

Summary of Research Results

News Discourse Analysis: Contents and Frames

In general, the ‘centre-right’ Times (46.4%) and Mail (54.6%) newspapers tend to focus more on issues of immigration and asylum in their coverage of migration and ethnic relations, whereas the ‘centre-left’ Guardian focuses more on racist/anti-racist activism issues (39.8%), and on racial abuse in particular (21.5%). This is indicative of the influence of the newspapers’ editorial lines.

The major finding of our comparative analysis of national newspaper coverage, was that although the newspapers varied considerably in the ways they themselves presented race issues -prominence, editorial line and commentary, and language, symbolism and meaning attributed- there was considerable similarity in the proportion of space that was given to ‘sources’ to make claims about the topic in news reports. Although the overall level of reporting on ‘race’ in the broadsheet Guardian was more than twice as high as for the Sun, both newspapers attributed proportionally similar amounts of this space to different types of ‘source’ claims-makers: e.g., government/executive source claims (Guardian 21.1%, Sun 23.3%); ethnic minority source claims (Guardian 18.6%, Sun 16.3%); extreme right source claims (Guardian 1.7%, Sun 2.3%). Thus, it is not the case that minorities are not given news space in a populist paper such as the Sun.

Political Discourse Analysis: Claims-Making

The claims-making approach, developed from social movement research, takes newspaper recording of events as a source of data for reconstructing the collective action and political demands made in a specific issue field. Here we point out only a few demonstrative findings about claims-makers in the British migrations and ethnic relations political issue-field. It is worth mentioning that our claims-making data is strictly comparative with that from other European countries, which has facilitated analysing the British experience in comparative European perspective (see publications).

The first important point to make regards the prominent position of minority claims-making. Minorities account for more claims than any other institutional or civil society actor, making a fifth of all political claims (19.4%). This finding indicates that the politics of migration and ethnic relations is not just *about* minorities, but is a political field which is importantly *shaped* by them, and the claims which they make.

Another important point, comes from comparing the claims-making by the three movements which interest us (ethnic, anti-racist, xenophobic). It is striking that the racist and extreme right organisations and groups are highly marginalised within migration and ethnic relations

politics, accounting for less than 3% of all claims. This indicates that such groups have difficulty in gaining visibility for their demands within national politics, whereas their ethnic and anti-racist opponents (23% combined of all claims) have better political opportunities in a society which upholds anti-discrimination principles in legislation. Ethnic minorities themselves are also the dominant actor *within* the broader anti-racist movement.

Another example indicates that minority claims-making is far from superfluous, not least because the state itself can be an important source of discrimination. A third of all demands by minorities were directed against the police, and this was the case for more than 40% of claims by 'Black' minorities. In addition, about 12% of all minority claims referred to discrimination or racial abuse by the police, and this rose to 27% of all claims by 'Black' minorities. This finding shows that opposition to police racism and discrimination have been a systematic basis for minority demands (particularly by Black groups), and are not simply tied to individual high profile events such as the Stephen Lawrence case. Such events are 'triggers' which allow structural grievances to make a policy impact through visibility in the public domain.

Interviews:Experts

Media Actors

In general, journalists did not feel a moral obligation to represent minorities in a positive light, and placed more emphasis on the technical aspects of producing an accurate and verifiable story, than its thematic contents. However, it was acknowledged that reference to minority background had to be dealt with considerable sensitivity, and was only mentioned if of direct relevance to the story. Most journalists and editors also claimed that the level of sensitivity in writing copy on ethnic relations topics had increased greatly over the last decade. However, they regularly stated that the focus for negative reporting has shifted from 'minorities' to 'asylums-seekers' in the 1990s.

Regarding campaigns, all journalists were careful about giving exposure to the extreme right for fear of legitimating them, and only did so in relation to events. In addition, all newspapers were regularly bombarded by campaigning groups but tended to view such material with diminishing returns.

Activists

All activists saw the press as cynical, interested only in circulation figures, and bemoaned the lack of moral stance taken by newspapers on issues. They also claimed that journalists had an ephemeral interest in a topic, focused on extreme events, and produced stories which had considerable negative effects on a long-term campaign. Campaigners often resorted to dramatic stunts or protest events to reach the news, though in some cases had good contacts with individual journalists. Organisations without access to the press —e.g. the BNP- resorted to using their own controllable communications media through leaflets and the internet.

Local institutional experts in the field referred to the damaging effect that national level negative reporting can have on race relations in the local environment.

Focus Groups: Public Perceptions

The first major result was the success of the innovative editing group technique. Groups were particularly adept at interacting with newspaper materials, and editing in and out preferred readings, as well as constructing their own headlines. These were taken as empirical indicators for how different ethnic groups (White, Asian, Black) constructed social problems and symbolic boundary markers of collective identity.

Using this editing technique, it was possible to identify and compare perceptions of the conflict lines —by different ethnic groups- in relation to specific topics. For example on asylum, most groups found the newspaper depiction of asylum-seekers as ‘bogus’ and ‘scroungers’ as stigmatising, but a substantial minority within groups then used such language themselves. All groups (White, Black, Asian) were hostile to admitting asylum-seekers to Britain, often telling stories of how much they cost the social services. In general, Black and in particular Asian groups were more sympathetic than Whites, relating back their own migration family histories, but nonetheless saw Britain as a ‘full’ country. This showed a clear ‘ingroup/outgroup’ symbolic boundary at the level of perception between British citizens (including ethnic minorities) and foreign migrants. However, this symbolic boundary was also drawn along ethnic lines by a minority of white groups, who also categorised Bradford Asians along with asylum-seekers as an outgroup, although they are British citizens.

Regarding potential for mobilisation, all groups expressed strong antipathy to the extreme right, even in cases where racist sentiments were expressed by some members of the group during the session. Some groups, particularly women, expressed solidarity with anti-racist activism, though most groups were rather apathetic in their assessment of the value of all forms of political activism. The findings from our study, when cross-analysed with the findings from the mainland European study, have resulted in the building of a theory of ethnic mobilisation that contradicts the contemporary body of research and theory that claims that the ‘national’ has been replaced by the ‘postnational’ (Soysal) as the relevant framework of reference for minority and migrant mobilisation.