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Full title: **'It's not racist. It's common sense.'** A critical analysis of political discourse around asylum and immigration in the UK.

Short title: **'It's not racist. It's common sense.'**

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**'It's not racist. It's common sense.' A critical analysis of political discourse around asylum and immigration in the UK.**

**Abstract**

This paper looks at a political speech given by the leader of the opposition party during the run up to the UK elections in 2005. Using this speech as a starting point, we attempt to trace the path of 'racism' within a text that makes explicit claims to being 'not racist'. Drawing on a number of theoretical and methodological resources, this paper approaches the analysis by focusing on a number of conceptually heterogeneous elements that, in relation with each other, function to produce, re-produce and stabilize 'racism'. One of the difficulties commonly encountered in social psychological work, we would suggest, is that an explicit statement of allegiance to a particular methodological and theoretical tradition can also result in a restriction of theorization to a particular 'level of analysis'. That is to say, a methodological process that constructs a pre-given category, presets the criteria by which 'racism' can be identified and fixes the 'level of analysis' at which it can be studied risks ignoring the multiple points of contact at which 'racism' can be made visible or made to disappear. The concern here is that such a process can work to reinscribe the very 'racisms' we aim to disrupt.

**Keywords:** Immigration; asylum; refugees; discourse; race; racism; Michael Howard, Conservative Party

The study of racism within the framework of cognitive science, has, of course, a long history in social psychology (e.g. Allport, 1954; Brown, 1996; Tajfel, 1969; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Within this tradition, racism is typically represented as 'prejudice' or as 'cognitive error'. Over twenty years ago Henriques (1984) in writing on social psychology and the politics of racism, argued that the individual-society dualism imposed on social psychological theorizing was of little use for a radical politics. In contrast to the cognitive approach, in the last three decades, analyses of the discursive or rhetorical reproduction of racisms have become quite established in the social psychological literature (e.g. Billig, 1978, 1991; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). These approaches emerged in response to the critique of traditional social psychological work, which, it was argued, constructed unnecessary dichotomies in its analysis of the social, such as splits between a material and a cognitive level of analysis (Parker, 1987). However, many practitioners of discourse analysis have (re)constructed a further range of polarizations in their work – for example, the text and the material, the cognitive and the discursive. There is nothing explicitly radical about the methodological practices of discourse, and they offer no magical solution to the embedded problem of dichotomization that is endemic to psychological and social psychological work. Following Burman (2003), we would argue that while an ethnographically rooted, linguistic analysis might offer some fascinating insights into political discourse, and serves a particular and useful purpose, such analysis often remains quite decontextualized and depoliticized,<sup>1</sup> and is therefore also limited. We suggest that one of the difficulties commonly encountered in social psychological and other psychological work is that an explicit statement of allegiance to a particular methodological and theoretical tradition can also result in a restriction of theorization to a particular 'level of analysis' (see Billig, 1996 for a sustained development of this point).

It might be argued that this situation calls out for a Hegelian type analysis which draws on notions of dialectics in which two levels, like 'cognitive' and 'discursive' might be brought into relation with each other. One might imagine, for example, a synthesis of analysis which would offer a broader, if not necessarily deeper, analysis of the phenomenon. It could be argued, as Bull does with reference to his work with conversation analysis of (political) communication, that "major 'macro' social issues such as racism, politics or feminism can be analyzed through microanalysis" (2003, p. 17). (Similar arguments around the embodiment of context and ideology in text are made by authors like Baxter, 2004; Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2005; van Dijk, 2001, 2004). Whilst these 'macro' issues are undoubtedly enacted within 'micro-contexts', there is limited engagement with the relationalities between these communications and the wider contexts in which they take place.

Alternately, it has been argued that both cognitive and discursive approaches to racism have generally emphasized similar phenomena. For instance, these approaches both suggest that racism is underpinned by essentialism - whether cognitively or discursively produced (e.g. Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst, 2002). However, it has been pointed out that this often leads to a disregard for the important role of (de-)essentialism (Verkuyten, 2003). Whilst we would agree with the proposition that racism may not need to be explicit or to rely on essentialist notions, we would maintain that it *does* need to be communicated and thus is constituted in language. However, we would also posit that it is not merely the level at which an issue is approached that limits its analytical power, but rather the act, in itself, of confining an analysis to levels. If an analysis is constrained by a prior assumption that phenomenon come in, for example, two (or indeed three) kinds, be it macro-micro, discursive-material or thesis-antithesis, the approach itself will

reinscribe these boundaries. What is left to the analyst then, is to argue that one level of analysis must be necessary to the other or contained within it.

In this paper we hope to sidestep this process by approaching the phenomenon in itself as one that has an already existing stability that resonates with other phenomena. This stability is interesting because it can produce effects: legislative, electoral, cultural, etc. Working from the premise that some social psychological approaches, both traditional and dominant, run the risk of reinscribing 'racism' through the engagement with methodological boundary construction and the insistence on the reproduction of levels of analysis, here we try to tease out an analysis of a political speech from the 2005 UK election campaign and to trace the path that that text has followed in becoming stabilized, whilst at the same time engaging with some of the resonances that it produces with respect to issues of 'racism'.

### **The Methodology**

Initially, we use analytic strategies from Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) (Burman & Parker, 1993; Parker, 1992, 2005) to explore how the speech draws on a range of discursive strategies to position asylum seekers as undesirable, while attempting to avoid the pejorative label of 'racist'. Whilst we recognize that the identifier FDA can be construed as problematic (see Hook, 2001), our aim here is not to engage with any methodological orthodoxy that seeks adherence to the writings of Michel Foucault, but rather to make use of this designation to refer to an analytical practice which conceptualizes discourse as enrolled in wider processes of legitimation and power (Parker, 1992). This approach, perhaps unsurprisingly, "conceives of 'text' in the widest possible sense containing networks of meaning (discourses) which construct social and psychological realities" (Willig, 2001, p. 118).

Given our aim in this analysis is to consider a 'text' (which is itself a complex phenomenon) in 'context' and that we began with the position that *a priori* boundary setting would serve to hinder that analysis, we would posit here that an analytic that would allow for the discussion of heterogeneous elements, and thus the conceptualization of a heterogeneous network, is required. This analytic, we would contend, can be found in Actor network theory (ANT)(Callon,1986; Latour, 1988; Law & Hassard, 1999). ANT makes no assumption about the homogeneity of the elements that comprise a network. The actor then, is comprised of any element: human, textual or material, that may contribute to the simplification of the network to make it appear as an actor or disappear into various actors. Law, proposing that "order is an *effect generated by heterogeneous means*" (1992, p. 382), has argued that ANT is thus "concerned with the *mechanics of power*" (1992, p. 380).

The attractiveness of such a theory to the study of 'racism' as a phenomenon is that ANT offers the possibility of theoretically avoiding the pitfalls of leveling, without opening the door to the reductionism of unidimensionality. From this theoretical perspective, one can begin to narrate an analysis without engaging boundaries, such as those around 'racism', which can be made visible or made to disappear. Following this approach our aim is to draw from both FDA and ANT to suggest some ways of approaching a 'racism' that presents itself as explicitly 'not racist'.

### **The Con-text**

In the run up to the U.K. elections in May 2005, the Conservative Party (the main opposition party) produced a manifesto which had, as one of its core policies, a

clear set of regulatory policies around immigration. In the manifesto, the party outlines five strategies that would be deployed to 'control' immigration, should they come to power.

- Have parliament establish an annual limit on immigration
- Institute legislation to control the legitimate issuing of work permits
- Ensure that asylum claims are processed abroad
- Establish 24 hour surveillance at ports
- Introduce a system of health checks for diseases like HIV and TB for immigrants.

(source:

[http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=policy.topic.page&tabID=5\)](http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=policy.topic.page&tabID=5)

In a superficial reading of these plans it appears that they are extraneous to issues of 'race', a position defended vociferously by politicians who have supported these types of proposals (see also van Dijk, 2000). However, in a broader context the separation of migration issues from those of race is, at best, problematic, as there is constant slippage between the two (Lewis & Neal, 2005; Sales, 2005).

Constructing these as separate enables the introduction of migration policy that certainly has both a racialised basis and racialised effects, while allowing challenges to the racialised nature of these policies to be dismissed as 'playing the race card' (e.g. Lewis, 2004). In this case, the immigration policies proposed by the Conservative Party, do not veer far from those of the current New Labour government and reflect many of the same concerns (Block, 2000; also, compare the language of this speech to that used in the 1998 Home Office white paper *Fairer, faster and firmer*). Similar policies have, at one time or another, been proposed and/or instituted in many other 'Western democracies' (Geddes, 2003). It has been further noted that there are clear resonances in the approaches of European countries to questions of migration (Yuval-Davis, Anthias & Kofman,



2005). As Lewis & Neal have highlighted with respect to the UK, France and Germany, there is "a similarity of direction written over their very different histories of migration and ideological and policy approaches to ethnic and cultural diversity" (2005, p. 433). Derrida (2001, p. 12) further suggests that control of immigration "forms part of the compulsory rhetoric of electoral programmes" in contemporary Europe.

Now in its third term in office, the UK Labour Party has already, on at least three separate occasions, passed comprehensive legislation to address issues of immigration and asylum. Lewis & Neal (2005) have argued that a number of governments, but particularly the British government, have tried to manage tensions around asylum, labor needs and multicultural citizenship by 'redrawing' political and policy approaches. According to Lewis & Neal, this process "places a traditional stress on policing national borders and excavates older discourses of assimilationism through an emphasis on cultural integration, social cohesion and a notion of a core national identity" (2005, p.423). Sales (2005) has further argued that despite rhetorical attempts by the Labour Party to disconnect asylum and refugee issues from those of race, these questions have become conflated with the wider debate about immigration more generally. Given this context, it is interesting to consider how the Conservative Party would have conceived this widely resonant approach as one that would win them votes and whether, given their subsequent electoral defeat, this was indeed the case.

### **The Text**

We begin with an analysis of a segment from a campaign speech delivered at the Spring Conference of the UK Conservative Party on Saturday March 12<sup>th</sup> 2005 by Michael Howard, the then leader. We would like to highlight that this speech is, of course, not 'naturally occurring'. It is a carefully crafted piece of rhetoric into which

numerous sources and resources have had input. However, in the moment of its occurrence, the speech was presented as 'Michael Howard's speech' and was reproduced as such on the Conservative Party's web site.

In the introduction to the speech Howard begins, 'Our plans, rooted in decent, common sense values, focus on what matters: school discipline, lower taxes, cleaner hospitals, controlled immigration and more police'. Thus, Howard locates 'controlled immigration' between 'cleaner hospitals' and 'more police'. The association of immigration with lack of cleanliness, illness and crime is not uncommon historically or cross-culturally (e.g. Raissiguier, 2003). In the speech itself immigration is addressed after 'more police' and just ahead of 'lower taxes', beginning as it does with a reference to upholding 'the rules' and ending with the statement 'It's our national health service – not a world health service'.

#### *Controlled immigration*

1. *People want a government that upholds the rules - not one that turns a blind eye when they are abused. And that applies as much to immigration as to crime. So we have a plan to limit immigration - to take control of our borders.*
2. *Today, our immigration system is out of control. I know it, you know it: everyone knows it, including the terrorists and people smugglers who make a mockery of Britain's hospitality.*
3. *In tomorrow's Britain - in Conservative Britain - immigration will be controlled and strictly limited.*
4. *Some people say that's racist. It's not. It's common sense.*
5. *I believe in controlled immigration for the most personal of reasons. I am the child of immigrants. As my parents always told me, Britain is the best country in the world. And one of the things which make Britain so great is our sense of fair play. We are a tolerant, generous, welcoming people with a profoundly compassionate nature.*
6. *We believe in immigration - in offering a home to people who want to work hard and make a positive contribution to our society. And we accept our moral responsibility to those fleeing persecution.*
7. *But all these virtues are threatened by an immigration system which is now out of control - which is undermining good community relations, placing an*

*ever-increasing burden on our public services and threatens our very security.*

8. *We face a real terrorist threat in Britain today - a threat to our way of life, to our liberties. But we have absolutely no idea who is coming into or leaving our country. There are a quarter of a million failed asylum seekers living in our country today. No one knows who they are or where they are.*
9. *To defeat the terrorist threat we need action not talk - action to secure our borders.*
10. *So we have a plan to control immigration. Parliament will set an annual limit on the number of people that can settle in Britain. We will impose 24-hour security at our ports so that we get to grips with illegal immigration and the terrorists who exploit it. And we will insist on health checks for people who want to settle here. It's our national health service - not a world health service.*

Extract from a speech given by Michael Howard, on (DATE) 2005.  
[http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj\\_id=120504&speeches=1](http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=120504&speeches=1).

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## **The Analyses**

Following ANT, our analyses of this text will trace the circulation of three discursive actors enrolled into a network which serves to produce, re-produce and stabilize racism whilst concurrently leaving it explicitly excluded, otherwise unnamed, and, apparently, invisible. The three actors we will focus on here, themselves constituted by other actor networks are: *Elaborating Britishness*, *Fantasizing the other* and *Conspicuous absences*. For the purposes of narrating the analysis we locate ourselves as 'the audience' to which the speech is directed.

### ***Elaborating Britishness*<sup>2</sup>**

Howard's stance on immigration is carefully framed as a positive feature of Britishness. Suggesting that 'controlled immigration' is an idea rooted in core British values of fair play, tolerance, generosity and hospitality which reflect 'a profoundly compassionate nature'(5). His appeal to 'common sense' (4) resonates with a claim earlier in the speech that the Conservatives represent 'the decent, common sense values of the British people'. Within this context, the failure to 'take

control of our borders' (1) is portrayed as irresponsible, as turning a blind eye (1), and in this sense, as 'un-British'.

### *Controlling our borders*

A discourse of discipline and regulation threads through the Conservative manifesto, for instance, in the description of their education policy and the problems of the school system, as well as the invocation that the health care system needs to 'put matron back in charge'. This discourse is equally evident in the policy on 'controlled immigration'. In emphasizing the need for greater discipline, for more control, the speech conjures up an image of Britain as needing to re-embrace core British values of strictness, of being fair but firm, of taking control.

The suggestion that we need to 'take control of our borders' (1) extends the idea of a need for greater discipline and regulation. The term 'control our borders' evokes war imagery. Britain is portrayed as a country under siege: if we need to take control of our borders, we must surely be under attack! In this sense, an image of 'Fortress Britain' (Geddes, 2003; Rosello, 1999) beset by those who would breach its defenses is produced. The current immigration system is constituted as a threat to national security (7), to a British way of life (8) and to our liberties (8). The threat, however, is not just from beyond our boundaries. By highlighting the need for controls and strict limits (3), the speech underscores the claim, that under current immigration policy, our defenses have been breached. The specter of *the enemy within* (Fekete, 2004; Lynn and Lea, 2003; Meehan, 1993) is thus raised - 'There are a quarter of a million failed asylum seekers living in our country today' (8) and 'No one knows who they are or where they are' (8).

The speech further positions immigrants and criminals as resonant categories (an issue we return to later in the paper). For example, it is claimed that the importance of upholding the rules 'applies as much to immigration as to crime' (1). The speech then makes further references to 'failed asylum seekers' (8), 'terrorists and people smugglers' (2) and 'illegal immigration and the terrorists who exploit it' (10). Thus, immigration and crime are constituted as dual threats to Fortress Britain by positioning immigrants as discursively linked to criminality and terrorism. Accordingly, an approach to immigration that has 'limits' (1) and is 'strict' (3) is the appropriate response to this lack of control. This is not 'racist', but simply a matter of 'common sense' (4). The alternative approach, among other things, literally 'threatens our very security' (7) and implies a lack of concern about crime, thereby constituting a threat to law and order more broadly.

In developing a position on immigration and asylum, this 'Britishness' is further elaborated. The need to introduce stricter immigration controls is a response, on the one hand, to the threat to British 'virtues' (7) and, on the other, to the 'real terrorist threat' (8). In both instances the words 'we' and 'our' are used repeatedly to construct specific, but inclusive, boundaries around the 'us' who comprise the audience (the Conservative Party but also the nation more broadly). In the first case, the virtues include a belief in immigration (6) and an acceptance of 'moral responsibility' (6). In the second, the use of the word 'real' works to mitigate against any arguments that might be raised around the 'real' need for these measures and resonates with the politics of fear that have become so prevalent since September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (e.g. Jayasuriya, 2002; Sparks, 2003).

#### *The reasonable man*

The speech sets up a polarization between 'good' and 'bad' government – good government 'upholds the rules' (1), while bad government 'turns a blind eye' (1) to

social problems like crime and immigration. Those who do not take issues of immigration (and crime, again conflated) seriously are positioned as 'turning a blind eye'. This does not suggest that they *cannot* see the problem, rather that they *refuse* to see it, implying that those who do not see the issue of asylum and immigration in the same way as the Conservative Party are *willfully blind*, they are making an *irrational choice*. 'Turning a blind eye' can further be understood as a choice that renders the person who turns, and consequently the nation as a whole, disabled and vulnerable. The 'common sense' discourse suggests that not to think on asylum as Howard and his party do is both irrational and irresponsible, playing games with the security of Britain.

With the statements 'Today, our immigration system is out of control. I know it, you know it: everyone knows it...' (2) and 'Some people say that's racist. It's not. It's common sense' (4), another invitation is sent out to the 'rational man', to take up the only possible sensible position on asylum. (This echoes one of the major slogans of the 2005 Conservative electoral campaign: 'Are you thinking what we're thinking?' in line with the 'common sense' discourse being built up here.) It suggests that the Conservative position is transparently obvious, that it is known to everyone, that any reasonable person would see it this way (Billig, 1996; Billig, et al, 1988) . This contrasts strongly with the suggestion that other (New Labour) politicians 'turn a blind eye'. Howard invites 'rational men' to agree with him that immigration does pose a threat, that this is not racist, but logical. There is no specific argument as to why such people are a threat – he merely reiterates that the truth of his policies should be self-evident to any person with common sense.

Furthermore the speech presents this policy as based in 'the most personal of reasons' (5). That is to say, it is both a reasonable response and a deeply cherished one, written into the character of true Britons (like Mr. Howard). The 'personal' is constructed here, not as an intimate or private position, but rather as a strongly

held set of values, that involves putting the needs of the nation, 'the best country in the world' (5), ahead of personal desires. Like Mr. Howard himself, to be counted a true Briton, people must embody the values outlined. He suggests (5) that True Britons are not necessarily those who are British by birth, that this is not a biological imperative, and so in rejecting those who do not embody these values, he cannot be construed as 'racist'. He widens our definition of Britishness to include those 'True Britons' like himself, with an immigrant past, who embody the cultural values of Britishness (as defined in the speech). However, as Durrheim & Dixon (2000) have argued, cultural and biological discourses of 'race' share common rhetorical and ideological strategies and functions, something clearly apparent in this instance of 'othering'.

#### *The decent Briton*

This speech, however, takes great care to distance itself from racist discourses that might be associated with conservatism. It creates a clear distance from the kinds of speeches offered by Enoch Powell (a Conservative Member of Parliament whose 1968 'Rivers of blood' speech on 'controlled immigration' was widely perceived as racist). The argument is built to defend against charges of overt racism by reference to the rational basis of this position on immigration, and to Howard's own status as a 'child of immigrants' (5). The position on immigration control is defended as rational and common sense, as *not xenophobic* (an individual 'attitude' that is seen as inherently irrational). Nonetheless, the echoes of Powell's (1968) speech are clear in this extract. Resonant with Howard's 'forgotten majority - decent, hard-working people', with his 'rational man', Powell referred to the '*decent, ordinary, fellow Englishman*', implicitly white, and contrasted this Englishman explicitly with the 'negro' immigrant. Moreover, it echoes Powell's position, that while immigration '*is not wholly preventable, it can be limited*'.

Howard distinguishes between two 'types' of immigrant. Those 'who want to work hard and make a positive contribution to our society'(6) and those who 'make a mockery of Britain's hospitality' (2). Powell too distinguished between two 'types' of immigrant:

*"The other dangerous delusion from which those who are wilfully or otherwise blind to realities suffer, is summed up in the word 'integration'. ... There are among the Commonwealth immigrants who have come to live here in the last 15 years many thousands whose wish and purpose is to be integrated and whose every thought and endeavour is bent in that direction. But to imagine that such a thing enters the heads of a great and growing majority of immigrants and their descendants is a ludicrous misconception, and a dangerous one."*

Mapping these connections, between the current speech and that of Howard's predecessor, Powell, we could suggest a 'macro analysis', pointing out that they draw on a common ideological basis of conservative racism. However, we suspect that there is also something rather more interesting going on here, that the resources being drawn on are rather more complex and multiple, and that they speak more to an identity of Britishness, and a complex relationship between Britain and its 'others', based in a history of empire and of capital. That is to say, whilst the two speeches work to stabilize racism in both similar and different ways, there are clear paths that unite the two. Howard's speech resonates with Powell's because both enroll a specific constitution of Britishness which is both experiential and visible. In this way it constitutes who 'we' are.

#### *Hospitality and control*

As mentioned above, one of the core British values that is claimed in this speech is that of 'hospitality' (2). It is positioned as such, suggesting that policies that allow a



continuation of this principle of hospitality are supported, without enabling that hospitality to be *abused*. In paragraphs 5 and 6, the British people are portrayed as kindly hosts to guests who are abusing their generosity (see Rosello, 2001). This suggests that this position is not racist – rather it enrolls a British character defined by a Mary Poppins-like archetypal British nanny who balances kindness with firmness. It is the balance of generosity, hospitality and compassion with discipline and regulation that makes Britain 'great'. Immigration control is presented as part of the British character, inscribed into our common values.

Derrida (2001) points out that this concept of 'hospitality' contains a double imperative. The logic of hospitality implies that it is necessarily unconditional – that a hospitable nation should be open, accepting, generous to migrants. On the other hand, the idea of hospitality does suggest the need for it to be established with some conditions, and positions the host, as the entity that opens its 'home' to others, to determine those conditions. The speech clearly suggests that unmediated liberality and generosity will inevitably lead to abuse by those who scorn it, and implies, by the statement 'terrorists and people smugglers who make a mockery of Britain's hospitality'(2), that hospitality can be a kind of weakness. In an extension of this concept of conditional hospitality, the idea of 'home' is introduced – we offer a 'home' to those who 'work hard', 'make a positive contribution' or are 'fleeing persecution' (6).

This emphasizes the conditionality of the offer of hospitality. Our generosity as a nation will extend to those who we can safely incorporate into our home, those with whom we will feel at home. One function of the language of 'hospitality' and 'home' is to establish firmly two terms in language – the host, the subject of immigration, whose needs and desires determine the conditions under which immigration takes place, and the guest, the immigrant, who is welcomed by the host, as long as they

behave in an appropriate manner, as long as they are judged to be a suitable guest. However, as Derrida also points out, the position of 'guest' is always conditional: a guest can never be a resident, never has the full rights of the citizen. The guest is always 'other'.

In a world preoccupied with terrorism and internal threat, the ideas of 'offering a home' (6) and controlling or securing our borders (1, 9) contained within Howard's speech also reminds us that 'an English man's home is his castle', and raises again the construct of 'homeland security' (other authors have also noted the way in which constructions of hospitality and home are often offset with reference to invasion and threat – for example, see Burke, 2002). Only the *right* kinds of people, *people like us*, should be permitted to share our home, and failure to adequately defend our borders leaves us exposed to threats from within – threats to both our way of life (8) and our lives (7). Because of course, if Britain is 'the best country in the world' (5) this makes it *desirable* to others, and renders British people vulnerable to that envious desire.

### ***Fantasizing the other***

As already noted, this account reproduces a distinction between two types of immigrant, producing a category of people positioned as 'them', as 'the other'. 'Good immigrants' are contrasted with these others, *failed* asylum seekers (8), *illegal* immigrants (10), a threat to the British way of life (8), and more ominously, through either their ill health (10) or their association with criminality (1), a threat to British lives (7).

### *The good, the bad...*

Racialised constructions of 'good' and 'bad' immigrants (linked to the creation of a politics of fear, and a sense of moral panic) are a familiar part of the landscape of

migration debates in Europe (e.g. Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Pijpers, 2006; Welch & Shuster, 2005) , and it is perhaps unsurprising to see them reproduced in Howard's speech. Interesting perhaps here is the resilience of these constructions, and the ways in which Howard is able to offer resistance to the positioning of these constructions as racist. This is achieved, at least in part, with the use of a medicalizing discourse (the idea of unfettered migration as posing a 'common sense' health threat), but more significantly by Howard's self-positioning as 'an immigrant too'.

Good immigrants are represented as hard working people *like us*, with whom we share a common vision of Britain and Britishness determined by a shared moral sense, shared cultural identity – not by birth necessarily ('I am a child of immigrants') but by a sense of common identification with the British way of life. As Lewis & Neal (2005) have observed many European states are developing immigration policies that promote social cohesion and national identity around a set of core values. Howard himself acts as a symbolic representation of the idealized, fully integrated, fully assimilated immigrant who shares these values (See his statements that 'Britain is the best country in the world' (5) and his regular use of the term 'our').

By constructing himself, first as 'other' – 'I am the child of immigrants' (5) – Howard affords himself legitimacy to speak on issues of immigration. When he states 'my parents always told me, Britain is the best country in the world' (5), Howard summons up a naïve, immigrant position – listening to his father, being a good child, passing on good folk wisdom. He embodies in that moment the mythical 'good native', reproducing colonial discourses of sophisticated empire at the centre, and untutored, unsophisticated, but noble and hardworking colonized subject. Howard contrasts his father's naïve believe in the goodness of the country with his

own perception that Britain's potential to be 'the best country in the world' has been undermined by an influx of unwanted, dangerous migrants, whose failure to embody Britishness erodes the moral fiber and political stability of the country. He positions himself as a true subject of the British Empire, reconciling the troubling hybridity of the child of immigrants, of the displaced, diasporic object (Bhabha, 1994) by recreating himself, not as the subaltern of colonial discourses, but as a British subject, a host with the right to determine who should and should not be admitted to the country as guest.

Fortier (2005) has argued that the claim to multicultural tolerance within a multicultural nation project, depends on a reinscription, within clear limits, of the (acceptable) other *as other*, (highlighting their *difference*), alongside a requirement for the others' 'sameness' (assimilation). Immigrants, like Howard's parents, must believe Britain to be 'the best country in the world' (5) and pass this belief on to their children (5). As Fortier argues, these declarations of pride are deployed as counter-narratives to the perceived accusation of Britishness as racist. They "are cast as evidence that Britain and Britishness are not racist, that Britain is in fact a great place to be 'ethnic' - 'this is a good country in which to be a member of an ethnic minority'." (Fortier, 2005, p. 570)

Bad immigrants on the other hand, are those we need to protect against as they are a threat to our borders (1), to our lives (7, 8), to our livelihoods (7) and to our health (10). The latter two threats are most clearly addressed in the closing statement of this section of the speech in which Howard states 'we will insist on health checks for people who want to settle here. It's our national health service – not a world health service' (8). (What happened to the 'generosity' (5)?) Because of the ever-increasing burden on our public services (7) by those who abuse our hospitality (2), the Conservatives suggest health checks be instituted - a policy

adopted in many countries and already proposed by the New Labour government. The use of health screening for immigrants has a long history, for example, the US government has engaged in such a practice for well over a century (Mautino, 2004). Exploring the immigration consequences of tuberculosis, Mautino suggests that the legal status of this position "appears to be reasonable" (2004, p. 50) (again, the 'reasonable man' discourse). However, if we consider that the countries hardest hit by both HIV/AIDS and TB are mostly located in Sub-Saharan Africa (source: W.H.O.) this statement loses some of its 'reasonableness'. When Michael Howard, as a leader and representative of his party, states that new immigrants should be subject to mandatory testing for HIV and TB, this statement enrolls for most people an image: the image of the 'typical' HIV/AIDS or TB sufferer. This image is not necessarily constituted by the content of his discourse, but rather by its context, by that which accompanies or comes 'with' the 'text'.

*...and the unwanted*

The speech therefore conjures up notions of those who are *not like us* and, thus, pose a danger to the British way of life. The presumed impossibility that such immigrants, multiply constructed as 'other', could ever be appropriately assimilated into British culture positions them as a permanent internal threat. For this reason, it is suggested, immigration must be controlled, to ensure that only 'people like us' or 'genuine asylum seekers' are admitted to the country. The dangerous influence of the *other* immigrant, the bad immigrant is so great that the identity of new immigrants must be established as 'good' before they even arrive on our shores and claims for entry should be processed outside the country. It is this sense of 'us' and 'them', the construct of the racialised, diseased, violent other, that flags up the incipient racism in this account, while Howard's positioning of himself as the idealized immigrant serves to deflect precisely such a criticism. Of course what remains silent in this account is the reality that Howard is *white* and thus unlikely to

ever be subject to the level of scrutiny that he proposes for these dangerous immigrants of the new millennium. Indeed, it has been suggested that whiteness offers unique flexibility to pick up and put down particular kinds of identifications, like 'immigrant' and 'British', a luxury that is not as easily available to black people (Phoenix, 2006). Mohammed & Smith (1999) suggest that there is typically an assumption that black people should integrate themselves into white culture, assimilating its values. However, such assimilation is rendered an impossibility for many migrants by virtue of their visibility as the racialised other (Ahmed, 2005)

By defining the desirable kind of immigrant that the Conservative party will deliver, those who 'work hard and make a positive contribution' (6) or as 'fleeing persecution' (6), the speech insinuates that those who are currently in the system do not fall into these categories. For instance the 'quarter of a million failed asylum seekers living in our country today' (8) are discussed in a paragraph that begins with 'We face a real terrorist threat in Britain today' (8). These individuals are portrayed as bad immigrants, illegal, terrorists. These are the unwanted, and thus, by comparison they are represented, at best, as not wanting to work hard (lazy?) or to make a positive contribution (negative contributors?) and, at worst, as dangerous.

In drawing these distinctions, a range of complicated imagery of 'the other' is produced and reproduced. The distinction between 'economic migrants' and 'political refugees' is pervasive. Derrida (2001) suggests that this distinction between economic and political migrants makes it impossible for anyone to be considered a 'genuine' asylum seeker, since the polarization suggests that true 'political refugees' should not hope to gain economically from their asylum claim. This positions those who do attain asylum as perpetual dependents, eternal guests of the benevolent host nation, never able to attain residence or permanence.

### ***Conspicuous absences***

As we have already noted, in ventriloquating his father, in the role of 'good immigrant', Howard positions himself as that elusive category of person – the 'genuine' immigrant, the fully settled, fully assimilated immigrant who has *become* British. What is explicitly omitted from the speech, though, is the issue of race. As we also mentioned, Howard's freedom to be a host in the UK, his capacity for full assimilation into British social life is a consequence, in part of his whiteness. The flexibility to make this choice is available to him because his parents were not among the 'commonwealth' immigrants so feared in Powell's speech. He can be a 'good immigrant' in the terms laid out in his speech precisely because of his position as a white man, and without ever having to name 'race'.

Further, Howard's location as a 'child of immigrants' operates as an inoculation against suggestions of racism. This claim relies on the tendency to conflate 'race', 'ethnicity' and 'minority status' that is prevalent in Northern multicultural societies (Anthias & Yuval Davis, 1992), and a tendency to homogenize members of minority groups and migrant groups, viewing all who could be characterized as either minorities or migrants as the same. This enables Howard implicitly to claim that 'I am coloured too' (Ahmed, 2005) Thus Howard's identity as a member of a minority group locates him as 'one of them' in this discourse, and thus blocks any accusation that he and his policies could possibly be racist. At the same time, his obvious whiteness positions him as 'one of us' removing him from this minority category, and enabling him to represent himself as a true Briton.

In contrast to the image of the ideal guest migrant, the immigrant who knows his place in British society, another, more familiar representation of the immigrant emerges in the address. Never explicitly named, never directly addressed,

nonetheless the specter of the dangerous, threatening immigrant is introduced through a range of associative links forged in the speech. Through a conflation of immigration and crime, Howard resurrects the construct of the 'illegal immigrant'. He invokes an image of foreigners as violent, disease ridden, lazy, emphasizing the extensive, draining health and welfare needs of this racialised other. In an impressive sleight of hand (paragraphs 8-10), we see immigrants become illegal immigrants and failed asylum seekers, and failed asylum seekers become terrorists. In this way, Howard constructs *immigration* as the terrorist threat. '*Failed asylum seekers*' are created as objects of suspicion. There is no space for the possibility that those whose asylum claims are rejected could be anything other than dangerous, or that their claims, though rejected, might nonetheless have some basis in fact. Their status as *failed asylum seekers* speaks necessarily to their untrustworthiness, their criminality. In his description of quarter of a million disappeared failed asylum seekers (8), he creates an image of the enemy within, the enemy we cannot see, the introjected psychoanalytic bad object.

A similar conspicuous absence in the speech is that of gender. And yet just the slightest teasing out of the talk reveals gender quite explicitly in operation. Howard's description of himself instructed at the knee of his father in the values of nationhood is *clearly* patriarchal. As Yuval-Davis et al. have argued with reference to the New Labour governments' position, "although there were major issues concerning the gendered character of both British society and the ways its boundaries and borders are being constructed, there has not been any explicit attention paid to this." (2005, p. 514) Thus, by virtue of omission, the position is thus further configured as inclusive, 'not racist' and ungendered.

Racism remains an unspoken phenomenon in British politics. Any politician, whether making accusations of racism, engaging in a racial analysis, runs the risk



of the accusation of 'playing the race card'. The effect of this anxious silence around matters of race in British politics means that it is quite possible for politicians to produce rhetoric that marginalizes and denigrates entire groups of people, without risk, as long as they play the game too and do not explicitly *name* the issue as one of race. We have noted distinct similarities between Howard's 2005 speech, and Enoch Powell's 1968 speech, but it is here that the difference is most stark. Powell's error was to explicitly *name* race, to talk about 'negroes' and 'white people'. Howard, instead suggests that 'it's not racism, it's common sense' (4). It becomes difficult to subject Howard's speech to the kind of analysis needed to reveal its racism, for fear of the accusation of 'irrationality', of seeing things that are not there, in the face of the clear denial that it is 'not racism, but common sense'. Stoler (2002) notes a similar dynamic of 'present-absence' in French politics, where racism remains a regular and disruptive feature of French life, but was not (until very recently and very briefly) discussed in polite society or explicitly engaged by politicians. This discursive move renders race as slippery and elusive, and makes the 'othering' of the immigrant and asylum seeker that bit more robust, because of its distancing from talk about race.

### **Amalgamation**

As we noted earlier, it is important to remember when exploring this speech that it is an explicitly crafted piece of rhetoric, a product of a range of authors, put together for a specific political purpose. The speech is, in itself a complex production, at once personal and political, rhetorical and recursive, immediate and historical. There are no preexisting 'levels of analysis' to this speech, no preset point of engagement, other than those which a cognitive theorist, a discourse analyst or a rhetorician might bring to bear upon it. It is a multiplous production that simultaneously represents a person and a political party, produces a national

identity and a racist ideology, fantasizes a British self and a demonized other, and is an expression of economic and political imperatives and personal identities.

Seeing the speech in this way enables a clear focus on the *performative* aspects of Howard's speech. The construction of racialised categories within the speech is not a product of 'inner states', nor is it produced by 'outer forces': rather it is embodied and enacted in his talk, producing relations that echo and reproduce the relationship of subject and other. What is most clear and stark from this speech is that race and racism are not *identities* as such – they are not the possessions of individuals. Rather they are *practices* (Quayson, 2005) embedded in and threaded through with historical material, productive, not just of the subject position of the speaker, but also positioning the audience in complex ways.

In this paper we have attempted to highlight the relevance of analyzing discourse, in this case a previously prepared formal speech, from a number of points of approach without making explicit, and thus constructing, the very boundaries we would then appear to transgress. What is interesting here is how 'identities' such as immigrant, asylum seeker, Briton or 'racist' become constructed and bounded in varying ways, and how these identities circulate becoming recognized as solid and stable, while at the same time transient and variable. This process of shifting boundaries, (see Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994) is achieved, we would suggest, through relationalities – what Haraway has referred to as "the one fundamental thing about the world" (1997, p. 37). We have attempted here to trace the patterns of movement of these relations. In doing so we have addressed issues around broader political contexts, the construction of legitimacy, the personal in relation to the political and the historical. These heterogeneous elements come together to stabilize in a specific way. To (re-)produce 'racism' as a 'thing' that has effects. We would suggest that this is one way in which these relationalities can be approached.

The process of constructing a pre-given category, which presets the criteria by which 'racism' can be identified, the level of analysis at which it can be studied, and ignores the multiple points of contact at which 'racism' can be made visible or made to disappear, takes a number of risks. The greatest of these risks would be the reinscribing of the very 'racisms' we aim to disrupt.

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst with some forms of analysis of discourse (e.g. Foucauldian) contextualisation is key, we would argue that there is always a tension in discursive work, that involves the risk of attending to language at the expense of a material analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers refer to paragraphs in textbox