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THE ROLE OF NATIONALITY CONTRASTS IN THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF AN INGROUP MEMBER: THE WOODWARD CASE IN *THE TELEGRAPH*

1. Introduction

Social categorisation, as a process in which individuals are assigned certain values and qualities, is a context-dependent activity in which discourse – as a means of purposeful and goal-oriented communication through language – draws on various referential and predicational strategies. This process often involves the discursive construction of two mutually opposed groups – the ingroup and the outgroup, which are subject to affective treatment: typically positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

This article documents the gradual positive presentation of an ingroup member charged with a criminal act in a foreign country, as identified in continued reporting of the case in *the Electronic Telegraph*. From a potentially deviant individual, and thus a possible representative of an outgroup comprising negatively perceived ‘criminals’ (be they convicted or suspected), the English au-pair Louise Woodward was re-constructed into a non-deviant member of the ingroup and assigned positive values. This was a gradual process, in which heavy use was made of nationality contrasts underlying the polarisation of the contrasting groups into ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Nationality contrasts played an increasingly important role during the case. First, they contributed towards the newsworthiness of the story. Then they were exploited in order to point out the alleged mistreatment of an ingroup member by the outgroup and, eventually, were combined with several positive stereotypes about the ingroup. In their aggregate, these strategies resulted in a redefinition of the issue: the seeming reversal of blame and the tendency to present the main news actor as a multiple victim of numerous other agents and circumstances.

2. Material and case background

The study is based on an analysis of 65 news articles published in *the Electronic Telegraph* within the span of ten months. In terms of the progress of the legal

case, this corresponds to the very first mention of Woodward – her arrest (7th February 1997) – until the overturning by the judge of the jury’s guilty verdict at the end of the trial (13th November 1997).

Louise Woodward, 18 at the time, was an English au-pair hired to take care of two children in the home of an American family in Boston, Massachusetts. In February, the Eappens’ nine-month-old son was taken to hospital with serious injuries, of which he eventually died a few days later. Woodward was taken into custody and charged with second-degree murder for an alleged assault on the child. The trial revealed various inconsistencies in the case, e.g. the child having previous untreated injuries of unknown origin, discrepancies in police accounts, etc. Woodward never admitted any guilt, not even when offered a plea bargain.

In October, the jury found Woodward guilty of second-degree murder, which carried a life sentence. The verdict came much to the amazement of the public on both sides of the Atlantic, as it was believed that Woodward was charged with a very grave offence by the prosecution only in order to encourage her to accept a plea bargain and thereby admit a much lesser one. Her trial and the eventual verdict sparked a rare public campaign in her support. The public discourse surrounding Woodward, as can be observed in *the Telegraph* and other British media, manufactured support for Woodward by viewing her positively and turning her into a victim of numerous circumstances.

A week after the jury’s finding, the judge exercised his right to overrule the verdict, changing it to involuntary manslaughter. At the same time, he reduced Woodward’s punishment, effectively setting her free. However, this act did not meet with uniform public approval either, since the punishment was felt to be too light. As a consequence, public opinion turned against Woodward, who ended up facing negative publicity, partly also due to the much condemned celebrations of her supporters.

3. Role of nationality contrasts in discourse representation

Social categorisation in the media has attracted widespread interest among researchers, particularly in the field of discourse analysis and critical linguistics (Fowler 1991, Fairclough 1989, van Dijk 1988, Richardson 2007). There are numerous analyses of the representation of social actors and events, with elaborate systems of referential strategies (van Leeuwen 1996, Fairclough 2003), predicational strategies (Reisigl and Wodak 2001), and rhetorical strategies (van Dijk 1992a, 1992b), that ascribe various values and qualities to people and associate them with particular groups. These are, obviously, employed in order to create certain effects on the recipients and consumers of messages.

The discursive construction of individuals in the media is a complex social process (Scollon 1998), in which journalists use numerous devices, such as voicing, manipulation of attribution, etc. to discursively construct people. In this process, the media may reveal their attitude towards the individuals reported on, e.g.

by choosing particular labels or naming forms. Since language – in the functionalist tradition – constitutes a system of options (Halliday 1978, 1985), choices along the paradigmatic axis may, obviously, be highly motivated, since some forms may be used in preference to certain other forms which, as unsuccessful competitors, are absent from the actual text. Yet, the value of a form present is also linked to those forms that are absent. In addition, syntagmatic combinations and transformations (e.g. passivization or nominalization as an instance of grammatical metaphor, cf. Fowler 1991, Halliday 1985) are likewise of crucial importance in social categorisation since it is through these devices that referential content is predicated about news actors. Inferences, cultural contexts, background assumptions and stereotypes are also heavily involved since they can be used, both intentionally and unintentionally, to communicate significant amounts of information and affective content ‘in between the lines’.

In the media, social categorisation of news actors and their presentation through language is also linked to the operation of news values – a set of implicit criteria held by journalists and crucial in the process of selecting an event to be covered as a news story (Bell 1991, Harcup and O’Neill 2001). In this connection, it is often more newsworthy to present individuals in the media as types and refer to them by means of category labels – either in connection with their names or independently (cf. Chovanec 2000). The advantage of using category labels, particularly in the spatially-constrained context of news headlines, is that they are grounded within a particular cultural context and can trigger commonly shared assumptions, beliefs and stereotypes (cf. Dor 2003: 716 on tabloids).

Social categorisation in terms of stereotypes tends to disregard personal features in favour of commonly held generalisations, which may block or hamper descriptions of a more ‘objective’ nature. Studies of representation and stereotyping have been frequently motivated by the effort to identify discursive practices of such discrimination against, for instance, various ethnic, racial and religious groups (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, van Dijk 2000, 2002, Richardson 2007), immigrants (El Refaie 2001, van Dijk 1987) and women (Clark 1998, Brookes and Holbrook 1998). Although such discursive practices typically have a negative polarity for the news actors concerned (i.e. they are discriminated against), the opposite may also occur: the perception of an individual may be boosted in the positive sense thanks to his or her co-classification with some stereotype, as the analysis of data on the media representation of Louise Woodward in this article indicates.

Significantly, such stereotyping typically occurs against the explicit or implicit background of a discursive construction of mutually opposed groups in the form of the dichotomy of ‘us’ vs ‘them’. The construction of ingroups and outgroups is, of course, of primary political importance at times of approaching military conflict (Richardson 2007: 209, Lule 2004) or other times when there is a need for the manufacture of public consensus (Partington 2003), but it is also very common in non-political domains, such as sport (Alabarces *et al* 2001, Conboy 2006).

The construction of ingroups and outgroups is usually accompanied by an application of several referential strategies, most notably the ideological square described by van Dijk (van Dijk 1992a, Richardson 2007). One of the key principles of the ideological square consists of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, and the ascription of positive legitimating values to ingroups and negative ones to outgroups (cf. Steve Chibnall 1977 in Fowler 1991: 52). The most obvious delimitation of groups is based on the nationality/ethnic distinction (i.e. the ingroup is defined in terms of belonging to the imaginary community of one's 'home' nation), but the boundaries are highly flexible. Consequently, different conceptions of 'us' can be used to discuss issues related to, as well as justify actions aimed against, various conceptions of 'them' (cf. Fowler 1991).

4.1. Nationality as a source of newsworthiness

The original impetus to the coverage of the story of Louise Woodward in the British *Telegraph* consisted, significantly, in the fact that the au-pair was of English origin. The very first article breaking the story and introducing what was to become a long media saga ran under the headline *ENGLISH NANNY ACCUSED OF HARMING BABY* (7 Feb 1997), where the presence of the nationality adjective clearly indicates that the story was newsworthy owing to the origin of the main news actor.

The initial report thus capitalises not only on the common news values of negativity, reference to persons and unexpectedness (cf. Fowler 1991, Harcup and O'Neill 2001) but, importantly, also on cultural proximity, which postulates an imaginary link between the audience of the news report and the main news actor. A story about an English person involved in some act (regardless of whether positive or negative) is obviously more interesting for an English audience, and thus runs a much higher chance of being included in a British newspaper, than an identical story about some other national. The nationality of the main news actor may even override the importance of the other values and may constitute the crucial factor favouring the selection of a story by a paper and its eventual coverage in the national media.

The nationality label was used extensively in the first part of the reporting on the case, before Woodward's name became sufficiently established as a household name in Britain (for a detailed analysis of the naming choices and the gradual construction of an assumption of familiarity with an initially unknown news actor, see Chovanec 2000). During this stage, the references to Woodward, in headlines and in leads, used the nationality adjectives 'British' in combination with a category label (*British au pair, British girl, British teenager*, including the highly frequent appositional phrase *the British nanny Louise Woodward and the British au-pair Louise Woodward*), as well as the journalistic noun 'Briton' (cf. the headline *Briton accused of killing baby 'dreams of home'*, etc.), which was sufficient – even without a category label in the headline – to guarantee sufficient newsworthiness of such news stories.

4.2. *Mistreatment of an ingroup teenager by outgroup members*

Within days of the first news report and amid discussions on the issue of au-pairing and its risks, the Woodward story started to be framed from the perspective of a new stereotype: a young teenage girl falling prey to external circumstances. Moreover, nationality played a crucial role in the on-going categorisation and characterisation because the British girl was presented as misused by a number of agents situated in the United States – be they, initially, the American host family and big business, and, eventually, the US legal system, the US media, experts and the American nation in general (see section 4.4 below).

It is thus from the occurrence of the underlying stereotype of ‘an English girl exploited by an American family’ that the national divide Britain vs America became omnipresent in the reporting on the case. In this process, two steps may be distinguished. First, affective evaluation is placed on the general notion of ‘English au-pairs in the U.S.’, whereby au-pairs are viewed favourably, unlike the ‘real’ motives of the host families bringing them into America (cf. the mention of ‘the truth’ in the quote below). This general discourse move is followed by a second one, focused specifically on Woodward and her treatment by the family, with the implication that she was mistreated. By noting unusual or non-standard behaviours or aspects of the host family (e.g. their ban on Woodward’s social life, their religious zeal, their failure to note the child’s earlier injuries despite both being doctors, their careerism), the whole issue is being redefined and Woodward’s blame backgrounded and diminished.

What the paper achieved, starting from its commentary on 16th February 1997, was the co-option of Woodward within the imaginary ingroup, perceived along nationality lines, as opposed to the outgroup, constituted by Americans and various ‘others’. The article evidences a significant strategic move in the formation of public consensus on the whole issue: the choice to categorise Woodward favourably, casting aside her potentially negative categorisations that could relegate her to the sphere of ‘the others’: people connected with suspect, criminal, illegal, violent, and other despicable acts.

Whatever middle-class couples may tell their friends, the truth is that thousands of young English girls who come to America offering their services are not “nannies” at all. Many are barely out of school and have little experience of looking after children beyond a few hour’s babysitting. They are recruited by multi-million-dollar companies as cheap labour. More properly described as au pairs, they are lured across the Atlantic by advertisements which promise the chance to sample the American way of life – all expenses paid. (16 Feb 1997)

... For most families, they are a cheap substitute to professionally-trained Americans who can expect to earn at least \$400 a week, even if they live with the family. (16 Feb 1997)

The article from which the quote is taken provides the context against which the case of Louise Woodward is viewed in Britain. Woodward becomes a representative of a group, although a somewhat untypical one due to her alleged involvement in the death of a child. Categorised as a representative of a group, she can indirectly benefit from some of the associations stereotypically connected with such a group, especially those that are explicitly made in the text of the article. Importantly, she can also be seen as ‘cheap labour’, an individual who seems to have been tricked by ‘multi-million-dollar companies’ which ‘lured’ her ‘across the Atlantic’ etc. The verb ‘lure’ is particularly effective due to its connotations of innocence and trickery. In other words, an individual who is ‘lured’ becomes a victim and can be viewed sympathetically and with compassion. The perspective of the text is thus clearly favourable to au-pairs. By virtue of this, it also provides, thanks to updating the cultural context shared by the readers, the background for a potentially favourable perspective towards Woodward in terms of the discursive strategy of reversing the blame and presenting her as a victim (see below).

The text above is also crucial in openly introducing the key dichotomy of America vs Britain, which came to permeate much of the subsequent reporting over the next nine months. The contrast between the U.S. and the UK takes various forms (legal systems, perceptions of the au pair industry, degree of ‘civilisation’ etc.), yet it can be subsumed into the basic polar opposition of ‘us’ (i.e. the British) vs ‘them’ (i.e. the Americans).

According to the text, English girls go to the U.S. to gain experience (...*advertisements which promise the chance to sample the American way of life – all expenses paid*), but their dreams disappear when contrasted with the reality (*These girls come over here expecting that it is going to be like a luxury cruise... Instead, they find themselves on a life raft*). It is not the girls who are presented as benefiting from the entire industry; they are only ‘cheap labour’ used by non-profit-making agencies (...*meaning that it pays no taxes [which] does not mean that those who run them do so for purely philanthropic purposes. ... the owners of some ... are paying themselves as much as \$300,000 a year*) and likewise exploited by families, who burden them with excessive work they could expect of fully paid ‘nannies’, not just cheap ‘au-pairs’. Furthermore, the girls, ‘lured’ to the US by ‘multi-million-dollar companies’ are presented as operating on the verge of legality and breaking laws – spurred on by the families – when entering the country:

Some families encourage English “nannies” to enter the country posing as tourists. An elaborate game of cat-and-mouse is played by immigration officials at Kennedy and Newark airports, where any young English girl is a potential suspect. One New Jersey couple successfully managed to bring in a teenage girl from Ireland, but only after she was told by the immigration officer that he had “bust nine nannies already today and she would be the tenth.” (16 Feb 1997)

The British au-pair Louise Woodward fits all of these characterisations of the actual experience of ‘an English au-pair in the U.S.’: she is a young teenager, fresh from school, her stay was mediated by such a company, the previous family denied her the chance to ‘sample’ the American experience by placing restrictions on her social life, and the new family placed her in charge of two young children, in her case, two-year-old Brendan and nine-month-old Matthew. As is revealed by subsequent reports, the ‘boisterous’ older son was very hard to manage (one au-pair even refused to take the job because of his hyperactivity). Furthermore, the new family eventually imposed restrictions on Woodward too, and, apparently, left the care of their children mostly to her while pursuing their own medical careers. Woodward – as an au-pair – was thus meant to replace a parent, i.e. perform the job of a nanny, rather than merely work with the parent and help with the children as her contract as an au-pair had stipulated. All this may lead readers to develop a predisposition to adopt a positive attitude towards Woodward, reinforced by the underlying unstated belief that she – as one of ‘us’ – is or has been subject to mistreatment by ‘them’.

4.3. The stereotype of the British Nanny

The general stereotype of ‘an English girl exploited in America’, which was activated early on with an emphasis on the national divide of ‘us’ vs ‘them’, was accompanied by references to the wider cultural stereotype of the ‘British Nanny’. One of the first articles, commenting on the initial appearance of Woodward in court after the eventual death of the child in hospital, made a clear reference to the positive values stereotypically associated with ‘Britishness’ in connection with the professional care of children:

It was as if the British Nanny herself, that paragon of domestic order, was in the dock for the murder of one of her charges. (commentary 16 Feb 1997)

From the perspective of the British paper, the positive cultural stereotype – explained in the apposition and familiarly referred to with the pronoun ‘that’ indicating that this stereotype is assumed to be shared as part of the cultural context by the readers – is obviously felt to be under threat. While Woodward’s case is partly newsworthy due to the violation of such a positive shared cultural stereotype, her reputation may benefit from a co-classification with this stereotype (‘Woodward as an au-pair’) and, simultaneously, be threatened due to her alleged deviance from the stereotype.

Interestingly enough, the newspaper reports on the case avoid explicit comparisons and contrasts of the stereotype with Woodward; references to the stereotype merely provide the background against which the facts of her case are reported. Nevertheless, it may be argued that the evocation of the stereotype eventually benefits Woodward rather than harms her. On the one hand, the stereotype is defended and its existence is re-affirmed; on the other, the national divide of Britain

vs America is brought into play by emphasising positive qualities of ‘us’ and negative traits of ‘them’, especially the non-genuine reasons of many Americans for wanting British nannies (see below).

On a more specific level, the national aspect was highlighted early on with the very first explicit occurrence (in the headline of a commentary) of the possessive pronoun ‘our’, applied in connection with the ‘British Nanny’ stereotype (*‘our girls’*). This pronoun, typically referred to as the ‘editorial we’, operates as an in-group designator by postulating the existence of an imaginary community whose membership is shared by the discourse participants (i.e. the British newspaper on the one hand and the British public on the other). In this function, the usage of the pronoun clearly promotes the dichotomising contrast between the ingroup (‘us’ – the British) and the outgroup (‘them’ – the Americans).

NANNY NIGHTMARE. The death of an American baby in the care of a British au pair may cast a slur on our girls, says Celia Dodd (22 Feb 1997)

The article further updates the stereotype of the ‘British nanny’, as held in English-speaking cultures. It describes *‘the name of the Great British nanny in the States’* as follows:

For years British nannies abroad have been able to trade on an unrivalled reputation for excellence which owes as much to Mary Poppins as it does to real worth. In the USA and all over the world British nannies are the ultimate status symbol. (22 Feb 1997)

Moreover, as the last sentence in the quote above indicates, the motives of some American families when choosing British nannies and au-pairs appear not to be entirely genuine. They do not seem to have only the well-being of the children in mind but are, rather, after the social image they project by having a child-carer from Britain. In the words of a direct quote of an English nanny, *“it sounds very good to have a British nanny”*.

In the process of constructing the positive image of British au-pairs, the language spoken by them plays a significant role, too: British nannies are advertised by agencies with an emphasis on *‘their low cost and fluency in English – as opposed to Spanish, the language of most cheap childminders’* (16 Feb 1997).

The highly positive cultural stereotype of the British Nanny (i.e., in other words, *‘our girls’*) thus provides the locus for a delineation of individuals according to their nationality, placing them into the contrasted groups of ‘us’ vs ‘them’. Various aspects of the stereotype undergo the typical processes connected with the ideological square: the negative other-presentation (cf. language problems of au-pairs from other countries mentioned above) and the positive self-presentation (cf. the evaluative lexis in the last but one example, the comparison *‘as it does to real worth’*, or the relative clause *‘which leads the world’* in the example below):

Americans choose British nannies not so much for their training, which leads the world with its emphasis on childcare in the home and hands-on experience, but because they like the accent, or the uniform, or the notion of a firm hand. (22 Feb 1997)

The negative other-presentation and positive self-presentation with respect to the 'British Nanny' stereotype has, of course, direct consequences for the perception of Woodward. Once the members of the ingroup are subject to positive self-presentation, Woodward is necessarily viewed more positively because she forms a part of such a group on account of her nationality.

At this point in the Woodward case, it is the 'reputation of British nannies', i.e. the social stereotype, which is at stake rather than Woodward's individual fate. As an agency representative commented, "...*Louise Woodward is a sacrificial lamb, and ... her case will open everybody's eyes*". Such a referential strategy is an early indication of the rhetorical move of the reversal of blame, with Woodward presented as an actual victim of various circumstances, and followed by the occasional redefinition of her individual case into a broader contrast between British and American people and values.

4.4. 'Us' vs 'Them' and the multiple victimisation of Woodward

The polar contrast of 'we' vs 'them', realised by a division along nationality lines (i.e. British vs American), became more pronounced with the approaching trial. The fact that Woodward was awaiting trial in a women's maximum security prison is condemned by the paper, by accessing the voices of local civic leaders, in terms of a fear of '*a second "tragedy" of injustice ... unfolding*' since '*a teenager should not be held in custody at the adult women's prison*' (5 Mar 1997). Moreover, Woodward is presented as a victim of harassment from other inmates, e.g. when they '*forced her to watch a television programme about children being abused*', as claimed by Woodward on TV when speaking about '*her ordeal in a US prison*'. In addition, there were concerns that she would not receive a fair trial, since, according to the Woodwards, it '*has been seriously prejudiced by US media reports*' (2 Oct 1997), also with the indication, by a Boston journalist, that she '*was becoming a victim of state politics and public bias*' (3 Oct 1997), since the district attorney prosecuting Woodward was poised to run for attorney-general in Massachusetts.

In this context, *the Telegraph* ran a brief news item mentioning that '*The task of finding an unbiased jury to try a British woman ... began in Cambridge, Massachusetts*' (7 Oct 1997), revealing the presupposition, indicated by the presence of the adjective 'unbiased' in the headline, that there were continued concerns about a fair trial. This echoes an earlier report on a public opinion poll which indicated that:

Two-thirds of potential jurors in the Massachusetts city where a British teenager faces a murder trial over the death of a baby in her care, have already decided she is guilty, a poll has shown. (3 Oct 1997)

Woodward thus comes to be presented as a victim of several circumstances (all of which are, significantly, American). From the perspective of the paper, these include not only multi-million-dollar au-pair agencies, a greedy family, harsh prison conditions, and massive US (and UK) pre-trial publicity, but also a biased jury with a preconceived idea of her guilt.

The implication that Woodward became the victim of the jury is made, after the publication of the highly unexpected guilty verdict, by *the Telegraph* by means of an argumentative strategy contrasting the presentation of evidence at the trial by the opposing parties. It is in its subjective and evaluative attitude that the paper reveals its favourable treatment of Woodward, as in, for instance, the following text:

Most observers at the trial ... thought the defence had done enough to undermine prosecution claims that Woodward had inflicted devastating skull and brain injuries on Matthew Eappen because she had become frustrated and angry with his crying.

But the jury appeared to put more weight on the evidence of local surgeons and medical examiners who had directly treated Matthew than on the string of renowned experts the defence produced to show the baby's injuries were, in fact, suffered several weeks before his death. (31 Oct 1997)

By accessing the unspecified voice of 'most observers' (almost literally repeated in another article one day later), the paper may be masking its own assessment of the case, thereby lending its own opinion a more 'objective' flavour. The conjunction 'but', introducing the opinion of the jury, indicates the unexpectedness of the jury verdict. This is pointed out by the rhetorical move of appeal to authority: a 'string of renowned experts' (who were not believed) is juxtaposed with and stands in direct contrast to 'local surgeons and medical examiners' (who were believed); the hyperbolic ('string') and evaluative ('renowned', 'experts') language indicates the paper's own point of view.

The role of the jury in returning the verdict was perceived as problematic not solely by *the Telegraph* and its anonymous 'most observers at the trial'. In its reproach of the jury, thought to have been influenced negatively by such phenomena as the presence in the defence team of a lawyer who had previously successfully defended O.J. Simpson, the alleged misinterpretation of expert evidence, and the strong pre-trial media publicity of the case, the paper also included a special article on the previous publicly aired attitudes of Judge Hiller Zobel, the judge adjudicating the case, concerning the American system of justice. In the article headlined *LOUISE JUDGE: US JURIES ARE IGNORANT*, he was quoted as saying that the jury system is "asking the ignorant to use the incomprehensible to decide the unknowable" (2 Nov 1997). The selection of such stories and quotes may be considered as significant when trying to identify the way the paper was involved in the gradual formation of public opinion on the whole matter.

The underlying British-American national divide openly resurfaced in a related article on the reactions of inhabitants from Woodward's native village.

Woodward's alleged innocence is explicitly mentioned, which contributes to her perception as a 'victim' of the jury. The sequence of sentences in indirect speech seemingly reports the beliefs of the villagers but is used to air the conviction that the trial was unfair since the facts presented at the trial (and mediated to the public) seemed to rule out any intentional harm:

At the start of the week it seemed a foregone conclusion. No doubts, they insisted, and no fears. Louise Woodward was innocent, and not even an American jury could possibly say otherwise. ... How could they come up with a verdict like that? There's no way she could have done it. (31 Oct 1997)

The indirect quote above uses the pronoun 'they', constructing an opposed group – the American jury, with which the pronoun is co-referential. The contrast between the outgroup and the ingroup, implicitly present in the text voiced by the paper (though ultimately attributable to the 'thoughts and beliefs' of the villagers), is made explicit in the quoted verbal reactions of individual people. Thus, in the text below, a local person (who had used Woodward as a babysitter in the past and thus can be rhetorically construed as an 'authority' on Woodward's au-pairing) uses the contrasting set of pronouns 'we' vs 'they' in a particularly emotional way:

"The fight will go on because the village is completely united behind Louise. ... I don't know how they can have found her guilty, but we'll help her through this. We've raised thousands of pounds so far, and now we'll keep the fund going to help her appeal. We can't leave her out there. We just can't." (31 Oct 1997)

The meaning of the pronouns is vague and potentially ambiguous, with the ingroup designator 'we' referring to the local villagers but possibly also to the wider community, and the outgroup designator 'they' referring generally to 'the others' – either the jury in particular or Americans in general. Other instances of vagueness in these quotes are used strategically: they underline the ingroup's detachment from the outgroup and the outgroup's negative actions. This is the case with spatial deixis (the adverbial phrase 'out there' emphasizing the physical divide and separation between 'us' and 'them') and demonstrative pronouns (*help her through this* and *a verdict like that* in the previous quote).

In another emotional testimonial by a local citizen, the pronominal reference combines with the imperative in a direct address, via the media, to the members of the outgroup – the Americans in Boston:

Vic Brown ... described the verdict as "one of the biggest travesties of justice that either of our nations have witnessed. "Cry for us in Boston. You have wrongly sent a young girl of tremendous strength, love and ability to waste away, denied the opportunity to make her contribution to goodness in the world." (31 Oct 1997)

Such an outspoken defence of a member of the ingroup, based on the conviction of her innocence, was not, however, limited to Woodward's fellow villagers, who could be understood not to be entirely disinterested. Similar hyperbolic rhetoric was also used by some politicians and public figures who might have been thought to be somewhat more guarded in their statements, despite their tendencies to follow the public opinion of their own constituencies. *The Telegraph* voiced some strong nationalistic rhetoric emphasising the polar 'us' vs 'them' divide in an article drawing on an interview with Louise Woodward's Labour MP, Andrew Miller, who maintained that "the au pair was innocent" and even called for diplomatic channels to become involved. Particularly noteworthy is his appeal to the stereotype of a perceived cultural superiority of the British over the Americans (unwittingly echoed and reciprocated by reactions of some American readers – see below):

"We in Britain have a well-developed judicial system but miscarriages can happen occasionally and we have to hold up our hands and admit they have happened. So what I am saying to the Americans is, be big enough and strong enough and recognise that Louise Woodward's case has been such a miscarriage of justice." (4 Nov 1997)

Relying on the obvious presupposition that the outcome of the trial constitutes a 'miscarriage of justice', this statement may be used to infer that Americans either do not have such a well-developed judicial system (unlike 'us' in Britain) or, if they do, they are not magnanimous enough (unlike 'us' in Britain) to acknowledge and rectify the unavoidable miscarriages of justice (or what the speaker considers as such). The British are, either way, presented as superior and the unsolicited advice by a British MP thus functions as yet another piece in the mosaic of discursive moves aimed at positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

A similar move, pointing out one's disappointment with the American legal system, was even made by a member of Woodward's American defence team. One of the quotes, in which Andrew Good, the leading defence lawyer, commented on the guilty verdict, recycles the same idea of a 'betrayal':

"Louise put her faith in the American system of justice and it failed her miserably" (1 Nov 1997).

This is another example of an indirect positive presentation of Woodward, since it implies that she is a victim of the system of justice, having been let down by it. This sentiment is repeated by numerous other individuals (both British and American), often quoted in direct speech in order to lend authenticity to their words, as in the following citation of an engineer from Cambridge, MA:

"I wonder if these people [the jury] were sitting in the same courtroom as

I was for the last three weeks. I just don't believe the prosecution proved their case beyond reasonable doubt." (1 Nov 1997)

Importantly, it was not only by directly or indirectly accessing the voices of others that *the Telegraph* was revealing its point of view. Occasionally, the paper made it clear, in its own voice, where its sentiments lay, as in the following quote from an extended article providing a summary of the case:

In the prosecution's decision to press for first or second-degree murder charges, the grief-stricken parents' wishes were taken into account. Their baby's death had been so cruel and so violent, they believed, that no lesser charge was thinkable. If Woodward had been convicted of first-degree murder, she would have died in prison, a fate reserved in Britain for the worst of serial killers, in the category of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady. (1 Oct 1997)

By drawing the comparison between the different levels of statutory punishments in the US and in Britain in the quote above, the paper again implicitly helps to co-construct Woodward as a victim. This is achieved by the obvious incompatibility of Woodward with, first, the manner of death constituting first-degree murder (significantly described from the perspective of the prosecution by the distancing attribution '*they believed*') and second, the class of ill-famed criminals with whom she was, in the eyes of the prosecution, co-classified (and obviously misclassified in the opinion of *the Telegraph*).

4.5. Post-verdict reversal of negativity

Following the controversial verdict, there was mounting public conviction both in Britain and the US that the murder verdict was wrong and that Woodward had not been given a fair trial. The media landscape was occupied by news of public rallies, appeals to the British embassy, letters to the editor, public opinion polls showing massive support for Woodward, etc. By contrast, the family of the dead child received only minimal coverage, in which, however, comments were repeatedly made on the reversal of blame (e.g.: *Mr. Eappen repeated... "It is like blaming a rape victim for rape"*, 6 Nov 1997, *...stung by suggestions that they should share responsibility for the death of their baby...* 8 Nov 1997, *...hate mail blaming them for their baby's death...* 10 Nov 1997).

Then, on 9th November, in an unexpected twist of events, Judge Hiller Zobel applied his judicial right and overruled the jury's guilty verdict. By changing her murder conviction to manslaughter, he cut Woodward's sentence to 279 days, the time she had already spent in prison. Amid discussions of a media bid to buy her story and media images of jubilant English people in her native village, the public attitude towards Woodward, as reported in *the Telegraph*, began to turn against her – mainly due to the belief, here voiced by a member of public, that she "*got off easy*" (11 Nov 1997). For the very first time, injustice was invoked in connec-

tion with someone other than Woodward; as one of the jurors directly stated, “*I’m flabbergasted... I’m appalled. This is unbelievable. This is a complete injustice to that child’s life, and this is not a reasonable sentence.*” (12 Nov 1997). References to Woodward’s innocence, unfair trials, etc. ceased altogether.

Reports of negative opinions on the Judge’s decision and, ultimately, Woodward (almost totally absent from *the Telegraph* before 10 November 1997), suddenly took centre stage (*US VIEWERS ATTACK JUSTICE SYSTEM*, 11 Nov 1997, *BACKLASH IN AMERICA*, *BACKLASH IN BRITAIN*, 12 Nov 1997). Opinion polls that showed a majority of respondents opposed to Woodward being freed were an indication of the swing of public opinion to the other side.

Due to the reversal of the affective evaluation of Woodward and the legal treatment of her case, the dichotomous contrast of ‘us’ vs ‘them’ came to be frequently revisited, especially in the accessed voices of numerous individuals commenting on the main protagonist and the legal system, as well as the public reaction in Britain. Thus, for instance, the contrast was alluded to by Mrs Eappen, the mother of the dead child, as follows:

Mrs Eappen said: “The idea that someone who looks normal and friendly or like a young – and I hate to stereotype – white, soft-spoken, British-accented, intelligent girl could harm your child is terrifying to people.” (6 Nov 1997)

There were several explicit references, made by American citizens, pointing out – against the background of English people jubilant at the freeing of Woodward – the apparent falsity of the belief that the English are a civilised nation. Such comments undermine some of the one-sided positive stereotyping of the ingroup (i.e. the British) in which *the Telegraph* had engaged previously:

... a man voiced his disgust at news footage from England showing people celebrating. He said: “Can you imagine what it was like for the parents of that child watching a shot on TV of people waving bottles of champagne around when they have lost their beloved child. The English are supposed to be civilised. That was not the act of a civilised group of people.” (11 Nov 1997)

Occasionally, some reactions by Americans amounted to vicious and xenophobic attacks, pointing out the assumed sense of cultural superiority held by the British about themselves. The following letter to the editor is worth quoting at length since it epitomises the confrontational nature of the ‘us’ vs ‘them’ divide and the awareness of the positive self-presentation / negative other-presentation of the ideological square:

This letter is with regard to the sickening behaviour and attitude exhibited by your nation and nationals in the Louise Woodward case in Massachusetts.

Apparently, according to your citizens and diplomatic staff, every other system of justice in the world is unfair and uncivilised except your own.

I know that after killing and slaughtering so many people, over these many centuries, all over the globe, the British must surely be better equipped to ascertain who a murderer is.

Instead, evidently, your populace seems to hold a greater deal of sympathy for the British criminal or criminals rather than the poor victims whose lives they have so coldly snuffed out. To then validate the hypocritical defence of these murderers as stating, ad nauseam, that the host nation's justice system is unjust and unfair is truly appalling. ... (Neil Gompers, Letters to ET, 12.11.1997)

The quotes from letters of other Americans use similarly strong and evaluative language pointing out the absolute unacceptability of the behaviour of the out-group (i.e. the British, when viewed from the American perspective). The characteristic language of these direct quotes includes personal constructions with highly negative evaluative adjectives (e.g. ...*I am appalled...*, *I find it abhorrent...*, *I am absolutely horrified*) and even an attempt to redefine the issue, by the use of metaphor, in religious terms (*This is sick and a blasphemy to the memory...*).

Nevertheless, *the Telegraph* did include self-reflexive comments of the British on the behaviour of some of their compatriots, as if to indicate that the celebrations do not follow national boundaries and that the whole of Britain is not, by any account, jubilant. The backlash in Britain is described in terms of shame; such a moral attitude may exonerate the majority of the positively perceived ingroup (the British) at the expense of a small group – a fraction that forms the Woodward's '*fan club*' (cf. the citation of Mrs. Eappen on 12 November 1997). This strategy allows the majority of the ingroup to preserve self-respect, while distancing themselves from socially unacceptable behaviour:

One caller... said his wife burst into tears "because she felt so ashamed to be British". Another told Talk Radio: "I'm truly embarrassed... the hysteria of the people in Elton is sickening." (12 Nov 1997)

Interestingly, the phrase 'so ashamed to be British' implicitly draws on the existence of the 'British cultural superiority' stereotype, paradoxically denying it ('the British do behave in an uncivilised manner') and at the same time affirming it ('not all of us are the same'). The affirmation of the underlying stereotype may also be perceived in the second quote above, since the 'hysteria' is localised in the village of Elton – Woodward's home – and thus spatially contained within rather limited bounds.

As regards the attitude of *the Telegraph*, it did, on the one hand, vocalise much of the opposition against Woodward's release and the behaviour of her British supporters (perhaps in order not to appear to condone it itself), but, on the other, it praised the courage of Judge Zobel, indirectly likening him to a hero. In an arti-

cle significantly headlined *Zobel was guided by a hero of the revolution* (11 Nov 1997), the paper discusses in detail the courageous life of the 2nd US president John Adams (quoted by Judge Zobel in his ruling), who, at the time of the revolution, “*defended British soldiers on trial for firing on citizens during the ‘Boston massacre’*”, since he was “*a lawyer dedicated to the legal system*”. A parallel is thus implied between Adams and Judge Zobel, who also stepped in to protect a British citizen because he felt the need to intervene and correct an obvious wrong committed on Woodward.

5. Conclusion

The representation of Louise Woodward in *the Telegraph*, as the material analysed has indicated, was not entirely disinterested. In the media coverage of her case, references to her English/British nationality played a crucial role. From an early marker of newsworthiness, the nationality label became the basis for Woodward’s direct and indirect social categorisation as a member of an ingroup. The gradual construction of two opposed groups, ‘us’ vs ‘them’ (i.e. the British vs. the Americans), was followed by the application of certain stereotypes concerned with positive self-presentation of the British nation and its members. In addition, by backgrounding and eventually suppressing Woodward’s potential categorisation as a deviant and harmful individual – the suspect of an alleged manslaughter of a baby in her care – the paper contributed to the formation of a positive attitude towards Woodward.

In this process, various referential strategies contributed to exonerating Woodward and mustering up wide public support for her at the national level. The range of category labels applied to her were mostly positive (*teenager, au-pair, school-leaver, victim of injustice, sacrificial lamb, borderline hero for her efforts to save the child*, etc.). As Neil Wallis, the deputy editor of *The Sun*, defending a later offer of a financial payment to the Woodwards for their story, put it, ...*the newspaper and the country saw her as a victim of a miscarriage of justice rather than a criminal* (12 Nov 1997).

In addition, the positive stereotypes of the ‘British Nanny’ and the ‘exploited teenage girl’ in America, thanks to which Woodward could be seen in terms of positive models, intensified the dichotomous contrast of ‘us’ vs ‘them’ and exacerbated the positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation of these groups. As a result, in a paradoxical reversal of roles, Woodward started to be perceived as a victim rather than a perpetrator. In this sense, her discursive construction solidified into another stereotype: that of an unjustly sentenced individual (cf. the quote by Congressman Slattery after voting down a bill to revive the death penalty in Massachusetts: *The spectre of the Woodward case left me with a deeply unsettled conviction about executing the wrong person. What happens to these people we’re not sure of? What happens to the Louise Woodwards of the world?*, 8 Nov 1997). As noted by Mrs. Eappen, the mother of the dead

child, Woodward was victimised to such a degree that she even achieved a status approaching that of a hero (“*To see Louise essentially exonerated, released to the cheers of her fan club ... to see her as some sort of hero*”, 12 Nov 1997).

The case study indicates the power of the media in redefining issues as a result of their use of discursive referential and predicational strategies. Thanks to creating group divisions, postulating group membership for individuals and engaging in affective representation as a part of the ideological square, they may significantly influence the positive or negative perception of individuals by the public and thus be directly involved in the manufacture of public consensus.

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