

# Discursive Repertoires Constructing a Positive Identity of the British National Front

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*Högerextremism är ett ökande problem i hela Europa och de medföljande sociala orättvisorna drabbar fler och fler. Denna artikel redogör för en studie som utreder, inom ramen för kritisk diskursanalys, de retoriska tekniker som högerextremister använder för att åstadkomma positiv självpresentation och attrahera nya medlemmar till grupperingar och partier. Studien undersöker de diskursiva repertoarer, dvs. återkommande meningsmönster bestående av ideologiska teman och ämnen, som det brittiska extremhögerpartiet The National Front använder sig av i sina internettexter. Materialet för studien utgörs av 35 artiklar från The National Fronts webbsida, som skrivits av partimedlemmar och som därmed reflekterar partiets ideologiska uppfattningar. Ur dessa artiklar togs återkommande teman, ämnen och metaforer ut, och man kunde slutligen se hur dessa byggstenar bildade fyra bredare repertoarer: Moralisk Plikt, Konspiration, Orättvisa och Nationalism. Uppbyggnaden av dessa repertoarer diskuterades slutligen utgående från retoriska drag som anses typiska för rasistpropaganda.*

**Keywords:** discursive repertoires, critical discourse analysis, positive self-representation, the National Front, racist rhetoric.

## 1 Introduction

There has been an alarming rise in right-wing politics and racist activity in both Europe and North America in the past years. Hate group activity in the U.S. has grown by almost 50 % (ADL 2006, Holthouse & Potok 2008), and several European countries, such as France, Germany, Austria and Sweden have increasingly started supporting far right parties (European Commission 2007). Far right parties aim at reinforcing traditional values and removing 'impure' social elements, such as immigrants, homosexuals and the perceived moral corruption of the media. This moral cleansing is presented as the only return to past order and the consequent salvation of the native population's national and moral identity. Since we cannot rapidly change our contemporary social structures, we instead need to reveal and obstruct the ideological agendas of far right groups and how they attract new members.

*Discursive Repertoires Constructing a Positive Identity of the British National Front*

An effective means for understanding and exposing these agendas is analyzing the *discourse* of written and spoken racist texts, since racism as a social practice and an ideology manifests itself discursively (Wodak & Reisgl, 2000: 1). The concept of *discourse* can be defined as a group of utterances that belong together and create a version of reality or an identity through recurrent themes (Foucault 1972: 49). Discourse analysis can, thus, supply us with valuable insights into racists' views of themselves and the outside world (van Dijk 1993: 245). This paper will provide an overview of my study "*Ain't no black in the Union Jack – Discursive Repertoires constructing a positive Identity for the British National Front*" (Enberg 2010) which has been conducted within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This field is concerned with how power relations and social inequalities are negotiated through language. It considers language in its social context, and applies linguistic research on social phenomena. CDA has, accordingly, often been used to investigate topics such as racism, gender studies and political oratory (Wodak 2006: 4, 5).

The study focuses on the iconic British extremist right-wing party the British National Front, which I will henceforth refer to as simply the National Front. The party is a neo-fascist party which is anticomunist, antisocialist as well as strongly opposed to multi-racialism and mass-immigration, abortion and homosexuality (Davies and Lynch 2002: 5) and has been described as "the most conspicuous authoritarian radical right movement of the 1970s and 80s" (Barberis et al. 2005: 639). The party's long-lived and aggressive policies provide a poignant material for doing research on right-wing rhetoric.

This study is based on the central assumption that all racist rhetoric has the aim of rationalizing racist opinion; a rationalization which usually happens through "the positive self-representation of white group speakers and the negative other-representation of minority groups" (van Dijk 1993: 109). My hypothesis is, accordingly, that the National Front aims at constructing a positive identity for the party and its ideology through implicit patterns of meaning in order to rationalize racist opinion and to attract potential members. The aim of this study is to, from the party's Internet articles, extract discursive repertoires that aim at presenting the party and its ideology in a positive light. I will

finally discuss possible reasons for why these particular repertoires have been used, based on the most common persuasive means of racist rhetoric.

## 2 Material and Method

As the Internet has become the most effective current platform for racist propaganda, my material consists of articles from the website of the National Front. The website consists of articles that are written by party members, and divided into categories according to theme. I chose to analyze articles from the 4 categories that treated contemporary social development, since I rather than analyze the party's *explicit* policies, wanted to investigate how these were applied in practice to evaluate current events. My sample, thus, consisted of 34 articles in total. The articles were chosen and analyzed within the time frame of September 2008 and May 2009. Each article was given a key word, which works as the source reference in the fluent text, whereas the full information of the articles is available in Appendix 1.

This study accounts for how the National Front uses language to convey a positive image of its political agenda, and an appropriate method for analyzing these implicit patterns of meaning is the location of *discursive repertoires* (Wetherell et al. 2001: 247). These repertoires are patterns of meaning which evaluate our experiences and narrate events from a personal view-point. They create versions of reality which are always ideological, that is, constructed according to the values of the author or speaker. By intensive re-reading of the material I tried to locate themes, topics and metaphors, which formed these repertoires. The *themes* are large abstract units of meaning which have a quite general descriptive purpose. These themes are constructed mainly by more event-based topics, which are usually concerned with difference, deviance or threat (van Dijk 2002: 152). The themes are finally completed by *metaphorical stories* which give detailed accounts of current events and aim at symbolizing the theme. Themes which discussed similar issues were finally assembled into a number of discursive repertoires. In what follows, I will briefly account for the repertoires that were found, and how they were constructed.

### 3 Findings

The intensive (re)reading of 35 articles from the National Front's website revealed four discursive repertoires, which I have named **The Repertoire of Moral Justice**, **The Repertoire of Conspiracy**, **The Repertoire of Injustice** and **The Repertoire of Nationalism**. The details of these repertoires will be further outlined in this chapter.

#### 3.1 The Repertoire of Moral Justice

The articles of the National Front are permeated by an image of the party as a beacon of moral guidance. Davies describes how subjects of traditionalism, work ethic and family values play a prominent part in right-wing rhetoric (Davies 1999: 66). Themes of moral decline describe the pitiful current state of Britain and, when focalized by a horrified and judgmental narrative voice, they show right-wing politics positively as a righteous and regulatory force. The main ideological subtext is here that the 'general good' justifies minor ethical qualms, which is typical of racist propaganda (Kramár 2000: 303). The themes that form this repertoire are *the lack of respect for traditional moral values* and *the contemporary disruption of traditional family values*.

The party's moral standard seems to be set by Christianity and historical values of the British nation. In connecting the party to traditionally authoritative sources for moral guidance, or the "authority move" (van Dijk 1987: 300), it naturally enhances its own reliability. The British past is here idealized as a time of order and national pride, whereas contemporary society is a disgraceful replica of what once was. The party's moral lessons are visible in this extract:

- (1) Political parties like Labour and Conservative which have embraced sleaze, must be **replaced with those who have higher morals**. These parties have no respect for the **sanctity of life, or marriage**, as shown in the legalized holocaust which occurs today in government sponsored abortion shops. **A return to basic Christian values is recommended, like Moses led the Israelites out of captivity to freedom**, we need modern leaders who can free us from our current bondage of financial debt, sleaze and **unChristian values**. (pornography)

The text shows how the party members identify themselves with Christ literally as *those who have higher morals*, but more symbolically as 'saviours'. The concept of

Christianity, in this context, becomes a refuge for readers who feel that their sense of community and traditional ethical values are disappearing (Fredrickson 2003: 133). By incorporating it into the national order of the National Front, the party introduces their policies in a socially acceptable framework that allows them to draw on familiar symbols of good (us) and evil (them).

The other theme of this repertoire revolves around the disruption of family values, which is mainly constructed around topics about young people being victimized by the moral decline in society, as well as about homosexuality. The party describes how “young lives have been wrecked through the glamorizing of a new healthy sub-culture” (falling apart), where the youth is engaged in the “sneering at tasteful and established culture, engendering thoughts of rebelliousness against parents, religious leaders and established rules” (interfaith). These quotes convey contemporary popular culture as mere self-indulgence. Young people are victims of the Labour government, and have reluctantly been seduced by the *glamorizing of a new unhealthy lifestyle and lead astray*. The Repertoire of Moral Justice is characterized by “extreme-case formulations” (Pomerantz 1986: 45), where *every* young person is involved in drug abuse and *every* school is terrifyingly deteriorated. The negative concepts of racism, aggression and intolerance are replaced with notions of saving the children from moral decay and building a future for them by cleaning out unwelcome elements, which sounds much more socially acceptable than explicit extremist propaganda.

The Repertoire of Moral Justice introduces the policies of the National Front as logical solutions to the evident social deterioration of British society. It consequently achieves highly positive self-representation, as it enables the party to assume the role as saviours or heroes.

### 3.2 Repertoire of Conspiracy

The second repertoire that emerges from the texts is that of a powerful government conspiracy against the British nation, which was set in motion when the Labour Party assumed power after World War II. Far-right parties are traditionally anti-establishment and according to the National Front, the British people are being brainwashed into

leading destructive lifestyles. Merkl and Weinberg point out that most right-wing groupings criticize the government in order to: “rob them of their basis of political and moral legitimacy in order to replace the dominant values with ‘the common sense of the people’ as a new basis of legitimacy” (2003: 79). The repertoire is built around the themes of *hidden governmental control* and *corrupted media influence*.

The country is, through the use of hyperbole and apocalyptic expression, described as being “assaulted” (conspiracy) and “attacked” (drug overdose) by the government, whose power extends to a frightening autocracy where “the powerful state machine has its electronic eye on every citizen” (media). The repertoire describes the metaphoric dichotomy of the British people as oppressed victims and the government as dictatorial villains. These themes aggressively underline the incompetence and unreliability of the government, as well as the secret control and sanction of British citizens:

- (2) **A politically-correct fifth column, who wants to destroy the British Nation**, have come to **occupy the corridors of power** to the extent that the British who oppose this treachery are, mostly, held in check by **threat of arrest and strict censorship**. (sale)

This inclusion of punishments in the Repertoire of Conspiracy increases the sense of threat and emphasizes the government’s disloyalty to their own subjects. The images of inescapable citizen control, again, shows the National Front as saviours who represent the people in their commonsensical quest for freedom.

The second theme is concerned with the corrupted media, which is made up of topics about the media’s disruption of traditional moral values and its role as the government’s submissive ally. The National Front claims that British people are mainly trapped in the cycle of brainwash because of the media, as it is the government’s submissive means of communication that indoctrinates the public with implicit left-wing propaganda. Parents have left their children to be “influenced almost entirely by subversive and insane media controllers” (falling apart) in a society where “the BBC is pumping pornography into every living room, the Tabloid press is doing its part also, The internet being the worst offender (pornography). The British Front describes a media system that has no intention of informing or educating, but rather dumbing down and misleading its audience. This perceived dramatic Labour conspiracy which aims at breaking down traditional

values, allows the National Front to motivate political change as well as enforce their identity as a small, but honest, movement of the people.

### 3.3 Repertoire of Injustice

This repertoire revolves around the claim that British people are treated unjustly in Britain to the advantage of immigrants. This claim of injustice is a conventional part of racist rhetoric, and van Dijk explains how: “(...) in stories about minorities, the local or national authorities are often portrayed as favoring the minority group, so that the majority members feel discriminated against” (van Dijk 1987: 72). The Repertoire of Injustice is the most overtly racist and most explicitly advocates the biased policies of the National Front. This repertoire approaches the social conditions for British people as citizens and workers, and is, through this concrete approach, highly convincing and persuasive. It defines immigration as the largest social problem in Britain and, pseudo-constructively, tries to resolve it. It is constructed by the themes *only whites can be racist* and *advantages over natives in Britain*.

The repertoire introduces a reality where all white people are “condemned as racist and every black person has the freedom to speak and act as they please” (conspiracy), and “white Britons (or whites anywhere else) are not allowed to complain about anything unless it’s also the concern of non-whites. Then it’s fine.(...) If you’re white you are a bastard and if you happen to like being white then you are lower than scum. (media). The premise here being that white people are hardly ever racist, but rather misunderstood and victimized.

The second theme is created by topics of immigrants as a financial and social burden, as well as unjust division of housing, employment and citizenship. The theme is consequently constructed around the basic conflict of the whites who are the rightful recipients of British social welfare, and the immigrants who are Other and therefore unworthy:

*Discursive Repertoires Constructing a Positive Identity of the British National Front*

- (3) The **enormous costs** in “compensation claims”, “asylum grants”, “refugee centres” and cleaning up the mess following inner city strife, not to mention the epidemic of crime, are **borne by the ordinary, long-suffering, British worker** (race riots)

The consequences of these immigration policies are taken to the extreme for persuasive purposes in the *enormous costs* and the *epidemic of crime*. Immigrants are described as arrogant and lazy, in being unappeasable parasites of the British welfare system with deliberate efforts to trample down the British natives. *Compensation claims*, *asylum grants* and *refugee centres* are seen as redundant extravagancies which the British people should not be obliged to pay for, since these do not directly concern the native population. The government is here seen as responsible for a destructive social system, whereas the immigrants are presented as one of the government’s means for destroying Britain.

This repertoire, yet again, presents a dystopic image of contemporary Britain, where native Britons are pushed into inferiority in their own country. The party avoids sounding racist as it shows these immigrant-related problems as a direct consequence of the liberal propaganda spread by the government. The Repertoire of Injustice was the most commonly occurring repertoire, and in its depiction of seemingly trivial everyday-life, perhaps the most dangerous.

### 3.4 Repertoire of Nationalism

The final repertoire that emerged was the Repertoire of Nationalism, which is perhaps the most self-evident pattern of making meaning in texts produced by right-wing extremists. Kramár highlights how public debates about racism usually focus on people’s views of *others*, whereas racists and racial theorists themselves are mainly *ethnocentric*, that is, they are most concerned with their own racial or national identity. (2000: 23). The texts of the National Front coincide with this claim, since most of their rhetoric aims at constructing a positive British identity for themselves, and enforcing this identity through examples which manifest their capabilities. The generalizing construct of *national identity* becomes a vital force that shapes the natives and supplies them with certain positive qualities that awaken a natural aversion towards foreign elements

(Davies 1999: 100). This apprehension of national identity as a commonsensical prerequisite for racism is visible in the National Front's propaganda and convincingly justifies their biased opinions. The themes that construct this repertoire are those of *Freedom* and of *Britishness*.

The first theme of *Freedom* is made up of topics on territory and the right to personal freedom. This theme describes how the British national identity thrives on the notion of freedom and is consequently incompatible with the limiting and destructive measures carried out by the government. The party describes the Briton's "natural instinct to live in one's own territory" (media) where they can "govern themselves justly" (pornography). The texts have the recurrent implication that immigrants will never be able to assimilate these features, or adjust to them, since they are inborn and exclusive to Britons (Fredrickson 2003: 84).

The second theme of *Britishness* is mainly constructed by topics of historical warfare, where the innate British fighting spirit is poetically described as the way to utopia:

- (4) It's wonderful that some young people are prepared to pick up the banner of Nationalism and are prepared **to fight for their heritage, their future and their freedom**. (...) **Don't allow our forefathers to have died in vain** defending a country, which some politicians are prepared to break up and give away for a few pieces of silver. The British nation will once again assert its **traditional values of honesty and fairness** (conspiracy)

In this harsh reality, appeals such as *Don't allow our forefathers to have died in vain* effectively provoke feelings of guilt and duty. The British values of *honesty and fairness* are mitigating factors of this warfare, and they how justify the fight for what is rightfully theirs, as opposed to the greedy intentions of other countries in conflict.

The repertoire is, perhaps, the one most clearly aimed at the target demographic. Most right-wing parties in Western Europe have since the beginning of the 1990s done particularly well amongst male blue-collar workers (Betz 1994: 161) and Ryan (2004: 21) confirms this, in describing right-wing groupings as "a working-class movement, full of dull anger and resentment at the bias of *the system*". The repertoire of Nationalism, thus, has a deeply persuasive purpose, as the references to hyper-masculine values of warfare,

territory and protecting your family are likely to resonate well with young working-class males. The repertoire is, in conclusion, crucial to party policies, since the concept of the Nation works as a unifying and justifying source of inspiration for party members.

#### **4 Conclusion**

This study aimed at locating discursive repertoires and seeing how they worked to present the National Front and its members positively. Four different repertoires emerged; Morality, Conspiracy, Injustice and Nationality, and they all revealed the biased and traditionalist thought processes of the party. Regardless of the occasional overlap, the repertoires were quite clear and often coincided with what is regarded as ‘typical’ features of right-wing rhetoric. Some of these features were the numerous current threats against the well-being of the nation, anti-establishment rhetoric, as well as the unjust treatment of the native population and the subsequent quest for reclaiming the country.

Van Dijk has stated how racist rhetoric is usually constructed with the main purpose of *rationalizing* racist opinion (quoted in Wodak & Reisgl 2000: 184). A large part of this rationalization was achieved through the National Front’s positive self-representation. The party members immerse themselves into the national identity of everyman: the National Front is the loyal representative of the entire native population. The party carefully expresses views that resonate well with the target group of white, young, working-class males; pride, strength, nationalism, traditionalism and hostility towards the Establishment are the honourable features that characterize the party’s quest for power. The National Front also aims at appearing reliable as they draw on sources which are likely to be valued highly by the target group, such as the Church, British history, and the illusion of consensus from all native Britons. The positive representation of the party is also achieved as a result of its negative other-representation and inferences of the social decline of Britain. The British nation is, according to the party, constantly being subjected to dangerous threats. Perhaps the most frequently recurring theme in all of the repertoires is, accordingly, *victimization*. The National Front may not independently exude great influence on British society, but

as part of the global rise in right-wing politics, they become an interesting and frighteningly relevant example of positive self-representation as a political and sociological force. With apocalyptic accounts of a Britain in danger, combined with immigration policies that through rationalizing propaganda have become increasingly acceptable, the party manages to become a current alternative for British voters. The present study has shown how discourse analysis can be used to investigate socially significant areas outside of linguistic studies, within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. Through revealing the thought processes behind propaganda texts one can increase awareness and dismiss the authors' illusion of sincerity or naturalness, which is a vital step in the fight against social and political inequalities.

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*Discursive Repertoires Constructing a Positive Identity of the British National Front*

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## **Appendix 1. Internet Articles used as Material**

The articles are divided according to category. The article name is followed by its keyword in brackets. The articles are no longer available online as of August 2011.

### **Values and Culture in Decline in the UK (10)**

"Communists in the Church" (communist church)

"Death by drug overdose" (drug overdose)

"Death of the Small Business" (small business)

"Gay Parades – Just one symptom of a sick society" (gay parades)

"Pornography – the new Opium" (pornography)

"Protest against the Manchester Gay Pride Festival" (gay pride)

"Suppression of the Christian Message" (suppression)

"The country is falling apart" (falling apart)

"The Disgraceful Treatment of Ballerina Simone Clark shows Britain is under Enemy Occupation Country" (ballerina)

"We must defend our Homeland" (defend homeland)

### **General Articles (10)**

"Alien laws enforced in Britain" (alien laws)

"Asylum Seekers" (asylum)

"Church Leaders fail us" (church leaders)

"Conspiracy Theory explained" (conspiracy) by Crusader

"Destruction of our aircraft industry" (aircraft)

"Hate Words Used Against Us" (hate words) by Francis

"Media – Biased against us" (media)

"National Front Activism" (activism)

"Nuclear Guinea Pigs" (nuclear)

"Why I support the National Front" (support) by Stephen

### **The National Front on Immigration (10)**

"Anti-White Propaganda" (propaganda)

"Bringing Asia into Europe" (Asia)

"Britain is not up for sale" (sale)

"Burnt Oak in London was a white working class area" (burnt oak)

"Is this Medway?" (medway)

"Race Riots" (race riots)

"Repatriation" (repatriation)

"Rogues Gallery" (rogues)

"Slovakian Attacks on English school boy" (slovakian)

### **The National Front on Education (4)**

"Boot Sex Offenders out from Schools" (sex offenders)

"Creating Bedlam for youth" (Bedlam) by A.K. Chesterton

"For all responsible parents" (responsible)

"Panic over interfaith schools" (interfaith)