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"Bring Back Hitler's Gas Chambers": Asylum Seeking, Nazis and Facebook: A Discursive Analysis

Shani Burke and Simon Goodman*,

both at Coventry University

*Corresponding author

Work E-mail: S.Goodman@Coventry.ac.uk

Personal E-mail: Simon.Goodman@yahoo.com

Office phone: 024 7688 8209

Personal phone: 078 2862 1165

Office Address: Dr Simon Goodman

                     Department of Psychology

                     Faculty of Health & Life Sciences

                     Coventry University

                     Priory Street

                     Coventry

                     CV1 5FB

Email for first author: Shani.Burke@hotmail.co.uk

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Abstract

In this article we explore how talk about Nazis is used in Internet discussions regarding asylum seeking, and the issue of whether or not opposition to asylum seeking is racist. Discursive analysis was conducted on discussions about asylum seeking from the social network website 'Facebook', where references to Nazis were made. Three strategies were identified: 1) People supporting asylum seeking accuse opponents of asylum of being racist by referring to Nazis, 2) Opponents of asylum seeking deal with such accusations by arguing that the debate is being suppressed because of references to Nazis, 3) In the final, and most striking strategy, opponents of asylum draw upon ideas associated with Nazis and Hitler to bring about their anti-asylum position. These findings are discussed in relation to how the link between Nazis and racism is emerging in the asylum debate.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; race talk; accusations of racism; Nazis; CMC

1. Introduction

Asylum seekers have been shown to receive unsympathetic treatment in the countries where they seek refuge (Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Hynes and Sales, 2009,) despite being vulnerable (Stewart, 2005) which has led many researchers to argue that the harsh treatment asylum seekers receive is prejudicial (Every and Augoustinos, 2007). Opposition to asylum seekers in the UK is part of a wide concern about issues such as an increase in racial diversity and cultural change in the UK (Lewis, 2005). These concerns have lead to a contentious and ongoing debate about whether or not opposition to asylum is racist (Lewis 2005; Goodman and Burke 2010). As the asylum debate is so prominent (e.g. Verkuyten, 2005), it is taking place in a number of arenas, including online discussions and social networking websites such as Facebook, where discussions are conducted in a less guarded way than other social spaces (Goodman, 2007), and includes extreme language such as references to Nazis.

Therefore this paper addresses discussions about asylum seeking in this under researched area.

Discursive Psychology and prejudice

Discursive psychologists (e.g. Billig, 2002) criticise traditional explanations of prejudice such as Tajfel's Social Identity approach (1986), because such approaches do not account for the variation that takes place in talk about race and prejudice, illustrated in the finding that people go to rhetorical lengths to deny that they are racist (Billig 1988), whilst making arguments which could be viewed as racist. This variation has been explained by what Billig termed "the norm against prejudice" (1988: 5), where people attempt to deny that they are prejudiced when they may be viewed as such.

People who oppose asylum seeking often justify their opposition in terms of economic or cultural factors (Lynn and Lea, 2003; Every and Augoustinos, 2007; Capdevila and Callaghan, 2008; Goodman and Burke, 2010; 2011) which is a way of disclaiming (Billig *et al.,* 1988) prejudice. Speakers ensure that opposition to asylum is attributed to reasons other than race, which makes the speaker appear to be reasonable. This is to be expected because as Edwards (2003) shows, any type of prejudice can be viewed as irrational. Therefore opponents of asylum will ensure that their arguments appear to be rational in order to avoid being seen as prejudiced. Capdevila and Callaghan (2008) show an example of this in the UK's Conservative Party's claim that their anti-asylum and immigration campaign was not racist, but common sense. This rhetorical removal of race has been termed "Discursive Deracialisation" by Every and Augoustinos (2007:133; see also Goodman and Burke, 2011).

Recent findings have suggested that the norm against prejudice is being challenged and criticised (Goodman 2010). This happens when members of majority groups use the taboo on prejudice to argue that they are being discriminated against by having their freedom of speech

suppressed. Accusations of racism have therefore been shown to be problematic, and as a result 'racism' is a term used for severe cases of racism only (Van Dijk 1993a). Because of this it has been shown that speakers attempting to support asylum seekers rhetorically distance themselves from the subject position of someone who makes accusations of racism (Goodman, 2010) because people who label opponents as being racist are open to accusations of "playing the race card" (Lewis, 2005:40).

Every and Augoustinos (2007) propose that the reason Nazi related language is rarely used in the asylum debate is because such language is considered too extreme for speakers to justify its use when discussing asylum. However, Nazi related language has been found to be used as a discursive device to both express and challenge racism. Lynn and Lea (2003) found that supporters of asylum used imagery of Nazi concentration camps in order to challenge detention centres where asylum seekers were held, so as to construct their detention as racist.

Computer -mediated Communication (CMC) and Extreme Language

Studies have suggested that CMC can lead to 'deindividuation', where writers are more likely to engage in more extreme language than in face to face settings, leading to the phenomenon of 'flaming' (e.g. Bomberger, 2004) where people use CMC to argue and insult. Contrary to such claim, however, other studies (e.g. Kushin and Kitchener, 2009) have shown that people can engage in civil interactions when discussing politics in CMC. Kushin and Kitchener (2009) suggest that one reason for this may be because social networking sites such as Facebook reduce anonymity by including peoples' names and photographs.

There has been little discursive research on asylum seeking using online data, with the exception of Goodman (2007) who identified some extreme dehumanising talk about asylum seekers, where asylum seekers were referred to as breeding animals. In his study both support

and opposition to asylum was achieved using less caution with language than has been found in studies focusing on political and media debates.

The focus on "ordinary, everyday" people (Lynn and Lea, 2003:429) rather than on parliamentary or media discourse means that the dilemma of stake and interest (Edwards and Potter, 1992) is minimised, so opposing asylum may be less problematic and people are less likely to be guarded about making accusations of racism (Goodman, 2007). Constructions of racism in talk are found to be carefully made (Every and Augoustinos, 2007), however Billig (2001) showed that more extreme language occurs in CMC.

Rationale

This research builds on previous research by Goodman and Burke (2010; 2011), who found that speakers constructed accusations of racism towards opponents of asylum as being unreasonable, and attributed their opposition to practical issues such as the economy, which demonstrates Discursive Deracialisation. The aim of this research is therefore to address how accusations of racism are made and rejected in an online setting where the language is less guarded and more extreme.

2. Procedure

The research used discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992) to address asynchronous (communication which is independent of time and place) CMC. The research was informed by a critical discursive psychological approach (e.g. Wetherell and Edley, 1999), which focuses on the action orientation of text (Edwards and Potter, 1992), rather than what accounts say about author's cognitions.

Archival data was obtained from the global social networking website 'Facebook', in which users can interact by writing posts and joining groups. Groups are set up by Facebook users

in order to discuss and share information about particular topics, and they include wall posts, discussion forums, photographs, and videos (Phillips, 2007). Groups are often used as a way of informal campaigning and debating (Seligstein, 2007). This data is naturalistic and not 'contrived' (Potter, 1997).

Data was collected between July and October 2009 by the first author, by searching for the term 'asylum seeker' in the Facebook groups search engine. Some of the groups had the term "immigrant" in the group title rather than "asylum seeker", this is not surprising as research has shown that these two terms are often conflated (Goodman and Speer, 2007), which usually means that discussions are rarely associated only with asylum seekers (Lewis, 2005). This data is from groups discussing the issue of asylum in the UK.

Group 'administrators' were contacted for permission to use their groups, although all content is in the public domain. The data included predominantly 'wall posts' (the area where discussions take place), but also includes 'discussion forums' and 'group descriptions'. Extracts included in the analysis are taken from the wall posts unless stated otherwise. The URLs for group pages are included as endnotes wherever the pages are still known to be available.

Six groups were selected for analysis by the first author: 'I refuse to hate asylum seekers'[1], 'STOP ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ENTERING OUR COUNTRY &TAKING OUR JOBS!!!!!!'[2], 'Stop The Asylum Seekers Coming To The UK'[3], 'Im NOT racist, just concerned about mass immigration!'[4], 'If you don't like our country, GO SOMEWHERE ELSE!'[5], and 'whos sick ov asylum seekers?'[6] These particular groups were selected for analysis because they contained discussions related to racism and Nazis. One of these groups, 'I refuse to hate asylum seekers', set out to criticise opposition to asylum.

Extracts containing the strategies discussed in the analysis were identified and subjected to more detailed analysis. The extracts presented are representative of the strategies. Extracts are reproduced as they were presented on Facebook, including spelling and grammar errors, with line numbers added to aid analysis.

3. Analysis

Three strategies were identified as common features in discussions; 1) Supporters of asylum seeking accuse opponents of asylum of racism by using Nazi related language, 2) Opponents of asylum challenge accusations of racism by arguing that the debate is being suppressed because of references to Nazis, 3) Opponents of asylum bring about their opposition by showing support for ideas related to Nazis and Hitler. Each will now be addressed in turn.

3.1. Supporters of Asylum seeking present opposition to asylum as being racist by associating opponents with Nazis

In the first extract (from a pro-asylum group) P1 issues an insult to members of Facebook groups set up in opposition to asylum seeking. These are frequently termed "racist groups" by authors in this group.

Extract One, I refuse to hate asylum seekers

P1, 07 January 2009 at 16:59

1. If I had the energy I would join and set a few of them straight... however I
2. actually don't have as much time on my hands as them! Some of the
3. arguments that they start are just absolutely ridiculas and always end in
4. cheap insults... rather pathetic if you ask me. Also I do not understand why so
5. many of them get so offended when their called racist, when they are blatent
6. neo nazi skinhead bnp members. Strange.

Here P1 is attempting to show that opposition to asylum is self evidently racist and does so by positioning opponents of asylum seekers as akin to Nazis. The subject position is invoked by using a three part list (Jefferson, 1990), 1) "neo nazi", 2) "skinhead", and 3) "bnp members" ("bnp" refers to the British National Party, a far-right political party). This three-part list is used to associate opposition to asylum as being similar to, and as extreme as, Neo-Nazis. It also suggests that the BNP is every bit as stereotypically neo-Nazi as a skinhead.

The BNP are a party which attempt to present themselves as being reasonable (e.g. Goodman and Speer, 2007), but by linking the BNP with Neo-Nazi skinheads, P1 positions the BNP as unreasonable, and part of a repertoire of what counts as being an unreasonable racist. Billig (1978) showed that the National Front, the forerunner to the BNP, had anti-Semitic ideologies despite denying this, an idea that P1 is claiming here. P1 presents him/herself as confused (4,6) as to why opponents are offended by being called racists, a rhetorical strategy used to suggest that opposing asylum and being a BNP supporter self evidently go together, and in doing so presents opposition to asylum as racist. Speer and Potter (2000) have shown that displays of lack of understanding, such as P1's here, exemplified by the use of 'strange' (6) have the effect of presenting another's actions (here the opponents of asylum seeking) as incomprehensible and the 'true' cause of confusion.

P1 criticises "cheap insults" (4) made by opponents of asylum seeking, yet issues an explicit insult towards them. P1 presents opponents' arguments as "pathetic" (4) and as "absolutely ridiculas" (sic) (3), which portrays them as unreasonable. P1 justifies the use of the insult s/he issues by presenting it as factual (Edwards and Potter, 1992), through using the word "blatent" (5). P1 orients to opponents' objections to being labelled as racist (4-5), which suggests that P1's post is part of a wider 'dialogical network' (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004) about asylum and that P1 is responding to the continuing debate over what counts as racist. P1 is orienting to, and criticising, the rejecting of the racist label, which is a strategy used by

opponents of asylum (see Goodman and Burke, 2010) that is explored in the following section.

Extract two includes a similar accusation, however here the post is made on a group that is explicitly opposing asylum.

Extract Two, STOP ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ENTERING OUR COUNTRY &TAKING OUR JOBS!!!!!!

P2, March 25th, 2009 at 7:31pm

1. You really are a bunch of uneducated, racist morons, aren't you? Do you

2. really believe it is the immigrants (illegal or otherwise) that are stealing your

3. jobs? Get real. This has been the same argument used by nationalists, and

4. their logical descendants (nazis) for over one and a half centuries. It is still an

5. argument that has no credence whatsoever with anyone with more than 2

6. braincells to rattle together. If you want a job, get off your lazy, useless

7. posteriors and look for one. If the illegal immigrants can find them, I'm sure

8. you wouldn't have a problem. While I'm here, I'd like to congratulate you all

9. on your grasp of your one and only language. My seven year old foreign

10. students over here in Hungary make fewer spelling and grammar mistakes.

11. So CONGRATULATIONS one and all. I must remember to pack my swastika

12. and jackboots next time I am visit England, or they might not let me in at

13. Heathrow.

P2 begins by issuing an insult to opponents of asylum and immigrants, in the form of a patronising rhetorical question (1). P2 links opposition with being uneducated, which draws on the idea that racism is basic (Goodman and Burke, 2010) and unreasonable (e.g. Edwards, 2003); the use of the term "bunch" infers a mob mentality and adds to the suggestion of

irrationality. This irrationality is supported with the suggestion that opponents have a flawed understanding of the relationship between immigration and jobs.

P2 later shifts his/her position by suggesting that immigrants may be taking jobs, but that it is British people who are unable or unwilling to compete for them. This statement allows for the possibility that "illegal immigrants" are taking jobs, but includes a moral contrasting of the immigrant who is deserving of a job, with the British person undeserving of a job (6). This is a reversal of the 'differentiating the self' repertoire identified by Lynn and Lea (2003), where the plight of British people marginalized in society, such as people who are homeless, is highlighted in order for opposition to asylum to be enabled. Presenting "illegal or otherwise" in brackets challenges opponents' use of different terms to describe immigrants (Goodman and Speer, 2007), and repositions 'illegal' immigrants as being, at least potentially, legitimate.

P2 positions nationalism as descending from Nazis, and similarly to extract 1, P2 offers a definition of what a Nazi is (11-12), and suggests that opponents of asylum are no better than them. P2 uses this to condemn the opponents on the Facebook group and position them as Nazis. Throughout the post P2 refers to a lack of intelligence (1, 2, 6, 9-10) in opponents of asylum/immigration which works both as an insult to the members of the group and as a challenge to the arguments that the opponents are making.

In the final extract of this section, an association with the harsh treatment towards asylum seekers and the Nazi's treatment towards the Jews is made more subtly, with rhetorical delicacy[7].

Extract Three, I refuse to hate asylum seekers discussion forum

P3 ,10 January 2009 at 00.20

1. It's a very complex issue........and by no means clear cut..........and worrying

2. (after all, much of Hitler's Jewish hatred was borne from his days as a

3. struggling artist where he preceived that Jews were taking all the jobs)......I

4. fear this country could head down this road if we are not brave enough to

5. stand up to racists, yet also to stand up to those few who do abuse the

6. system, without being too scared of being accused of acting in

7. discriminatory fashion.

In this extract P3 represents Hitler as a "struggling artist", which normalises Hitler and suggests that the conditions for Nazis to gain success could happen again. By referring to Hitler as a struggling artist rather than a prominent dictator and glossing over his 'perception' of Jews rather than his elaborate attempted genocide simultaneously downplays Hitler's impact, while also highlighting the potential menace of the anti-asylum lobby. Here it is implied that asylum seekers could take the place of Jews as the persecuted, as both groups have been perceived to take the majority group's jobs. That asylum seekers take native workers' jobs is a common argument used by opponents within the asylum debate (e.g. Goodman and Burke, 2010), despite asylum seekers not being allowed to work (e.g. Refugee Council, 2010).

P3 is managing the ideological dilemma (Billig et al., 1988) of acknowledging that whilst there are asylum seekers receiving harsh treatment, there are also asylum seekers who "abuse the system" (5-6). Describing asylum seekers in this way is a similar strategy to that of differentiating between "genuine" and "bogus" asylum seekers (Lynn and Lea, 2003), which is damaging as it is used to de-legitimise asylum seekers. P3 is managing his/her own subject position as someone who supports asylum, which is done by making an accusation of racism to opponents. However, P3 also orients to the taboo against making accusations of racism and to the repertoire that some asylum seekers abuse the system.

P3's account is characteristic of Van Dijk's (1993b:115) notion of a "firm but fair" approach to immigration, where the speaker presents themselves as being humane towards asylum seekers and immigrants, but without being seen as acting too lenient, a strategy which is often shown to come down more on the 'firm' than the 'fair' to the detriment of the group being spoken of. P3 is presenting a balance between standing up to both "racist" opponents of asylum, and asylum seekers who "abuse the system". This account is made with rhetorical delicacy shown through the use of dots used to indicate sentences that have not been completed, which suggests that there is more detail that isn't being covered. P3 explicitly acknowledges that the asylum debate is a controversial one that requires delicacy in addressing (1), but makes a delicate orientation to the idea that being harsh towards asylum seekers is seen as discrimination, using a less explicit term, "discriminatory fashion".

In this section we have discussed how supporters of asylum issue explicit accusations of racism to opponents of asylum, constructed through the association with Nazis to challenge opposition as racist. These accusations contain insults and often suggest that opponents of asylum lack intelligence. The previous extract shows how an association with Nazis can be made more subtly, with delicacy around accusations of being a Nazi, which orients to the possibility that asylum seekers may be 'cheats'. This delicacy supports the suggestion that there may be evidence for a taboo on making accusations of racism towards opponents of asylum (e.g. Goodman and Burke, 2011), which is absent in the first two extracts.

3.2. *Opponents of asylum criticising an association with Nazis as suppressing their opinions*

At this point it has been shown how opponents of asylum can be accused of being like Nazis. The extracts in this next section demonstrate how opponents of asylum deal with these accusations by claiming that these accusations are suppressing their (purportedly legitimate) concerns about asylum seeking.

P4, August 3rd, 2009 at 4:04pm

1. we all know that actions speak louder than words. what we need is a leader

2. who is willing to voice our oppinion and opposition to immigration. we see

3. muslims organise rallies and protests protesting against silly cartoons. So

4. why dont we actually organise a protest march to the gates of Buckingham

5. pallace. thousands of people marching through london would make the

6. government sit up and listen. but we would more than likely be labled as BNP

7. skin heads that where rioting by the biasted BBC who would not be able to

8. ever hold a non bias discussion if they wanted to

P4 constructs numerous extreme case formulations (Pomerantz ,1986) to present his/her opposition to immigration as not racist. Notice that P4 addresses the government rather than asylum seekers, a point identified by Billig (1978), a strategy that P4 is using in order to be seen as not attacking asylum seekers. The phrase "we all know actions speak louder than words" (1) is an appeal to common knowledge, presenting the argument as self-evident and factual (Edwards and Potter, 1992). P4's argument is made collectively as his/her footing is on behalf of all opponents of asylum (Goffman, 1981) by using terms such as "we" and "our opinion". There are various "us and them" distinctions throughout (Lynn and Lea, 2003; Van Dijk *et al.*, 1997). Muslims are referred to on line 3, which implies that most asylum seekers are Muslim and also links in to the idea of Muslims being a threat and a problem (Goodman and Burke, 2011). Note also how P4 has given 'muslim' a lower case 'm', but 'Buckingham palace' a capital 'B', placing British people as more important than Muslims.

P4 speaks of organising a protest, which draws attention to the problematic nature of asylum (4), but then shifts position (6) to account for why s/he is not going to carry out this action, by

claiming that s/he and other opponents of asylum and immigration will be labelled skinheads. P4's account of being labelled a skinhead appears to be a direct criticism of the association with Nazis, and specifically the type of talk identified in the previous section. That this is a direct response to earlier (or anticipated) criticisms can be seen in P4's use of the exact words (6-7) used by his/her accusers. P4 contrasts (Atkinson, 1984) the unfair treatment towards opponents of asylum, with the purportedly preferential treatment towards Muslims, who are presented as free to organise "rallies and protests" (3). In contrast, P4, and those s/he is speaking on behalf of, are presented as not free to organise their own protest, precisely because of the danger of being labelled as Nazis (6). In doing so, P4 orients to a subject position that s/he explicitly denies, that of a racist Nazi. This suggests that P4's comment is a part of a dialogical network (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2004), and P4 is orienting to, anticipating, and rejecting a recognisable alternative position.

The next extract is taken from the Facebook campaign group description, where the author orients to accusations of being racist and instead questions the legitimacy of asylum seekers so as to present opposition to them as being based on economic factors.

Extract Five, Im NOT racist, just concerned about mass immigration! Group description

1. This group is for all people who are fed up of being branded a racist or fascist
2. for being concerned about the amount of immigrants entering this
3. country.This group does not condone the removal of all immigrants but the
4. ones we dont need,the so called asylum seekers and the visa overstayers
5. are not welcome to use the british taxpayer as a never ending cash reserve
6. which they can exploit whenever they like

In this extract the author is explicitly responding to the label of being racist and fascist (1), orienting to the linking of these concepts aimed at opponents of asylum. In doing so, the

author is managing the ideological dilemma that this creates of opposing immigration without being seen as racist or fascist. The author attempts to make the account sound reasonable by only calling for the removal of immigrants that are "not needed", asylum seekers and "visa overstayers" (4), and questioning their legitimacy by referring to them as "so called" (4), which has the same effect as the term "bogus" (Lynn and Lea, 2003:432). This is used to suggest that opposition to asylum is based on practical and economic factors rather than unreasonable prejudices (e.g. Goodman and Burke, 2011).

This presentation of asylum seekers as undeserving (Lynn and Lea, 2003) allows the author to position his/her actions as moral, which strengthens the case that this opposition is reasonable, rather than prejudicial. Indeed the author is orienting to the norm against prejudice (Billig, 1988) by explicitly denying that opposition to asylum is racist (note the emphasis of "NOT" in capital letters). The strategies used by the author are characteristic of discursive deracialisation (Every and Augoustinos, 2007), as the author is justifying opposition to asylum by drawing on reasons such as economic factors. Additionally, the account is presented as a response to a concern, which is a strategy used to construct opposition as being rational (Goodman 2008).

While this group has been set up with the specific aim of rejecting accusations of racism and of being Nazis, it is clear from the following extract that it has not been entirely successful as the following extract contains a post on the 'group' page where the author (who is the same author as the previous extract) responds to being labelled as a Nazi since starting the group. Here we see how P5 deals with these accusations.

Extract Six, Im NOT racist, just concerned about mass immigration!

P5 , January 13th, 2008 at 11:11pm

1. there has since been a campaign started labelling me a nazi by [name removed]

2. and associated chums.This is the whole reason i started this

3. group as i dont understand why it is so taboo to talk immigration.I would

4. like to emphasize i do not condone the holocaust or any killing innocent

5. people Just thought i would clarify that point.

P5 constructs him/herself as suffering as a result of discriminatory treatment, and so presents the taboo on prejudice as victimising him/herself (Van Dijk, 1991). P5 explicitly criticises the taboo on prejudice, which draws upon the strategy of criticising accusations of racism as being unfair (Goodman, 2010). As in extract 5, P5 manages the ideological dilemma of trying to reject the Nazi label while maintaining opposition to immigration. P5 justifies why s/he is not a Nazi by presenting a definition of what a Nazi is: someone who condones the Holocaust and the killing of innocent people (4-5). P5 uses this criterion of what a Nazi is to present him/herself as neither racist nor a Nazi.

P5's final comment (5) is used to suggest that being associated with Nazis is unfair as his/her lack of condoning Nazi actions is presented as self-evident. What is noteworthy is that the title of the group rejects the label 'racist' and the organiser of this group at this point needs to reject the additional label 'Nazi' which suggests that within these debates what is meant by 'racist' and 'Nazi' is very closely associated.

In this section we have shown how opponents of asylum manage accusations of being a Nazi by criticising the taboo against prejudice and presenting it as suppressing arguments. In doing so Nazis are presented as more extreme in an attempt to make opponents of asylum appear more reasonable, a strategy identified by Van Dijk (1993c).

The following section explores people demonstrating support of ideas associated with Hitler in their posts that are opposing asylum. These extracts are more unusual in comparison to previous extracts, particularly because they openly embrace the position that is criticised in the first section of this analysis, and is so carefully rejected by contributors in the previous section.

3.3. Opponents of asylum seeking showing support for ideas related to Hitler

The following two extracts contain short statements presenting support for Hitler's ideology in explicit opposition to asylum seekers.

Extract Seven, Who's sick ov asylum seekers?

P6, March 25th, 2009 at 6:01pm

1. Bring back Hitlers gas chambers. There nothing but rapists anyhow.

Extract Eight, Who's sick ov asylum seekers?

P7, March 25th, 2009 at 6:41pm

1. init mate, all fukin rapists & thives!!!

The title of this group is of interest, as it is a rhetorical question addressing other opponents of asylum and inviting them to contribute to the group. The use of the word 'sick' presents asylum seekers as being an ongoing problem. After setting out this 'problem' P6 responds to the invitation in the title by offering a 'solution'.

P6's first sentence in his/her very short account displays opposition to asylum and support for Hitler in an extreme, direct and unguarded manner. Only one reason is offered for this extreme statement, which presents asylum seekers in an extremely negative light. This is achieved by constructing asylum seekers as 'nothing but' (1) which suggests that they bring

nothing positive to the country, but by contrast are sexually deviant and predatory. This mixture of support for Hitler's most notorious action and the extreme dehumanisation of asylum seekers in this post suggest that the purpose of this account is to have a shocking and extreme impact.

P7's account is a direct response to P6, which begins by offering P6 an agreement token (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001). P7's agreement has a three-part structure (Clouder *et al.,* 2011): 1) explicit agreement ('init'), 2) addressing the person being agreed with ('mate'), and 3) an elaboration of P6's account. The use of "mate" presents P6's account as friendly and informal. P6's extreme case formulation is repeated, but P7 inserts his/her own addition which includes a swear word to add emphasis and a further upgrading of the negative presentation of asylum seekers who are now constructed as thieves as well as rapists. This is effective in positioning P6 and P7 as members of the same group, and by accepting P6's extreme comments in a friendly way, P7 plays down the extreme and controversial nature of what P6 has said. Despite P6's post appearing to be extreme and categorising asylum seekers as committing serious crimes, P7's agreement token suggests that P6's post is somewhat consensual. There is certainly no delicacy or attempt to reject the Nazi label; instead it is embraced to help strengthen their case.

The final extract in this section is from a different group, but contains a similar structure to the previous extracts.

Extract Nine, STOP ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ENTERING OUR COUNTRY & TAKING OUR JOBS!!!!!

P8 wrote at 8:26am on February 2nd, 2009

1. hitler was right, it's the forins that cause all the troble!

This extract has a similar structure to the previous extracts in this section. Again this is a very short post that begins with a statement of support for Hitler and ends with some (supposed) evidence for the claim. Once more there is no delicacy or guarding of a statement that would normally be oriented to as at least a little controversial. This extract comes from the same group featured in extract two, although this was made before the accusation of links with Nazis made in that post. While asylum seekers are not directly oriented to in this post, the term 'forins' (sic) is used to refer to all outsiders (asylum seekers are referred to in this group). Finally, "all the troble" (sic) is a vague and general description of the supposed harm that these outsiders do to the country. As with P6 in the previous extract, this post includes misspellings, the use of such may imply further aggressive rebellion that is presented in a light hearted way (see Billig 2001).

This section has examined the harsh language in opposition to asylum seeking. There were few strategies to make accounts seem reasonable in opposing asylum, suggesting that opposition to asylum seeking is not problematic. The taboo on prejudice appeared to also be less problematic, or at least ignored.

4. Discussion

This analysis has focused on the use of Nazi related language in the asylum debate. From this we have identified three strategies: 1) Supporters of asylum challenging opposition to asylum by invoking Nazi imagery, 2) Opponents challenging this association on the grounds of it suppressing their views, 3) Opponents of asylum ignoring the problematic associations of Nazis, identified in strategy one, making explicit and bold associations with Nazis to bolster their case.

That references to Nazis are being used to both express and challenge racism suggests that this is a feature of informal, online talk, which has not previously been addressed before, and

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so may explain the conflicting findings (e.g. Lynn and Lea, 2003; Every and Augoustinos, 2007) about the frequency and use of references to Nazis in the asylum debate. This further demonstrates that there are arguments surrounding what is exactly meant by the term "racism" (Figgou and Condor, 2006). This analysis has shown that there is a complex and contentious relationship between what is considered to be 'racist' and 'Nazi'.

Previous research has shown that making accusations of racism, particularly using Nazi related language, is difficult (Every and Augoustinos, 2007). The current findings differ by suggesting that in CMC this is less problematic, as supporters of asylum explicitly presented opposition to asylum as being racist by associating such opposition with Nazis. We have demonstrated that opposing asylum seeking is less problematic in an online environment. This may be due to the minimisation of stake (Lynn and Lea, 2003) in this context. A possible explanation for the extreme views presented in this data is that people who have strong views are most likely to join or create Internet discussion groups about asylum, and engage in debate (Goodman, 2007).

Nevertheless, the norm against prejudice has also been identified even in this online setting, which was demonstrated in section two where authors rhetorically used strategies to disclaim racism (Billig, 1988), in line with discursive findings in this field conducted in non CMC settings (e.g. Goodman and Burke, 2011). Opponents of asylum seeking were identified to be defending against accusations that they were racist or Nazis by criticising the taboo on prejudice, and presenting the notion of being victimised as a result of the taboo. These findings build upon research from Van Dijk (1993a) who found speakers from majority groups presenting the taboo on prejudice as itself being discriminatory towards them, and causing them to be victimised. The notion of the taboo on prejudice being a way of suppressing debate was commonly used by opponents of asylum, as identified by Lewis (2005) and Goodman (2010) in contexts outside of an online environment. These same

opponents of asylum also used strategies of discursive deracialisation (Every and Augoustinos, 2007). We have therefore demonstrated that discursive deracialisation takes place in Internet discussions in addition to political debates and focus group discussions (Goodman and Burke, 2011), albeit to a lesser extent.

A common structural feature of the more extreme comments in section three was the short length of the posts and the use of misspellings. The most unexpected finding was that the most extreme post generated an agreement token, which somewhat normalised what the author was saying and suggests that the post was somewhat consensual.

Despite the unique, online data used in this research, some standard anti-asylum devices have nevertheless been identified. First, some of the asylum related groups had "immigrants" in the title despite the focus of discussion being asylum seekers, this conflation of the two terms 'asylum seekers' and 'immigrants' to present asylum seekers as undeserving supports Goodman and Speer's (2007) findings. Second, asylum seekers were presented as problematic and therefore deserving of harsh treatment (Van Der Valk 2003). Third, the notion of "genuine" and "bogus" asylum seekers, and the "us and them" distinction (Lynn and Lea, 2003) was used to challenge the legitimacy of all asylum seekers.

On the basis of these findings we could suggest that supporters of asylum should defend asylum seekers in a way which cannot be seen as a strategy to suppress opponents' views and lead to an abrupt end to discussion (Guerin, 2001). Instead, supporters could focus on the harsh treatment that asylum seekers both fled from, and face in their country of refuge (Hynes and Sales, 2009). In order to overcome the prejudice towards asylum seekers in the UK effectively, a rhetoric needs to be developed by supporters of asylum that challenges racism (Every and Augoustinos, 2007), without issuing extreme accusations that are oriented to as

suppressing debate, so as to best defend a vulnerable group of people who have fled from

persecution.

Acknowledgements

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