

How Racist Violence Becomes a Virtue: An Application of Discourse Analysis

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This discourse analytic study examines how violence can be constructed as an honourable course of action, using the example of a leaflet circulated in the loyalist Donegall Pass area of Belfast urging the removal of the minority Chinese population. Starting from the assumptions that racism is an ideological practice that naturalises social categories and devalues members of some of them so that their subjugation and exclusion is legitimised (Miles and Brown 2003; Billig 2002), and that violence is a human activity imbued with meaning through discourse, we applied guidelines set out by Parker (1992) to consider language as a social practice that achieves specific discursive effects by constructing its objects in a particular way. Two interrelated discourses were identified: a community-focused discourse construed the Chinese immigrants as morally and culturally bereft and negated their worth, while a martial discourse focused on defending the locality against foreign invasion. An examination of themes in loyalist culture revealed ways in which the text reconstructed resonant fears, and we argue that the way the in-group constructs its character defines the racist construction of the other.

The currency of “prejudice” as a social scientific construct over the past sixty years owes much to Allport’s classic, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). The breadth of phenomena that Allport sought to capture with this construct is clear as he set out five ways in which an outgroup can be rejected, placing these on a continuum of increasing intensity from “antilocution” (verbal rejection), at one end, through avoidance and discrimination, to physical attack, and finally extermination at the other.

Yet, it has been argued that scholars have considerably less to say about phenomena at the extreme end of the spectrum. Billig (2002), for example, is sceptical as to whether the dominant cognitive-attitudinal approach can ever comprehend extreme bigotry. He calls instead for language-centred analyses of hate speech, racist humour, and so forth. Other critics maintain that the construct of “prejudice” has frequently been used as a poor theoretical surrogate for rac-

ism (Leach 1998, 2002; Pehrson and Leach 2012; Wetherell and Potter 1992). Whereas prejudice is a property of individuals, racism is an ideological practice that naturalises social categories in a particular way and devalues members of some of these categories such that their inferior treatment is prescribed or legitimised (Miles and Brown 2003). By defining research questions in terms of “prejudice”, much of the specificity of racism as an ideological phenomenon is ignored if racial categories themselves are de-historicised, taken for granted, or, ironically, even incorporated into the very theories of prejudice that are meant to explain antipathy between racial groups (Hopkins, Reicher, and Levine 1997; see also Wetherell and Potter 1992).

Both of these lines of critique inform our focus on violent racism, which we conceptualise here as discourse that advocates, celebrates, or excuses direct violence against a racialised “other”. We suggest that violent racism is a dis-

The authors would like to thank Patrick Yu, Executive Director at the Northern Ireland Council of Ethnic Minorities, for supplying the “Yellow

Invasion” leaflet from the organisation’s archives. Please contact the first author to obtain a copy of the full leaflet.

crete phenomenon that deserves analytic attention in its own right. From this point of view, a crucial question is how violence comes to be treated as a defensible or even honourable course of action. Using guidelines set out by Parker (1992), we seek to address this question through a discourse analytic study of a leaflet with an explicitly racist content distributed in an area of Belfast, Northern Ireland. This leaflet, printed in black typeface on plain A4 paper and amateur in its presentation, was circulated in Donegall Pass, near central Belfast. A series of violent attacks on the minority Chinese population followed in the locality.

1. A Discursive Perspective on Violent Racism and Racist Practice in Northern Ireland

1.1. A Discursive Perspective on Violent Racism

The current study asks how racist violence is socially constructed and rendered meaningful at a collective level. In various contexts, the words “intervention”, “struggle”, “resistance”, “service”, “operation”, and “action” may all signify violent means to some end, but in doing so each constructs violence differently, and thus positions its users, targets, advocates, and opponents in qualitatively different ways. Our primary interest is in language-in-use (Taylor 2001). Central to this is the idea that language is constitutive. Thus, when studying texts (which may include interview transcripts, political speeches, leaflets, etc.), discourse analysts are not seeking knowledge about some reality that lies behind language by regarding it as a description of people’s thoughts and feelings or of events that they have experienced. Rather, the situated use of language is itself the phenomenon of interest. Violence is a human activity imbued with meaning, which is not inherent but is acquired through discourse. Thus, we analyse language not as a window on emotions but as a social practice that achieves specific discursive effects by constructing its objects in a certain way. We argue that the psychological processes of moral disengagement (Bandura 1999), “eulogising inhumanity as the defence of virtue” (Reicher, Haslam, and Rath 2008), contempt (Tausch et al. 2011), dehumanisation (Haslam 2006), and even “sidestepping inhibitory mechanisms” (Moghaddam 2005) are not just things that happen privately inside the heads of individuals but are active social practices, or “coherent system[s] of meanings” (Parker 1992) aimed at the mobilisation of

others, the management of blame and responsibility, and so forth. Language is a central part of the phenomenon in its own right, and not just a medium through which to examine cognitive, perceptual, or emotional mechanisms.

“Race talk” has been one of the most popular topics for discourse analysts (e.g. van Dijk 1992, 1993; Wetherell and Potter 1992; Durrheim and Dixon 2000; Verkuyten 2001, 2003; Condor 2006). One of the key contributions of this line of research has been to demonstrate how people manage and counteract potential accusations of racism whilst still naturalising racial categories and characterising the “other” as problematic or inferior. Scholars have highlighted the communicative ingenuity and creativity involved as people routinely articulate racism whilst simultaneously denying it (e.g. Wetherell and Potter 1992). As such, the empirical and theoretical emphasis has been very much on everyday talk and non-obvious, socially acceptable varieties of racism. By comparison, there has been less attention on what Billig (2002) calls “extreme bigotry”: discourse that actively revels and delights in hatred. In examining such discourse, we seek to explore the possibility that extreme bigots are as ingenious, flexible, and creative in their discursive practices, and just as acutely attuned to their audiences, as everybody else. Through approaching the issue from Parker’s discourse analytic point of view, we focus squarely on how the legitimisation and celebration of racist violence are achieved within a specific text. This affords an account of how such violence is rendered morally appropriate. Parker provides a working definition of discourse as “a system of statements which constructs an object”, meaning that the task of the analyst is to alert readers to the effects of description that create a particularised and powerful way of speaking. Thus, our approach is centred precisely on this active process of construction of the object under analytical scrutiny: violent racist discourse in practice.

1.2. Racist Violence in Northern Ireland

The research context of the current study is Northern Ireland, a place best known to social researchers for the period of violent conflict between the late 1960s and mid-1990s known as “The Troubles”. Despite the decline in wide-scale violence following the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, the

years since have seen a significant rise in the number of hate crimes. Racist crimes in particular have caught the attention of the media and academics (McVeigh 2006; McVeigh and Rolston 2007; Connolly and Khoury 2008; Knox 2011), earning Northern Ireland the moniker, the “race hate capital of Europe” (Chrisafis 2004). Attacks have targeted ethnic minority communities, notably the Chinese community which first arrived in Northern Ireland in the 1960s. Many of these incidents have occurred in Protestant working-class, loyalist areas that remain a focus for ongoing low-level violence. It was from within these communities that loyalist paramilitary organisations, such as the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), were formed in the early years of the conflict as an explicit and violent response to (or, in the case of the UVF, in anticipation of) the militant campaign of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) to bring about a united Ireland. Both the UDA and UVF are complex organisations often united by little other than their opposition to Irish republicanism and a fragmented and loose series of alliances, structures, and political convictions. The interests gathered under the umbrella term “loyalism” have also driven internecine violence as well as ongoing animosity directed towards their perceived political allies within the unionist and British political parties who have been regularly accused of betraying working-class Protestants.¹

Despite the ceasefires and the eventual decommissioning of UDA and UVF arms in 2010, loyalist paramilitary organisations have remained an active presence in their communities. This paper focuses on a provocative leaflet distributed among local residents in the Donegall Pass area, calling them to “resist” the “invasion” of Chinese immigrants. Whilst this settled minority ethnic group constitutes approximately only 0.8 per cent of the population of Belfast (NISRA 2011), a Chinese immigrant presence is evident in the micro-geographical composition of the area as a number of businesses in close proximity are managed

by members of this migrant group, in a locality otherwise dominated by the paramilitary presence of the loyalist UVF. The Donegall Pass is a main thoroughfare connecting arterial routes into Belfast city centre and has a distinct visual appearance in a city often characterised solely by the visual emblems of the conflict between Irish nationalist and loyalist paramilitary groups.

Although UVF representatives claimed to the authors of this paper that the leafleteer had no official approval and was later expelled from the organisation, violent attacks on Chinese, African, and Pakistani families and business owners living in the vicinity belie the argument that the sentiments were maverick and isolated. Indeed such was the extent of the intimidation, physical assaults, pipe bomb, petrol bomb, and paint bomb attacks, that Patrick Yu, head of the Northern Ireland Council of Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), reported a widespread feeling within many minority ethnic groups that “after the ceasefires we became the next target” (Boycott 2006). This particular leaflet therefore constitutes an appropriate text for analysis of racist discourse in a setting where overt hostility and violent attacks were very much in evidence.

2. Method

The particular form of discourse analysis used in this research is based on the guidelines set out by Parker (1992). Parker specifies seven criteria to guide a process that has been theorised as intuitive (Potter and Wetherell 1987; Holloway 1989) and aims to reveal “implicit themes” (Billig et al. 1988): “A discourse is realised in texts; it is about objects; it contains subjects; it is a coherent system of meanings; it refers to other discourses; it reflects on its own way of speaking; it is historically located” (Parker 1992). Parker cautions that these should not be treated discretely as a series of stages or a “method”, but rather as part of a recursive process of sense-making. The criteria are described as “necessary” but the researcher should also seek to consider the role of institutions, power, and ideology when describ-

¹ Whilst both the Unionist political parties and the loyalist organisations want to maintain the Union with Great Britain, loyalists generally believe that mainstream politicians do not represent the interests of the working-class loyalist community.

ing discursive systems. Parker urges analysts to identify institutions which are reinforced or attacked when discourses are employed, by identifying “discursive practices” (Foucault 1972) that can be meanings, expressions, physical changes, or systems (Harré 1979). He also asserts that as discourses reproduce power relations (Foucault 1980) analysts should look at who stands to gain or lose from the discourse and identify who would seek to either promote or dissolve it. Finally, in agreement with Billig’s theoretical approach (1991; Billig et al. 1988), he urges analysts to consider that discourses have ideological effects, but in contrast to Foucault’s insistence that ideology presupposes truth (1980), analysts should attempt to show how ideological discourses can be employed to justify oppression and silence those who use subjugated discourses.

The researcher is considered a creator of a unique text, working with potentially infinite forms of texts and multiple forms of knowledge. Once analysts begin to describe or systematically classify the original text by identifying discourses, the work moves beyond its authorial or structural intention. This kind of elaboration thus incorporates both methodological and researcher reflexivity as an intrinsic aspect of the analytical procedure. Parker further states that discourse analysts should explore “connotations, allusions and implications” (1992, 7) evoked by a text and that this exploratory process of associations should ideally be a communal exercise. The authors of the current paper, comprising a group of social and political psychologists and a political scientist, collaborated to reproduce and create meaning within this interpretative framework using an inter-disciplinary approach congruent with this idea.

3. Analysis

The text calls for a violent expulsion of Chinese immigrants from the locality as a reasonable and virtuous response to their presence. This outcome is achieved by two discourses that support the practice of the legitimisation of violence as an honourable and morally appropriate subject position. These discourses, which refer to and

support each other, were identified as *community-focused and martial*.

3.1. Community-Focused Discourse

From the beginning of the text the Protestant community in Donegall Pass is presented as subjugated and powerless, facing an overwhelming threat:

YELLOW INVASION²

WHO’S “PASS” IS IT?

Donegall Pass is no longer a Protestant/loyalist area, it is commonly known as “Chinatown” throughout our city and the people of the Pass are in the midst of losing the already small foothold they have in their community forever.

The Protestant people are rapidly becoming a minority in their own community.

If you walk from one end of the Pass to the other you would see the hoards of Chinese immigrants not to mention the vast amount of Chinese restaurants, wholesalers, travel-agents, garage, bookies and even a Chinese solicitors.

Apart from all these premises they own a substantial amount of land ready for future development.

This is not to mention the community building they have in the Gasworks site.

The title “YELLOW INVASION”, a dehumanising metaphor reminiscent of the “Yellow Peril” theme evident in American war movie culture, evokes an image of an alien force. The territorial construction of place as exclusively a Protestant and loyalist area renders the Chinese immigrants’ presence analogous to a flood that cannot be stemmed: later described as an “influx” which has the effect of “eroding ... Britishness and Ulster Protestant culture”. The loyalist community appears to be drowning in pathos: stranded on a tiny island, helplessly watching the surrounding deluge and “losing the already small foothold they have ... forever”. The historical institution of Northern Ireland as dominated by Protestant rule is paradoxically subverted. The subject position of the working class loyalist within twenty-first-century unionism becomes one of victimhood, powerless against international migration.

2 All errors reproduced from the original.

The Chinese immigrants are further characterised as an “overwhelming mass ... hoards ... a vast amount ... a substantial amount”. The allusion to the communist east is reiterated; a faceless and multitudinous force is rendering Ulster Protestants a “minority”. Immigrants are construed as pillaging essential resources: further alluded to in the leaflet as “occupy(ing) a vast amount of our houses”, owning “land ready for future development ... driving our youth to move out ... tak(ing) from our community”. They are constructed as inferior in intellect and reason. The phrase “even a Chinese solicitors” is rhetorically presented as a statement of incredulity; the idea of the immigrants entering the legal profession seems an impossibility, but it may be interpreted as a sign of anxiety that the Chinese community holds their own defensive strength as “they” are legally and financially more powerful than the loyalists via business and professional status.

The idea of community thus becomes exclusivist and oppositional. Any possible inclusivist definitions of participation are negated by a powerfully constructed racist ideology which totally negates the worth of the migrants’ presence:

The Chinese only take from our community and provide nothing for it. These foreign immigrants have no sense of Christian values or decency and have no respect at all for our community.

The author uses the triad “nothing ... no ... no respect at all” to emphasise a perceived void in community values, morality, and religious belief amongst the Chinese people. Despite the overwhelmingly secularist nature of the loyalist paramilitaries, the evangelical tradition has a strong influence within mainstream loyalist culture, with its references to purifying images and its intolerance for ecumenism (Todd 1987, 1998; Mitchell 2006a, 2006b; Spencer 2008), and this particular aspect of Protestant religiosity may permit the construction of the Chinese community as entirely without the values espoused by this form of Christian virtue.

Indeed, the idea that any sense of community should be fostered amongst the immigrants is treated as incomprehensible. The Chinese population is depicted as without culture or values: the word “community” is broadly

defined in mainstream discourse as wholly virtuous, applying only to the Protestant population, and it is this community exclusively that signifies all that is civilised. The immigrants’ achievements and contributions to community life in the “Pass” count for nothing. The only subject position offered to Chinese immigrants in relation to the heritage of the community is one of ahistorical and moral vacuity. Those who possess a different culture and lifestyle to the presented discourse of loyalist identity are not only excluded from the hegemonic institutions but also dehumanised by the employment of this system of meanings that negates the worth of their existence.

By rhetorically constructing the immigrants as utilitarian invaders, the loyalist community is counter-constituted as deeply tribalised, localised, and characterised by insecurity and fear of loss, defined around place and the territorial safeguarding of an exclusive form of Protestant culture, reinforced by notions of exclusivity and segregation. These narratives become delineated by this construction of the term “community”:

These Immigrants occupy a vast amount of our houses stopping any Protestant families moving in that would be more beneficial for the betterment of our community in all aspects of community life. The overwhelming mass of Chinese immigrants in Donegall Pass are driving our youth to move out of the area where they were reared, because they see no future for them in the Chinatown/Donegall Pass.

In fact, the word “community” is repeated nineteen times in the text, yet the Chinese themselves are never described in this way. “Community” is normalised within the text as a taken-for-granted good; the Chinese populace are potentially a threat to virtue, and something despicable whose removal is essential. This existential threat is constructed as a conflict between defenders of decency and civilisation and barbarians who lack these values. The subtitle “Who’s ‘Pass’ Is It?” uses rhetorical questioning to bring the idea of a Chinese invasion into direct opposition to the loyalist conceptualisation of the area. This is exemplified in the construction of a Chinese community centre as an extreme case formulation:

They have access to *Our* community centre ... more than we have access to it. ... The Chinese are now in the process of

building their own community centre – I wonder will the Donegall Pass community get offered the use of their facilities.

The pronouns “Our ... we ... their” promote a discourse of Chinese people as the other, and the questioning suggests that the new facility will compound the idea that the Chinese people are more factionalist, separatist, and oppositional than the community that has reluctantly hosted them. The “community” aspect of this discourse appears deliberately partisan: in all other instances the Chinese people in the Pass are referred to as “The Chinese” or “these foreign immigrants”. The new community centre is imagined as an enclave; the idea that the Chinese immigrants should be able to form something mimicking the idea of communal life is presented as ridiculous, with the sneering tone berating the idea that the immigrants could share resources. The concept of diversity is entirely absent from the system of meanings used to construct the *community-focused* discourse.

3.2. Martial Discourse

The martial discourse is situated within the historical narrative of defence against the militant paramilitary organisation, the IRA. Migrant settlement is constructed as having caused unprecedented cultural damage to the area, greater even than the Protestant community suffered during almost thirty years of sectarian violence and bloodshed; this is the rhetorical force which constructs the Chinese immigrants as the other:

The influx of the yellow people into Donegall Pass has done more damage than 35 years of the IRA’s recent campaign of republican propaganda and violence waged against the Protestant community of Donegall Pass.

It is eroding the Britishness and Ulster Protestant culture and heritage from our area – more than the IRA could have ever hoped to do.

It is within this construction of loyalism as an institution subject to cultural annihilation that the Protestant community is regarded as requiring defence. The ideological effect of this discourse that constructs the immigrants as an

object of foreign invasion is to show that there is only one morally correct subject position for the Protestant community, bound to the rhetoric of honour and duty. This is to uphold the practice of the defender:

I firmly believe that it is our duty to defend our community and our Protestant way of life within it.

A martial form of action against the Chinese immigrants is further constructed as righteous by referring to both the emotionally laden recent memory of sectarian violence during “The Troubles” and other historical narratives of militarism which have resonance with loyalist culture:

The men and women of Donegall Pass have maintained a brave fight down through the years against republicanism, yet they let foreign immigrants take over their area without even so much as a protest. The forefathers of this community shed their Ulster blood on foreign battlefields in two world wars and at home in present day conflict to keep their communities free from foreign invasion, while we are now giving our community away to these Chinese immigrants. *SHAME ON US!* ...

... The time has come to fight back before it is too late. Rid our community of these Chinese immigrants and clear the way for Protestant families to move in and our young people to remain and contribute in helping to make our community a better place to live.

Reclaim your area – give the Pass its Protestant and Ulster culture and heritage back.

The symbolism is typical of loyalist narratives, which manifest a strong identification with British military engagements, with the commemorative culture of the Battle of the Somme in particular representing an enduring aspect of its modern iconography (Shirlow and Graham 2006; Brown 2007; Orr 2008).³ The tone moves from pathos to shame, berating loyalists for cowardice and the dereliction of duty. The “Yellow Invasion” has been accomplished without armed resistance, in strong and direct contrast to the actions of the community’s predecessors. The only correct subject position for the Donegall Pass loyalist is clearly stated: “Rid our community of these Chi-

3 Loyalist narratives self-identify with the mythologised role of the 36th Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme during the First World War that

advanced ahead of other British units and captured a German redoubt, but were ultimately condemned to slaughter by overwhelming enemy forces in front

and the failure of British reinforcements to match their advance behind (Orr 2008).

nese immigrants.” Within this localised construction of military history, inaction against the “Yellow Invasion” is regarded as shameful. Alternative subject positions for members of the loyalist community towards the object “duty” are silenced. This call to militant action creates an ideological framework where the forcible removal of Chinese immigrants is constructed as a virtuous act. The idea of prioritising community resources for white “Protestant” youthful “families”, combined with the allusion “clear the way” invokes a quasi-religious image of the “unrighteous” being cut down. This reluctantly reminds the reader of the imagery employed by the German National Socialist movement whose ideology was also presented as a virtuous and moral project, where the vision of a community that was constructed as ethnically superior would be realised by service to a cause which included the cleansing of social elements regarded as impure and an existential threat (Kooonz 2003; Reicher et al. 2008).

3.3. Relations Between the Two Discourses

The future for the loyalist community is constructed as realised within only one of two conflicting power relations: either a dystopian nightmare where the “yellow people” will complete their takeover of the district, or the Protestant people of the Pass will “Reclaim” the area in the name of the community-focused discourse that constructs discursive objects such as loyalty, family, morality, and history through a particular and coherent way of speaking about them. The rhetorical effect is so complete and exclusive that the Chinese immigrants are constructed as entirely alien to the loyalist viewpoint. Regardless of wider community opinion, the rhetoric of the *community-focused* discourse defends this position as correct:

By now you would think that we would have got used to the anti-Protestant propaganda from the press but we still squirm in fear of being branded a racist – if a racist is someone who puts their own people, culture and heritage first with a will to preserve their community ... then we should be proud to be branded a racist, for this is our duty.

There is no opportunity afforded for tolerance, with engagement in wider UK debates about integration, assimilation, and multiculturalism made irrelevant by the discourses employed. The *martial* discourse of invasion,

defence, and duty, and the dehumanisation of the Chinese immigrants through the *community-focused* discourse work together to support the exclusion and removal of the Chinese as a moral duty; the eradication of the out-group is deemed necessary to defend the virtue of the defined community group (Reicher et al. 2008). The label “racist” in this construction, becomes a badge of honour to those who would wish to preserve their community values from annihilation. A call to violence is thus constructed as an appropriate, and indeed virtuous, response.

4. Discussion

Our analysis of hate speech focused on the productive and constitutive power of language in creating coherent systems of meanings or *discourses* (Parker 1992), with the specific purpose of showing how violent racist discourse can be legitimised. The sophisticated use of rhetorical language in the leaflet constructs a viewpoint which presented violence as a virtuous response. A community-focused discourse constructed the Chinese immigrants as morally and culturally bereft and dehumanised them by negating their worth. Community life in the Donegall Pass was presented as something exclusive to the loyalist population and under threat of destruction. This justified the martial discourse which focused on defending the locality against foreign invasion and situated the racial cleansing of Chinese immigrants as a defence against extreme threat. Inaction was constructed as shameful and a dereliction of a duty.

One benefit of a discursive approach is its sensitivity to the specific meanings implicated in violent action in a given time and place. While one can point to general features shared across diverse instances of dehumanisation, to take one example, dehumanisation is always actually achieved within unique contexts. Thus, we may deal theoretically in universals and generalities, but empirically we are presented only with specific cases. As Tajfel put it: “The general case is an impossible myth” (1972, 74). In discourse analysis, the specificity of our data becomes a strength because we are able to examine how particular constructions and ways of talking that are available and meaningful in a given local-historical context achieve a more general end such as the legitimisation of violence. In this way we can study phenomena that are of broad social significance, such as

racism, without flattening out the diversity of specific local settings, which is after all where racists are actually at work.

This idiographic methodology turns away from measures of the extent to which these discourses may be socially shared within a community. Further, we do not seek an explanation of causal links between phenomena, nor do we wish to ruminate on the extent to which the discourses at work contributed to actual attacks. Instead, we interrogated discursive practices as a means of understanding how such violence may be rendered morally appropriate within a localised and historical context. The analysis demonstrated that discourse can legitimize extreme bigotry associated with a racist ideology (Billig 2002). We also note that hate speech may potentially influence material conditions. For example, the expulsion of the leafleteer, discussed in the introduction, linked the production and distribution of the written propaganda to seemingly contrary forms of discursive practice. Pro and counter forms of action such as the increase of forms of violent intimidation versus in-group acts of severance, serve to highlight the complexities of making cause-and-effect judgements concerning attitudes of former paramilitary combatants and their supporting communities towards racialised out-groups. It is worth reflecting that the expulsion of a UVF member was allegedly ordered by a paramilitary elite who presided, quite literally, over life and death amongst the populace during the conflict. It is because of this highly specific context that the amateur processes of the production and distribution of the leaflet were neither ignored nor casually ridiculed. This should serve to accentuate the intricate political complexities at work *in situ*, and hint at powerful social and cultural forces that are not addressed within an alternative empirical model proposing direct links between attitudes and action, where language is conceived merely as a mediating tool.

This analysis may also be regarded as a caution against discourses which often construct group-level violence, whether on the streets of Belfast, London, or elsewhere, as “senseless”, thereby demeaning processes of sense-making within marginalised or non-normative social groups. Given the impact of violent group behaviour, we would suggest that this disengagement is a perilous stance as it fails to

consider the social construction of reality through meaningful speech acts that may impact by mobilising groups and instigating shared social practices through a rhetorical justification of violence. This radical reconceptualisation of language analysis within social psychology has been documented by discursive and rhetorical psychologists as part of the “turn to language”, within the discipline which has directly informed our focus on language in use (e.g. Potter and Wetherell 1987; Billig et al. 1988; Parker 1992; Wetherell and Potter 1992).

The idea of cultivated rhetoric making hate speech appear virtuous is linked not only to this process of argumentation but to specific and localised meanings. In addition to drawing upon overt references to the IRA’s campaign, the Battle of the Somme, and the world wars to construct a martial discourse of defence as honourable, an examination of themes in loyalist culture reveals ways in which the text draws upon anxieties that are politically, historically, and geographically located. For example, in many areas of Belfast, individual housing estates and streets have become paramilitary fiefdoms: from the onset of “The Troubles” local rivalries led to the division of territory between the UVF and the UDA (Bruce 2004), with activity in the Donegall Pass being co-ordinated by the former. This profoundly localised sense of identity, where loyalist morale is tied to the defence of physical spaces, is a part of the system of exclusivity represented in the *community-focused* discourse. An understanding of this territoriality demonstrates that the discourse of the leaflet operates as a coherent and rich system of meanings that would make sense to its intended audience.

These issues also raise questions about the positioning of the researchers in relation to the communities under investigation (see also Billig et al. 1988; Holloway 1989; Billig 2002); unlike investigations in communities where violent collective action by civilians is consensually considered non-normative (e.g. Tausch et al. 2011), some specific communities and research contexts create more difficulty in separating the dichotomous distinctions between “normative” and “non-normative” actions. In Belfast, this is most visibly manifest in the phenomenon of “Peace Walls”, which separate loyalist and nationalist communities in

many parts of the city where civil disturbances have become part of the fabric of life.⁴ This construction of “Peace” in many areas of Belfast as the absence of violent attacks through physical separation makes a case for the use of qualitative methodology so that specifically located communities can be studied within their own contexts rather than using the lens of other, “external” normative frameworks. It also furthers the argument for the incorporation of context into social science investigations, and the active promotion of empirical work that arises out of deliberately selected environments.

Indeed, many researchers argue that racism is always a situated phenomenon (e.g. Lentin and McVeigh 2002) and that to claim otherwise essentialises perceived race differences. In Northern Ireland, a combination of ongoing political instability and geographical isolation led to the experience of race relations following a different trajectory from the rest of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland’s political status has been contested since partition in 1921: the unionist majority population wish to maintain links with Britain, whereas nationalists desire unification with the Irish state. Political polarisation is reflected in the continued maintenance of distinct identities between the Protestant and Catholic communities, separation in housing and education (e.g. Campbell, Cairns and Mallett 2004), and preferences for limited contact (e.g. Tausch et al 2007). Commentators have asserted that this has resulted in the marginalisation of the needs of minority ethnic communities and a denial of racism in both social and political arenas (Hainsworth 1998; McVeigh 1998) not least evidenced in the late arrival of the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order, in 1997, thirty-three years after the Race Relations Act (1974) was applied in England, Scotland, and Wales.

After the 2004 enlargement of the European Union Northern Ireland experienced an unprecedented increase in migration, coinciding with the transition from “the Troubles” that claimed over three thousand lives to a period of relative stability following the signing of the Belfast

Agreement. In common with the Republic of Ireland but unlike many other UK regions, Northern Ireland had not previously experienced immigration on a significant scale. Gallaher’s political analysis (2007) showed that industrial decline and the movement of middle-class Protestants from the city into suburban areas left homes available to immigrant families, and claimed that a number of orchestrated incidents against racial minorities led to a climate of fear in the area, and it was in this climate in 2004 that the “Yellow Invasion” leaflet was distributed in Donegall Pass.

To understand the importance of this specificity, it is worth exploring some resonant and dissonant themes in the wider United Kingdom literature of “race”, ethnicity, and “whiteness”. In the current analysis, the *community-focused* discourse constructed a system of meaning connected with the preservation of loyalist virtue; in analyses of working-class English populations, indigeneity and respectability have also been associated in language use (Ware 2009; Rhodes 2011; Evans 2012). The idea of “community” and its allusions to all that is good, constructed in the moral and economic climate of post-Thatcherite Britain, has its opposite in the discourse of “community breakdown” associated with claims of working-class degeneracy, stasis, and failure, linking the phrase “white-working class” with the pejorative (Rogaly and Taylor 2009; Edwards, Evans and Smith 2012). Whilst these analyses may invite a form of reasoning that the white, Protestant loyalist narrative explored is not exceptional, it is worth noting that the specificity of Parker’s methodology has allowed us to explore a different frame of reference outside of British multiculturalism, often interpreted within “white” communities as resource competition: working-class populations in the urban conurbations of England have sought to construct a recondite form of racialised group identity in relation to the ethnicised other, whilst denying racism (Gilroy 2005; Rhodes 2010; Evans 2012; Smith 2012). By contrast, our analysis demonstrated that in a very different part of the United Kingdom, ideas of *martial* defence, rather than competitive multiculturalism, constructed specific nar-

4 The Peace Walls, official concrete and wire barriers separating communities in conflict, are currently being mapped out by the Belfast Interface

Project and have actually increased in number since the Belfast Agreement of 1998 (see Jarman 2005, 2008).

ratives of resource competition closely aligned with interpretations of the history of Ulster in the twentieth century, permitting the discursive construction of “racist” as a term of honour, respectability, and virtue.

This construction of the “racist” in this Ulster narrative raises the question, what associations exist between sectarianism and racism? Brewer (1992) has noted parallels: both processes may lead to discrimination, inequality, and conflict. McVeigh (1998), discussing the different aspects of racism experienced by the Traveller community in Northern Ireland as resulting from community division, interpreted the influence of sectarianism upon racism as situational, where both emanate from the politics of difference. If answers to this kind of question are to move beyond the level of description, the determinants must be appropriately and empirically investigated. The current study appropriately acknowledges the complexity of answering this or any other question that would postulate a link between complex and politically contentious social psychological phenomena.

5. Conclusions

We have demonstrated that the performative act of writing and disseminating text is a means of maintaining and creating a psychological environment that affects how discursive objects, such as “community” and “violence”, are structured and evaluated, making an empirical contribution towards developing a psychology of bigotry (Billig 2002). In particular, the current study has demonstrated the ingenious ways in which “offensive”, rather than “defensive”, racism (Hopkins, Reicher, and Levine 1997) may be reconstructed as a virtue, furthering the argument that the power of this type of discourse should not be underestimated or consigned as a relic of the past.

We are mindful that this type of analysis, which does not take quantitative account of group norms, nor explore individual subjectivity or group dynamics through quali-

tative accounts, may invite or reinforce further discourses that may stereotype populations in Northern Ireland as insular and bellicose, and entrench existing impressions and opinions of loyalism as unreconstructed in its social and political outlook following the Belfast Agreement of 1998. Attention should also be drawn, for example, to other martial discourses employed as a reconciliatory, rather than socially divisive tactic, with some notable reconciliation initiatives by prominent ex-paramilitaries centring around attempts to educate Catholics and Protestants about the contribution of Catholics during the two world wars;⁵ and in a social psychological study of Northern Irish Protestants’ attitudes to migrants, van Rijswijk, Hopkins, and Johnson (2009), noted that another series of leaflets were distributed by local paramilitaries in a nearby district, detailing the contribution of Polish airforce pilots in the Second World War to counteract the xenophobic image of loyalism. Nonetheless, we argue that the discourses explored here allow for a broad investigation of the composite effects of history, ideology, institutions, and power (Parker 1992), contributing to the psychological literature to date that has explored intergroup dynamics concerning immigrants in Northern Ireland by considering the effects of context (van Rijswijk, Hopkins and Johnson 2009) and history (Pehrson, Gheorghiu and Ireland 2012) upon majority attitudes.

We would like to make one final but crucial point concerning a theoretical implication for inter-group research: our analysis concurs with Reicher, Haslam, and Rath (2008), who have argued that the way the in-group is defined precedes the racist construction of the other. Working from the social identity perspective within social psychology, they consider the construction and championing of a uniquely virtuous in-group as the form of social identity to which out-groups may then be construed as an existential threat. This model implies that if we are to understand phenomena such as racist violence, we need to attend not only to how people view the targets of violence,

5 Such as that of the International Peace School in Derry/Londonderry, headed by Glen Barr, a former UDA political advisor and Vanguard Assemblyman. The School has focused on reconciliation through

cross-community commemorations of the contribution of Catholics and Protestants in the two world wars of the twentieth century.

but also how they understand themselves as a group: that is, representations of “us” are at least as important as representations of “them”. The language of the leaflet analysed here constructed a deixis where the label “racist” became an honour to the loyalist rather than an insult, but this recreates the deep insecurity within a community that characterises itself as a victim under siege and threat of destruction.⁶ The “hot surplus variety” of “ethnic nationalism” identified in Northern Ireland by Billig

(1995) is abundant, but couched in a carefully argued morality that is justified by appealing to past historical events and an imagined flourishing future. This study of the rhetoric of the “Yellow Invasion” leaflet, targeted at a racialised group, confirms the theory that in-group emotion is a socially constructed phenomenon (Billig 2002) that in this specific location reinvents anxieties, creating new narratives and discourse from a combination of current fears and past events.

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6 The discursive context of the text created a form of meaning, or deixis, of the word “racist” that gave it a contextually positive connotation. See Billig’s classic social psychological study (1995) that considered how a deixis of nationalism is constructed and communicated in the British newsprint media (93–127).

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