

“Readings” of Britishness and community cohesion in BBC News Online during 2001 race riots**Hassen Zriba¹****Abstract**

The race riots of 2001 in some British cities remarked a considerable lack of inter-ethnic harmony. The violence that plagued cities like Bradford, Oldham and Burnley was officially read as symptomatic of the fragility and absence of common core values. One central norm was the belief in a common national identity (Britishness). A number of local and national race-related reports were produced to champion the hegemonic official discourses that “the absence of community cohesion is basically the end product of the absence of a shared British national identity”. Based on the British cultural critic Stuart Hall’s Reception theory, this article postulates that an influential news agency like BBC News Online is expected to decode and then encode the official discourses of community cohesion and Britishness in tune with the mainstream version. However, my critical and interpretative analysis of some electronically produced articles of BBC yielded some interesting findings. BBC News Online, despite its “official-ness” did not read official hegemonic discourse in an absolute preferred way. There are important nuances in its readings. Such nuances reveal that audiences (in this study BBC News Online is treated as an audience to official discourses) are not passive consumers of hegemonies. They have their own choices and constraints which shape their decoding of and re-encoding of their world realities. The basic target of this article is to show the way BBC News Online reproduced, if any, the dominant discourses of social cohesion as a guarantee of Britishness and vice-versa.

Key words: *Britishness; community cohesion; BBC News Online; Reception Theory*

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Introduction

It uses the Reception Theory of Stuart Hall in order to decipher the multiplicity of readings in BBC News Online of official community cohesion discourses in contemporary Britain.

The criteria for selecting the targeted articles are mainly the recurrence and availability of terms like «cohesion», “Britishness” “national identity”. There are more than 5000 articles dealing with the concept of Britishness in BBC Online archive. Up to 460 articles deal with the concept of community or social cohesion. However, when combining social cohesion and Britishness, we got no more than 440 articles. Yet only articles that tackle the concepts from ethnicity-related perspective are selected for study. Thus the number of article to be studied falls down to about 300. Content analysis methodology is employed. Conceptual and relational (thematic) analyses reveal how social cohesion and Britishness are inter-related and even inter-changeable.

Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model: (Reception Theory)

Cultural and Media Studies established the importance of culture in shaping the consciousness of social agents. Accordingly, I scrutinize in this section Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model of reading media texts by the audiences. Reading media texts has been a vital component of media semiotics. People can read and decipher the meanings of mass-mediated texts in a number of ways. Unlike, the American behaviorist approach to media, critical culturalist considerations of the media output were quite different. Thus, I propose to study the model followed by the British cultural critic and sociologist Stuart Hall while taking in consideration the way media texts are being read and decoded by the audience. Hall’s approach is called Reception Theory. The theory focused on the ways the audience read mass-mediated messages. Hall is trying to prove that media cannot be an all-powerful agent to the extent that it anticipates and shapes the way its texts are read by the targeted audience. He postulated that in the communicative process there are three basic concepts: encoding (which is the job of media broadcasters), code (which is the message itself) and finally decoding (that is the activity of the message receiver: the audience).

Nevertheless, in spite of the attempts of dominant ideology to semiotically encode messages that cultivate certain values and thus promote its hegemony, the audience cannot be homogeneous in its decoding of the dominant codes. Such possible oppositional reading of the transmitted and diffused cultural signs brings out the question of normative acceptance of the dominant cultural representation by subordinate groups. The culturalist approach of Stuart Hall shows that media representations are received and interpreted heterogeneously. He states three possible readings: dominant readings, negotiated readings and oppositional readings. The nature of reading is governed by the social situations of readers. Those whose interests are served by the dominant ideology will produce the preferred reading; negotiated reading are for those who can convince the dominant ideology to take their interests into account, and those who read oppositionally are usually the excluded groups. Thus, Hall focuses on the possibilities of acceptance, negotiation and opposition on the part of media text readers. The reader has, to use Hall's term, a "margin of understanding" which allows him/her to interpret the received code in a different way (Hall, 1990).

The three readings suggested by Hall (preferred, negotiated and oppositional), are governed by certain cultural parameters of the reader (decoder). Hall expressed the tenets of his Reception Theory in his influential article "Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse" (1980). Hall insisted that the audience is active and creative in decoding of media messages. The reader (audience) is thus a re-creator of his/her experience of reading. He/she is engaged into an active and informed decoding of media representation which unveils the declared and embedded dominant discourses and relations of power within the received message. Thus, the reader is empowered with Reception Theory. "If the reader is powerful in terms of removing the veil of representation i.e. informed interpretation, then the reality itself becomes more representative than the representation of reality produced by means of representation". (Saied, 2007, p. 11)

Unlike, behaviorist explanations which explain the process of communication as a "loop"; a direct linear line from sender to receiver (Klapper, 1960), Hall argued that the production and the consumption of mass-mediated messages are two different activities governed by different parameters such as the medium of

communication and the discursive context of encoding and decoding.

Having argued that nothing is natural in media output, Hall showed that messages are socially and discursively constituted before being transmitted to the audience. The multi-accentual nature of encoding process entails same or more heterogeneous nature in decoding. The belief, "no necessary class belongingness of ideological elements and possibilities of ideological struggle to articulate/disarticulate meaning" (Hall, 1990, p.80) was paramount in Hall's Reception Theory. Media messages are not exclusively confined and reduced to mere class or economic relations. The multi-referencing of media codes along with the somewhat free agility of the audience made it possible for diverse and multifaceted interpretative readings of "encoding" to emerge. Thus as Turner wrote, the media audience "cannot be seen as a single undifferentiated mass; it is composed of a mixture of social groups, all related in different ways to dominant ideological forms and meanings" (Turner, 2002, p. 73).

Thus, Hall does not believe in the existence of natural codes. The act of encoding itself, like that of decoding, is a linguistic and social construction. He believed that no "natural codes" existed; only "naturalized" (Hall, 1981). If a code appears natural, that is because of the work of hegemonic common sense. For instance, the visual language of TV creates a fiction of "reality"; the image of something is perceived as the thing itself. It is a case of "epistemic fallacy" in which reality is conflated with its representation (Bhasker, 2002). However, Hall thought that "the reality effect" of TV visual codes worked just like other mass-mediated codes. Visual codes are polysemic but they are not totally pluralistic. They are open but they set limits. The connotative content of those codes are diverse, yet they share the same myth of reference. Such mythic "third order of representation", to use Roland Barthes term, constitutes the explanatory framework of the norms of acceptable and preferred decoding. Hall wrote:

Connotative codes are *not* equal among themselves. Any society's culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classification of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a *dominant cultural order*,

though it is neither univocal nor uncontested. ... The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organized into *dominant* or *preferred* meanings. (1980, p. 134)

Consequently, the "*dominant cultural order*" sets the general criteria to the acceptable ways of both encoding and decoding. Nevertheless, it is vital to remember that dominant meanings are not absolute; they are not irresistible. They are only preferred by those decoders whose interests and world views are served and correspond to those meanings. Representational codes are used in a way to prioritize preferred meanings. Thus, encoding media messages is the process of limit setting. Decoding is thus supposed to be performed within confined frameworks of reference. Guided reading, cultivates the desirable and functional effects on the part of the decoder (to sue George Gerbner's jargon). And hence a "preferred" or "hegemonic reading" is generated and maintained. Hall suggested that:

In speaking of *dominant meanings*, then, we are not talking about a one-sided process which governs how all events will be signified. It consists of the 'work' required to enforce, win plausibility for and command as legitimate a *decoding* of the event within the limit of dominant definitions in which it has been connotatively signified. (1980, p. 135)

The second type of reading is what he called "negotiated reading". This kind of reading is the most complex one. It is by and large the most realistic pattern of reading. Theoretically, it is possible to decode messages within the framework of hegemonic discourse, yet practically, almost all decoders even those who accept the dominant frameworks of reference negotiate the preferred reading and accommodate such hegemonic encodings to their socio-cultural positioning. Within negotiated reading, the audience generally agree with the dominant values and messages expressed within the preferred reading but they may disagree with certain aspects according to their socio-cultural background. This process of negotiation is indicative of first the polysemic nature of mass-mediated messages. Codes are not homogenous

and fixed entities. Second, audience is active and dynamic in their decoding process. The audience make up is diverse "interpretative communities" who work within certain structural parameters while retaining the power of their agency. In this thesis, it is suggested that media agencies like Muslim News Online tend to decode the hegemonic encodings of social cohesion and Britishness in a negotiational manner. They attempt to accommodate the dominant discourses to their own agenda while avoiding decoding oppositionally.

In the third reading-the oppositional reading- the audience members can "read between the lines" and in some instances "... reverse the intended direction of the message" (McQuail, 2000, p. 57). Here the reading is rather counter-hegemonic. The decoder who decodes in oppositional way understands the message of preferred reading yet he/she is located in an oppositional position which propels him/her to oppose the hegemonic codes and decode within an alternative explanatory framework. Those who produce oppositional readings are usually those who are at odds with the dominant value system and are outside the center of power.

Hall referred to various phases in the Encoding/Decoding paradigm of communication as "moments". John Corner offers a number of definitions to those different moments (Chandler, 2001). He defined three distinctive moments: moment of encoding, moment of the text (code) and finally moment of decoding. The moment of encoding is "the institutional practices and organizational conditions and practices of production" (Corner, 1983, p. 266).

The moment of the text is "'the... symbolic construction, arrangement and perhaps performance... The form and content of what is published or broadcast' (Corner, p. 267); and finally the moment of decoding is "'the moment of reception [or] consumption... by... the reader/hearer/viewer' which is regarded by most theorists as 'closer to a form of "construction"' than to 'the passivity... suggested by the term "reception"' (Corner, p. 267). Importantly, those moments indicate the complex and the multifaceted nature of communication whether interpersonal and especially mass communication. Also, the different working mechanisms that contribute to the production and consumption of the mass-mediated codes are uncovered and their interrelated natures highlighted. Those moments stress the dynamism of the

politics of signification and show the fierceness of the struggle to signify at different levels and in different phases.

BBC News Online consideration of the concept of Britishness

The data to be analyzed and interpreted is retrieved from BBC online (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>). The criteria followed in the selection of such mediated texts are mainly the availability and frequency of the term "Britishness"; other lexical derivatives are also taken into account such as the adjective 'British' or the expression "British identity". Chronological dimension of the selected articles is also considered. The bulk of articles belong mainly to those produced after 2001 race riots. However, some articles cover the prior period, especially the late 1990's, to churn out the immediate context of the 2001 race riots and to compare post-riots discourses with prior ones. More than thirty articles are selected from the first 100 articles within a data base that contains more than 3000 articles (20/03/2009). Precisely, there are about 220 articles in which the term "Britishness" was frankly stated according to the website's research engine. Thematically, the 30 selected articles focus basically on the ethnic dimension of the Britishness concept. Generally speaking, Britishness is a multifarious concept that allows a huge array of interpretations and readings. It has national, regional, global, cultural and ethnic dimensions. In this chapter, we focus on its ethnic and racial trajectories.

The aim of this article is to answer the question of how and to what extent BBC News Online contributed to the dissemination of mainstream reading of the state of British race relations. Also it tries to decipher the various semiotic and linguistic tools used to anchor a preferred reading of the situation. It is, however, assumed that BBC News Online web-based textual output is in many respects an echoing of the socio-cultural and ideological infrastructures that produced them.

The corpus is selected from the BBC News Online official website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/>. The co-existence of the two major concepts in question within the same web page (article) is a powerful criterion for selection. Yet, the individual occurrence of the concepts "Britishness" and "Community Cohesion" is also taken into account. BBC News Online web site is a very sophisticated web site. Technically, it is an advanced web site that includes a large number of links and audio-visual output.

Graphically, a lot of photos and pictures exist in the site and serve different semiotic and political ends.

BBC News Online "dominant" reading

The BBC News Online questions the meaning of Britishness and tries to delineate its various dimensions and meanings. An article entitled "What is Britishness anyway?" (BBC News Online, 2002) was published in September, 10, 2002, one year after the race riots. It attempts to define the concept from different perspectives and present multifarious attitudes regarding the importance and credibility of the concept. The very title of the article is noticeable. It itself casts shadow of doubts over any potential or definite definition of the concept. The use of the adverb "anyway" is likely to reflect the attitude of the author. Apparently, the author seems to disbelieve the very existence of an absolute definition of Britishness. We are also tempted to argue that "anyway" suggests the futility of such definitional endeavor. But also, we can assume that there is a need for a definition that takes "any way" (perhaps any definition). The article orchestrates a multiplicity of voices and perspectives over Britishness. Graphically, the article includes a number of photos that refer visually to some understanding of the concept of Britishness. However, the first photo which is the map of Britain is followed by a comment underneath "Apart from the sea, what keeps the British together?" Such statement is of vital importance. It reworks the main title of the article ironically. It seems to be a rhetorical question whose answer is either known or unwanted. The unsaid is that nothing keeps Britain unified but it's being geographically wielded. Consequently, nature is a source of unity while culture is a source of fragmentation. This sort of discourse frames what comes next in the article into a certain pre-defined ideological context? There seems a refusal of the idea that Britishness is a unifying element in contemporary multi-cultural Britain. The article starts by setting the stage for subsequent definitions. The context is that the Home Secretary David Blunkett wanted to produce what came to be called "Britishness Test" for future immigrants. Yet the problem is that, the author goes, there is no consensus over what is Britishness.

The article "What is Britishness anyway?" offers different understandings of the concept. We could identify four definitions of Britishness. The first definition is an ethno-racial one. That is the one suggested by Blunkett himself when he links Britishness to issues of citizenship and immigration. Blunkett's concern is to test

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the loyalties of would-be immigrants to British cultural and political values. The Britishness test is reminiscent of the "cricket test" of Lord Norman Tebbit which attempted to check loyalties of mainly South Asian immigrants to British national cricket team during its competition with either India or Pakistan.

The second definition is offered by Lord Norman Tebbit. He compared his "cricket test" with that of David Blunkett's Britishness or citizenship test. Tebbit commented that his test was just to measure the extent of immigrants' integration in British mainstream society. However, the "cricket test" was also interested in cultural assimilation of new comers. Within the context of the ideology of assimilationism, cultural mismatch of immigrants was deemed as a great problem to social cohesion. Thus there has to be a kind of a cultural value consensus in order to avoid cultural difference and social fragmentation. Lord Norman Tebbit thus sees Britishness as a question of adapting ethnic minorities to mainstream culture. Quoted in the article, he said that "The question is about foreigners and how foreigners are persuaded to adopt British customs and styles." It is basically a cultural definition of the concept of Britishness.

The third attempt is that of ex-British Prime Minister John Major. His definition is rather political. Britishness is thus a political identity that distinguishes Britain from other continental and global identities. Yet he emphasizes the cultural specificities of Britishness via representing a communitarian vision of British culture in which the British way of life of "dog lovers and pools fillers and - as George Orwell said 'old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist'"(BBC News Online, 2002) will not vanish.

In the last part of the article, we tend to discover the definition favored by the author. Yet as audience, we are prepared to cope with the complexity of Britishness. We are told that Britishness can be generally defined, but when it comes to details, the mission turns out to be almost impossible. The author argues that "stating in any detail what *characters of Britishness are* is a challenging task." (BBC News Online, 2002)

Later, we discover the attitude of the author and arguably that of the BBC News Online itself. The final paragraph of the article suggests that Britishness can be best defined as a national identity. The frequent presence of the concept of "nation" and its

derivatives is the evidence that Britishness is more operational at a national and international level (the words "nation" and "state" and their derivatives are mentioned about 7 times). The reference to the history of unifying Britain and the acts of union highlights the national dimension of Britishness.

The same national character of Britishness can also be churned out in other Britishness-related article. The analysis of our corpus suggests that although BBC News Online gives room to different and competing versions and understandings of Britishness, it foregrounds somewhat national elements of the concept. Britishness as a question of values maintenance was also tackled in another BBC News Online article. The political editor Martha Kearney focuses on the discourses of the ex-Labour chancellor and Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Her article "Brown seeks 'British Values'" (BBC News Online, 2005) seems to trace the pro-Britishness tones in Brown's discourses. The editor seems to share Brown's views. The web page highlights graphically just the quotations of Gordon Brown which champion Britishness as a necessary formula for community cohesion and social harmony. Those selected quotations are written in bold. Also, they are located at the center of the web page. The first highlighted quotation suggests that "our understanding of Britishness will shape the UK's political and cultural agenda". Britishness is thus represented as a central concept in British culture. The use of the modal "will" suggests that the concept is a future oriented one. It is expected to control the future of the nation on many levels. It has become a question of destiny. It is "an idea of what your destiny as a nation is". The second bolded quotation draws intertextually on the debates regarding the nature of British history. Stating that the "British don't have to apologise for their history" echoes the fierce reactions against the *Parekh Report* and its demands of revising British history so as to include ethnicity in its narratives.

However, the editor exposes other oppositional attitudes to those of Brown. We learn that "celebrities" like Lawrence Llewellyn Bowen and David Starkey and especially Bhiku Parekh criticize (and even refuse) Brown's discursive formations. Lawrence Llewellyn Bowen and David Starkey suggest that British values are context-governed and they are by no means exclusively British. Thus Britishness can be seen in relation to devolution; ethnicity, globalization. It is not just –as Brown

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thought- a question of national identity and values. Brown seems to essentialise Britishness in set of fixed values whereas Bhiku Parekh and others highlight some of its dimensions. For instance, Parekh focuses on the relationship between Britishness and the history of British Empire. He shows that Britishness is a historicist concept and what Brown did was simply to present a "too rosy, one-sided view of empire" (BBC News Online, 2005).

The editor thus attempts to create equilibrium between two antithetical considerations of the concept of Britishness and its relationship to community cohesion. However, she tends to give priority to Brown's pro-Britishness discourses. Structurally, the article starts exposing Brown's attitudes. Then it treats their antitheses; to finish by reconsidering Brown's discourses in more affirmative tone. Gordon Brown's views are fore grounded compared to the anti-Britishness ones. The mood in the article is Britishness is a necessity but at worst it needs some rectifications and amendments. Quantitatively speaking, the term Britishness and derivatives are mentioned more than twelve times. Also, the space dedicated to Brown's views is radically larger than that devoted to oppositional views. This can evidently reveal the cultural and ideological orientations of the editor in particular and the BBC News Online in general. The attitudes of Brown and Blair (being the dominant official discourses) are prioritized and fore grounded. Other oppositional readings are back grounded and represented as nuances to the "normal" discourses. Meaningfully, the editor reminds the reader of the high academic credentials and qualifications of Gordon Brown. We, as audience, learn that Brown is a person "who has a PhD in history" (BBC News Online, 2005). This piece of information adds to Brown's discourses a high credibility. Thus, he is represented as a knowledgeable man with high academic traits which further discloses the hidden ideological formations of the article, its writer and its host news agency.

In another publication entitled "Brown speech promotes Britishness" (BBC News Online, 2006), BBC News Online further celebrates the concept of Britishness. Gordon Brown speech was delivered in 2006 when he was a chancellor while attending a meeting of the British left-wing Fabian Society. The thesis of the speech was Britishness had to be celebrated officially as the unifying national identity which would guarantee acceptable levels of social cohesion within an increasingly multicultural

society. Central to Brown's arguments is to make the "Union Flag" as an embodiment of British identity and social unity. Quoted in the article, Brown asserts that "We have to be clearer now about how diverse cultures which inevitably contain differences can find the essential common purpose also without which no society can flourish" (BBC News Online, 2006). Thus community cohesion is frequently represented as the ultimate outcome of a "united shared sense of purpose". Brown suggests that Britain should have a day to celebrate its national identity. Doing so, he projected his Labour Party as a patriotic one that attempts to play the card of Britishness to win support for its community cohesion agenda.

The article is basically an exposition of Brown's arguments. Though, we learn at the end of it that the idea of officially celebrating Britishness was not originally Brown's one, we get no counter-arguments. There is a process of naturalization of the idea that Britishness is the national identity and that it has to be celebrated so as to achieve satisfactory degrees of social harmony and cohesion. BBC News Online achieves discursively such supporting purposes through different tools. First, the article teems with Brown's attitudes. Remarkably, his arguments are embedded and fore grounded through direct and indirect speech quoting. For instance, Brown was directly quoted 12 times in a comparatively short article. Graphically, there is a photo of the Union Jack which further and visually embed the centrality of Britishness as British basic identity. Some selected quotations are highlighted in bold. All of them inter-textually repeat the same idea. Two different bolded quotations of two different speakers utter almost the same argument. Brown is quoted "We should assert that the Union flag by definition is a flag for tolerance and inclusion" (BBC News Online, 2006). Almost the same idea is quoted from Billy Brag. He said "The thing that binds us together is our civic identity which is Britishness" (BBC News Online, 2006). Implicitly, the two speakers complement each other's arguments. Thus, Britishness is a civic identity based upon values of tolerance and inclusion and such identity has to be embodied symbolically by the Union flag.

However, as stated above, the article attempts to create certain equilibrium. Shadow Chancellor George Osborne attacked Brown's speech and declared that it was no more than "pale imitation" of David Cameron's plans. Yet, we suggest that that was a sort of fake balance. What is criticized is not the idea or

argument but just who was the first to propose it. BBC News Online, thus, created a meaningful explanatory context in which both dominant and oppositional discourses are encoded and then decoded. Even those apparently oppositional discourses are fitted within a well and pre-established order.

BBC News Online "Oppositional" Reading

While the previous section attempted to trace the dominant or preferred readings of official discourses of national identity and social cohesion, this one will try to study some allegedly oppositional articles. The articles are identified as oppositional based mainly on the modality, theme and syntactic structure of their titles. Moreover, the frequency of anti-Britishness and community cohesion discursive formations within a selected article is a powerful proof to judge it as oppositional.

Expectedly, the BBC News Online was considerably a reproducer of dominant official cultural and political discourse. Nevertheless, the BBC News Online questions the vitality and credibility of Britishness as a unifying factor in multiethnic Britain. An article entitled "Britishness 'will not unite us'" (BBC News Online, 2008) seems to present an oppositional reading of Britishness to that of official race-related reports. Britishness is thus unable to secure community cohesion. Reportedly, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation stressed the fact that "Cohesion is about negotiating the right balance between difference and unity," (BBC News Online, 2008). If so, Britishness, being an amalgam of common shared values, fails to be the glue that unites different mosaic components of British society. The article states the findings of a study on race relations in Britain entitled "Immigration and Social Cohesion in the UK". The most important finding was that "Trying to unite people around a fixed notion of Britishness will not achieve social cohesion" (BBC News Online, 2008). Contrarily, such imposed and fixed notion of Britishness would result into "subversive effect". Professor David Conway wrote: "The government thinks everyone has to become best friends, all lovey-dovey, but that's not realistic. By and large people of different ethnic groups do get along all right, but simply don't have much contact." (BBC News Online, 2008) Britishness is not a guarantee of good race relations and hence community cohesion. This type of discourse, though reported from the above-mentioned study, may uncover alternative readings of the relationship between Britishness and social cohesion. Such

discourse seems to deviate from the hegemonic official discourses allegedly disseminated and defended by race-related reports.

Britishness is an identity. It can have different dimensions but it remains subject to the mechanism of identity formation and maintenance. Yet identity is not essential or simple phenomenon. Mac Ghaill scrutinized the dynamism and subjectivity of identity positioning when he argued that:

“Such subject positions can be seen as being constituted by a range of narratives that speak identities ... These narratives regulate normative subjective positions. As an individual can be located in a range of social relations at one time, the formation of ethnic identities through a range of discursive positions is a highly complex, ambivalent and unfinished process. In this way, 'black' and 'white' subjectivities are conceptualized as processes of becoming, characterized by fluidity, oppositions and alliances between particular narrative positions” (1999)

Identity is thus a problematic concept: a problematic narrative. It is multiple and cannot be categorized in fixed binary oppositions. Stuart Hall's idea of new ethnicities (Hall, 1992) eradicates the conventional black vs. white dualism to show that identity is dependent on a range of subject positions. Thus different discursive frameworks produce different subject positions which entail an endless spectrum of identities.

However, those new academic formulations of concepts of identity did not necessarily inform political discourses. Those discourses of race-related issues as well as their reflection and treatment in media tended to over-generalize and over-simplify the complex realities of identity formation and articulation. Ethnicity is thus understood as

“... a relational process - in which categories of community and identity are in constant formation at the intersection of the actual or imagined cultural (understood as ways of life)

heritages and the political/economic/cultural (understood as representations) relations through and upon which racisms emerge and operate. It is around this intersection that boundaries demarcating 'ethnic groups' (within and between 'minority' and 'majority' are formed)." (Hall, 1992)

Equally, Britishness-orientated identity politics were also highly criticized (and even attacked) by some BBC News Online journalists. "Lost in translation" (BBC News Online, 2007c) is an electronic article written by Trudi Davies in response to Citizenship test. The article criticizes the government's policy of Citizenship test as a requirement for settlement in UK. "Lost in translation" is an attack on linguistic politics of post-2001 New Labour governments. Trudi Davies announces his criticism of official discourses from the very beginning. The title of the article focuses on loss rather than gain. What is expected by the readership is to know the loss of New Labour linguistic politics rather than gains (if any). The article starts by stating some of the questions of the notorious Citizenship test as an example to conclude that the knowledge and familiarity with English is paramount in such project. The journalist writes that "A basic knowledge of history, law and culture is required but above all, you have to speak English" (BBC News Online, 2007c) The use of the adverbial "above all" has an emphatic function. It reveals the author's attitude. Davies juxtaposes some different requirements for citizenship. Thus no citizenship is granted to immigrants and asylum seekers unless they get a "basic" grasp of British history, legal and cultural system. However, linguistic mastery of English is pivotal. This can be easily understood when we focus on the language used. The modifier "basic" and adverbial "above all" create a dichotomous relationship between various citizenship requirements in which English language speaking has the upper hand. Furthermore, the author creates links between citizenship test and central issues of national identity and social harmony: "'Integration", "Community Cohesion" and "Britishness" are back on the political agenda". Conclusively, citizenship test is just another official attempt to integrate British ethnic populations via educating them the meanings of being British in order to maintain social and community cohesion. Later he goes on criticizing official educational politics. He believes that the measures

introduced by Bill Rammell Minister for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning to make English learning courses more effective are a failure. Ironically, he inquires "What measures did he propose in his race Equality Impact Assessment? Fees!" (BBC News Online, 2007c) Noticeably, the tone of the question has a rhetorical function. The author seems to disbelieve in such educational and cultural politics. The punctuation marks (?) and (!) reveal such ironic mood. Davies adds: "In his initial plans even asylum seekers would have to cough up, the very people most in need of help you might think". The language used further discloses his oppositional reading of official race-related discourse. For instance, the use of the phrasal verb "cough up" rather than the verb "pay" is indicative of his criticism.

Within the same line of thought, another article entitled "Britishness lessons 'fuel racism'" (BBC News Online, 2007a) accuses official politics of Britishness of promoting special forms of racism. Gary Eason, the editor, reported heavily the anti-Britishness attitudes and declarations of the president of the National Union of Teachers Baljeet Chale. Chale argued that claiming that universal values like those of "tolerance" and "freedom of speech" are exclusively British enhanced a "shadow of racism" behind the meanings of Britishness. She questioned "Well, in what way, I would like to know, are these values that are not held by the peoples of other countries?" (BBC News Online, 2007a) Baljeet Chale was quoted directly and indirectly more than nine times. The journalist tends to report some oppositional views and comments. For instance, we know that a government spokesman considered her arguments as no more than "nonsense". However, statistically, the article teems with Chale's arguments and comments. Also, the lead of the article highlights Baljeet Chale's main argument that "ministers fuel racism by ordering schools to teach "British values"". In addition, other quotations are written in bold which tends to foreground her arguments while back grounding oppositional ones. Gary Eason continues the exposition of Ghale's anti-official educational policies. He reports her attacks on New Labour educational discourses which would entrench forms of racism. Ghale argues that "To demand that people conform to an imposed view of Britishness only fuels that racism" (BBC News Online, 2007a). Then she relates Britishness to community cohesion by declaring that "teenagers' learning about shared British history is one of the essential blocks of community cohesion".

The over-quoting of Baljeet Chale comments along with downplaying oppositional ones tempted me to conclude that the journalist and the BBC News Online in general seem to sympathize with her readings of official discourses. Equally important, we can better churn out the voice of the journalist (and accordingly that of the agency) from two statements. They are as follows:

- 1) "It was another example of government making policy without talking to those it would most affect".
- 2) "Its leadership and management were inadequate and change was required." (BBC News Online, 2007a).

These two statements best express the attitude of the journalist. The first was uttered in the middle of the article in response to Baljeet Chale refusal of what she called "imposed" versions of Britishness. These versions seem to harm the identities of ethnic minorities and they impose uniformity and conformity. The use of the word "another example" suggests that the government had a record of political failures one of them is "Britishness lessons".

The second statement criticizes the government's policies. It considers them as inadequate and ineffective. Thus, they need to change or maybe the government itself has to change. The statement made was the continuation of Chale' accusations. She accused New Labour educational policies of being a failure. Commenting on such policies, she said: "If the current government was marked with an Ofsted grading it would be given a notice to improve" (BBC News Online, 2007a). The same quotation is mentioned twice in the article. Subsequently, those two statements are a direct manifestation of the author's voice. They reflect the oppositional readings of official discourses by BBC News Online and its journalists.

However, as Stuart Hall suggested in his Reception Theory, there can be no purely dominant or oppositional reading. All readings are greatly negotiational. In an article entitled "Can pupils learn 'Britishness'?" (BBC News Online, 2007b) BBC News Online seems to strike the middle and make the two ends meet. The article represents a negotiational reading of the concept of Britishness and that of community cohesion. A number of different attitudes from different perspectives are presented. The article is multi-vocal and exposes a diversity of values and views.

The article itself is an informative one that poses questions more than offers answers. Noticeably, the title of the article is a question that is followed by two other questions. Also, all questions are highlighted via being written in bold.

"Is there such a thing as "Britishness" and is it something that can be taught to children in school?" (BBC News Online, 2007b) (Bold is in the original text).

Thus, the article is rather an exposition of various points of views regarding the definition and feasibility of the concept of Britishness and its links to that of community cohesion. A plethora of pro and anti-views are introduced which allowed the author to attain a considerable equilibrium. Also it seems that no voice is granted an upper hand over the others. For instance, we know the proponent views of Jim Knight, the Minister of State for Schools and Learning and Conservative MP David Willetts who believe that it is possible to create Britishness-based curriculum that could help ethnic students grasp the meanings and dimensions of British national identity and thus achieve higher levels of social cohesion. Equally, the opponent attitudes are given ample room. Consequently, The Equality and Human Rights Commission chairman Trevor Phillips as well as the British historian Dr David Starkey could express their suspicion of and disbelief in Britishness as a unifying concept.

BBC News Online seems to be aware of the complex and dynamic nature of Britishness that is why it chooses to broach the issue from different perspectives and gives room to almost all voices. Though BBC News Online tends to be pro-Britishness, it cannot just parrot the official discourse. My analysis of the corpus in question shows that BBC News Online tries to create a balance between opposite views while implicitly (and arguably) favors the official discursive formations on/off British national identity.

Conclusion

The major objective of this article was to scrutinize and study the ways community cohesion and notably Britishness was processed in a principal news agency like BBC News Online. Following the theoretical model of the British cultural critic Stuart Hall, it is argued that the hegemonic discourses of community cohesion and Britishness were decoded in different ways by BBC News Online which reflected a considerable extent of diversity and plurality. Such multiplicity of reading stems from the constraints and limits within which mass-mediated texts were produced. It also meets the multifarious interests and natures of targeted audiences. BBC News Online does not devote its mass-mediated output to a limited audience. Being an online medium, BBC News Online deals with not only a national audience but also with global ones which require more flexibility and heterogeneity in its output.

My critical and interpretative analysis of the corpus yielded a number of key findings. Though BBC News Online was expected to decode the official discourses of Britishness and community cohesion and then re-encode them according to its respective ideological and cultural contexts, it contained diverse readings. Thus BBC News Online did not encode preferred way of reading. Its readings were largely negotiational. However, such diversity of readings is performed within well-established hegemonic frameworks. Such frameworks are governed by the taken-for-granted ideological and socio-cultural assumptions of BBC News Online. For instance, BBC News Online tends to prefer the official story of national identity that can be deduced from the modality used and the frequency of positive modifiers attributed to discourses of Britishness and community cohesion. Thus, it seems that mass media cannot go beyond the ideological and cultural infrastructure through which they operate. Relatively, they can change it and be changed by it, yet, they can never escape it.

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