
MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

**RACISM, THE PRESS, AND CANADIAN SOCIETY:
LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDY**

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Introduction

Canadians hold at least two conflicting images of the history and place of ethnic minorities in Canadian life. One image suggests that Canada is a mosaic where ethnic groups have lived together in harmony, each cherishing its distinctive way of life ... The other assessment of the place of ethnic minorities in Canadian society points out that the mosaic ideal is of recent vintage and is far from being universally acclaimed. Further, it asserts that at the level of mundane reality there has been a strong current of prejudice and racism in Canadian national life.

— Historian Howard Palmer in *Patterns of Prejudice* (1982, p. 5)

As its national anthem proclaims, Canada is indeed “glorious and free,” especially with the trope of a harmonious cultural mosaic as a defining characteristic of this fundamentally democratic nation. As Prime Minister Jean Chrétien asserts, egalitarian values have always been at the basis of Canadian society: “Throughout the course of our history, we Canadians have built our society on the principles of fairness, justice, mutual respect, democracy and opportunity” (Department of Canadian Heritage, 1997). However, there also emerges from Canada’s history a legacy of racial prejudice, discrimination, and disadvantage. As numerous studies have shown, racist attitudes and beliefs persist in Canada, even though they are not always apparent to those unaffected by their direct repercussions. This tension begs the question: how does a society that upholds liberal democratic values, prohibits overt discriminatory practices of ethnic group dominance, and defends its tolerant and humanistic character simultaneously perpetuate racism?

As Stuart Hall notes, racism is one of the “most profoundly ‘naturalized’ of existing ideologies” (1981/2000, p. 272) and, as such, is an elusive and changing concept. Ideologies are produced and reproduced in sites that generate social meanings and distribute them throughout society, such as government, law enforcement, the education system, and the site that is the general focus of this discussion: the media. While this is not the place for an elaborate discussion on the operation and effect of the media—indeed, their offerings emerge out of a complex and often contradictory system of structures, practices, and discourses—they have a key role in the dissemination of ideologies, including racist ones. These racist ideologies embody the entire range of ideas and concepts that frame the organization, legitimization, and preservation of racial thought in society as well as the systems of dominance and relations of power based on race.

But while the media as an institution (the press in particular) is criticized for reproducing the dominant field of the ruling ideologies and for its Eurocentric predisposition and racist tendencies, it is simultaneously esteemed for its dedication to free and equitable access, impartial reportage, and accountability. Furthermore, it is held as a bastion for the free flow and exchange of information and opinions of a liberal democratic state, and a vital instrument in producing and disseminating its ideals. A profound tension thus emerges between, on the one hand, the belief that the press serves the role of public watchdog and is the cornerstone of a liberal democracy, on the other hand, the accusation that it actually purveys racialized discourse and functions in a systematically racist manner.

This paper investigates the nuances of this dialectic and uncovers the other tensions at work between racism and “traditional” Western values. Rather than attempt to “break new ground,” the goal here is to lay out a solid theoretical foundation for thinking about the connections between “race” and racism, the functions of the press, and the ideologies of society in which these dialectics play out. The first section looks specifically at *Ideology*, and to some degree, acts as a preface to the entire rest of the discussion. The tenuous notion of “Race” is then explored in order to gain a sense of the complex and volatile concept in which racism is ingrained. A segment is dedicated to *Defining Racism* itself, which is divided into two large categories: *The “Common/Traditional” Notion of Racism* and “Contemporary” *Notions of Racism*. The following chapter on *The New Racism*, a branch of the latter category, is Martin Barker’s important contribution that was the first to locate racist undertones in traditional values. Following that, *The “Problem” of Democracy* and the contradictions embedded in this esteemed principle are explored, leading into a discussion of another form of contemporary racism, *Democratic Racism*, which similarly recognizes the contradictory forces that characterize mainstream society as well as modern-day journalistic practices. By citing examples of the ways in which the press has engaged in racist rhetoric against the Chinese community in Canada, the forms, functions, and processes of the *Discursive Reproduction of Racism* are demonstrated. Finally, *Methods of Journalistic Resistance* are outlined in a gesture to reclaim the possibility that—despite its ubiquity—racism can be combated at the very least on a micro level, within the press and without.

Approach

As indicated, the rather modest intention of this paper is to lay a groundwork for thinking about the dialectical nature of racism in the press and in contemporary Western society; therefore, this paper is necessarily theory-heavy in order to meaningfully address some of the complex concepts that are central to this discussion. That said, it should be explicated that where examples are used, particularly in the discussion of the Canadian press's treatment of the Chinese community, the aim is not to build an in depth case study or to favour micro-level analysis over macro-level (the specific approach prefaces that section). Also, it is certainly not the intent to suggest that all of the media are guilty of racist discourse all of the time, or to label as racist any particular newspaper, journalist, or editor.

Instead, examples are employed to suggest that individual expressions which do not appear outwardly racist may actually hold subtle racist undertones that contribute to a racist cultural rhetoric and ideology when amassed over time. Here, evidencing racism through specific examples is not meant to focus on individual prejudicial attitudes so much as it is to encourage a re-evaluation of news discourse not simply in terms of what is easily identifiable as racist in method, but what is racist in effect. Without neglecting the significance of the contexts and ideological centres within which racism in the news functions, closer inspection of news discourse reveals the way in which the press—under the guiding principles of fairness and objectivity—voices racial biases, the cumulative effects of which contribute at best to a sort of cultural “shorthand” of race based largely on

essentialisms and common sense notions, and at worst to the insidious and ubiquitous form of cultural racism.

Ideology and Racism

Defined as the set of beliefs, assumptions, and values that comprise a worldview, ideology necessarily underlies any discussion of racism and the media. It helps explain how—despite the heterogeneity of media users who actively participate in their own sense making—the media are able to influence attitudes and opinions as well as produce and reproduce meanings, ideas, and norms. Any debate, differences of opinion, or opposition that occur do so well within the boundaries of tolerable ideological variation. Teun van Dijk asserts this ideological force of the mass media:

The overall ideological effects of the media are undeniable ... Fundamental norms and values, the selection of issues and topics of interest and attention (agenda setting), selective if not biased knowledge about the world, and many other elements or conditions of ideological control, are presently largely due to the mass media, or indirectly to the groups and institutions, such as those of politics, that have preferential access to the media. (1998, p. 188).

Coupled with practice, racism functions on the level of ideology and, as an ideology in and of itself, includes everything from ideas to institutions which provide the framework of interpretation and meaning for racial thought in society (Essed, 1990).

For example, a prevailing unquestioned assumption that shapes thinking on race in Canadian society is that “whiteness” indicates “normality” (Dyer, 1997).

Although the category “White” is as problematic as other racial groups (since within

these categories are distinctive subgroups of people that experience racialization differently), White is “the colour of domination” (Razack, 1998, p. 11) and the tacit standard against which the “differences” of all other subordinate groups are evaluated. The troubling trend that “non-whites continue to be a negligible proportion of the overall journalism population” (“So you want,” 2002) leads to the common criticism that “the media, it seems, measure the real world using a scale of values based upon hue, with the norm firmly fixed around the lighter varieties” (Ferguson, 1998, p. 196).

In “Racist Ideologies and the Media” (1981/2000), Stuart Hall makes three fundamental statements about the character and function of ideology. First, ideologies are not isolated and separate concepts; they consist of the articulation of different elements into a distinctive set of meanings. Second, though individuals make ideological statements, ideologies are not the product of individual consciousness or intention, since intentions are formulated *within* ideology. Third, ideologies function by constructing positions of identification and knowledge for their subjects, allowing them to speak ideological truths as if they were their authentic authors (p. 272). Implied in all three of Hall’s observations, and what is arguably most significant about ideology, is its “naturalizing” force. Naturalization, in the words of Robert Ferguson, “is the process whereby specific social relationships, often of power and subordination, are constructed and presented as natural rather than being the result of complex historical interactions between individuals, ethnic or other groups, genders, classes and power blocs” (1998, p. 156). The ideological force of racism is such that it provides a framework for the

organization of relations of power and dominance in a manner that effaces the social origins of beliefs and judgements.

Another crucial dimension of ideology is its reproduction in social interaction in general and in discourse in particular. Media discourse is pivotal in the construction and sustaining of racist ideology, and the role of the press in the reproduction of racism is far from a simple and straightforward process; for it to be meaningfully discussed and analyzed, a multidisciplinary approach that greatly extends what can be addressed here is required. For the purposes here, it is fair to say that ideologies are typically reproduced by the social practices, especially discourse, which occur in everyday life. Van Dijk describes the “macro-micro” connection of ideological reproduction: “Whether by socialization or other processes of sharing social representations (initiation, teaching, training, preaching, propaganda), ideologies are continually reproduced because social members ‘acquire’ or ‘learn to use’ them” (1998, p. 229). The modalities of the reproduction of knowledge premises are primarily discursive; that is, racist and other ideological reproduction take place most commonly through the routine and taken-for-granted processes of discourse production.

The Problem of “Race”

Crucial to any discussion of racism is an understanding of the concept on which it is based: *race*. Like the discourses that surround it, race is contestable, volatile, complex, and emotionally loaded. As a concept, race is generally understood in two ways: as a biological notion and as a social construct. The first aspect conceptualizes the world’s races as natural, immutable, and each with its

unique set of hereditary traits, including physical characteristics like skin colour, cranial shape, hair texture, and so forth. In addition to differences in visible anatomy, the biological notion of race also frequently implies inherent hierarchical differences, separating peoples into superior and inferior categories. Although this biological understanding has been refuted since the 1930s first by scientists of “population genetics,” the term’s common usage in everyday vernacular indicates that this erroneous understanding prevails. As Kay Anderson notes in her study of racial discourse in Canada, “Unfortunately, the concept of race, though for many decades being seen as problematic by population geneticists, continues to be used and propounded by many lay people, policy-makers, and journalists as a concept with scientific value” (1991, pp. 10-11). Indeed, what has long been accepted as fact in academic circles has not yet advanced to become “common knowledge” within the public sphere, despite sporadic attempts having been made by various groups including journalists.

For example, in a recent story in the *Toronto Star*, science reporter Peter Calamai uncovers the way in which the ethnic diversity of the residents of Toronto makes the city an ideal locale for one researcher’s genetic study of phenotypes. Calamai loosely defines “phenotypes” as the “genetic basis of measurable differences among people,” then goes a step further by denying the seeming similarities between these differences and those that define “race” according to its pseudo-scientific conceptualization:

But don’t call these “racial” differences within earshot of ... researchers in the field. Few even use the term race any more, preferring instead to a “socially recognizable population.”

The vocabulary switched because of scientific advances, not political correctness. Research found that the DNA inside people with different complexions and hair textures could still be as much as 99 per cent alike. More strikingly, the genetic variation between two people of the same "race" can be larger than between two people of different races. (22 July 2003, p. A14)

While "race" itself is not central to the story being reported, Calamai takes on a voice that is not frequently heard in mainstream society and clarifies the status of race as *not* a biological concept; consequently, he provides an informed account of "race" compared to the usual rudimentary usage of the concept in the popular media. However, Calamai simultaneously limits to a debatable degree the significance of this accurate (re-)conceptualization by implying that race as a scientific concept is unsuitable only for those "in the field" yet still suitable for everyone else.

While popular belief is that race is rooted in common ancestry and differentiated by inheritable physical traits, the formal consensus is that it is, in fact, a socially constructed category. The historical contexts and specific social relations in which racial categories are embedded give "race" concrete expression and thus meaning (Omi and Winant, 1986). James M. Jones elaborates on this point:

Race is defined by social convention, role definitions, and characteristics of particular societies at specific times. As a social construction, race has no fixity, except, perhaps, for the premise that a biological essentialism underlies whatever meaning the concept of race takes on. And, finally, race takes on a hierarchical meaning. It serves to help us separate groups that have been defined by "race" into superior and inferior categories. (1997, p. 348)

In this formulation, “race” is a scientific fallacy and an ideological fact.

Fundamentally arbitrary, its categorical divisions and hierarchical implications are historically and socially dependent. However, the concern with emphasizing the constructedness and arbitrariness of “race” is that it risks mitigating the very material consequences associated with it. Van Dijk notes:

Ideological struggles are rooted in real political, social or economic conflicts. They do not merely involve arbitrary groups, but involve group relations of power, dominance or competition. At stake is access to scarce social resources, both material as well as symbolic ones. (1998, p. 282)

History has shown that when people are explicitly discriminated against or denied certain rights and opportunities based solely on the “race” ascribed to them, they will often harness that racial category and rally as a unified, expressly marginalized group against their oppressors (i.e., members of the dominant group who hold the power to define who is “Other”) in order to demand fair and equal treatment and reclaim their rights. So, while the consensus is that “race” is a socially constructed category with no scientific basis, there are very real present-day political and other reasons why racial taxonomies of different peoples continue to be invoked and deeply felt.

The application of “race,” therefore, is fundamentally paradoxical. Stuart Allan rightly remarks that the word “race” is “one of the most politically charged in the journalistic vocabulary” (1999, p.157) and as such, its application is often intimidating. Broadcast journalist and professor Hubert Brown addresses the general fear factor associated with talking openly about “race”: “Journalists are no

different from so many [people] who find the discussion of race uncomfortable. Our fear of saying the wrong thing can silence us as it does people in other professions” (2000, p. 12). This silencing is a method of “playing it safe”; certainly no one, especially in a society that upholds liberal democratic values such as equality, wants to be labelled as racist, least of all journalists, whose professional success relies heavily on reputation.

Defining Racism

We see it everywhere, but rarely does anyone stop to say what it is, or to explain what is wrong with it.

— Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah on racism, in “Racisms” (1997, p. 105)

If we are to identify racism in the news media, we must first achieve a sense of what precisely is meant when “racism” is invoked and recognize that, like the concept “race” on which the term is based, it is complex, contestable, fluid, and shifting. It has no one definitive referent; rather, there are several definitions for racism as well as a multitude of varieties of racism (or, multiple “racisms”), each with its own defining set of characteristics. Hall emphasizes this point and the fluidity of racism:

It has no natural shape and universal law of development. It does not always assume the same shape. There have been many significantly different *racisms* – each historically specific and articulated in a different way. Racism is always historically specific in this way, whatever common features it may appear to share with other similar social phenomena. It always assumes specific forms which arise out

of the *present*—not the past—conditions and organization of society.
(1978, p. 26, original emphases)

In light of Hall's observations, then, any attempt to define racism must consider the context in which it is manifested. Jones succeeds in this task as he profiles seventeen prominent scholars' definitions for racism and classifies them into types, which include xenophobia, racial superiority, aversive racism, White nationalism, structural racism, and more (particular ones will be addressed in some detail later in this discussion). While Jones distinguishes between them and comments on their subtleties, he locates the significant commonality that is the essence of any notion or brand of racism: "What is ultimately important to all of the definitions is the idea that one group enjoys privilege and retains the powerful position needed to maintain it, define it as natural, and reject others who deviate from the standards that it has set up to reflect its way of life"(1997, p. 373). In light of this general, fundamental characteristic, any of the following, most common definitions of racism is apt: as a system in which one group of people exercises power over another group on the basis of "race"; as an implicit or explicit set of beliefs, erroneous assumptions, and actions based on an ideology of the inherent superiority of one racial group over another; as a form of racial discrimination evident in organizational or institutional structures and programs as well as in individual thought or behaviour patterns, which result in the exclusion or advancement of specific groups of people.

However, even these approaches fail to encapsulate all the aspects that theorists have associated with the term. It is apparent, then, that distilling a singular notion of racism is less fruitful than fleshing out some of the elements of racism:

- Belief in racial hierarchy and of superiority/inferiority of racial categories
- Belief in “race” as a determinant of fixed innate qualities
- Strong feelings of in-group preference, allegiance, and unity coupled with the rejection of people, beliefs, and customs that diverge from those of the in-group
- Negative attitudes, behaviour, and feelings (i.e., of resentment, antagonism, adverseness) that promote practices of inclusion/exclusion
- Systematic attempts to prove the rationality of beliefs about racial differences
- Disavowal of the existence of racial inequalities and discriminatory practices

Clearly, racism is a multifaceted and fluid concept that embodies a range of ideas.

Although there are numerous categories of racism that contain some or all of these elements, for the purposes of this discussion “racism” is considered in two broad groupings, which are not a definitive binary but a way of differentiating between the widely held, “lay” understanding of racism and the subtler forms that contemporary notions of racism describe. Making this distinction is to attempt to demonstrate the way racism can be understood not simply in terms of what is easily identifiable as racist in method, but what is racist in effect, which in turn contributes to the understanding of the discursive reproduction of racism and the prevalence of racial bias in the output of the press. *Table 1* delineates some of the major differences between these categories as they are detected in the news.

Table 1 – Comparing two general notions of racism as they exist in the media

“Traditional” Racism	“Contemporary” Racism
“Overt”: Favoured media coverage is granted to what are explicitly or openly racist positions and arguments (Hall, 1981)	“Inferential”: Seemingly naturalized representations of situations where racist premises or propositions are inscribed in the media coverage as a set of unquestioned assumptions (Hall, 1981)
Minorities are biologically inferior (biological deterministic perspective)	Minorities are different, though with deficiencies
Blatant	Subtle, symbolic
Exists on the level of the individual or individual groups (personal prejudice)	Exists (1) Systemically – consists of policies and practices, entrenched in institutions and across sectors, that result in the exclusion or advancement of specific groups of people (2) Culturally – subsumed in the dominant ideology and embedded in the entire tacit network of assumptions, beliefs, and values of the prevailing culture that encourages and justifies discriminatory actions
Anti-cultural/anti-societal element when detected - what few believe	The “norm,” status quo, “natural,” “common sense” - what everyone knows
Involves intent to harm/oppress, conscious of effect	Not necessarily with intent, unconscious of effect
Employs explicit racist labels	Employs negative and code words for minorities like “illegal,” “welfare mothers,” “inner city,” “aliens”; divides the populace into an “Us” versus “Them/Other”; diction has a specific ideological function: “they kill, we eliminate,” “they cause <i>civilian causalities</i> , we cause <i>collateral damage</i> ,” “they are <i>terrorists</i> , we are <i>freedom fighters</i> ”

The “Common/Traditional” Notion of Racism

“Racism” in this context refers to the widespread, popular lay understanding of this phenomenon, that is, how most people conceive of and define this term. Under this notion, racism is easily recognizable because the racial bias on which its manifestations are based is blatant and deliberate. Another defining characteristic of this form is its basis in the biological conception of “race” and the assumptions that go along with it, such as inherent inferiority/superiority beliefs. Also, this racism reflects personal prejudice and is manifest in the overt behaviour prompted by the prejudicial attitudes of individuals; thus, it exists on the level of the individual or individual groups. In conventional analyses of racism and the levels at which it functions, “individual racism” is made a distinct subgroup.

In the press, it describes instances when personal biases based on race interfere with fair hiring, promotion, or story assignment, and when a writer’s remarks suggest a belief in the superiority of his or her own race. For example, in a column in the *Globe and Mail* entitled “Good People and Bad People,” John Barber states, “Although statistics are banned, everybody knows the tale they tell: Young Black men are responsible for a disproportionate amount of violent crime in Toronto” (12 April 1994). The racist sentiment underlying this comment is clear; it racializes young black men into criminals. Barber gestures at the existence of evidence but does little to suggest what often skews race-and-crime figures, such as racial profiling in policing. Even without presenting these so-called banned statistics, Barber nevertheless employs them to defend his virtually tautological argument. Furthermore, by stating that his comment is something “everybody

knows,” Barber attempts to appeal to common sense, as if this statement is naturally true or plain fact.

Blatant racist remarks such as this one not only characterize individual racism (simply a division of the much broader, widely understood conception of racism) but also formulate what Stuart Hall calls “overt racism.” Pertaining specifically to the media, Hall describes this as the favourable coverage given to arguments that advance a racist view, such as in the open partisanship of sections of the popular press that circulate and popularise openly racist policies and ideas. The threat is not simply that the press translates these racist ideas into the vivid populist vernacular, but—

it is the very fact that such things can now be openly said and advocated which *legitimizes* their public expression and increases the threshold of the public acceptability of racism. Racism becomes acceptable”—and thus, not too long after, “true”—just common sense: what everyone knows and is openly saying. (1981/2000, p. 274, original emphasis)

Hall contends that overt racism is rarely expressed in the media, especially not in the news media, where high standards of objectivity and fairness would dictate that any racist sentiment which is easily perceptible and made consciously and with intent be screened out. If racism were strictly what conventional knowledge purports it to be, how would one explain the continued presence of racial prejudice in the news and in Western societies that champion egalitarian values like equality that directly oppose and undermine racism?

“Contemporary” Notions of Racism

Hall (1981/2000) accounts for this seeming anomaly in the media with the notion of “inferential racism.” Inferential racism embodies those representations of issues and events in the media relating to “race” that have racist foundations inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions, which include beliefs that Western culture is superior, that Canada is a multicultural and tolerant nation, and that “whiteness” is “normal” (see pp. 8-9 of this discussion). Because such representations are naturalized and “common sense,” the racist predicates on which they are grounded are never exposed. This concealment of racism is a crucial component of what is called “new racism” (Barker, 1981), which is a more contemporary conceptualization of racism—in contrast to the “traditional” formulation of racism—that is covert, insidious, and pervasive because it is largely invisible to those, like newsmakers, who formulate the world in its terms.

Contemporary notions of racism like Barker’s “new racism” tend to be more subtle and symbolic than the forms typically associated with the everyday (i.e., “common/traditional”) invocation of racism. These newer forms are not necessarily made with intent because they tend to exist not at the level of the individual but at the institutional and cultural levels.

Institutional (or structural/systemic) racism manifests itself in the policies, practices, laws, and customs of an organization or social system. To some degree, it is the extension of individual racist thought in order to achieve and maintain racist advantage over others through the manipulation of established institutions. It also operates on a subtler level, as the by-product of certain institutional practices that

operate to restrict—on a racial basis—the choice, rights, mobility, and access of groups of individuals. In this respect, institutional racism does not necessarily involve individual racist intent, as Jones explains: “If racist consequences accrue to institutional laws, customs or practices the institution is racist whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racist intentions” (1972, p. 131). Since institutional racism can be overt or covert, intentional or unintentional, accounting for those instances of overt racism by individual journalists is only minimally effectual in portraying the presence and force of racism in the press. Rather, studying the policies and daily practices (regarding deadlines, sources, hiring, story assignment, and so forth) of a news organization and across the journalistic field gives a more accurate sense of the way racism is entrenched in the structure of the institution of the popular media.

In the collaborative effort entitled “The Social Production of News” (2000), Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts make an important contribution to the study of institutional racism in the field of journalism. They indicate the way in which the professional practices of journalism ensure the media’s key role in reproducing the “dominant field of the ruling ideologies,” that is, the way journalistic practices and structures contribute to the ideological processes that maintain the exclusion or advancement of specific groups of people. One should be wary, though, of making the link between dominant ideas and professional media ideologies and practices simply because the media are mainly capitalist-owned, since to do so ignores the autonomy of the newsmakers from direct economic control. To explain how the media reproduce the definitions of the

powerful without being, in a simple sense, “in their pay,” Hall et al. distinguish between “primary and secondary definers” of social events.

The practical pressures of incessant deadlines and the professional demands of objectivity and impartiality combine to produce a systematically structured “over-accessing” to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions. These two aspects of news production serve to familiarize the media with the “definitions of social reality” that their “accredited sources” (i.e., institutional spokespeople) provide. The media are frequently not the “primary definers” of news events at all; it is their structured relationship to power that has the effect of making them play a crucial but *secondary* role in reproducing the ideologies of those with privileged access to the media (the “accredited sources”). Since the relationship between the media and the primary institutional definers is a structured one, it permits the institutional definers to establish the initial definition or primary interpretation of the topic in question. Due to the daily practices of news making, then, the media stand in a position of structured subordination to the primary definers (p. 649). Unlike perspectives that tend toward “conspiracy” notions—of a ruling elite who dictates to editors and reporters what to run in their newspapers (as in Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s “propaganda model”)—which often characterize the discussion of institutional racism in the press, the theory of primary and secondary definers in the social production of news helps explain the way in which journalistic practices (including those that perpetuate racism) are forged by their relationships with larger forces in society.

Examining the media for institutional racism involves not only examining micro-level practices (i.e., news reportage), but also macro-level processes (i.e., ownership of news organizations) and the interrelated and interwoven forces that link them. In *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America* (2000), Entman and Rojecki detail the closely woven forces of mainstream culture, media personnel and organizations, market demands, political pressure, and the economy that interact to determine which messages obtain extensive and repeated distribution—and thus social and political force—and which remain either unexpressed or marginalized in obscure media channels. Because of the bureaucratic organization of the media, the structure of news values, and journalistic practices, the news rarely allows journalists to cultivate their audiences' accurate understanding of racial matters.

The concentration of Canadian newspaper ownership and the structured relationships between the media and “power” (i.e., corporate elite media owners, “accredited” institutional sources, advertisers, etc.) are also a contributing force of institutional racism. Karl Marx's contention that “the ruling ideas of any age are the ideas of its ruling class” holds particular clout in considering the ways in which this class owns and controls the means of mental and ideological production, in addition to the means of material production. Van Dijk states:

Groups can remain dominant only if they have the resources to reproduce their dominance. This is not only true economically, but also socially, culturally, and especially ideologically. Hence, it is essential for the reproduction of racism that also the “means of

ideological production,” such as education and the media, are controlled by the white dominant group. (1991, p. 32)

In addition, Stuart Hall *et al.* insist that the ability of the members of the ruling class to produce their definition of social reality and the place of “ordinary people” (including, at the very least, minority peoples) is fundamentally oppressive:

Because of their control over material and mental resources, and their domination of the major institutions of society, this class’s definitions of the social world provide the basic rationale for those institutions which protect and reproduce their “way of life.” This control of mental resources ensures that theirs are the most powerful and “universal” of the available definitions of the social world. (2000, p. 651)

Given the political, social, economic, and cultural position of major newspapers (particularly in western societies), it may be expected that the news media participate—whether or not individual journalists do so wittingly—in the overall system that sustains group dominance. Journalists are often subject to considerable economic, organizational, and professional constraints that adversely affect the news. Although most strive to be independent and objective, journalists sometimes may produce unconsciously and unintentionally output that reflects corporate interests; thus, the systemic mechanisms of journalism often concurrently create a particular picture while preventing the formation of alternative ones.

Similarly, more open and alternative views of “race” are unconsciously stifled on the level of culture. When Raymond Williams famously claimed, “Culture is ordinary” (1958/1989), he wrested the term “culture” from the realm of the fine arts and specialist knowledge into the mundane aspects that shape everyday

experience, or, into “a whole way of life.” Hodge, Struckmann, and Trost expand upon this broad, all-encompassing notion of culture, describing it as “the sum total of life patterns passed on from generation to generation within a group of people ... [including] institutions, language, values, religious ideals, habits of thinking, artistic expressions, and patterns of social and interpersonal relationships” (1975, p. 2). Thus, as culture includes all aspects of day-to-day life of a society over time, cultural racism represents the entire tacit network of assumptions, beliefs, and values that are deeply embedded in the prevailing culture and subsumed in the dominant ideology of a society, and which encourages and justifies discriminatory actions. Jones offers the following definition:

Cultural racism comprises the cumulative effects of a racialized worldview, based on beliefs in essential racial differences that favor the dominant racial group over others. These effects are suffused throughout the culture via institutional structures, ideological beliefs, and personal everyday actions of people in the culture, and these effects are passed on from generation to generation. (1997, p.472)

Cultural racism is reflected in the images generated by education, media, films, and other forms of cultural production (Essed, 1990). For example, cultural racism is present in socio-linguistic movements like political correctness and colour-blindness that function to mask references to “race” and resist social change, in discriminatory or exclusionary public policies (see W. Peter Ward, 2002), in the racialization of crime and the “problematizing” of immigrants in the media (see Greenberg and Hier, 2001), and other facets of society in which a legacy of racist views are infused and persist. Van Dijk notes that it is “clear from much of the literature on

‘modern racism’ [that] most forms of racism are no longer biologically based, but take a more ‘acceptable’ form as cultural racism: others are not vilified for what they are, but for what they do and think” (1998, p. 278). This observation is a crucial component of Barker’s notion of “new racism,” which does not simply describe *where* contemporary notions of racism exist, but it provides an explanation as to *how* institutional and cultural racism function in a society that upholds liberal democratic values and how racial biases are naturalized and made commonsense.

New Racism

They are ... legitimate instincts. These instincts express themselves in feelings, as beliefs to which we feel committed. They are our commonsense. ... For commonsense is not understood as made up out of gut reactions based on the best in our nature; it is the realization of customs, traditions, culture, way of life. ... Thus is racism theorized out of the guts and made into commonsense.

— Martin Barker in *The New Racism* (1981, p. 23)

“New racism” is a crucial development in recognizing the subtle and pervasive force of racism and is arguably the most influential and imperative conceptualization of racism for critically examining news discourse. It describes the general dynamic behind other noted variants of “contemporary” racism, particularly the modern, symbolic, aversive, and democratic racisms.¹ In many

¹ **Modern racism**—The belief that discrimination is a thing of the past because minority groups have a level playing field of opportunity and the freedom to compete in the marketplace. (McConahay, 1986)

Symbolic racism—Resistance to change in the racial status quo based on moral feelings that blacks violate traditional values like individualism, self-reliance, the work ethic, etc. (Sears, 1973, 1981)

Aversive racism—Ambivalence based on conflict between feelings associated with a sincere egalitarian value system and unacknowledged negative feelings about [minority groups]. (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986)

Democratic racism—Refer to the following section for Henry et al’s (2000) definition.

respects, these contemporary forms of racism are markedly different from “the ‘old’ racism of slavery, segregation, apartheid, lynchings, and systematic discrimination, of white superiority feelings, and of explicit derogation in public discourse and everyday conversation” (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 33). In contrast to these examples of the “old-fashioned” form of racism, in which beliefs about one’s inherent superiority/inferiority give rise to blatant racial prejudice, contemporary approaches of racism suggest the emergence of a new form that engages with traditional Western values. This new form permits those who partake in this redefinition of racism to be free from any imputation of claiming to be superior to other races.

Rooted in the concept of xenophobia, Barker’s theorization claims that racism is a set of pejorative racial attitudes framed in terms of logic and rationality, such as the belief in the naturalness of feeling essentially different to members of other populations (which does not necessarily imply disliking foreigners or discriminating against them). This “new” racism is particularly insidious and potent because it is embedded in the framework of democracy, as Barker explains: “The gambit works as follows. First, present a case that we are normally and by nature fair and tolerant; then claim that these goods are being overstrained” (p. 13). The new racism is expressed through the argument from “genuine fears” and the idea of a homogenous “way of life.” The connection between the two notions contains a theory in which —

— people’s feelings about their essential unity and individuality are so central that they constitute their way of life. If it were not for feelings of belonging, of sharing traditions, customs, beliefs, language—in a word, culture—there could be no society. ...

Therefore the very existence of fears about damage to the unity of the nation is proof that the unity of the nation is threatened. (17)

According to this logic, the self-validating fears—that the “alien” ways of immigrants would inevitably ‘crack the homogeneity of the insiders’ and absorb that imagined unified ‘way of life’— threaten the democratic principles of fairness and tolerance and thus help formulate a portrait of racial prejudice without outward feelings of dominance. Disliking or blaming foreigners, much less than feelings of superiority, is not even necessary to say that their presence constitutes a threat to one’s way of life.

Race is linked with nation in this theory, and the “insiders” (“We”) are not better or worse than outsiders (“Them”). The force of this new theory of racism lies in the fact that it is fundamentally a theory of human nature. Human nature dictates that strong feelings of allegiance to one’s nation (and the “imagined community” within it) is “natural.” As a theory of human nature, the new racism does not merely appeal to common sense, but creates a new common sense, such that it denies that it is racism at all:

What is important about the new racism is its claim of logic and rationality of thought and judgement. That is, the new racist is not a bigot, is not antiblack, or anti-Asian, or anti-Hispanic, but simply a staunch defender of those valued beliefs and practices, customs, and way of life that make ours a great society. (Jones, 1997, p. 371)

The uniqueness of this understanding of racism and the ones that have developed from it is that there is a close linkage between traditional values and racism. Jones (1997) asserts that traditional values of liberty, freedom, and democracy are closely

associated with beliefs in racial superiority/inferiority, the denial of rights and opportunities on the basis of group membership, and institutional structures that limit participation of "the others" (i.e., those not like us); therefore, the "new" racism is not that much of a departure from the "old-fashioned" racism. Barker originally makes this observation and anticipates another critique of his theory:

There are several important things to be said about this new theory. First, of course, it is by no means totally new. Ideas of this sort, of the naturalness of the nation and the difference of foreigners, have been around for a long time. But its self-conscious renewal at this time has brought forward new elements; and some of its connections are dangerously new ... Secondly, it is important to be clear that there was a struggle to create this new theory. It would be senseless to deny that there are real problems and tensions surrounding immigration; but in themselves these do not add up to a theory, or a conceptualization of race." (p. 24)

As Barker concedes, real problems with immigration exist. But in identifying the tacit superiority/inferiority beliefs, irrational fears, and undue vexations that are enmeshed in the "principled" loyalty to traditional values that characterize the new racism, there is a chance of painting a definition of racism in too-large strokes. Indeed, this broad-brush approach can fail to allow for legitimate opposition to racial remedies on non-racial grounds (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993). At the same time, this point is also employed to justify the publicizing of what are, at best, inflammatory xenophobic remarks, as in the case of news writer Diane Francis, who often refers to the real problems of immigration as a defence to accusations of racism.

A useful way to conceive of the new racism is as a *system* of racial inequality, which consists of sets of sometimes-subtle everyday discriminatory practices sustained by socially shared representations. Due to its symbolic and subtle nature, the new racism manifests itself discursively and is thus evident in virtually all facets of society including everyday conversations, parliamentary debates, textbooks, and news reports in the press. Though the new racism is manifested discursively (rather than, physically, for example), the efficacy of these forms, as Teun van Dijk observes, should not be underestimated:

They appear “mere” talk, and far removed from the open violence and forceful segregation of the “old” racism. Yet, they may be just as effective to marginalize and exclude minorities. They may hurt even more, especially when they seem to be so “normal,” so “natural,” and so “commonsensical” to those who engage in such discourse and interaction. (2000, p. 34).

Because the media function discursively and symbolically, they play a crucial role in establishing the discursive and cognitive hegemony that reproduces the new racism. As a “thinly veiled rationalization of racial hatred” (Jones, 1997, p. 377), the new racism helps account for the expression of racist thought in journalism specifically—since it is an industry that esteems values like integrity, objectivity, and accountability—and Western society at large, which upholds liberal democratic values like equality and liberty.

Comparing the “Traditional” and “Contemporary” Notions of Racism

To think about the way in which contemporary forms of racism have come to replace traditional ones, Daniel Hallin’s (1986) spheres of Consensus, Legitimate Controversy, and Deviance, which comprise his model of objective journalism, prove useful. The Sphere of Consensus—the innermost circle in what resembles a dartboard—is the area of agreement, the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy comprises debate, and the Sphere of Deviance includes issues “beyond the pale.” The spheres in which any given issue falls shift over time and in different contexts as politicians, journalists, and the public shift their views. For example, the segregation of people of colour moved over time from the Spheres of Consensus to Legitimate Controversy to its current, deeply embedded place in the Sphere of Deviance.

Applied to racism in the news, it is apparent that traditional, “old-fashioned” forms have not just simply dropped from view in a single, direct shift to make way for newer forms. Though explicit racist sentiments are now firmly set in the Sphere of Deviance, just as measures that support equality are firmly set in the Sphere of Consensus, it seems that the *idea* that many of us—even those who esteem egalitarian values—often partake in racist practices, whether wittingly or not, is currently far from the Sphere of Consensus. The notion is confounding at best and taboo at worst. In believing that only bigots engage in racism, we expunge from ourselves the responsibility to work towards eradicating racism in the present day. In this light, one achieves a sense of what news is with respect to matters of “race”: a site of discursive struggle.

The “Problem” of Democracy

Racism is not just the excesses of mean-spirited bigots, but the consequence of this truly extraordinary experiment in democracy.

— James M. Jones in *Prejudice and Racism* (1997, p. 377)

The presence of contemporary, pervasive forms of racism—that is, of racism entrenched in the very fabric of society—stands in stark contrast to the ideology of democracy and its corresponding values of liberalism and equality on which society is predicated. In fact, with democracy come certain challenges and contradictions. Though the Oxford English Dictionary defines democracy as “government by the whole people of a country, especially through elected representatives” (1994), what tends to emerge in this parliamentary process is tribalism (that is, those feelings of identity with and loyalty to one’s “own kind,” the belief that it is natural to like one’s own kind, and the act of resisting the idea that others may control one’s own fate). Here, the dilemma is that democracy in theory implies equal power to everyone, but in actuality granting control to everyone is not wholly appealing, especially to those who solely pursue the interests of their own group.

Along with democracy’s feature of majority rule is individual liberty, but individualism—though not a bad thing in and of itself—works selectively and inconsistently. Though there is a general belief that opportunities abound and that taking advantage of them is a matter of individual character, the racial category to which one belongs plays an important role in determining what opportunities are available and under what conditions. The salience of examples of individual success—however unrepresentative they may be of the collective experience of a

group—is sufficient to maintain the belief in individualism and equity of opportunity even though opportunities are often limited to individuals of particular races (Jones, 1997). Another challenge to democracy is factionalism, which conflicts with the features of equality and tolerance associated with democratic societies and which arises when diversity mutates into conflict over diverging self-interests.

The media, like other institutions, embody the “problem” of democracy. In theory, the notion that the popular press is essentially democratic (i.e., in accordance with the principle of equal rights for all) is consistent with both the facts and forum models of journalism (see David Nord, 2001 or James Carey, 1989), even though in practice it seems that these methodologies of journalism have long provided opportunities for the affluent and powerful more so than for the marginalized and disenfranchised. As Nord (2001) observes in a critique of pluralism, journalism is more open to some interests than to others:

[It is] anything but a fair and democratic marketplace of ideas ... overwhelmingly biased in favour of well-heeled, well-organized, well-defined interests. The system excludes interests that are weak, diffuse, or difficult to organize. Tolerance ... masked systematic bias and inequality. In this critique journalism, with its dependence on groups as sources for both fact and commentary, faithfully reflects the appalling inequities of American pluralism. (p. 8)

However, Nord is quick to also point out the way in which both the fact and forum functions of the press are inclusive and provide access opportunities to all:

Making a claim to access in the name of balance, fairness, and diversity is a play upon the forum function of the press, and such a claim has the force of professional and historical tradition. For the truly powerless, ... the fact function of the press provides another opening. For journalists, a newsworthy event is a fact, and the people and groups that are not insiders can gain access to the media by causing events to happen. (pp. 8-9)

Nord reminds us that bias does not simply exist but is organized and mobilized, and he concedes that some of the political and cultural “work” of mobilizing bias is accomplished through the press, even though that challenges the notion of democracy.

And if the press is indeed skewed only slightly in favour of “well-heeled” interests, the spectre of an egalitarian press—namely through images of diversity—may well be enough for the masses. One must question whether media audiences truly want diversity or whether the illusion of diversity is sufficient in sustaining society’s ideals of being fair, just, and democratic. Writer Kheven Lee LaGrone suggests that mere images of diversity “create a mythical, racially integrated, equal America. In reality, America is divided into a White, or mainstream, America, and an un-American ‘other’” (2000, p.13). In this respect, the Canadian situation is comparable. Journalist Loreen Pindera notes that “mainstream media still mostly represent the status quo—middle ground, middle class, white male Canadian reality. Whatever is outside of that seems ‘other’” (cited in Roth; 1996, p. 78). LaGrone suggests that the illusion of diversity is important for “White America” to defend democratic ideals like “equality” and “liberty,” which downplay the country’s racial

realities. The “problem” of democracy, it seems, is that it is not without flaws or limitations; it can tend towards tribalism or factionalism, and it can also act as a guise for existing inequalities and thus stifle change.

Democratic Racism

The paradox is that both a liberal democratic value system and racist beliefs and behaviours—belief systems that should be in conflict with each other—nevertheless coexist.

— Frances Henry, Carol Tator, Winston Mattis, and Tim Rees in *The Colour of Democracy* (2000:57)

Building upon similar tensions raised by the “new racism,” Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees (2000) develop the notion of *democratic racism*, which specifically addresses how it is that the powerful and conflicting ideologies of democracy and racism coexist in Canadian society. Both of these contemporary racisms describe a latent, more insidious and complex form, but whereas the new racism describes how the act of promoting traditional values can in fact propagate xenophobic sentiments with strong racist undertones, democratic racism describes an ideology in which egalitarian and discriminatory values are made congruent to each other. Arising when democratic societies retain a legacy of racist behaviours and beliefs, democratic racism is elusive because the racist rhetoric is hidden within the norms that define Canada as a White, humanistic, and tolerant society (Henry et al, 2000).

Undoubtedly, the vast majority of Canadians are committed to (at least the idea of) a democratic society shaped by egalitarian principles of fairness, justice, and equality. This is evident in the Canadian Human Rights Code, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, policies based on multiculturalism, employment equity, and

so forth. Canadian society boasts numerous defining markers of its ideological basis in democratic liberalism. However, embedded in this dominant ideology is also a collective racist ideology, as seen in the racist behaviour and beliefs that penetrate all levels of Canadian society. The existence of systemic racist practices and individual negative feelings toward minorities are often denied or obfuscated to give the pretence of continued faith in egalitarian ideals (Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Yon, 1995). It seems that most people not directly affected by racism more readily subscribe to the belief that egalitarian ideals effectively govern society, rather than concede that racism exists in a forceful way or question the behaviour and practices in which they so readily and naturally engage. However, as observed in the discussion of Barker's conception of the new racism, one can support traditional values and simultaneously support racial differentiation since "liberal principles are the very language and conceptual framework through which intolerance and exclusion are enabled, reinforced, defined and defended" (Mackey, 1996, p.305).

Following their work with Mattis and Rees, Henry and Tator (2002) focus the lens of democratic racism on the English language press in Canada. They contend that democratic racism is evident in the everyday discourses that pervade mainstream cultural, social, economic, and political spaces, and particularly in the press. Within these spaces, which are controlled mainly by a dominant White culture, there exists a constant moral tension between the lived experiences of people of minority groups and the perceptions of those who have the power to redefine that reality (Henry & Tator, 2002). While democratic racism describes the

dissonance that emerges between the ideology of Canada as a liberal democracy and the racist ideology embedded in its collective belief system, it also describes the dialectic that emerges from this process as it is applied to the media in particular:

There is a profound tension in Canadian society: a conflict between the belief that the media are the cornerstone of a democratic liberal society and the key instrument by which its ideals are produced and disseminated, and the actual role of the media as purveyors of racialized discourse, supporters of a powerful White political, economic, and cultural elite, and a vehicle for reinforcing racism in Canadian society. (p. 189)

As a form of the new racism, democratic racism elucidates the way in which the news media participate in the overall system that sustains group dominance, especially in a society where overt discriminatory practices of ethnic group dominance are scorned and legally forbidden.

The Discursive Reproduction of Racism in the News

For the ability to present news objectively and to interpret it realistically is not a native instinct in the human species; it is a product of culture which comes only with knowledge of the past and acute awareness of how deceptive is our normal observation and how wishful is our thinking.

— Walter Lippmann in 1931, cited in *The Essential Lippmann* (1963, p. 405)

In assessing the role of the press in the reproduction of racism in society, one cannot simply list its stereotypical topics or cite examples of obvious bias against minority groups. Instead, as Van Dijk observes in *Racism and the Press* (1991), a

multifaceted approach better addresses the complexity of the relationship between racism and the press:

Since its role is largely symbolic and ideological, and hence based on discursive practices, we first of all need a thorough discourse analytical approach that is able systematically to describe and explain the subtleties of ethnic reporting. Secondly, we have found that this reproductive and symbolic role of the Press is not isolated, but linked in many ways to political, economic, or other power institutions or the elites in general. ... Finally, we need much more insight into the most complex question of the problem of reproduction, that is, the role of the Press, and in particular of the detailed structures and meanings of its reporting, in the process of opinion and attitude formation among the public at large. (p. 253)

Not simply looking at mere words alone, then, but also considering the way the press as an institution is organized and relates to other institutions and society at large achieves a clearer sense of the way the press contributes to the continuity of racism at the macro level (the heavy theoretical musings that have led up to this discussion in this paper such an attempt). However, the following section focuses on news reports, which are sites of interaction between social actors and the output of the functions of these macro and micro level processes of racism. The following section takes its cue from critical discourse analysis, which makes sense of the relationships between detailed textual structures of news and the cognitive, social, political, and cultural structures of their contexts. In examining the way the press reproduces racism discursively within social and political contexts, through

rhetorical structures and other strategies, this discussion employs research² that mainly focuses on Chinese-Canadians and Chinese migrants. The aim in doing so is to depict the way in which racist and liberal-democratic ideals coexist in the workings of the media and to flesh out the ways that newsmakers have participated in casting this racial group in a negative light, all the while subscribing to the liberal principles of a free press.

“Us” vs. “Them”: The Process of “Othering”

A subtle form of discrimination that suffuses news discourse—and which may not at first glance appear to be a *method* of sustaining racism but certainly has the *effect* of sustaining detrimental racial divisions—is the process of rendering groups as “Other” through the rhetoric of “us” and “them.” To Henry et al. (2000), this us/them binary describes the “Discourse of ‘Otherness,’” which is a dominant discourse of democratic racism: “The ubiquitous *we* represents the White dominant culture or the culture of the organization ... *they* refers to the communities that are the *other*, and that possess ‘different’ (i.e., undesirable) values, beliefs, and norms” (p. 231, original emphases). News discourse is organized around notions of belonging and strategies of inclusion and exclusion, such that the construction of “us and them” encourages only some groups to feel “at home” in the community (Allan, 1999). Consider the example: “Send them back. That’s the opinion of the majority of callers who responded to Friday’s *Times Colonist* phone poll on the 123

² The studies referred to here reflect a mere handful of the contributions to what is a growing body of research on the relationship between the media and this ethnic group, and which include critical discourse analyses, content analyses, ethnographic studies, and more. In referring to these works, the author is not trying to prove what the researchers have already proven but is employing their conclusions to exemplify some of the strategies newsmakers engage in and to what effect.

Chinese migrants who arrived here last week" (*Victoria Times Colonist*, 12 July 1999). This type of inclusionary/exclusionary strategy creates and reinforces fears and divisions between groups of people, particularly between the assumed mainstream (i.e., White) audience and people of other ethnic groups.

The "othering" of minority groups by newsmakers is most frequently employed and most obvious in war reportage, in which the news media project a sense of a collective "we" that is tacitly or explicitly mobilized in opposition to a "them," which is arguably a reflection of the political rhetoric that emerges in wartime. This polarization is an ideological strategy of positive self-representation (made often by associations with patriotism, loyalty, and allegiance) and negative other-presentation (made through the depiction of the evil workings of then enemy "Other"). The racist implications are apparent, even though journalists and others employ this language without intent or awareness of the repercussions (thus contributing to the larger cultural racist rhetoric consistent with contemporary racisms); as journalist Phillip Knightley observes in the reportage of the Vietnam War, racism "became a patriotic virtue" (1982, cited in Allan, 1999, p.173). In the chapter of *News Culture* entitled "'Us and Them': Racism in the News" (1999), Stuart Allan lists an extensive overview of the types of terms the British press used to report on the war in the Persian Gulf (first compiled by the *Guardian Weekly*), which pinpoints how a racialized "us and them" frequently dictated some journalists' choice of descriptive terms to avoid using explicitly racist labels but still evoking the same kind of negative racist imagery (this is further discussed in the section entitled "Local Meanings").

Turning to the research on people of Chinese descent in Canada, in "Making the News, Racializing Chinese Canadians" (1996), researchers Creese and Patterson examine the discursive forms that signify groups or individuals as Chinese in the *Vancouver Sun* during two five-year periods (1919-1923 and 1986-1990). What the researchers found in over 230 samples was that news reports signifying Chinese subjects fell into three broad themes: crime, economics and immigration, and issues related to consumption and citizenship; this narrow range of representation signals marginalization from the mainstream. Furthermore, the discursive content reproduces the image of a "Chinese Other": "Racialized, gendered, and classed discourses framed news so as to produce a Chinese Other; an object, not a subject of news reporting" (p. 124). In a similar earlier study, Ma and Hildebrandt (1993) draw similar conclusions in their focus on *Toronto Star* and *Vancouver Sun* coverage of the Chinese community from 1970 to 1990, claiming that the increase of negative reportage mainly dealt with issues of immigration and crime.

Topics

As the Creese and Patterson (1996) and Ma and Hildebrandt (1993) studies suggest, ethnic groups tend to be included in the media only under specific thematic categories, which is another method of "othering." The topic of a news story is the subject of the text, or the "discursive event." Though there are virtually infinite subjects that the media can offer, the notion of "newsworthiness" caps off the bulk of these so that a limited amount of topics are covered, and done so repeatedly. Rather than depictions of everyday life situations, the coverage of ethnic groups in

particular is restricted to certain topics and events (Van Dijk, 2000) that include but are not limited to:

- The arrival of new (illegal) immigrants
- Threats such as violence, crime, drugs, and prostitution
- Social problems like unemployment and welfare
- Cultural (and negative) characterization of their differences and deviations
- Integration conflicts

The selection of topics emerges out of the social, political, professional, and other ideologies and expresses the priorities, concerns, and agendas of the dominant (White) culture (Henry and Tator, 2002), so that even “neutral” topics can garner negative dimensions. For example, immigration is a topic that often—though not invariably—appears in the news in its negative aspects; as Creese and Patterson note in their analysis of the coverage of the diverse Chinese community in Canada, “crime and immigration were routinely linked” (1996, p. 128). The selection of topics that limit favourable coverage of these “Other” communities serve to build a racially biased discourse of national identity by means of the discursive exclusion of non-white “races” and emphasis on positive self-representation. Without resorting to a discourse of explicit “race” supremacy, the signification of “race” and criminality, illegal immigration, and other negative topics decidedly casts in a positive light the symbolic, non-“Other” Canadian community.

Local Meanings

A similar semantic method that grapples with the simultaneity of racist and egalitarian values in the news is the use of “local meanings.” As noted in *Table 1*, contemporary notions of racism employ diction with a specific ideological purpose:

as Van Dijk notes, “The new racism ... avoids explicitly racist labels, and uses negative words to describe the properties or actions of immigrants or minorities” (2000, p. 39). Instead of the derogatory words that immediately signal racism as it is traditionally understood, code words (i.e., “urban,” “inner city”) are employed which function in the same discriminatory way. Negative words (i.e., “illegal aliens,” “welfare mothers”) are also used pejoratively to describe minorities and their actions without immediately signalling racism.

When ships carrying migrants from China arrived to the shores of British Columbia in 1999, the following labels emerged that disseminated racist sentiment through local meanings: “aliens,” “illegals,” “human cargo,” and “boat people.” Standing on their own in the context of headlines and bodies of news reports, these terms assume illegality and have a dehumanising effect. For example:

- “Boat people prepared to test their refugee claims” (*Vancouver Sun*, 7 September 1999)
- “Ship dumps human cargo” (*Victoria Times Colonist*, 12 August 1999)
- “Snookered again by the boat people” (*Toronto Sun*, 15 August 1999)

Creese and Patterson note that, in their research of news coverage of already established Chinese-Canadians, “the common signifier was ‘Chinese immigrant’: a discursive practice of exclusion that constructs immigrant and Canadian as oppositional social categories” (1996, p. 123); yet again, the overall strategy of positive self-representation for the mainstream audience and negative other-representation is played out with local meanings.

Problematization and "Crisis"

Chinese migration has in recent years propagated much of the discourse on immigration in Canadian news. The recent prominent historical event alluded to in the above was the arrival of four boats of Fujianese migrants to British Columbia in the summer of 1999. The arrival of these migrants, 599 in total, sparked a whirlwind of news stories and commentaries, even though "Canada routinely accepts 25,000 refugees every year with minimal media uproar" (Clarkson, 2000, p. 6). In the earlier of two similar studies by Greenberg and Hier (2001, 2002), the authors examine the news coverage of this incident in the *National Post*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Toronto Sun*, and *Victoria Times-Colonist*. Following their thorough investigation, they conclude that news coverage of this event precipitated a process of "collective problematization." This problematization resulted in the portrayal of migrants as an embodiment of danger and a threat to the physical, moral and political security and well being of the nation. A plethora of editorials and columns reacted to what was evidently a "crisis" in the immigration system, but, as Clarkson notes, "They [the media] manufactured an immigration crisis where none existed" (2000, p. 6). Greenberg and Hier contend that the newsmakers' descriptions of immigration and refugee "crises" are best seen not as the outcome of structural failures of the state but as socially constructed through narrative.

Even before this historical event, Creese and Patterson remark that "in both the 1920s and the 1980s Chinese Canadians were constructed as immigrants and foreigners who posed a problem ... for the larger society" (1996, p. 122). Specifically, this "problem" is the threat to health, the increase of crime, and the

“crisis” status of the immigration system. With the “troubling” arrival of the four boats of migrants in 1999 came a proliferation of news reports and editorials that generated a “consensus” around Canada’s purported lax policies and perception that the immigration and refugee system and was in a “state of crisis” (Greenberg and Hier, 2001, p. 564). Stressing the alleged illegality of all the migrants contributed to this sense of crisis (emphasis added):

- “a mystery ship filled with *illegal* aliens” (21 July 1999, Vancouver Sun)
- “an estimated 190 *illegal* Chinese migrants” (1 September 1999, The National Post)
- “the expected boatload of *illegal* Asian migrants” (12 August 1999, The National Post)

The repeated coupling of “illegal” with “Chinese or “Asian” has the effect of “race-tagging,” that is, problematizing the “Chinese identity” by suggesting its inherent link to illegitimacy, and it also constructs the issue of human migration in terms of a Chinese phenomenon.

Moral Panic

Linked to the idea of crisis and problematization is the concept of “moral panic.” Cited in other literature as “discursive crisis,” moral panic suggests that a particular event is not considered to be contentious until it has been constructed as such in public (i.e., media) discourse (Henry and Tator, 2002, p. 233). In their later study, Hier and Greenberg (2002) address the “tendency for a large part of a society to consolidate in response to a threat, which can be real or imagined ... [and] believed to be so dangerous that the social body and the ‘moral order’ that ‘something must be done’” (p. 140), which characterizes moral panic. From the

“hard” news stories that formed the basis of their analysis, Hier and Greenberg uncover the way in which the discourse of moral panic dominates in these reports, characterized by racialized illegality, health risk, and other decidedly negative notions that are exaggerated and fabricated.

Such an imagined health risk (which again signals the troubling state of immigration) is recounted by *National Post* writer Diane Francis: “Asians are bringing syphilis and malaria, too, spread through prostitutes in that area of the world” (21 August 1999). Francis’ statement does not simply voice what she perceives as a real threat, it also reveals only blatant inaccuracies (malaria is transmitted through infected mosquitoes) and a decidedly xenophobic undertone.

However, the expression of threat in moral panic discourse need not be as pointed and outwardly racist as in the last example to be effective, but can also draw on everyday “common sense” notions. Henry et al. (2000) and Henry and Tator (2002) identify moral panic as a discourse of domination that contributes to the reproduction of democratic racism:

Drawing on discourses that have historically been part of Canada’s national mythology and nation building, some of the media constructed a discursive crisis that centred on the ‘flawed’ Canadian immigration and refugee systems. Many newspapers tapped a rich reservoir of core ideas and images, which included often fabricated notions of illegality, objectified identities, amplified migration patterns, health risk, and criminality; in doing so they mobilized politicians, government representatives, and various sectors of the population at large into a frenzy of protest. (2002, p. 233)

This discourse achieves its racist effect both in isolated statements *and* cumulatively, as Greenberg and Hier note: “It is clear that the press generally gave prominent coverage to the idea that the migrants’ arrivals posed a significant danger to the ‘health’ and ‘security’ of the Canadian state and its public” (2001, p. 573). By lending itself to the idea that the present state of society is under siege by outsiders, news discourse has the ability to shore up differences between groups of people, reproduce dominant cultural beliefs and values, and—over time—create a rhetoric of “race” based on inaccurate notions.

While asserting that moral panic and other similar strategies ensure that racism in the news thrives, it is worth reminding that the aim of this discussion is *not* to lay blame or “expose” the “mal-intents” and racial biases of those who dedicate themselves to the institution of the media. The workings and effects of these strategies are complex; some of these specifically embody the simultaneity of liberal-democratic and racist ideologies, while others simply contribute to outright racism under the institutional claims of fairness and neutrality. By letting these discursive practices continue, newsmakers accede to the reproduction of dominant cultural values and norms and in a way deny the existence of racism (which is a form of modern racism itself - see the footnote on p. 26). Due to such racist implications, a tension emerges that underlies the professional practice of journalism: the dialectic between the conservative, system-sustaining role of news, which preserves oppressive hegemonic practices and social relations, and its simultaneous role as the “public watchdog” and “voice of and for the people,”

espousing liberal-democratic values of fairness, equality, objectivity, and freedom of expression.

Methods of Journalistic Resistance

In order to render problematic the narrative conventions which sustain different forms of racism, it is necessary to disrupt the taken-for-granted assumptions about "race" which inform what counts as journalistic "common sense."

— Stuart Allan in *News Culture* (1999, pp. 164-5)

In evidencing the forms and functions of the new racism and the way in which news discourses reproduce it, one should seek to intervene in its propagation and take up Hall's challenge "to undermine, deconstruct and question the unquestioned racist assumptions on which so much of media practice is grounded" (Hall 1990, p. 8). Since the mechanisms of racism are so embedded in ideology, reporters and editors might feel immobilized to the task of developing an "anti-racist common sense" (ibid); however, there are indeed methods to resist the racist tendency in everyday and news discourse.

Show the breadth of various communities over time. By restricting minorities to stories solely about immigration problems, crime, and other negative topics, newsmakers limit the topics in which ethnic groups are represented, thus risking the act of "othering." Instead, writers should realize that words and images accumulate over time to potentially exacerbate racial tensions, even though the "facts" may be accurate on a story-by-story basis. Seib and Fitzpatrick observe this important long-term effect of the news: "The impact of news coverage is determined

only rarely by one story or a few stories. The substance and tone of coverage over a lengthy period are more influential” (1997, p. 187). Writers should be encouraged to familiarize themselves with the community they are covering, recognize the range of minority groups, and not forget that minority communities are also diverse. Also, writers should not ignore what is representative in favour of what is sensational, particularly when covering extreme viewpoints within a minority group; the context of these radical views should be defined and it should be made clear whether they are widespread.

Implement diversity efforts. Diversity efforts range from sources to stories, within and without the newsroom. Although the pace of daily journalism makes it difficult, writers should strive to achieve a variety of voices, particularly those that are not often heard. Representatives from minority groups should be sourced, but not limited to stories about “minority issues.” Measurable hiring goals for an inclusive newsroom should be instituted, particularly in decision-making positions. Also, closer ties with ethnic media and with minority journalists’ organizations should be made to encourage their critiquing role of the mainstream media’s positions and perspectives.

Practice greater reflexivity. Since the newer forms of racism are embedded in common sense notions, examining one’s own biases and assumptions helps avoid imposing one’s own cultural values on others. If references to “race” are mentioned, then “race” must be relevant to the story. Lorna Roth reiterates that taken-for-granted practices should be examined: “Crossing into new cultural and

racial terrain is an opportunity to identify gaps in conventional journalistic practices that should be taken up, deliberated over and resolved in an honest, open and sensitive manner” (1996, p. 83).

Avoid timidity in the coverage of “race.” Though many journalists have addressed the common fear in the profession of being offensive or labelled “racist,” it is sometimes important to harness that fear in order to address key issues: “In the name of political correctness and tolerance, we’re not touching issues that should be dealt with. It’s difficult. We can’t be afraid to offend. Sometimes, you have to be prepared to offend” (Pindera, cited in Roth, 1996, p. 82). If “race” is an issue, one should be bold enough to uncover it. According to the code of ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), journalists should “Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so” (SPJ, 2002).

These tactics serve the pursuit of news coverage that is truly fair, honest, and sensitive, not just has the veneer of these qualities. Although perhaps only radical change of the prevailing social order can truly efface the ideological premises on which racism is based and breeds, promoting a discussion of “race” that is more conscious of the dominant discourses at work in society at large and in the media in particular can, at the very least, encourage all social actors to evaluate the ideologies—egalitarian, racist, and otherwise—that frame the experiences of day to day life.

Conclusion

If this paper has served its purpose, then at least one thing should be apparent: addressing the issue of racism in the press uncovers an array of assumptions, contradictions, ambiguities, and complexities. Exploring the various understandings of racism reveals that it is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is embedded in common sense and everyday practices, it interacts with other ideologies, and it penetrates various levels of society. Evidencing racism in the press, therefore, requires sensitivity to the larger dialectical forces that emerge out of the interactions and contradictions that fundamentally shape our society. This sensitivity must necessarily emerge from the vigorous examination and recognition of one's own biases because, as Gardenswartz and Rowe remark, "Without examining and understanding the layers of diversity that form filters, we are apt to be victims of our differences, making unconscious assumptions and encountering unexplained and frustrating barriers" (1994, p. 18). Like other institutions and sectors of society but more so, the press is a site of discursive and ideological struggle, where one can either accept the brand of ignorance and fear-mongering that racism breeds on, or face it with insight and candour.

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