

Discourse and Racism

Some Conclusions of 30 years of research

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After 30 years of research on discourse and racism it is time to formulate some general conclusions, findings and experiences. We shall begin with a chronological account of the various (sub) projects involved in this mega-project, and then formulate some general theoretical and empirical conclusions.

The social turn in discourse studies: Discourse and Racism

Until the end of the 1970s, I had been mainly engaged in research on generative poetics, text grammar, discourse pragmatics and the psychology of text comprehension (with Walter Kintsch). Thus, besides formal approaches to text and talk, as well as the cognitive approach that characterizes my work until today, what was fundamentally lacking was the *social dimension* of discourse analysis. It was also at that time that I visited the so-called “Third World”, namely Mexico, for the first time. This meant that also for the first time I became confronted with real poverty, especially of the indigenous population, and the abysmal economic and political differences between the rich and the ‘rest’, that is between local white(r) and non-white, as well as between Europe and Latin America.

Upon returning to Amsterdam in 1980s after several months in Mexico DF, I decided to refocus my research by exploring the social and critical dimension of discourse. At that time, immigration from Turkey, Morocco and former colonies such as Surinam, had become to characterize Dutch society, drawing attention from social scientists, but as yet hardly from linguists or discourse analysts. More specifically, social scientists would rather study and confirm stereotypes of the immigrants, such as cultural differences or drug abuse, but virtually no one appeared to be interested in the rampant racism of the white Dutch population. So I decided to study the ways racism is expressed in text and talk.

The role of the press

The new project on discourse and racism started in the Netherlands in the fall of 1980 with a class studies on minorities in the media, which was also the title of my first book, in Dutch, about this topic (Van Dijk, 1983).

Also in the years to come much of my social and critical research would be focused on the press and their role in the reproduction of racism and social inequality (Van Dijk, 1988a, 1991, 1997). At the same time, these empirical studies were not only sustained by theory formation on prejudice and racism, but also by the development of a multidisciplinary theory of news as a prominent genre of discourse, ignored as such in mass communication research of that time (Van Dijk, 1988b). Whereas my first studies of the press were limited to the Netherlands, soon also the press in the UK, Spain and Latin America became object of such critical analysis in several books (Van Dijk, 1991, 1997, 2003, 2005, 2007) and many articles. Despite the usual differences between the press of these countries, it soon became obvious that their coverage of immigrants or ethnic minorities was very similar, such as the polarization between (positive) Us and (negative) Them at all levels of discourse structure, and hence as a manifestation of underlying racist ideologies. It is within the same perspective that in 1988 Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson and I edited a multidisciplinary book on discourse and discrimination, in which critical discourse analysis of racism was combined with research on racism in the USA, especially also by African-American scholars.

Among the other critical studies of the press, I thus undertook with my students a major project for UNESCO on the variations in the international coverage of an event in the Middle East, namely the assassination of president-elect Bechir Gemayel in September 1985, also in order to see the differences between North and South in reporting such events. This study was also inspired by well-known UNESCO publication *Many Voices, One World* (UNESCO, 1980) about the exclusive power of the international news agencies in the coverage of the Third World. Interestingly, the major difference of coverage we found in international reporting of the assassination was not so much between North and South, but rather between the quality and the popular (tabloid) press. Indeed, the press, and hence also the elite press, in the South in many respects relied on the international news agencies as well as their preferred formats, that is, mostly on the news as defined and described in the USA, the UK and France. In other words, the globalization of news as a scarce commodity, a monopoly aggressively defended by the Northern/Western news agencies and the governments of their countries, so much so that the USA even decided to leave UNESCO because of the resistance in the South against this form of discursive colonialism.

Prejudice in talk

My first study on racism in the (Dutch) press was followed by an official research project with the Dutch Science Organization (NWO) on conversations on immigrants, based on fieldwork and interviews with Dutch people in different neighborhoods of Amsterdam (Van Dijk, 1984). The aim of this project was threefold: To get to know how Dutch people talk about minorities or immigrants, to explain such talk in terms of underlying social cognitions such as prejudices and ideologies and to describe the social functions of such talk in Dutch society. This project and several related ones gave rise several books and many articles that stimulated more general interest in this topic, not only in the field of discourse studies (see, e.g., Van Dijk, 1987). At the same time this research provided the empirical base for my growing interest in establishing, with other colleagues, at first especially with Ruth Wodak, what later would be called Critical Discourse Analysis, in this case especially within an antiracist paradigm.

Whereas my earlier studies on racism and discourse were still limited to Dutch discourse materials, a sabbatical at UCSD in California in 1985 allowed me to extend the empirical basis of my research to another context. Hence, with my students there I started to collect data by interviewing (white) Californians about their experiences with immigrants in their neighborhood or in the city, or about immigration in general. Interestingly, the similarities between conversations about immigrants in California and the Netherlands were more striking than the differences. Semantic strategies (such as disclaimers), storytelling and argumentation against immigration were indeed very similar, and we may conclude that both exhibit general patterns of Northern/Western prejudice against people in and from the South (for detail, see Van Dijk, 1987a).

The research on prejudice in talk was initially theoretically inspired by new developments in social psychology, namely the emergence of the study of social cognition in the early 1980s. Instead of defining prejudice as personal bias, as was still quite common around that time, I emphasized that it is a form of socially shared cognition, as negative social representations (attitudes) characterizing large segments of the dominant white population in Europe and North America (Van Dijk, 1984). In the California study, this social psychological approach was extended with a communicative dimension, by showing how such everyday talk about immigrants was a direct function not only of personal experiences in some (usually poor) neighborhoods, but rather by the public discourse of the mass media (Van Dijk, 1987a). Indeed, also people without personal experiences with immigrants or minorities talked in a very similar way about them. I thus was able to related

the earlier studies of racism in the press with racism in every talk, and clearly attributing the causal role to the mass media, rather than to the people of poor neighborhoods.

Textbooks

Besides this research on the representation of minorities in the press and in conversation, in the 1980s I also examined the way (Dutch) secondary school textbooks dealt with minorities and immigration (Van Dijk, 1987b) — another genre of public discourse that would remain a major type of text being investigated in my research, also in my later work on discourse and knowledge. This critical textbook research was embedded in activist endeavors to improve Dutch textbooks through the foundation of PAREL (PEARL): Project on Anti- Racist Educational Materials. This small foundation published brochures critically evaluating Dutch textbooks on the way they dealt with immigrants, minorities and the Third World, and making proposals for improvement - culminating in a book, also translated into English with recommendations for several areas of learning.

Elite Discourse and Racism

In the early 1990s, after more than a decade of research on racism and discourse, the time had come to look back and reformulate earlier theories. Thus, whereas the earlier work on racism in conversation was largely influenced by new social psychological theories of social cognition, group identity and prejudice, also the social and sociological dimensions of the project needed more attention. Hence, in my book *Elite Discourse and Racism* (Van Dijk, 1993) I formulated a new theory of the discursive reproduction of racism as being based on the special access of the symbolic elites (politicians, journalists, teachers, etc.) to public discourse, especially of politics, the media, education and research. Since racism is not natural or innate, its ideological basis — and other social representations — must be learned, and such acquisition largely takes place via public discourse. Since the symbolic elites control such public discourse, they are the first responsible for the reproduction of racism (as well as anti-racism) in society. The book on elite racism illustrated this thesis with chapters on several discourse genres and contexts, namely for the first time also on parliamentary discourse in Europe and the USA, on secondary school and university textbooks, on the media and also (also for the first time) on organizational discourse of business companies. Especially the study on the role of racism in parliamentary debates would later come to represent large part of my research.

It is also with this book that the theoretical framework of the complex project on racism and discourse obtained its more complete and explicit formulation. Racism, thus, became defined as a social system of ethnic or ‘racial’ domination, that is, of power abuse,

consisting of a sociocognitive basis of ethnic prejudices and racist ideologies, on the one hand, and its social manifestation as everyday racism in interaction (discrimination) at the micro-level and large-scale, institutionally reproduced, social and political inequality at the macro-level, on the other hand. We were thus able to finally link prejudiced personal talk and institutional and organizational texts with the same underlying social representations controlled by racist ideology.

Discourse, power and CDA: Racism as System of Domination

My first interest in the study of the discursive reproduction of racism at the end of the 1970s coincided with the seminal study of Roger Fowler, Gunther Kress, Bob Hodge and Tony Trew on Language and Control (1979), introducing ‘critical linguistics’. Whereas in that book the influence of (sentence) grammar was still quite prominent, it was obvious that such an approach need to be extended to the field of text and talk, and that we needed a *critical discourse analysis*, a term that became more common only towards the end of the 1980s (indeed, even Norman Fairclough’s first book in in 1989 still bore the title of *Language and Power*, and not *discourse* and power). Thus, after my first studies of racism in discourse, squatters in the press as well as the coverage of the Third World, the Conclusions of my book *News Analysis* (1988a) in fact presented an explicit plea for engaging in a broad, multidisciplinary critical discourse analysis.

In the meantime, since a first meeting in 1991s in Amsterdam, the paradigm of CDA had become established as an international movement, at first in Europe and later also elsewhere, though with quite some resistance from more traditional linguists. My further research on racism and discourse explicitly took place within this more general critical perspective several discourse analysts had started to develop in the 1980s. Indeed, conclusions from the long-year project on discourse and racism also allowed more general assumptions on the relations between power, domination and discourse, one of the central tenets of CDA (Van Dijk, 2008). Racism was thus defined not as individual prejudice or incidental discrimination, but as a system of domination, that is, of socially and politically based power abuse of (white) majorities. Such a system prevails both in Europe as well as the rest of the world, even where people of European descents may be a minority, as is the case in several countries of Latin America, as well as in apartheid South Africa.

Already explicitly in the CDA paradigm, one major project on discourse and racism in the 1990s, *Racism at the Top*, was carried out with Ruth Wodak and other researchers. Against the background of the notion of elite racism, in this project we aimed to study how leading politicians in several western European countries talk about immigrants and minorities in their parliamentary speeches. This vast project, in which we examined and coded thousands of pages of official parliamentary transcripts, resulted in a book with

various chapters on parliamentary discourse in general, and studies of various countries in particular (Wodak & Van Dijk, 2000). It was a pity though that this book had limited circulation because it was locally published by a small Austrian publisher. This collective study especially also showed that the thesis of the prominent role of elite racism is literally true for the political top of society, and hence there were the first formulations of racism tend to be formulated, especially in the dominant discourse of exclusion of immigrants.

At the same time, the study of parliamentary and other political discourse of this project was later extended by Ruth Wodak's research on political discourse within the framework of her impressive Wittgenstein project. Earlier, Ruth Wodak and her associates in Vienna already had studied many forms of racism and anti-Semitism, for instance on the occasion of the Waldheim affair. It is not surprising, thus, that much of our research on discourse and racism was mutually inspiring, and that we were able to cooperate so closely for so many years. The study of racism and discourse in parliamentary debates not only continued my first studies of parliamentary debates in *Elite Discourse and Racism*, but also broadened the empirical field of discourse from conversations, news in the press and textbooks to political discourse. Also my later theoretical and critical work on context and knowledge would often be applied to the analysis of parliamentary debates (Van Dijk, 2008, 2009).

Racism and Ideology

The theory of racism and its discursive reproduction since my first book on discourse and prejudice (Van Dijk, 1984) was firmly established within a sociocognitive paradigm, defining prejudices as socially shared mental representations of dominant ethnic groups. These prejudices were in turn related to more fundamental underlying social representations: racist ideologies. Yet, despite its earlier interest in prejudice and its later development of the social cognition paradigm in the USA and the social representation paradigm in France, social psychology had hardly paid attention to ideologies — a topic usually left to political science and philosophy. Thus, although I had earlier founded the dominant system of racism sociocognitively on racist ideologies, I only had an approximate idea about the more general notion of ideology. The same was true for other CDA studies — which routinely dealt with various kinds of ideologies of race, gender and class, but hardly within an explicit account of the precise sociocognitive nature of ideologies. Conversely, studies of the sociopolitical dimensions of ideology ignored both the sociocognitive nature as well as the discursive acquisition and reproduction of ideologies.

Hence at the end of the 1990s, I started a long-year project on discourse and ideology, initially with a general, multidisciplinary monograph *Ideology* (Van Dijk, 1998). This book should later be followed by books on ideology and cognition, ideology and society and

ideology and discourse. This new multidisciplinary theory of ideology also proposed an integrated sociocognitive and discursive approach, by defining ideologies as the abstract underlying system of the socially shared attitudes of social groups. Thus, racist ideologies control and are originally derived from more specific ethnic prejudices. Not surprisingly, the 1998 book illustrated this first multidisciplinary theory of ideology with the example of racist ideology and a critical analysis of a racist book by prominent rightwing ideologue De Souza in the USA. In other words, much of my later theoretical work naturally found its inspiration and application in empirical studies of racism. This was not only true for my study of news, parliamentary debates, textbooks, social cognition and ideology but also more generally for the study of discourse and domination as power abuse as a basis for CDA (Van Dijk, 2008).

Although a first formulation of ideology was presented in the 1998 book, the theory is still very much in its infancy. We have merely a vague idea of the cognitive nature of ideologies as mental representations and their organization, as well as their acquisition and relations to attitudes, norms and values and other socially shared representations. We still need to explore the precise social basis of ideologies as shared by social groups, how people become engaged in such groups and acquire ideologies by various kinds of text, talk and communication. And we only have begun to chart the discourse structures that express, convey and reproduce ideologies in everyday life. Indeed, such a huge, multidisciplinary program should be one of the major aims of CDA.

After 2000, the ideology project also gave rise to my later research on **knowledge** and discourse. If ideologies are defined as socially shared representations of social groups, one of the classical topics of debate, also in the sociology of knowledge (e.g. by Mannheim and others), was how to distinguish between knowledge and ideology. In order to be able to continue the study of the sociocognitive nature of ideology, it thus had become crucial to first examine the detailed structures and functions of socially shared knowledge — a major project that would take many years to develop and execute, and that is still in its earlier stages.

Discourse and Context: The Relativity of Racism

Besides my contributions to CDA on racism and discourse and political discourse, among other topics, my aim has been to also develop fundamental theory, e.g., on racism as a system of domination, on elite discourse, on prejudice, ideology and knowledge. One of these general notions is that of context — a concept often used in CDA, as well as elsewhere, but seldom defined. Hence, in the mid-2000s, my theoretical framework was further extended by a multidisciplinary project on context (Van Dijk, 2008, 2009). In this project contexts were defined as (pragmatic) context models that control how speakers

adapt what they say, and especially how they say it, to the parameters of the communicative situation *as they subjectively define it*. This theoretical attention is crucial to explain why underlying racist social attitudes or personal opinions are not always expressed or otherwise displayed: This also depends on Setting (Place, Time), Participants (and their identities, roles and relationships), Goals, current Social Acts as well as Knowledge. The important methodological implication of such a definition of context is that discourse can only be called racist, as a social practice, given specific contextual conditions, that is, given specific settings, participants and their roles and relations, as well as their intentions, goals and ideologies. This means that the ‘same’ thing in one context may be racist and not in another context — as we already know from the use of the seemingly self-derogatory use of the N-word by black adolescents in the USA. For the methodology of research into discourse and racism, this understanding of contexts as subjective context models is crucial — because it requires not only detailed analysis of text or talk, but also of communicative situations.

Racism and Discourse in Spain and Latin America

Whereas 1980 both in my personal and academic life meant a significant change of perspective and experience, the same is true twenty years later, when I left the Netherlands and soon also my chair at the University of Amsterdam, and went to live and work in Barcelona, Spain, and at the same time further extended my already frequent contacts with, and travels in Latin America. It could be expected that my earlier studies of racism and discourse in Western Europe and North America would thus be broadened to Spain and Latin America.

Earlier research of, and contacts with Luisa Martin Rojo, in Madrid, both within the European CDA group, as well as within the *Racism at the Top* project, already had established the (at first still moderate) role of racist discourse in Spain, although most of the immigrants of Spain only started to arrive after 2000. Also in Spain, the marked increase of immigration was accompanied by an explosion of political, media and academic discourse on immigration, generally following the patterns of similar public elsewhere in Western Europe: a rather negative focus on first arrival of “waves” of immigrants from Africa by *pateras*, as well as from South America, and a stereotypical emphasis on religious and other cultural differences, and hence on problems of integration of Moroccans, Chinese, Pakistani and others. And, again as elsewhere in Europe, this negative portrayal of immigrants in elite discourse stimulated increasing forms of popular racism against “moros” and “sudacas”. On the other hand, also here elite discourse on racism and the experiences of the newcomers was scant, thus following the ideological strategy of mitigating Our negative characteristics, as was also shown in the studies by Luisa Martin Rojo, Antonio Bañón and the documentary activities of the Mugak collective led by Peio Aierbe in Bask

country, among others. My own empirical work on racism and discourse in Spain was generally limited to the press, parliamentary discourse and textbooks (Van Dijk, 2003, 2005).

My earlier frequent visits to many countries in Latin America finally resulted in a further extension of the project to the study of racism in several Latin American countries (Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Peru), resulting in an edited book with contributions from experts from these countries — a book published in Spanish, Portuguese and English (Van Dijk, 2007). Since this research, by several scholars, was also regularly reported in the bi-annual meetings of ALED (Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso), the topic soon became more popular also in Latin America, where the discrimination of indigenous peoples and people from African descent by people from European descent remains a major, though often ignored or denied, social problem.

Theoretical and Empirical Conclusions

After this general summary of the mega-project of discourse and racism, spanning the three decades between 1980 and 2010, it is imperative to formulate some of its theoretical and empirical conclusions, some of which have already briefly been mentioned above.

Defining racism as a system of ethnic domination

International studies of racism in the last decades of the 20th century generally focused on the sociology of immigration and ethnic relations, that is, on patterns of discrimination and exclusion and on problems of integration and social cohesion, on the one hand, and on the social psychology of prejudice, on the other hand. Compared to the blatant earlier forms of explicit ‘racial’ racism, for instance during segregation in the USA and Apartheid in South Africa, the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, on the one hand, and world-wide decolonization internationally, on the other hand, led to more indirect forms of ‘new’ and ‘symbolic’ racism that increasingly focused on cultural differences. Few of these studies paid attention to the fundamental role of discourse in the reproduction of racism.

Our project therefore took a different, multidisciplinary perspective that would integrate the study of racism in the broader framework of the relations between discourse, social cognition and society. Thus, first of all, racism was defined as a social system of ethnic domination, that is, as a form of power abuse of dominant European groups, not only in Europe and North America, but also elsewhere. This system has to major dimension, namely a sociocognitive system of socially shared ethnic prejudices and ideologies, on the

hand, and a system of discrimination or “everyday racism” in interaction and its political and organizational embedding, on the other hand. Secondly, discourse is the crucial interface of these two subsystems. On the one hand, dominant group members “learn” racist prejudices and ideologies through various forms of public discourse, especially through political and media discourse. On the other hand, discourse is itself a social practice and hence constitutes part of the discrimination and everyday racism that defines the social manifestation of the system of racism. In other words, racism as a system of domination is daily reproduced by racist practices, including by text and talk, based on the underlying prejudices and ideologies shared by white Europeans. Given the control by the symbolic elites of public discourse, our sociology of racism specifically focuses on the role of these elites in the pre-formulation and legitimation of racism in society, thus spawning popular racism exacerbated by unemployment, crime and problems of urban decay and ethnic relations in poor neighborhoods. In this way, the symbolic elites were able to deny their own — sometimes subtle — racism and to blame it on the people, thus legitimating their own policies, e.g., of immigration restrictions and negative media coverage of minorities and immigrants.

The logic of this complex theoretical racism is straightforward. Racist ideologies and practices are not innate, but learned. They are largely acquired by public discourse. Such discourse is controlled by the symbolic elites. Hence, the symbolic elites bear a major responsibility in the daily production and reproduction of the various kinds of racism in society, even when popular racism may thus become a social force of its own. This popular racism in turn legitimates the symbolic elites to formulate more radical forms of racist discourse and immigration policies, as we have been able to observe in the political and social developments in Western Europe during the last decades. Much of the empirical research of this and related projects have been able to show these processes at work in the dominant discourses in politics, the mass media, research and education.

Racist prejudices and ideologies as forms of social cognition

The sociocognitive basis of our theoretical framework, though inspired by the new social cognition paradigm in social psychology after 1980, was similarly grounded in a broader social and discursive perspective going beyond the typical laboratory studies of social psychology. Data for this research were obtained by informal, non-directed interviewing of people of different social background in different neighborhoods in the Netherlands and California — and later elsewhere — on the one hand, as well as by systematic analysis of elite discourse of various organizations, on the other hand. The theoretical assumption of this approach was that underlying prejudices and ideologies will tend to be expressed not only in non-verbal discriminatory practices, but also through text

and talk. Discourse thus became a primary source of evidence for underlying social representations. In order to avoid circularity, however, it is crucial to take account the fundamental role of context. Discourse is not a direct expression of underlying ethnic or other attitudes, but is adapted to the way participants interpret and represent the relevant parameters of the communicative situation in their context models. This means, for instance, that among family members, friends or ideological partners, people may formulate their ethnic prejudices without much restraint, but in other contexts they may avoid or transform their underlying racist attitudes in many ways, for instance by familiar racist disclaimers (“I am not a racist, but...”).

It is within such a complex sociocognitive framework and with the methodological caveats spurned by the theory of context that we were able to formulate the basic dimensions of ethnic prejudices and ideologies by a systematic study of the structures and strategies of talk and text about immigrants and minorities. Thus, racist ideologies, as well as other ideologies, tend to be organized by a polarized representation of Us vs. Them, where positive characteristics of the ingroup and negative characteristics of the outgroup are emphasized, whereas Our own negative properties (such as racism) and the positive characteristics of Them tend to be mitigated.

Racism and the Structures of Discourse

Given the pivotal role of discourse both in the acquisition of racist mental representations, as well as in their social and political reproduction by the symbolic elites, a systematic study of the structures of various genres of text and talk have been the center of this project. Practically, this means that we need to examine which properties of discourse are typical or possible expressions or manifestations of underlying ethnic prejudices and ideologies.

Methodologically, such a study has both top-down and bottom-up discovery procedures. Thus, top down, if underlying ideological structures tend to be polarized between Us vs. Them, we may expect to find such polarization also in discourse, and not only in the use of the pronouns *Us* and *Them* themselves. On the other hand, bottom-up, systematic observation of what dominant group members tend to talk and write about and how when they talk and write about Others, provide the concrete empirical basis of a study of racist discourse.

Within such a combined methodological framework of theoretical prediction and empirical observation, analysis of everyday conversations, news and opinion articles in the press, political debates as well as textbooks, yielded detailed insight in the forms and meanings of racist discourse, which may be summarized as follows:

- a. **Topics.** Talk and text about ethnic others tend to be limited to a few dominant topics, which may be summarized by the keywords *Difference*, *Deviance* and *Threat*. Others are first of all perceived as (very) different from us, not only in appearance, but also socially and culturally (habits, religion, etc.), whereas similarities between Us and Them tend to be ignored. Although such difference may initially still be associated by exoticism, it soon deteriorates into a focus on unacceptable differences, that is, into deviance, for instance of religion (such as the use of hijab or burka by Muslim some women, or the construction of mosques), or the assumed unwillingness or inability to learn “our” language and otherwise the lack of adapting themselves to our culture, norms and values. Finally, the other may be perceived as a threat when they are defined as “waves” or as “invaders” of our country, as a threat to Western values and norms, or when they are seen as aggressive and criminal. Such dominant negative topics are consistent with the underlying ideological characterization of Them as an outgroup. Similarly, we may expect, and do find, that Our racism as a topic is marginal in all public discourse, unless it can be blamed on marginal ingroup members (the “Others” among Us), such as Neonazis, the Extreme Right or football hooligans. Racism as a property of the symbolic elites obviously is seldom or never topicalized in dominant discourse — and hence also in popular talk inspired by elite discourse of politicians and the mass media.
- b. **Local meanings.** This general pattern of ethnic polarization may also be observed at the micro levels of discourse meaning, for instance in lexical items, person and group descriptions, implications and presuppositions and metaphors. Thus, our group members tend to be described as normal, modern, tolerant, intelligent, hard-working, responsible and law-abiding, whereas the Others (immigrants, minorities) tend to be described as strange, traditional or backward, intolerant, aggressive and as criminal — with few exceptions of some “like us” who confirm the racist rule. Metaphors emphasize Their negative characteristics, beginning with the representation of immigration as invasion, whereas metonymies mitigate our negative ones, as is the case for the account of Our racism in terms of popular discontent. Several types of global discourse strategies and their local moves, such as disclaimers combine positive self-presentation (“We are not racist...”, “We have no problems with immigrants...”) with immediately following and dominant negative other-presentation (“but...”).
- c. **Other structures.** Whereas the general structures of polarization may be observed in global and local meanings, also the other structures of text and talk may contribute to the racist representation of the others. Thus, multimodal media discourse may emphasize the negative properties of Them by prominent

placement of articles on the front page, large headlines, pictures and cartoons. They may do so by active sentences focusing on Their negative actions, and passive sentence hiding ours. The general system of limited access to public discourse is specifically detrimental for members of minority groups, both as sources of news as well as for minority journalists. Hence, if at all, the Others and their organizations and spokespersons will seldom be cited, and if so, in a negative or cautious way, using double quotes to emphasize the controversial or unreliable nature of their evidence or the doubtful nature of their opinions.

Obviously, this is only a brief summary of the many findings of 30 years of research in our own project as well as many others that have been started world-wide on discourse and racism. Each of the findings on the structures of discourse need to be specified for the different national and communicative contexts and genres studied. News and editorials have different structures than parliamentary debates and textbooks, mainly depending on the goals and functions of these discourse types in society, and the same is true for the ways they express and reproduce racist prejudices. Whereas much (though not all!) parliamentary debates today may be cautious with their negative characterization of immigrants and minorities, the right wing press or internet sites may be very adamant and explicit. It is therefore crucial to always take into account the context of discourse in order to make reliable conclusions about their racist nature.

Racism and Colonialism

Our project has focused on ‘white’, European, racism and its discourses. Obviously, such racism has its historical roots as well as its role outside of Europe. Earlier it served as the legitimation of slavery and colonialism. Today it serves to ‘curb’ immigration, especially from the South to the North, on the one hand, and to control immigrants and minorities once established in the North.

Our research has repeatedly found parallelisms between various kinds of racisms and colonialisms. First of all, both in the mass media as well as in textbooks, there is remarkable similarity between the representation of Other ‘here’ with ‘Us’, as well as ‘over there’ in the South. Trivially, this is first of all because the Others among us are typically from the South, in the first place. But more generally, we found that dominant discourse about Them, anytime, anywhere, stereotypically associated the Others with backwardness, traditionalism, primitiveness, intolerance, aggression (terrorism, etc.) and crime, and more generally not satisfying “our” prominent norms and values.

Secondly, our research of discourse and racism in Latin America has shown that very similar patterns of racist text and talk characterize the symbolic elites of European descent,

for instance in political discourse, the mass media, textbooks and everyday conversations. If colonialism has left its mark in Latin America, as well as more generally in the South, such is not only obvious in political structure and economic power, but also in public discourse. This means, first of all, a general denial or ignorance of racism, and an emphasis on assumed 'racial democracy', even where blatant forms of racism against indigenous and African-Latin peoples remain prevalent. Access to public discourse in politics, the mass media and science is generally reserved for the elites of European descent. With some exceptions of prominent leaders, indigenous and black people seldom have a public voice. As soon as they claim and defend their rights, they are soon branded as terrorists, as is the case for the Mapuche in Chile and indigenous people in Mexico and elsewhere. People of African descent, as elsewhere, tend to be associated with various forms of deviance, crime or drugs, or at most with non-dominant forms of culture (music, etc.) — and play subordinate roles in the ubiquitous telenovelas. If quotas are necessary, as in Brazil, to compensate for bad public education so that they are able to enter the elite universities, elite discourse, also on the Left, denounces them as reverse discrimination, while an intolerable assault on white privilege. Beauty queens in Venezuela are seldom recruited among the African population. Whereas indigenous people elsewhere are small minorities (as in Brazil and Chile), when they are large minorities or majorities, as in Mexico and Bolivia, their raise to minimum forms of (formal) power are often accompanied by stereotypes and negative coverage, as is the case for dominant discourse about President Morales in Bolivia, or the official reactions against the Zapata uprising in Chiapas, Mexico.

These few examples not only show the obvious inequalities in the power structures between people of European descent and the others in Latin America, thus reproducing the structures established during colonialism, but also the dominant discourses and ideologies that form the basis and the legitimation of ethnic domination. We are only beginning to chart the more detailed properties of such discourse in Latin America and hence as yet have only a very general picture of the way European racism and neocolonialism continue to be reproduced by such discourse throughout the world.

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