is indeed the case. Even in the accounts of ethnic events, with mostly ethnic minority actors, those who are quoted, and hence may define the situation and give their opinions, are usually the white elites – such as the government, politicians, the police, lawyers, NGOs, or professors. If the Others and their leaders are cited at all, this nearly always happens in company of white speakers. That is, the Others are seldom the ones who are allowed to define the ethnic event or situation alone.

We now have only mentioned a few examples of typical structures of news that reflect underlying mental models and social representations of journalists and writers who have access to the newspaper. We have seen that at all discourse levels of news and other press genres, such bias is expressed by an overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Immigrants and ethnic minorities thus tend to be represented as a problem, as deviant, or as a threat, from

the moment they enter the country in “waves” of “illegal” immigrants, to the many situations of daily interaction in which they are perceived as different, as strange if not as a threat to our safety, welfare, or culture. This is true not only for the important selection of news topics and the headlines but also for more or less explicit, precise, or detailed local meanings, the manipulation of presuppositions, disclaimers, the choice of hyperboles and euphemisms, and metaphors, among many other structures of discourse that allow the writers to emphasize *their* bad things and *our* good things. This is also true for layout, placement, size, pictures, and a host of structures not mentioned above, such as arguments (and fallacies), the order and format of news reports, person and group descriptions, and so on.

Reception

Biased news production and news reports would be pretty harmless if they would not have a tremendous influence on the readers. Although traditional effect research in mass communication often has found that the media are not that influential at all and that most people make up their own minds, more or less independently of the media (Bryant and Zillmann 1994, see also Graber 1984; Van Dijk and Kintsch 1983), this is certainly not the case for the role of the press in the reproduction of ethnic prejudice. In our study on communicating racism, we found, for instance, that many people use the mass media as a source and legitimation of their prejudices (Van Dijk 1987a). As long as people have no direct personal experiences with minorities or immigrants, as is the case in, for instance, Latin America, where indigenous people (e.g., in Bolivia and Peru) or people from African descent (as in Brazil) form large minorities or majorities, they have no concrete mental models as a basis for the formation of general attitudes. In that case, such mental models are taken from the mass media. It is in this way that prejudices are reproduced in society and not examined critically by comparing them to personal experiences or scholarly studies. On the other hand, even daily experiences are no guarantee for the development of antiracist attitudes or media practices, as we know from the absence or the biased representations of blacks in Brazilian telenovelas (D’Adesky 2001; Van Dijk 2009b).

For a study of the role of the mass media in the formation and challenge of stereotypes and prejudice, we also need to examine in more detail which social groups use which mass media. Thus, the elites generally use more newspapers and other people television as their main source of information and opinion – and such also may lead to differences in the kind of prejudices construed by the recipients. This means that if the press especially influences the symbolic elites and the symbolic elites in turn control public discourse (e.g., the press itself), then the press has a crucial role in the reproduction of racism, both by its news reports and by its editorials, op-ed articles, and columns in which opinions about immigration and the multicultural society are being made explicit and hence reproduced in society.

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