**Benefit or Burden? The difference in discursive frames of immigration between the boroughs of Hackney, and Kensington and Chelsea.**

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**Abstract: In this article, we compare the social representations of immigrants in two London boroughs (Hackney and Kensington & Chelsea) differing in income and patterns of immigration. Immigration is currently a salient issue on the public agenda and national discourses on immigration are a prominent area in social science research. However, there is need for more research on the variations of discourse at the local community level. We use the methods of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to uncover what kinds of discursive frames are used in the local media outlets and the popular vernacular in both boroughs. Drawing on qualitative analysis of articles from two local newspapers (‘Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea Today’ and ‘Hackney Gazette’), we shed light on the variations in the discourse of immigrants and immigration between the two boroughs. We then augmented our findings by conducting semi-structured interviews with people from both boroughs. The social representations found in the popular vernaculars echoed the media discourse in each borough. Our research makes the contribution to conceptualising the link between demographic properties of communities and the discursive frames on immigration that these communities use.**

**Key words: immigration, critical discourse analysis (CDA), London, social representation, media.**

**Introduction**

This paper explores how the discourse surrounding immigration varies in as small an area as one city. While some may represent immigrants within a positive economic frame, for example by describing immigrants as hard working, others may simultaneously represent them in a negative economic frame, describing them as low skilled and ‘stealing’ jobs. While variations of the discursive frames surrounding immigration are clear at the macro-level of national discourse, this variation also exists at the micro-level of discourse within the local community. Therefore, we felt it necessary to further explore this variation at the micro-level and to reflect on the potential links between the variation and other factors, such as ideology and socio-economic context. In order to do this, we compared two boroughs (Hackney, and Kensington and Chelsea) with different incomes and patterns of migration in order to compare the variation in the discursive frames of immigration within those boroughs. We focused on the local media and compared the discursive frames of immigration found here to the representations used in the local vernacular. We then augmented these findings with semi-structured interviews of people in each borough and found that there was also variation in the social representations used in the popular vernacular of each borough.

**Literature review**

A critical discourse analysis is a problem oriented, interdisciplinary approach to studying complex social phenomena and is used to demystify ideologies and power through the systematic investigation of semiotic data (Wodak,2008).  Discourses are stable uses of language that serve the organisation and structuring of social life (Wodak, 2006a,b). Discursive practices may have major ideological effects- they can help produce and reproduce unequal power and social relations. In the CDA framework, language is seen as a ‘social practice’ that is determined by social structure and contributes to stabilizing and changing that structure simultaneously (Fairclough and Wodak,1997). The main aim of CDA is to create awareness by producing and conveying critical knowledge to emancipate ourselves from forms of domination through self reflection(Bourdieu,1989).

Immigration has been one of the areas studied by CDA scholars. For example, Van Dijk (2000) discusses the portrayal of immigrants in political speeches in his work; Giffin explores the complexities of the migration experience focusing specifically on the gender dimension (Griffin, 2007). However, the focus has mainly been on national discourse. We are focusing on the analysis of their depiction in local media in order to examine unequal social and power relations in smaller communities.

We are drawing on the social representation theory (Wodak ,2008) which states that social actors involved in discourse do not only use their individual experiences but rely mainly on collective frames of perceptions, called social representations. Social representations are a core element of an individual’s social identity. Social representations are bound to specific individual social groups and do not span society as a whole. The varying social representation of immigration in both boroughs confirms this view. Social representation has 3 main aspects- power, attitudes and ideology. We have focused mainly on the *ideological* social representation portrayed in the local media.

As our main focus is on ideological representation as established above and hence we looked at Van Dijk paper, ‘Ideologies, Racism, Discourse: Debates on Immigration and Ethnic issues’. He establishes a thesis stating that both racism and ideology are prominently reproduced by discourse. We explore this thesis by examining our own samples of two boroughs in London and providing a comparison between the media discourse and conversational discourse in these boroughs.

According to Van Dijk, ideologies are defined as general and abstract mental representations that govern the shared mental representation of a social group. We have noticed this with the two boroughs that we have examined with each borough having individuals with similar mental representations which went on to govern the shared mental representation as seen by the local media and political preferences. For example, the interviewees in Kensington and Chelsea expressed views such as the economic burden of immigration along with a rise in criminality and this was expressed in its media and preference for the Conservative party. Van Dijk explains that certain groups and institutions are involved in the formation, confirmation and reproduction of ideologies. We have identified and focused on the media as one such group. She also states that the societal processes of ideological formation and change are enacted by the general social practices of the group members. We have noticed this in the interviews we have taken across the two boroughs; the separate ideologies of both boroughs have influenced the mental models of each individual that we have interviewed.

Another aspect that Van Dijk notes is that discourse is influenced not only by a person’s own mental models but also by the mental models of the communicative situation they are in. The social context that our interviewees were subject to restricted some of their responses. Context models may also be ideologically influenced hence, contextually controlled structures of discourse may be ideologically based. (this was the case with our interviews as the interviewer employed an us-them context while discussing immigrants).

We draw on an analytical scheme developed by Van Dijk to identify the discursive frames in public narratives and media text. Although there are contextual differences between immigration, and hence media discourse about this issue in both boroughs, the overall theoretical framework of their analysis is the same. The framework used to analyze the discourse used here include (a) an us-them ideological difference (b) negative and positive framings of immigrants and (c) deservedness of resources.

**Methodology**

We compared the local discourse in the boroughs of Hackney, and Kensington and Chelsea. We chose these boroughs due to their high levels of diversity and differing income[1]. Our rationale for this is that the differing socio-economic circumstances of Hackney, and Kensington and Chelsea may influence the way immigration was perceived within those boroughs. Our focus within the local discourse was newspaper articles drawn from the local newspaper of each borough and semi-structured interviews conducted in each borough.

*Analytical Framework*

We then analysed both the interview transcripts and the newspaper articles using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). While CDA is a diverse field of study, it tends to focus on ‘naturally occurring’ language (Wodak, 2008). Since Local Newspapers and interviews consist of ‘naturally occurring’ language, CDA was an appropriate theoretical framework within which to analyse our data.  In terms of the methodology of CDA, CDA research has no single methodological characteristic (ibid.). Hence, in operationalising CDA as a methodology we drew on some of the key concepts of CDA in order to establish an analytical framework with which to analyse our interviews/articles. We looked at different *discursive frames* of immigration and how they are manifested in the forms of (a) *propositions* about immigration and (b) *linguistic devices*. Propositions are the general statements made about immigration, for example “immigration is fine for us as long as immigrants are prepared to work”, whereas linguistic devices are more specific ways that actors in the discourse use language to communicate discursive frames. We categorised the propositions found into broader themes, looking at how immigrants were framed in terms of economic impact, welfare, resources, culture and crime. We also focused on linguistic devices, such as us/them terminology and disclaimers (e.g. “I’m not xenophobic, but…”).

When analysing both the local media and the interviews, we identified the propositions made on immigration in the body of the text. We then analysed these propositions in order to ascertain the types of discursive frames used and also focused on particular linguistic devices used when talking about immigrants.

*Local Media*

For the media section of our research, we analysed every article (except those published in the sports section) published on the website of a local paper from each borough in May 2016. The papers chosen were the Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea Today (‘Today’) and the Hackney Gazette. In total, we analysed 42 articles from ‘Today’ and 46 from the Hackney Gazette. Our rationale for analysing every article is that immigration could be mentioned in an article without it being made clear in the headline. Indeed, some of our most interesting findings on discursive framings of immigration came from articles which did not use the word immigration once.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

The media analysis was then followed up using semi structured interviews conducted in Kensington and Hackney. We decided to use semi-structured interviews, since they allowed us to compare to what extent the discursive frames used in the local media publications are present in the popular vernacular. The interviews also allowed us to discover new discursive frames. Given the nature of critical discourse analysis, interviews were recorded and fully transcribed, in order to allow us to analyse the exact wording and terminology used by respondents. The three members of our group all took part in the interviewing, transcription and analysis process. This allowed us to all develop individual analysis and review each other’s interpretations.

**Results**

*Local Media*

Immigration was a fairly common topic within the “Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea today”, with immigration being discussed in some manner in 9 of the 42 articles in our sample. In some articles, migration was mention in brief, neutral terms, usually in the context of a wider topic, such as the EU referendum. Other articles focused more specifically on immigration and used negative discursive frames in order to do so. A particular example of this is a feature article discussing the modern implications of the assassination of Pope John Paul II. This article framed immigrants in terms of criminality, explicitly linking the ethnicity of the assassin, “Mehmet Ali Ağca, a 23 year old Turkish petty criminal cum-bank robber” to the possibility of increased Turkish immigration if they join the EU. Furthermore, the article talks about tensions in the Middle East ‘bringing violent Islamic extremism to the streets of Europe’, implicitly linking Turkish Immigration to Islamic Extremism. This works to frame immigrants in terms of criminality.

Other articles used the discursive frame of economic impact when discussing immigration, focusing on specific immigrant groups, such as refugees. One particular article discusses the Syrian Refugees currently residing in Germany. The article discusses the money requested by German regional governments to assist with the integration of refugees into German Society, for example stating that “the cost of relocating refugees could reach as much as €25 billion this year.” As well as the discursive frame used being an economic one, it is also a negative one, with the article focusing on the ‘strain’ caused by the refugees. This strain is described as both a financial one and one on German communities. While the reference to communities is ambiguous as to what the exact framing is, it appears to imply both a negative economic frame and a negative cultural frame, suggesting that strain is placed on trying to maintain the local German culture in the face of new refugees with different cultures entering communities.

In contrast, the ‘Hackney Gazette’ did not discuss immigration in a single article mentioned in the sample. While there was one article discussing diversity in general, as opposed to focusing on immigration, the article framed diversity in positive terms, discussing a ‘celebration’ of Roma and Traveller culture taking place in Hackney. One potential explanation for this contrast would be the differences in immigration levels to the two boroughs – perhaps since there is a smaller proportion of foreign born residents in Hackney, there is simply less immigration related stories to report on. However, the stark contrast in frequency of references to immigration between the ‘Today’ and the ‘Hackney Gazette’ cannot be explained in terms of differences in levels of immigration. While the percentage of foreign born residents is lower in Hackney than it is in Kensington and Chelsea, it is still relatively high, with 38.9% of the population being born outside of the UK. Furthermore, the “Today” never reports any specific stories from within the borough; the stories reported on immigration tend to discuss UK wide immigration, or even immigration in other countries, as is the case with the article on Germany. Hence, it is not the case that there a just more stories about immigration within Kensington and Chelsea than there are within Hackney; the “Today” is actively choosing to report negative stories about immigration, while the “Hackney Gazette” is choosing not to report stories specifically about immigration.

This may be because of a fundamental difference in the way the “Today” views immigrants compared to the way the “Hackney Gazette”. In a few articles, the “Today” uses Us/Them language, a linguistic device used to present one group as separate from another group. In this case “them” is used to refer to immigrants, treating them as other from the broader society which they live in. The language used by the “Today” suggests that it views immigrants as a separate community from the broader community of Kensington and Chelsea. The “Hackney Gazette”, on the other hand, uses very inclusive terminology when discussing stories about Hackney, referring to people by terms such as “residents” which do not reveal whether those who are being talked about are immigrants or not. By using this more inclusive terminology, the “Hackney Gazette” appears to frame immigrants as part of the wider Hackney community and not as a separate entity. While this is only a tentative conclusion, this sheds some interesting light on how immigrants may potentially be more socially excluded in Kensinton and Chelsea than they are in Hackney. However, further research would be necessary in order to explore this more fully.

**Interviews**

*Economic Framing*

Within Kensington and Chelsea, a number of respondents tend to frame immigration in terms of economics. This framing tends to be negative, with respondents proposing that immigrants are low skilled and make it more difficult to find jobs. One respondent stated that,

*“It’s a shame people who have good skills don’t come”* (Male respondent, Kensington and Chelsea).

This proposes that immigrants tend to be low skilled, suggesting that they add little to the economy. Another male respondent states that you can feel the impact of immigration “jobwise and that”, proposing that immigrants make it more difficult to obtain jobs. While most of the respondents frame immigration within a negative economic discursive frame, some do frame immigration within a positive economic discursive frame. One female respondent stated in immigrants “are highly skilled and have better education than a lot of British people.”, suggesting in direct contrast to one of the previous respondents that immigrants were in fact highly skilled and thus beneficial to the economy.

In Hackney, the respondents tended to use a positive economic frame when discussing immigrants, referring to the benefits immigration bestows on the economy. For example, one female respondent notes that “it’s good for us to have other people who are multilingual”, asserting that British people are “incredibly lazy” when it comes to learning languages and as such immigrants bring valuable linguistic skills. As such, the respondent proposes that “it benefits our economy to have people from everywhere.” Another female respondent also argues that “a growing economy needs culturally diverse people in order to progress.” This positive economic framing was typical of most respondents in Hackney.

*Crime Framing*

In Kensington and Chelsea, some respondents framed immigration in terms of criminality, linking immigrants to crime. In these cases, respondents tended to refer to particular cases where immigrants have committed certain crimes. An example of this is one male respondent, who discussed criminal allegations against immigrants:

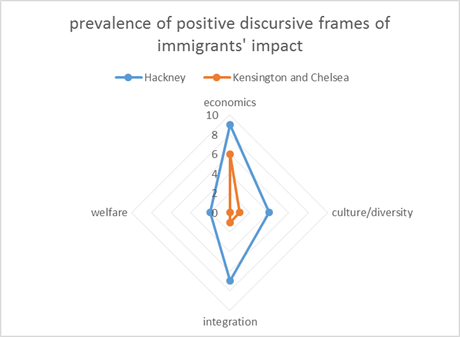
*“Yeah but when you look at the bad press that the refugees are getting in Germany and what happened over New Year and things like that, you always worry for it. And then when they’re saying in the media, oh if we stay in the EU, there’s going to be more chances of rapes and things like that…” .*

The respondent picks out specific cases of immigrants committing crimes (in this case rape and sexual assault) and generalises it to all immigrants, proposing that immigrants may be more likely to commit certain crimes.

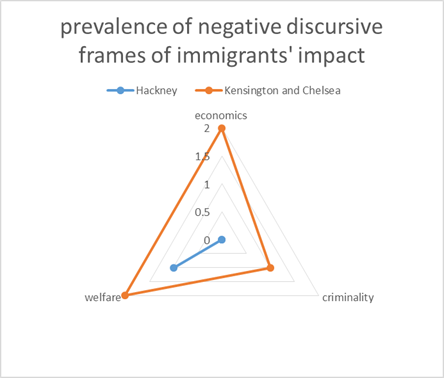
On the other hand, this discursive frame did not really appear in Hackney. When prompted to speak about immigrants and crime, many respondents proposed that the actions of a few weren’t indicative of the actions of the whole.  One female respondent talked about the fact we can’t “tarnish the whole” due to the actions of individuals, while another female respondent stated that “to pin it just on immigration is ridiculous, you only get the one story”.

The two graphs below compare the positive and negative framing of our interviewees in two Boroughs in a more direct way.

[1] 38.9% of the resident population of Hackney was born abroad, compared to 54.7% for Kensington and Chelsea. The median household income is £42,690 for Hackney and £116,000 for Kensington and Chelsea. (London Data Store, 2016)

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*The graph above compares clearly two boroughs’ differences in the prevalence of positive discursive frames of immigrants’ impact in the welfare, economics, integration and culture/diversity areas. As can be seen from the graph, Hackney respondents offered more positive discursive frames in all areas than in Kensington and Chelsea Borough. Especially, Hackney interviewees provided much more confidence on immigrants’ integration into their Hackney Borough and gave better comments on their contribution to economics.*

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*This graph compares two boroughs’ differences in the prevalence of negative discursive frames of immigrants’ impact in the welfare, economics, and criminality. The interviewees in Kensington and Chelsea Borough commented negatively much more than Hackney respondents on welfare, criminality and economics areas.*

*Protection of the public resources*

Protection of the public resources is one of the key themes emerging from the interview. For the Kensington and Chelsea Borough, interviewees showed greater protection of the local facilities and resources from immigrants than in Hackney Borough. Some of them believe that immigrants obviously consumed British public facilities and resources (long queues in NHS and larger school class size). One interviewee even claimed that even though UK government sets clear restriction on immigrants’ right to claim benefits, eventually all the immigrants will claim benefits. As our respondent put it,

*“But I know that the government is doing things like they’re not allowed to claim as soon as they arrive, they have to wait a certain amount of time before they can claim but everyone will claim in the end, won’t they? Everyone will.”* (Male respondent, Kensington and Chelsea)

This strong ownership of public resources suggests their bias towards immigrants. As Van Dijk (2000) puts it, even though subjects may not have self-categorised as a racist, but their protection of public resources and “our” territory indicates their racist self-schema.

The quote below clearly indicates the prevalence of racial bias in the popular vernaculars when the public resources are discussed:

*“It is good for the economy but it is the infrastructure of this country…you know to get an appointment to the doctors…you know school classes are 50 rather than 30…so we need more control”* (Male respondent, Kensington and Chelsea)

Comparatively speaking, in the Borough of Hackney, only one interviewee shows her worry to the idea that immigrants have occupied public spaces and exploiting resources. Many interviewees are holding positive idea to setting a better system and some people even believe that as taxpayers, immigrants are actually contributing to the British economy. As a respondent put it,

“ *I believe that when we have an immigrant population working, they help fund the social system. It’s been sold in a negative way; we’ve got an ageing population, we need young people to be working and putting money into the social welfare system.”* (Female respondent, Hackney)

*Us-them ideology*

One of the themes we looked at was the ‘Us and Them’ ideology by which people may view people in different groups as outsiders and not in the same group as themselves. Such themes can be analyzed in conversational discourse.

One method used to differentiate Us and Them is to use a ‘positive Self representation’. But to limit the negative impression the speaker makes on the recipient by doing so, the respondent may employ a ‘apparent negation disclaimer’. It begins by denying a negative self-characteristic, but continues negatively about ‘Them’. One of the respondents at Kensington assumed a more defensive position when asked about immigrants and constantly giving negative replies.

“ *I have nothing against immigration. I mean it is healthy for it to be in sort of control which it isn’t at the moment.”* (Male respondent, Kensington)

In general being extensively against immigration can have negative social representation as it could be tied to racism and selfishness. This led to the respondent to state that he wasn’t against immigration even though contradictorily he would want to put a stop to it.

In Kensington and Chelsea in general there was a ‘negative Other representation’ with people viewing immigrants as a strain on resources and associating them with a rise in criminality.

*“Most of the country is anti because of what is happening with the NHS and things like that. We are feeling it even though we shouldn’t really complain because this is how my family came over to the country anyway…but you can feel it now with the queues to the NHS…”* (Male respondent, Kensington)

This respondent views the immigrants as the Other even though he is himself an immigrant. He reports views based on what he hears in the media and has internalized this ‘Other’-feeling due to perhaps the power that the media exerts over his views.

Hackney exhibited ‘Positive other representation’ viewing the immigrants as beneficial to the economy. The people sometimes even expressed ‘Negative self representation’ and described themselves as lazy.

*“Ah, advantages for immigration is we benefit culturally and we gain from their culture and they’re hard working and they often rejuvenate an economy, they work really hard and they bring great value to an economic system.”* (Female respondent, Hackney)

Even with ‘positive other representation’ however, the immigrants are still viewed as the ‘other’ and this implies some degree of social isolation.

**Conclusion**

There was considerable variation in the discursive frames used in Hackney, and Kensington and Chelsea, both in the local media and in the popular vernacular. While the local media in Kensington and Chelsea tended to frame immigrants as a separate ‘them’ group to the wider ‘us’, whereas the Hackney local media framed immigrants as part of the wider Hackney community. In the popular vernacular, “negative other” framing was used in Kensington and Chelsea and “positive other” framing was used in Hackney. Furthermore, both the local media and popular vernacular in Kensington and Chelsea framed immigration in negative terms with respect to crime, economic impact and resources, whereas this framing was more positive in Hackney. Potential further areas for research could explore how this variation in discourse around immigration affects immigrants themselves within these boroughs, exploring whether these discourses contribute to the social exclusion of immigrants.

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