

The Revival of the Classical Racist Discourse in Europe: A Critical Discursive Analysis of Racism in the Context of Russia-Ukraine War

إحياء الخطاب العنصري الكلاسيكي في أوروبا: تحليل خطابي نقدي للخطابات العنصرية خلال الحرب الروسية-الأوكرانية

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Abstract

With the rise of critical theories and legal regulations that criminalize racism and accentuate tolerant and liberal values, racist discourses turned to be articulated indirectly (Essed, 1990; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2008), and a neo-racist discourse replaced classical racism to be ostensibly respectable and democratic with reference to cultural, rather than racial, difference (Barker 1981; Jayasuriya, 2002; van Dijk, 1997, 2000). However, a blatant and essentialist racist discourse has found its way back to the public sphere in light of the Russia-Ukraine war. Racist remarks have been documented in different types of texts directed to the masses. Therefore, this paper investigates the discursive strategies through which classical racism normalizes its reappearance in a supposedly liberal and democratic political environment. To achieve its objectives, the study adopts the Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak, 2008) to analyse 18

texts of politicians and media reporters and commentators that include racist and discriminatory remarks in justifying the classification of refugees into 'like us' and 'different' categories. The study finds that the racist discourse uses special rhetoric in order to adapt to the current socio-political realities by combining classical elements of racism, including those of culture, race, and religion, with spatial proximity. The result is that the close White Christian Europeans are the only social actors who belong in the in- (superior) group.

Keywords: Classical Racism, Neo-Racism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach, Russia-Ukraine War, Refugees.

ملخص

مع ظهور النظريات النقدية والتشريعات القانونية التي تجرم العنصرية وتؤكد على قيم التسامح والليبرالية، أخذت الخطابات العنصرية منحىً مبطناً، وتم استبدال الخطاب العنصري الكلاسيكي باخر جديد ليبدو في ظاهره ديمقراطياً ومتسامحاً من خلال الإشارة الى الاختلافات الثقافية لا العرقية. الا ان خطاباً عنصرياً أصولياً واضحا قد ظهر من جديد في ظل الحرب الروسية الأوكرانية، حيث تم رصد العديد من الخطابات العنصرية التي تخاطب الجماهير. بناء على ما سبق، تتناول هذه الدراسة الاستراتيجيات الخطابية التي تم توظيفها في تبرير ظهور العنصرية الجديدة في محيط سياسي من المفترض انه ليبرالي وديمقراطي، حيث انتهجت الدراسة منهج التحليل الخطابى التاريخى لروث وداك، وذلك من خلال تحليل نصوص سياسية وإعلامية تحتوي على عبارات عنصرية صارخة تبرر تقسيم اللاجئين الى قسمين: "نحن" ضد "هم". خلصت الدراسة إلى أن هذه العنصرية تستخدم خطاباً مميزاً ليتواءم والوقائع السياسية الاجتماعية الحالية من خلال جمع عناصر العنصرية الكلاسيكية من ثقافية وعرقية و دينية مع القرب المكاني، وأظهرت نتائج التحليل أن الأوروبيين المسيحيين البيض هم فقط من ينتمون الى مجموعة ال "نحن" (الأسمى).

الكلمات المفتاحية: العنصرية الكلاسيكية، العنصرية الجديدة، التحليل النقدي للخطاب، المنهج التاريخي لتحليل الخطاب، الحرب الروسية-الأوكرانية، اللاجئين.

Introduction

Racism is a social practice that is manifested discursively (van Dijk, 2000; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). It is produced and reproduced by means of discourse, which in turn constructs or reconstructs stereotypical images and perspectives about groups of people, refugees, minorities, immigrants,

etc., establishes collective identities by classifying people into in- and out-groups, and then justifies and legitimizes these prejudiced categorizations (van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Wodak & Busch, 2004; Wodak, 2008).

As a discursive practice, racism used to take blatant forms against specific social actors (Catalano, 2011; Krolikowski, 2011; van Dijk, 1997, 2000) including apartheid, slavery, lynching, and racist remarks with reference to racial supremacy and skin colour (Catalano, 2011; Krolikowski, 2011; Teo, 2000; van Dijk, 1997, 2000). However, with the rise of critical theories and legal regulations that criminalize racism and accentuate tolerant and liberal values (Billig, 1991; Catalano, 2011; van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2008), racist discourses started to be indirectly articulated (Essed, 1990; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), and the neo-racist discourse tended to be ostensibly respectable and democratic with reference to cultural, rather than racial, difference (Barker 1981; Jayasuriya, 2002; van Dijk, 1997, 2000).

Against expectations, however, the Russia-Ukraine war has become a context in which classical racism against non-Europeans have surfaced in public discourse (Bayoumi, 2022; Roane, 2022), and racist exceptionalism has been prominent both inside Ukraine and in other European countries (Bayoumi, 2022). At the time when both Ukrainians and non-Ukrainian residents in Ukraine were trying to flee the country, a “Ukrainians first” policy was operated, by virtue of which only Ukrainians were allowed to board trains and buses first while non-Ukrainians were obstructed in Ukraine (Dovi, 2022). On another level, people with colour were discriminated against by elite groups and Western media organizations on the ground of not only religion and culture, but also race and colour, as Western politicians, journalists and commentators expressed more concern for blue-eyed and blond-haired refugees (Bayoumi, 2022; Roane, 2022). On the ground, Ukraine’s European neighbouring countries received the white Ukrainian refugees with open arms despite the abuse and demonization by these countries of non-European refugees, particularly Muslim and African ones, for decades (Bayoumi, 2022). Discursively, the discriminatory discourse in classifying refugees into 'like us' and 'different' groups has an explicit and essentialist (racial) fashion. It is developing a

2018). In this regard, racists express racial prejudice not in terms of racial superiority but socio-cultural differences (Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997; Leach et al, 2000; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Sawires & Peacock, 2000; Sonn et al, 2000; van Dijk, 1997; Tougas et al, 1998; Walker, 2001; Wodak & Busch, 2004). Consequently, the out-groupers, who are perceived as racially inferior, are according to this neo-racist discourse, socio-culturally different from the prejudiced in-groupers (e.g. in terms of religion, language, customs, and cultural values), and one would agree that the question of racial or regional dissimilarity is irrelevant (van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Jayasuriya, 2002).

This change in the nature of racism into a more socially-acceptable practice is attributed to two main reasons. First, it has been no longer acceptable to voice discriminatory remarks publicly, and racial opinions and practices have been tabooed when clashing with the ideological values of tolerance, liberalism, and democracy (Billig, 1991; van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2008; Catalano, 2011). Second, compared with the blatant comments which are inimically segregationist, subtle racism is considered to be much more effective (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; van Dijk, 1997, 2000; Walker, 2001) that it continuously influences the public's beliefs, attitudes, mental models of groups of people, and thus behaviours (Bissell & Parrott, 2013).

Racism has been subjected to numerous analyses in the field of critical discourse analysis. Various research projects tried to outline the discursive mechanisms by which racism is produced, reproduced, and enacted. In this, language patterns are correlated with socio-political structures and political and ideological motivations. All in all, the misrepresentation of non-Europeans, mainly Muslims and immigrants, was found to feature in Western elite discourses. It is realized by various discursive strategies to maintain a line of distinction between Us and Them. Yet, these strategies vary according the varying contexts. More importantly, the racist discourse varies in its fashion of expression, from explicit to less evident discursive realizations, as previously mentioned.

strategies that also demonize liberal media in Poland as sharing similar sources of danger against Polish cultural values.

The *politics of fear* (Wodak, 2020) continued to guide the discursive construction of Muslims and immigrants in other European countries, especially in the aftermath of the Brussels attacks in 2016. For instance, Pop (2016) argues that the Romanian mainstream media and the dominant political trends establish a civilizational antagonism between the West and the Muslim world, claiming that the socio-cultural values in these spheres are incompatible.

What is common in the findings of these studies is that the racist discourse against non-Europeans, especially Muslims and Africans, is usually justified by the exploitation of events in which some Muslims/Africans or Muslim countries are involved (i.e., attacks by Muslims, the war in Syria), so the rightist elites managed to constantly associate Muslims with danger and direct threat. However, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, neither Muslims as individuals nor any Muslim country have a direct role in the conflict. In addition, few studies in the existing literature deal with the reviving explicit forms of racist discourse, as it might have been against expectations that blatant discriminatory discursive practices would adapt so fast with the changing socio-political realities. Initial observations show that classical racism is publicly reproduced on essentialist basis alongside religious and cultural prejudices, all of which are intertwined with dimension of spatial proximity. So, this paper mainly addresses the new racist discourse that has been expressed by Western elite groups in Europe during the Russia-Ukraine war, as it rejects non-Europeans on the ground of not only religious or cultural differences but also, inseparably, race at a time when racial prejudice has supposedly ended in liberal and tolerant societies (van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000; Wodak, 2008). To this end, the study explores the strategies used to classify social actors into in- and out-groups, and the argumentative bases used as a rationale for the classification made. The findings of this study are thought to provide important insights about the rapid discursive shifts racist discourse is taking to express itself explicitly. This not only helps in understanding the discursive nature of

At the analytic level, DHA distinguishes between three dimensions of analysis; themes/ topics, strategies, and linguistic means and forms of realization (de Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999). Themes are overall macro meanings that can be only observed by language users. They are made out by a coherent mapping of propositions with relation to a pragmatic background that makes processing the information possible. As such, themes are not assumed beforehand as a top-down fashion of analysis. Rather, they are worked out based on the different representations of the discursive strategies and the pragmatic awareness of the analyst (see Unger, 2013). Second, the analysis will take place at the macro strategies level. A strategy is “a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal”. Finally, the linguistic realizations, such as nominations, predications, metaphors and processes are analysed.

Wodak (2008, 2010) and Reisigl (2017) maintain that the discursive construction and legitimation/justification of in- and out-groups necessarily implies the use of strategies of positive Self-presentation and negative Other-presentation. These strategies include:

- Referential and nomination strategies
- Predication strategies
- Argumentation strategies
- Perspectivization

Referential and Nomination Strategies

These are the strategies by which a speaker/writer discursively constructs in- and out-groups, as they identify social actors, objects, events, phenomena, actions, etc. (Wodak & Reisigl, 2005; Wodak, 2015). Referential strategies are realized through the use of proper names, deictic terms, metonymies, and synecdoches, etc., (Reisigl, 2009; Wodak, 2001). In this regards, the analysis groups together the linguistic items that nominate and construct the in- and out-groups, such as “Europeans” and “Syrians”.

“Y, because X” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 69–80). Fallacies, however, are arguments that are apparently valid but are not so (Hansen, 2002). In the analysed data, topoi are investigated in the warrantless arguments and identified in the form of conditionals, as in the topos of *comparison and assimilation*, which suggests that “if X is similar to you, you should sympathize with them and take them in”, as will be discussed later in the analysis (see sections 4.1 and 4.3.1).

Perspectivization

According to Engström and Paradis (2015), any linguistic realization, be it persuasive rhetoric or not, is always perspectivized and framed. In other words, perspectiveization is an omnipresent strategy of any discursive practice (KhosraviNik, 2010a) by which an interlocutor positions their viewpoint in reporting or narrating events by means of choosing language realizations and framing these goings-on and social actors based on the interlocutor’s perspective (Renkema, 2004; KhosraviNik, 2010a; Fitri, 2013). This process of framing entails expressing often socially-motivated attitudes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

By employing these strategies, the analysis will answer the following questions (Reisigl, 2017):

1. How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?
2. What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?
3. What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?
4. From what perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?

Data Collection

This study adopts the principle of triangulation in the collection of data (see de Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999), in which different sets of texts

Discussion

The in-depth analysis of the strategies of reference and nomination, predication, argumentation, and perspectivization identified a number of macro themes that mark the argumentative discussion over the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian refugees. As the following section shows, the systematic investigation of these themes reveals the discursive mechanisms through which racism finds its way to the public discourses.

Assimilation-Based Sympathy

Sympathizing with the white Christian European social actors based on not only spatial proximity to the speakers but also their racial, religious, and cultural similarities is a salient topic in the data at hand. The analysis touches on several discursive strategies used in the positive Self-presentation and negative Other-presentation to determine who fits in the in-group based on both the proximity and assimilation dimensions. On the one hand, social actors are referred to by metonymic nominations that refer to geo-political entities. The in-group, for example, is referred to by “this [...] place” (Ukraine), “this [...] city” (Kyiv), “Europe”, and “Ukraine”, and the out-group is referred to by “Iraq”, “Syria”, and “Afghanistan”. On the other hand, nominations of the two groups invoke the element of assimilation. Those who belong in the in-group are referred to via referential and nomination strategies related to race, as in “White”; religion, as in “Christians”; and culture, as in “Europeans” and “Ukrainians”, where strategies of racialization, religionization, and ethnicization are used respectively. When used with predications such as “look like US”, “[their cars] look like OURS”, “they seem so like US”, “they are very similar [to US]”, among others, such and other nominations serve as micro-argumentative schemes based on material proximity, race and physical appearance, religion, and culture. So, all White Christian Europeans belong to the in-group and are, consequently, represented positively. The out-group, on the contrary, is nominated with reference to religion, such as “Muslims”; and to culture, such as “Arabs”, “Syrians”, and “Algerians”. Similarly, the referential strategies used to name the out-group function as micro-argumentative schemes to denote negative traits

France can give Ukrainians visas because they have ties to, and families in, France. Notably, mentioning that Ukrainians have families in France has a topos of *humanitarianism and sympathy*, given that a family is a vulnerable segment that evokes emotions. Zemmour, furthermore, employs the topos of *religion and culture* to legitimize the classification of the social actors involved and the sympathy with the in-group. Besides, the justification is supported by the use of the fallacious argument that it is hard to integrate Arab or Muslim immigrants because of the religious and cultural differences. Interestingly, the capitalized deictic terms in the above utterances indicate that the nominations, attributes, and discriminatory arguments are expressed from a Eurocentric perspective, which extends to elements beyond those of religion and culture, mainly elements of racial superiority.

Other utterances justify sympathizing with white Ukrainians is the Former Deputy Prosecutor General of Ukraine David Sakvarelidze's, who uses a topos of *race*, i.e., If X's race is so and so, one should sympathize with them. See example 2 below:

Example 2

It's very emotional for me because I see European people with blue eyes and blond hair... being killed every day.

(David Sakvarelidze, 26 Feb, 2022)

The predications "blue eyed" and "blond haired" are physical traits that restrict Sakvarelidze's sympathy with a particular race. His argument implies that if the victims were non-Europeans with a different race, he would not sympathize with them. Accordingly, Sakvarelidze's argument is justified by the topos of *race*, which entails that those who belong in the out-group are not worth sympathy even if they are victims of the same regime and go through similar events, such as Syrians.

Race-Based Civilized-Uncivilized Dichotomy

The reference to social actors' physical traits, as was explained above, takes an essentialist turn when it introduces a civilized-uncivilized

Christian Europeans, traits, viz., intelligent and educated, Petkov makes an over-generalization, mainly a conventional implicature, by using the nomination “Europeans” to positively name the in-group, thus functioning as an argumentative device, and by collocating it with “intelligent” and “educated”, which implies that all members of the in-group are civilized, intelligent and educated. Besides, by contrasting the two social actor groups while not referring to the out-group’s traits regarding intelligence and education, the speaker implies that the out-group is unsophisticated, ignorant, backward and primitive. In this discriminatory remark, Petkov uses both the topos of *definition*, i.e., if X is designated European, then X should carry the qualities of being civilized and intellectually superior, as such qualities are, according to the speaker, essential in any European; and the topos of *danger and threat*, i.e., if X is not European, X is dangerous for, and poses a threat to, Europeans. The latter topos is evident in Petkov’s “[n]o European country is afraid of them”, where “them” refers to Ukrainians. It also appears in the use of the metaphor “wave”, which serves as a nomination that has an argumentative function that presents the out-group as being dangerous. Indeed, by stating that the intelligent and educated Ukrainian refugees pose no threat to Europe, he constructs another negative image of the out-groupers by implying that the non-Europeans are dangerous and, more or less, barbarian because, as he claims, they have an unknown past and have no education background.

While racially classifying social actors, other speakers deny the fact that they are racists and stress positive Self-presentation such as being liberal and tolerant. They employ disclaimers in order to defend their racist opinions and justify their in-group–out-group classification while denying or mitigating the prejudice. While so doing, those who criticize the out-group use variants of the rhetoric ‘I’m not prejudiced but’, claiming that their criticism of some social actors is fact-based, reasonable, commonsensical and objective (see Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Rojo-Martín & van Dijk 1997; van Dijk & Wodak, 2000). See examples 4 and 5 below by CBS news correspondent Charlie D’Agata:

Although D'Agata supposes that the disclaimers he uses mitigate prejudice, he was widely criticized for his derogatory remark. As a result, on the very next day, he publically made an apology in which he, again, used such a rhetorical device and re-stated his prejudiced opinion. Notice the disclaimer in example 5 below:

Example 5

I just wanted to clarify something I said yesterday in describing the conflict here. I spoke in a way that I regret, and for that, I'm sorry. What I'd hope to convey is what's unique about the fighting on the way here is that this country has not really seen this scale of war in recent years unlike some conflicts in countries that I covered that tragically suffered too many years of fighting. You should not compare conflicts anyway. (Charlie D'Agata, 26 Feb, 2022)

The speaker used the deictic term “here” and the near demonstrative “this” in “this country” in order to position himself closer to the in-group. D'Agata apologized by using the disclaimers “I spoke in a way that I regret, and for that, I'm sorry” and “[y]ou should not compare conflicts anyway”. Yet, his racist view resurfaced again by comparing between the two social actor groups. In both of his statements, he emphasizes the idea that non-Europeans have gone through wars and conflicts for decades, thus war is the norm in these countries. This theme is elaborately discussed in the section that follows.

Wars and Conflicts in Non-European Countries Are Normal

The construction of wars and conflicts as a normal state in non-European countries is key in the rise of the blatant racist discourse. As the analysis below show, the strategies used in the realization of this theme essentialise the state of war in non-European countries so that less, if any, human and political action is expected to stop these wars. In contrast, the abnormality of war in Ukraine requires urgent intervention, simply because the victims are like *us*.

France's BFM TV Journalist Phillipe Corbé, present the same derogatory idea by the structural opposition of the in- and out-groups, i.e. Syrians and Ukrainians, as example 7 demonstrates:

Example 7

We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin. We're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives. (Phillipe Corbé, 26 Feb, 2022)

Corbé refers to the in- and out-groups by the nominations "Syrians" and "Europeans" (referring to Ukrainians) respectively. Although both references are followed by predications that denote fleeing war, the speaker disregards the war taking place in Syria by stating that it is not his topic, but the one in Ukraine is. He uses the deictic term "here" to portray the in-group as being closer to him than the out-group, considering war to be a normal status in Syria. This normalization of the war in Syrian in particular, and in non-European regions in general, is justified by the topoi of *comparison and assimilation* and of *Europeanness*. The former is evident in his use of "in cars that look like ours", where he stresses the socio-cultural similarities, whereas the latter appears in his nomination of Ukrainians as "Europeans". Interestingly, the in-group's predication pertaining fleeing the war is followed by the conditional "to save their lives", thus associating Ukrainians who are under war with being victims. However, the out-group's predication does not extend to mention the reason behind fleeing the war, although it is commonsensically recognized as to save life. This may evoke the exclamatory question of *are Syrians fleeing the bombs for different reasons?*, which leads to another topos, viz., that of *valuableness*, which suggests that if X is European, then X's life is valuable and should not be threatened by any danger. Consequently, despite being backed by the same party, i.e., Russia, war in Syria is considered to be normal whereas in Ukraine it is an unusual event that is worth talking about.

Through the analysis, this discursive proximity was found mainly in the deictic terms and demonstratives. Near demonstratives such as “These [...] refugees” and “this [...] refugee wave” in example 3, “this [...] place” and “this [...] city” in example 4, “this country” in example 5, among many others, are used to refer to Ukraine, Ukrainians, Kyiv, or Europe. These linguistic devices position those to whom these demonstratives refer closer to the speaker, thus as belonging to the in-group. Other linguistic devices used to construct this proximity include deixis. The deictic term “here” was frequently used to refer to Ukraine, a place that is viewed as being close not only spatially but also racially, religiously, and culturally. This construction of proximity serves as a vehicle for the construction of a homogeneous European community where the in-groupers are the ones who belong. Given that the in-group is determined by elements such as race, religion, and culture in the first place, then by civilization, those who belong in such a community are white, Christian Europeans who are supposed to be civilized and culturally superior.

One example of the above discursive construction of the European *sameness* by emphasizing spatial proximity is Chancellor Karl Nehammer’s derogatory remark where he uses the phrase “neighbourhood help” to refer to the help Austria offers to Ukraine:

Example 8

Of course we will take in refugees, if necessary. It’s different in Ukraine than in countries like Afghanistan. We’re talking about neighbourhood help. (Karl Nehammer, 28 Feb, 2022)

After he uses metonymic nominations that positively and negatively represent the in- and out-groups respectively, Nehammer’s argument is supported by the previously mentioned topos of *comparison* (see section 4.1). So the neighbourhood help occurs when the neighbours are spatially close, and when they belong in the white, Christian, and European group.

Conclusion

This research aims at investigating the racist discourse against non-Europeans that is revived in Europe during the Russia-Ukraine war. It

war is an exclusively normal status for the out-group's countries, and that it should not take place in Ukraine in particular and in Europe in general.

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