"It's Not Racist To Impose Limits On Immigration": Constructing The Boundaries Of Racism In The Asylum And Immigration Debate

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Abstract

This paper addresses how members who argue for limiting asylum and immigration in the UK construct and deal with accusations that they are racist. An action orientation focussed discourse analysis is conducted on public sphere data gathered primarily from the British general election campaign of 2005. Opponents of immigration and asylum are shown constructing accusations of racism as a way of stifling a 'proper' debate about asylum and immigration. As a result of this, supporters of asylum and immigration are seen using rhetorical delicacy when attempting to make accusations of racism in anticipation of, and in order to deflect, such criticism. It is suggested that in debates about asylum there appears to be an additional disclaimer so that as well as 'I'm not racist...but' participants are seen claiming that 'I'm not calling you racist...but'. The implications of this analysis for discursive psychologists interested in the construction of racism and wider debates about asylum and immigration are discussed.

Keywords: Asylum seekers, racism, prejudice, disclaimers.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Asylum seeking, and the distinct but often conflated issue of immigration (Goodman and Speer 2007), have become very dominant issues in British public debate (IPPR 2003; Randall 2003; Schuster 2004; Verkuyten 2005). Asylum seeking was one of the most important issues of the British general election of 2005, which was described by Liberal spokesman Mark Oaten as a 'bidding war about who can be nastiest to asylum seekers' (Oaten, 2005). This 'nastiness' refers to the lack of rights and harsh measures that are used against asylum seekers (Schuster 2004; Verkuyten 2005; see also Goodman 2007, 2008a; Goodman and Speer 2007). As part of this campaign the Conservative opposition party launched a poster with the slogan 'it's not racist to impose limits on immigration'. This slogan highlights (and explicitly rejects) the idea that attempts to limit immigration are based on racism, and in doing so highlights the controversy around making such a claim. This interest in immigration showed no sign of abating in the 2010 British general election campaign.[1]

In this paper discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter 1992) is used to explore how members who wish to limit asylum in the UK construct and deal with accusations that they are racist. First, the discursive approach to prejudice, and in particular prejudice denial, is presented. Next the data analysis is introduced and presented in three sections: (1) An example of an accusation of prejudice, (2) Opponents of asylum claiming that such accusations are an assault on free speech, and (3) Supporters of asylum showing delicacy in making accusation of racism. Finally the discussion explores a possible taboo on making accusation of racism and its implications for our understanding of prejudice and for supporters of asylum.

1.2 Discursive Psychology

Discursive psychologists (Edwards and Potter 1992; Every and Augoustinos 2007; Lynn and Lea 2003) reject traditional social psychological cognitive approaches to prejudice (e.g. Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Oakes *et al.* 1999; Pratto *et al.* 2001; Tajfel and Turner 1986) claiming that these approaches cannot account for the variation in, and interactional work accomplished by talk about prejudice. Instead, discursive psychologists focus on the action orientation of language (for example Billig *et al.* 1988; Figgou and Condor 2006; Speer and Potter 2000; Wetherell and Potter 1992) which means that rather than viewing people's talk as a reflection of their inner thoughts and beliefs, speech is viewed as a social event designed to *do* something, such as make a request, manage the speakers stake, or justify particular treatments of others.

Discursive psychology has been particularly effective in studying racist language. Numerous studies have shown that people attempt to avoid potential accusations of prejudice and racism even while justifying (arguably) prejudicial or racist actions, in what Billig calls the 'norm against prejudice' (1988: 95; see also Augoustinos *et al.* 2005; Capdevila and Callaghan 2008; Every and Augoustinos 2007; Potter and Wetherell 1988; van den Berg *et al.* 2003; van Dijk 1993; Wetherell and Potter 1992). Billig *et al.* (1988) treat this norm as a culturally held value, which means that it is a norm widely accepted across a culture (in this case that of the UK) that everyone is expected to adhere to. Therefore speakers avoid producing 'racist talk' so as not be seen violating this norm.

This is why the disclaimer 'I'm not prejudiced, because some of my best friends are Jews, but...' (Hewitt and Stokes 1975: 3), or simply 'I'm not prejudiced, but...' (Billig *et al.* 1988: 112; see also van den Berg 2003), are so common. Disclaimers are a rhetorical device for presenting the speaker as non-prejudiced even when saying arguably prejudicial things. Existing data shows that this norm appears to be operating even in the discourse of far-right, and arguably racist groups such as the British National Party (BNP) who claim that their opposition to immigration and asylum 'isn't a matter of colour' (Goodman and Speer 2007). Paradoxically, by disclaiming racism, one demonstrates an interactional orientation that what is about to be said may be interpreted by recipients as problematic in some way and as something requiring delicacy (e.g. van Dijk 2000).

van Dijk (1993) suggests that the taboo against being racist is so far reaching that accusing someone of being 'racist' is itself problematic. It is deemed by

members to be far too extreme an accusation for what he describes as 'modern or moderate racism' (1993: 180). Instead, he claims that the term 'racism' 'is seen to apply only to overt right-wing racism (or to racism abroad) [while] the terms discrimination, resentment or xenophobia are used to describe various manifestations of such everyday racism' (1993: 180).

1.3. Discursive Psychology and Asylum

There is a growing literature of (critically informed) discursive psychological analyses of talk about asylum. War and natural disaster analogies (e.g. 'invasion' and 'flood') have been shown to be used to make people coming into a host nation appear to be a serious problem (e.g. van Dijk 2000; van der Valk 2003). It has also been shown how an asylum seeking 'them' is distinguished from a British 'us' which makes asylum seekers seem unworthy of support (Lynn and Lea 2003, 2005; Mehan 1997; van den Berg *et al.* 2003; van der Valk 2003; van Dijk 1997; Verkuyten 2001, 2003, 2005) and that a rhetorical separation (Lynn and Lea 2003) and conflation (Goodman and Speer 2007) of 'genuine' and 'bogus' asylum seekers function to present all asylum seekers as potentially illegitimate while allowing speakers to appear caring about those labelled 'genuine'. Lynn and Lea (2003) have also shown how the needs of poorer British people are favoured ahead on needy people from abroad. Goodman (2008a) has shown how the harsh treatment of asylum seekers can be justified on the ground of protecting social cohesion, which allows policy makers and commentators to appear to be opposed to prejudice while implementing and supporting policies which discriminate against asylum seekers.

1.4 Analytic Approach

This analysis supports the existing discursive research on race talk and the taboo on racism by showing how opposition to asylum is presented despite this taboo (see also Goodman 2007; 2008a; Goodman and Speer 2007). These findings are built upon by showing the way in which those supporting tighter controls on asylum have limited the ability of supporters of asylum to make accusations of racism, by suggesting that such accusations are a form of censorship. It is shown how this has led to the use of an additional disclaimer in asylum and immigration debates where supporters of asylum appear to be disclaiming that they are making accusations of racism. In keeping with the discursive psychological approach, this analysis is not about determining whether the Conservative party's claim that 'it's not racist to impose limits on immigration' is factual or not. Instead it is concerned with how 'racism' is constructed, oriented to, and used in the debate about asylum seekers. In doing so, this goes some way towards answering Figgou and Condor's observation that social (and discursive) psychologists have not addressed exactly what lay-people mean by 'prejudice' (2006; see also Every and Augoustinos 2007).

This analysis is informed by a critical interpretation of discursive psychology (sometimes referred to as 'critical discursive psychology' (e.g. van den Berg *et al.* 2003: 7)) which retains the key assumptions, in particular the action orientation of talk (Edwards and Potter, 1992), and analytic rigour of the original discursive psychologists (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992; Wetherell and

Potter 1992) while also paying particular attention to 'the social and political consequences of discursive patterning' (Wetherell 1998: 405). Discourse analysis is the research method associated with discursive psychology, although Potter has suggested that the two cannot be separated as discursive psychology is a paradigm or 'a whole perspective on social life and research into it' (1996: 130)

This analysis is not designed to make essentialist claims that talking about asylum is necessarily racist. However, it seems that many people demanding a debate about asylum are those who favour a stricter approach to asylum seeking, an approach which does amounts to the exclusion of 'others' living within the socially constructed boundaries of the UK (see Billig, 1995; Reicher and Hopkins, 2001). Excluding asylum seekers is likely to prolong their mistreatment as they may have to continue suffering the conditions they are fleeing, conditions unlikely to be deemed acceptable for British citizens. The asylum debate can therefore be seen as one which 'sustains and legitimates social inequalities' (Wetherell 2003: 21).

2. Data

The analysis explores how those opposing asylum in the UK construct and respond to accusations that they are racist. In doing so Leudar and Nekvapil's (2004) concept of the 'dialogical network', which is influenced by Bakhtin's writings on polyphony (1973) and the dialogic nature of discourse (1981) is drawn upon. Dialogical networks are debates that are played out in a linked series of forums, here in the mass media. These debates consist of coherently organised arguments, but are asynchronous, so do not follow the same organisational patterns as face-to-face conversation. Speakers may respond to earlier parts of the network, which in turn may consist of several, spatially isolated, utterances. This means that the apparently diverse range of extracts used in this analysis are all part of the same wide debate.

Two points need to be made about the extracts. First the distinct issues of asylum and immigration have tended to be conflated in public debate (Goodman and Speer 2007; Steiner 2000). Therefore extracts referring to either or both asylum and immigration have been included in this analysis. Second, much of the talk about race in the asylum debate takes the form of 'laypersons'' discourse analysis where members comment on the use of language in other parts of the debate. Therefore much of this analysis could be described as a 'meta discourse analysis' in which members' own analyses are analysed. This demonstrates how the use of 'racism' in the asylum debate is a participants' concern.

The data in this paper is drawn from a large corpus of 'public domain media texts' (Leudar *et al*. 2004: 245); that is, data readily available in the public sphere debate about asylum. Such data allows the analyst to address issues that are prominent in public debates. This corpus, collected between November 2002 and September 2006, consists of thirty hours of taped television debate programmes, news items, speeches, interviews and documentaries about asylum seeking. This corpus is supplemented with data from newspaper articles, websites and publications by interested pressure

groups and political institutions. The majority of the extracts analysed in this paper are part of the debate around the British general election campaign of 2005 in which the issue of controlled immigration and asylum was a major part. Printed extracts did not need transcribing and are represented as published. Spoken extracts were transcribed according to a 'simplified version of the Jeffersonian' convention (Clarke *et al.* 2004: 535) which includes details of the talk (underline represents emphasis, (.) represents a pause and .hh an in breath, talk within >< is spoken quickly and : represents elongations and capitals are spoken loudly) while remaining accessible to all readers.

To conduct the analysis the data were read thoroughly and it soon became clear that talk about racism, and accusations of racism was an important feature of the debate. Extracts relating to this were then analysed in more detail to look for what was being achieved rhetorically (the action orientation) in each case and what discursive strategies were being used. Strategies identified include the use of concepts such as interpretative repertoires, which have been described as the 'building blocks of conversation', a range of linguistic resources that can be drawn upon and utilized in the course of everyday interaction' (Edley 2001: 198). In this case it can be seen how the repertoire of 'prejudice is irrational' is challenged with a repertoire of the importance of free speech. Extracts included in the analysis were chosen as exemplars to represent and illustrate the rhetorical strategies being described.

3. Analysis

This analysis is divided into three sections. It begins by reviewing a direct accusation of racism. Second, it explores how opponents of asylum respond to – and significantly, pre-empt - such accusations. Finally, it investigates the ways in which supporters of asylum orient to the rhetorical problems of making accusations of racism by showing great delicacy when doing so.

3.1 A Direct Accusation of Racism

The analysis begins with a demonstration of a direct accusation of racism by a supporter of asylum, the first part of this dialogical network, looks like. This first extract contains a direct accusation of racism directed at the government. This extract is from an analysis of a message board about the 'Section nine laws' proposed for asylum seekers in the UK (Goodman 2007). These laws were designed to take into care the children of failed asylum seekers with the rationale that this would prevent those children from becoming destitute. These measures were controversial because they could also mean the separating of failed asylum seeking families.

Extract (1): F Franklin, Hulme, Manchester 24/08/2005 at 15:12[2]

1.   I'm glad that for once the council is standing up to National Government
2.   and not allowing social workers to be used as tools of some very
3.   oppressive and dubious legislation. Surely social workers are meant to
4.   take children into care if they are in danger, not separate them from
5.   loving families in order to serve someone else's racist and illogical
6.   immigration policy that thinks human rights are a numbers game not

7.   obligation under international law?

F Franklin describes the government's policies explicitly as racist (by directly using the term 'racist' in line 5) in a rhetorical strategy to undermine the Section Nine policies. He presents racism as synonymous with oppression (which invokes an extreme outcome of racism) and as illogical, consistent with Edward's claim that '*any* kind of prejudice is tantamount to irrationality' (Edwards, 2003: 40, emphasis in original). By using an accusation of racism to undermine an anti-asylum policy, Franklin is orienting to the 'norm against prejudice' (Billig 1988:94) and using this norm to bolster his/her argument against Section Nine and in favour of asylum seekers. In the next section it can be seen how accusations of racism such as this are made to be problematic.

3.2 Opponents' Response: Accusations of Racism Stifle the Debate

This section contains extracts which all show members who are opposed to asylum orienting to the 'norm against prejudice' (Billig 1988:94) by claiming that it prevents a debate on asylum. Extract two is a newspaper column written by Kilroy-Silk, after being sacked from BBC television for making anti-Islamic comments in this newspaper. Kilroy-Silk was a popular television presenter with his own talk show who became controversial after some high profile anti-Islamic and anti-immigration comments and when he became a member of the European parliament as a representative of the UK Independence party, a right-wing and anti-immigration party. Kilroy-Silk can be seen to be responding[3] to this condemnation by blaming the cultural norm against prejudice for preventing debate about, amongst other issues, asylum.

   Extract (2): Sunday Express. Robert Kilroy-Silk. 23/01/05

1.   The trouble with this country is that we are not allowed to
2.   tell the truth about certain things - such as immigration,
3.   asylum, multiculturalism and race - without being
4.   pilloried. But straight talk is needed.

The argument here is that you cannot say what you think about issues to do with race without being accused of racism. van der Valk (2001) has shown that the far right can rhetorically use the norm against prejudice in a way which makes them appear to be battling this 'unfair' taboo. Kilroy-Silk is using a similar strategy to manage his own stake (Edwards and Potter 1992) and anti-asylum position. His contentious comments are therefore presented as designed to preserve the value of free speech (or 'straight talk' in line 4). Therefore, this taboo that results from the 'norm against prejudice' (Billig 1988: 94) is manipulated by Kilroy-Silk to argue against the multiculturalism the taboo is supposedly meant to protect.

The following extracts are taken from an internet discussion on the BBC website about Michael Howard's, (the then Conservative opposition party leader), plans to put a quota on the number of asylum seekers who could enter the country in any one year.[4] Here members of the public can be seen using the same argument as Kilroy-Silk above.

Extract (3): Have your say. Howard's asylum plans: Your views. BBC 26/01/05[5]

1.   It is about time that someone spoke up for the majority of people in
2.   this country who are genuinely worried about the impact of
3.   immigration on the very fabric of or *[sic]* society. For too long, anyone
4.   who dared challenge the immigration system was shouted down as a
5.   racist, but it isn't about racism, it is about protecting the way of life of
6.   this country, and providing a safe future for our children. After all, it is
7.   our children that the future is all about. He has now got my vote.
8.   *Richard Dixon, Herts, UK*

Extract (4): Have your say. Howard's asylum plans: Your views. BBC 26/01/05

1.   I think Michael Howard is a politician not frightened to talk about and
2.   act upon something that concerns the vast majority, but which a
3.   minority try to smother as racism. Blair and Kennedy are very weak
4.   on this subject. Howard will get my vote without any doubt.
5.   *Les, Morpeth, England*

Both extracts begin with a statement of support for Howard's breaking of the taboo against prejudice. This serves to work up the taboo as problematic and as something that must be fought. Therefore both Dixon and Les claim to support Howard for this reason. Howard's comments are given credibility by both speakers through the claims that he is speaking on behalf of the public. This means that they are making a lay analysis of his 'footing' (Goffman 1991). Both extracts continue with a direct criticism of the norm against prejudice. This is achieved by suggesting that free speech cannot in fact freely be expressed, but instead requires courage to be done publically (which can be seen through the use of 'dared' (3:4) and 'not frightened' (4:1)). This barrier to free speech is attributed to the 'norm against prejudice' (Billig 1988: 94) which is maintained through simplistic accusations of racism (3:3-5 and 4:2-3). Here 'shouted down' and 'smother' are used like Kilroy-Silk's 'pilloried' to account for the (allegedly) unfair way in which the taboo against prejudice prevents talk about these issues. That these two extracts are so similar in both their content and structure suggests that this argument is a rhetorically useful, and generalisable (Goodman 2008b), one. Note also how Dixon, like Kilroy-Silk, conflates the immigration system with asylum policy (Goodman and Speer 2007).

Unlike Les, Dixon (extract 3) directly orients to the taboo by explicitly disclaiming (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975) that this opposition to asylum is racist ('but it isn't about racism,' on lines 5-6). The disclaimer is bolstered with a purportedly non-racist account for his opposition, which is that he is interested in protecting the children of this country. It is therefore the suppression of talk about asylum, rather than the policies which are justified by such talk, that are deemed to be problematic and immoral. This disclaimer, however, allows for the arguably racist claim that asylum is damaging to British children, to be made. This is an example of what Billig *et al.* describe as discourse that 'simultaneously deplores, denies and protects prejudice' (1988: 114).

The following extract contains an extreme version of this critique of the taboo against prejudice on the grounds that it prevents freedom of speech. Here, the British National Party (BNP) leader, Nick Griffin, is making a statement outside court after being charged with incitement to racial hatred. This statement concluded the party's election broadcast in the 2005 general election campaign. This earlier section of the broadcast contrasted the plight of a homeless ex-soldier with the (supposedly) preferential treatment received by asylum seekers.

Extract (5): BNP Party Election Broadcast 21/04/05[6]

1. Crowd   NICK WE LOVE YOU [cheering for 10 seconds]
2. Griffin   I've been cha:rged (.) under a la:w (.) which says the truth
3.   is no defence (.) with incitem<u>ent</u> (.) to racial hatred (.) one of
4.   the speeches (.) for which I'm accused of inciting racial hatred
5.   (.) was delivered in Keighley (.) where I was talking about the: (.)
6.   endemic problem (.) o:f (.) heroin (.) and (.) grooming of young
7.   girls (.) >I think its very important that these< issues are
8.   got out (.) and are dis<u>cussed</u> (2.0) I don't (.) regret (.) saying (.)
9.   >anything at all< because all I've said is the truth (.) if they
10.   want to send me to <u>jail</u> (.) for telling the truth (.) then I'll come
11.   out of jail and I'll carry on (.) telling the truth

Griffin distinguishes 'truth' (mentioned repeatedly, lines 1, 9, 10 and 11) and those who prevent this truth from being spoken. To Griffin, the 'norm against prejudice' is so far reaching that it is an instrument of the state in the form of the crime inciting racial hatred. Griffin was accused of breaking this law, which is designed to prevent public comments considered offensive enough to lead to racism, after he suggested that immigrants were involved in pimping and paedophilia.[7] Griffin makes no other reference to 'race' in this statement; instead he refers to non-racial - and yet problematic - issues (here drug use and paedophilia) which removes any racial connotations from his remarks, even though they had been aimed at specific ethnic groups (Asians and Muslims in Britain). This is an example of what Billig described as a situation where 'the speaker who wishes to express discriminatory views must be ready to search for, and find, suitable reasons' (1988: 103) for it. To Griffin, incitement to racial hatred functions to prevent free speech. This explains his theme of defiance against censorship throughout the speech and his extreme case formulation that he would even defy a jail sentence in his fight against this taboo (lines 9-11), which is met with loud applause that signals support for his comments.

The following extract, from a televised BBC debate about asylum, follows an interview with a supporter of the BNP. When the presenter and chair of the debate asks journalist Peter Hitchens, of the anti-asylum Mail newspaper, to account for such extremists, he does so by explicitly blaming the taboo against prejudice for preventing a debate about asylum, which he claims has helped extremist gain popularity.

Extract (6): Asylum: Face the Nation. BBC1 23/07/03

1. Murnaghan   OK well that's a question for all the politicians er in our
2.   audience but lets er (.) put that one to you Peter (.) Hitchens
3.   it is a big political problem isn't it we we've seen more the
4.   rise of extremism in British political society
5. Hitchens   well part of the reason for the rise of this very nasty extremism
6.   is the way in which the issue has been suppressed for a very
7.   long time by a smug (.) liberal elite (.) which isn't personally
8.   effected by it and ha and hasn't cared about it and has smeared
9.   (.) those who did try to raise it (.) repeatedly as racist (.) the real
10.   problem is (.) that a society which is (.) capable of being
11.   generous (.) has to be a society which is united (.) in some way
12.   around a series of ideas and beliefs and a culture (.) and if you
13.   have what we have now and lets call it by its proper name (.)
14.   mass illegal immigration .hhh that undermines that very culture

Hitchens accounts for a rise of extremism (such as the BNP featured above) by blaming the taboo against prejudice for preventing the discussion of the asylum issue. That is, he too presents the taboo against prejudice as a way of preventing a reasonable debate from happening because it, allegedly, allows for accusations of racism towards participants in the debate. It seems, however, that the 'debate' Hitchens wants is used as a euphemism for opposition to, and the preventing of, asylum into the country. What is significant here is that Hitchens blames the taboo against prejudice, and the censorship it is alleged to cause, for the rise in extremism which functions to present the taboo not only as failing to prevent prejudice, but also as helping to increase it. This means that Hitchens is arguing in opposition to the taboo against prejudice on two counts: first that it prevents debate and second that it is counterproductive and can actually increase prejudice (see Goodman 2008a).

This section has illustrated the way in which those arguing against asylum criticise the taboo against prejudice (Billig 1988: 94) and those who invoke this taboo through making accusations of racism. These accusations are presented as a way of stifling the debate about asylum so that they are seen as a form of censorship. This allows the speaker to align with the positive value of free speech while denying any prejudice in their opposition to asylum seekers in the UK.

3.3 Supporters of Asylum: Delicacy in Making Accusations of Racism

This section demonstrates how supporters of asylum attempt to make accusations of racism while orienting to the critique of making such accusations highlighted above. This is done by delivering accusations of racism with delicacy in a manner which resembles the type of disclaimers associated with making prejudicial arguments. In this next extract is from later in the televised debate in which Hitchens has made his critique of accusations of racism (above). Murnaghan, the chair, brings to attention Hitchens' comments and selects a supporter of asylum from the refugee council, to speak.

Extract (7): Asylum: Face the Nation BBC1 23/07/03

1. Murnaghan   Margaret Lalley from the refugee
2.   council so the the the press are doing the government's job
3.   is what Peter Hitchens' said
4. Lalley   No they're not I mean the problem with a lot of the press is
5.   that they're putting over myths and (.) .hhh things which
6.   aren't true and I certainly agree we should have a proper
7.   debate about this and (that) that isn't racist .hhh what can
8.   be racist is using inflammatory language and .hhh putting out
9.   misinformation if we look at what's happened over the last
10.   century .hhh (.) throughout that century there've been times
11.   when the press .hhh has talked about asylum seekers in very
12.   inflammatory language we saw the same in the nineteen thirties
13.   .hhh and indeed before that when (.) Jewish people were
14.   over clearly fleeing persecution .hhh it was the British press
15.   .hhh which has quite often opposed them coming over here

Lalley contrasts (a) not wanting to censor the debate (lines 6 and 7) with (b) claiming that certain aspects of the debate may be racist (lines 7-9) through the repetition of 'that isn't' (line 7) and 'what can be' (lines 7 and 8) 'racist' (both lines 7 and 8) (Atkinson, 1984). This contrast has a similar effect to a disclaimer 'I'm not *calling* you racist...but', which is almost the opposite of that identified by Hewitt and Stokes', 'I'm not racist...but' (1975: 3). Lalley's criticism of the media could potentially be seen as an allegation of racism so she orients to the potential difficulties now associated with such accusations (i.e. allegations of attempting to censor the debate) by explicitly stating that there should be a debate (lines 6 and 7). Further she dissociates herself from the subject position of being someone who makes unwarranted accusations of racism by drawing attention to her opinion that having a debate is not racist (line 7).

After rhetorically moving herself from this position Lalley does go on to make a statement about racism and in particular the negative portrayal of immigrants in the media. This statement is presented in a very delicate and subtle manner, which again suggests an orientation to the difficulties associated with making accusations of racism. In particular, instead of saying 'what *is* racist' Lalley says 'what *can* be racist' (lines 7 and 8). Lalley brings about this subtle accusation of racism by drawing parallels with the current newspaper treatment of asylum seekers with similar historical newspaper approaches which are now generally considered to have been racist.[8] This type of subtlety in making a claim has been noted to be used in disclaimers (e.g. Billig *et al* 1988). Often those calling for a debate about asylum are usually those opposed to asylum (e.g. Goodman 2008a). Lalley bucks this trend by calling for a debate precisely to argue for a more liberal approach to asylum.

In this next extract is a press release issued by the head of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Trevor Philips, as a response to the way in which the political parties were dealing with the issues of immigration and asylum in the British election campaign of 2005. The CRE has now become the Equality and human rights commission[9], still led by Trevor Philips and remains a 'non departmental public body' concerned with promoting racial equality. Again,

the potential repercussions of making an accusation of racism can be seen being oriented to.

Extract (8): Commission for Racial Equality statement on tone of electoral debates 12/04/05[10]

1.   CRE chair Trevor Phillips said:
2.   We are calling for political parties to engage the electorate in grown
3.   up, rational debates which do not become racialised. No subject should
4.   be off-limits for democratic debate, but we want politicians to realise
5.   that their words, and the tone of their words, may create tensions and
6.   conflict.

Here a press release is used to warn against potential prejudice in the election campaign. This warning orients to both the norm against prejudice (in which 'racialised' debates are constructed as problematic) and also the potential criticism that drawing on this norm can be seen as a form of censorship (lines 3-4). Phillips attends to this ideological dilemma (Billig *et al.* 1988) by presenting this warning in a way which works in a similar manner to a disclaimer: 'I don't want to prevent the debate, but your debate may be racist'. The use of 'but' (line 4), is a common feature of disclaimers (Hewitt and Stokes 1975). This shows that Phillips is orienting to the delicacy that is necessary in making accusations of racism.

In this final extract, Sherlock, the chief executive of Refugee Council, can also be seen orienting to the difficulties associated with a pro-asylum position, here in an interactional setting. Again, delicacy is applied to help to disclaim attempts to suppress the debate when alleging racism.

Extract (9): Newsnight BBC2 24/01/05

1. Paxman   well I hope we'll be able to get back to you in a second or two
2.   because we're joined now by Maive Sherlock who's chief
3.   executive of the refugee council and by Rodney (.) Hilton <u>Pots</u>
4.   who was winner of ITV's .hhh vote for me .hhh you can't deny::
5.   as is ex<u>emp</u>lified by mister Pots here is that <u>this</u> (.) i<u>:s</u> (.) <u>now</u>
6.   <u>ma:i:n</u>strea:m politics in this country
7. Sherlock   there is a <u>rea:l</u> public debate .hhh that needs to happen about
8.   immigration (.) I have no doubt about that at all .hhh where I
9.   would disagree with with with conservatives .hhh is I want to
10.   see that debate happening on the basis of <u>facts</u> and not my:ths (.)
11.   so for example .hhh its not helpful to have a debate (.) just about
12.   immigration in gene:ral .hhh which con<u>flates</u> together the issues
13.   of an of an investment banker from De:lhi: with a <u>language</u>
14.   student from Stockholm .hhh with somebody fleeing torture
15.   (.) from Zimbabwe .hhh what these proposals would actually do
16.   is en:d the right to asylum in Britain (.) <u>completely</u> (.) end the
17.   right to claim asylum (.) that's REALLY a fundamental change

The presenter, Paxman, a well known BBC political presenter recognised for his tough approach to political interviews, suggests the asylum debate is mainstream rather than only of interest to extremists, using a negative question formulation that is often oriented to by interviewees as the interviewer's own opinion (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 209). Sherlock

attends to this statement as though it were a manifestation of the criticism used by opponents of asylum that accusations of racism are used to stifle the debate.

Here Sherlock uses a concession to argue that she does not want to stifle the asylum debate. She concedes that a debate does need to happen (note the emphasis brought about through the use of 'at all' on line 8). However, this concession is followed by a claim that can be seen as subtly accusing those involved in the debate as being prejudicial (through the use of saying that this should be based on 'facts and not myths' in lines 9-10). Antaki and Wetherell (1999) suggest that by virtue of making a *show* of such a concession, the speaker is signalling that a concession needs to be made. In this situation it suggests that Sherlock is displaying a rhetorical awareness that a critique of harsh asylum and immigration policy can be heard as an attempt to censor debate; a claim that requires some rhetorical work to deny.

As with Lalley and Phillips, Sherlock argues about the way in which this debate should take place. The utterance 'real public debate' (line 7) is key here as this suggests that what has been happening is a distorted debate. Furthermore, the implicit accusation that many in the debate are prejudiced is made with the use of the delicate term 'myths' (line 10) to refer to what opponents of asylum have been saying. This shows once again that supporters of asylum make couched accusations of racism while rhetorically dissociating themselves from attempts to censor the debate.

This section has dealt with how supporters of asylum must deal with the rhetorical difficulties now associated with holding such a position. This is evident in the way accusations of racism are made in a very delicate and often implicit manner. Contrast pairs and disclaimers which resemble "I'm not calling you racist, but' are used by those defending asylum to show that they are not simply resorting to accusations of racism and that although they do not agree with what their opponents say, they do not intend to prevent a debate from taking place.

4. Discussion

This analysis began by showing what an accusation of racism in the asylum debate looks like. Such direct accusations are used by people arguing against the harsh treatment of asylum seekers and are designed to undermine the anti-asylum position by invoking the cultural norm against prejudice. Nevertheless, this rhetorical strategy is rare in this corpus, and is generally found in non-institutional settings used by members of the public. The low occurrence of such direct accusations of racism appears to be due to the rhetorical strategy employed by those arguing against asylum, who are critical of such accusations. This strategy presents accusations of racism as a form of censorship. Here, accusations of racism are presented as immoral because they break another cultural norm: freedom of speech. This strategy has reduced the rhetorical strength of direct accusations of racism. This is consistent with Capdevila and Callaghan's claim that

> any politician ... making accusations of racism ... runs the risk of the accusation of 'playing the race card'. The effect of this anxious silence around matters of

race in British politics means that it is quite possible for politicians to produce rhetoric that marginalizes and denigrates entire groups of people, without risk. (2008: 12)

Instead, when accusations of racism are made they are presented delicately which suggests that supporters of asylum are orienting to the difficulties which have come to be associated with accusations (see Capdevila and Callaghan 2008; Every and Augoustinos 2007); that is that they are a form of censorship. This delicacy is achieved through a number of rhetorical devices, used so as to dissociate the speaker from this alleged censorship. These have the same rhetorical effect as would the disclaimer 'I'm not *calling* you racist, but'. This strongly suggests that as well as the documented taboo on being racist (e.g. Augoustinos *et al.* 2005; Billig 1988) there is also a taboo on making *accusations* of racism. Opponents of asylum may therefore have dealt with, and reduced, the effectiveness of accusing someone of racism. They have achieved this by associating accusations of racism with censorship. It seems that in the asylum debate calling someone racist is no longer an effective rhetorical strategy; much to the detriment of those defending asylum into the country.

While a taboo on making accusations of racism has been identified, the taboo against prejudice can still be seen to persist. Indeed, the strategy of rejecting accusations of racism works precisely to prevent opponents of asylum seeking being seen as racist and can be viewed as a debate wide disclaimer, which is exemplified by the Conservative slogan 'it's not racist to impose limits on immigration'. This strategy of criticising accusations is used alongside traditional disclaimers, so for example in extract three the comment 'but it isn't about racism' (line 5), which is a conventional disclaimer (Hewitt and Stokes 1975) is identified. Rather than racism, a number of purportedly non-prejudicial reasons are used to oppose asylum such as 'culture' (e.g. extract six) and 'drugs and paedophilia' (extract five). Instead, it is those defending asylum that must defend their position as being one that does not resort to accusations of racism. Therefore it seems that the Conservative's slogan that 'its not racist to impose limits on immigration' is becoming 'common knowledge' (Edwards and Potter 1992).

Discursive psychologists have shown how despite the taboo against prejudice, speakers are still able to say racially dubious things (e.g. Augoustinos *et al.* 2005; Every and Augoustinos 2007; Billig 1988; Billig *et al.* 1988; Capdevila and Callaghan 2008; Potter and Wetherell 1988; van Dijk 1993, 2000; van den Berg 2003; Wetherell and Houtkoop-Steenstra 2003; Wetherell and Potter 1992). This is also the case in this analysis. What is different here, however, is that it is the very taboo against prejudice, precisely because it is a *taboo*, which allows the speakers to make these racially dubious comments. It remains to be seen whether this reflects wider changes in the way in which disclaimers 'get done' in race talk.

Barnes *et al.* show that talk about "who' can belong 'where' is a prejudiced topic of argument that requires an amount of discursive work to make it safely sayable' (2004: 202). In this case that discursive work functions to undermine the rhetorical strength of accusations of racism, despite the racist undertones of the debate.

Notes

1   See, for example, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8442662.stm

2   Please note this extract is accurately reprinted so spelling errors remain.

3   Note that this is a response within the 'dialogical network' and not to a present speaker.

4   This is no longer a central part of the Conservative's asylum policy.

5   http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/4201371.stm

6   This broadcast is available in full on youtube:
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j7mGnenJtI

7   For more on Griffin's comments and the following trial see
    http://politics.guardian.co.uk/farright/story/0,11375,1265651,00.html and
    http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/4671026.stm

8   In particular the Daily Mail, which Hitchens writes for, is now criticised for its anti-Semitic
    and pro-Nazi approaches.

9   http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/

10   http://www.cre.gov.uk/media/nr_arch/2005/s050412.html

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